disciplinary remains to be seen. However, it can be safely said that teachers of phonology and graduate students will find this book immensely stimulating and thought-provoking.

References


Language and cultures in contrast and comparison


Reviewed by Denise Gassner

*Languages and cultures in contrast and comparison* is a collection of articles on three main topics: information structure, lexis and second language (L2) acquisition. These topics are discussed by providing examples from different languages and drawing comparisons between them. In part one of this edited book, the way information is structured in a sentence in languages such as English, German, Spanish, Norwegian and Dutch is compared. In this first part, the distinction between theme, which is utterance initial information, and rheme, which describes all or part of information in the rest of the utterance, is central. Part two investigates lexical features of English, Swedish, Norwegian, French, German, Akan, Italian and Spanish. In this part lexical matters are discussed such as, for instance, the expression of human emotions in different languages. Studies in part three of the book present research covering different topics in L2 acquisition from a contrastive perspective. Whereas the studies in the first two parts of the book introduce research on a great variety of languages, the research in this last part focuses on findings from native and non-native speakers of only three languages: Spanish, German and English.

The first study by Fetzer, in part one of the volume, compares theme zones in English and German in a systemic functional linguistic framework. In particular, the communicative act of non-acceptance in political interviews is investigated. Fetzer gives a detailed overview of the concept of theme and concludes by looking at theme as multiple themes that are composed of several elements (Halliday 1994; Gomez Gónzalez 2001). The different elements of the concept of multiple themes are topical theme, which expresses a semantic function; interpersonal theme, which expresses modal meaning; and textual theme, which expresses discourse cohesive functions (p 4). Fetzer states that the concept of theme is universal, whereas its linguistic realisation is not, as it follows different parameters in different languages. In
this study, the British data show a high degree of interpersonal themes, whereas theme in the German data is often a negative textual element. The author explains this by stating that, generally, in the German cultural context, interpersonal themes are avoided. Another difference between the two data sets is that theme zones in the British data are more conventionalised than in the German data.

Hannay and Martínez Caro's study in the next chapter investigates clause-final focus in Spanish and English using a functional discourse grammar framework (Hengeveld 2005). Therefore, in contrast to the previous study, which investigated theme, this study looks at the rhyme part in a sentence. Rheme has not been investigated as much as theme (Butler 2003: 179). Hannay and Martínez Caro state that clause-final position, rhyme, is the pragmatically unmarked position in many languages (after Dik 1997: 427). However, in some languages clause-final position may, indeed, be the marked position, as has been suggested in regard to Polish (Siewierska 1998: 257) and Dutch (De Schutter 1985). This present study compares clause-final focus in two languages that differ significantly in their syntax. Hannay and Martínez Caro claim that, whereas in Spanish clause-final focus is mostly determined by the syntax of Spanish sentences, in English it seems to be a 'more discourse-strategic matter' (p 49).

A contrastive analysis of cleft-sentences in Spanish, Norwegian and English is provided by Gundel in the third study of this first part. By looking at a translation of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone, Gundel finds that cleft sentences most frequently occur in the Norwegian translation and were least frequently found in the Spanish translation of the novel. The frequency of clefts in the English original is somewhere in between the two translations. These results corroborate earlier findings that claimed that the frequency of cleft sentences varies considerably across languages. However, the reason for this difference in frequency is still unclear. Variation in the frequency of cleft sentence usage has been attributed to differences in word order flexibility of different languages (Jespersen 1937) and intonational flexibility. Gundel suggests a further reason for the difference in cleft usage: the information-structural properties of cleft sentences in different languages. However, she concludes that all these reasons cannot account for the big differences in cleft usage she found in her study among the languages. She proposes to explore the influence of Celtic languages, such as Irish, on the languages she investigated, since a strong preference for cleft structures can be found in Celtic languages.

In the last study of the first part of this book, Magnus compares the syntactic position of adverbials and the pragmatic organisation in declarative sentences in French and Dutch. An important theoretical assumption underlying her work is that a distinction exists between focusable and non-focusable constituents of a sentence. She states that in Dutch all constituents of a sentence are focusable; even the whole sentence itself. Magnus finds that in French, however, there is a clear distinction between focusable and non-focusable parts in a sentence. According to Magnus, adverbials in French demonstrate a 'strong correlation between the focusability of adverbials and the positions they can occupy' (p 89). In Dutch, however, all types of adverbials can occur in all positions. Furthermore, in French, as opposed to Dutch, there is a greater difference in meaning when adverbials occur in different positions (p 90). Magnus relates the difference in the position of French and Dutch adverbials to the pragmatic organisation of declarative sentences in these languages. She concludes by saying that the pragmatic organisation in a sentence is more rigid in French than in Dutch, and is one reason why adverbials can occur in more positions in Dutch than in French.

The four studies presented in part two of this book compare lexical features across different languages. Using two translation corpuses, Viberg investigates Swedish verbs of perception by comparing them to verbs of perception in other rather closely related European languages. Verbs of perception can be divided into activity verbs, experience verbs and phenomenon-based verbs. For the perception of sight, for example, the activity verbs are watch and look at, the experience verb is see and the phenomenon-based verb is look. The main focus of Viberg's study on verbs of perception is the Swedish verb see (to see). She finds differences in the functions and use of this Swedish verb in English, German, French and Finnish. Whereas in English, for instance, the verb see can only be used as an experience verb, in Swedish see (to see) can also function as an activity and a phenomenon-based verb. However, Viberg also finds similarities in the lexical field of verbs of perception among
the languages she investigated. Verbs meaning see, for instance, tend to extend their meaning across languages and sometimes include the meaning of to perceive. She concludes that even though many contrastive patterns can be found among verbs of perception across languages, certain basic aspects are very similar. She finds one reason for this similarity in human biology and general cognition.

Fretheim and Amfo investigate the term abroad and semantically related terms in European languages and in Akan, which is the dominant indigenous language spoken in Ghana. In English, the term abroad can either be perceived as ‘away from the subject’s referent’s country’ or as ‘away from the speaker’s/writer’s country’ (p 173). However, in Akan the term abroad is only used to refer to going away from Africa and would not be used to refer to, for instance, going from Australia to Europe. The authors show that there are two words in Akan, one formal and one informal, that could function as approximate translations of the English term abroad. Etymologically, the informally used word (aburokyiri) consists of two compound words, which can be translated into English as white man and homeland. This causes problems for more educated people who are aware of the existence of other ethnic distinctions apart from black and white. Therefore, they tend to be hesitant to refer to Asia, for example, as ‘white man’s homeland’. Furthermore, the history of colonisation and the use of aburokyiri to refer to Great Britain gives this word a connotative overtone. These are some reasons identified by the authors for the preference given to a geographical name of a country over an Akan translation of the English term abroad (p 189).

In the third study in this part of the book, Pounds investigates fairy tales in Italian and English to see how emotion is expressed in this genre in the two languages. Studies have shown that fairy tales appear to encode emotive content in such a way that may facilitate aspects of children’s emotive development (p 193). Pounds draws on some concepts from Martin’s notion of affect (Martin 2000; Martin and Rose 2003) and Wierzbicka’s (1999) concept of indirect reference to emotion as a method for analysing the fairy tales (p 197). The fairy tales Pounds uses for a comparison are not direct translations from English into Italian but modern adaptations of the same fairy tales in both languages. She finds that the main difference between the two corpuses is the frequency of the emotions expressed in the two languages (p 204). In the Italian corpus more references to emotions are made than in the English corpus. Happiness, in particular, is referred to more often in Italian than in one of the fairy tales, followed by anger and fear. Pounds recognises a link between the focus on interpersonal values in early childhood education in Italy and the focus on emotions like ‘intentionally aggressive or deceitful behaviour’ (p 209) in fairy tales. In English early childhood education, the focus is on problem-solving, which is more compatible with the way English fairy tales are written.

Ródriguez González investigates, in the last study of this second part, the feminine stereotypes in gay characterisation. He finds words from different lexical fields that have been coined and are now used to describe homosexuals, often in a derogatory way by the heterosexual community. Lexical fields from which these terms have been drawn are, for instance, names, colours, flowers, food and professions. One explanation he gives for the allusions to women in words used to describe gay people is that, ‘In the subconscious of many people in accordance with the prevailing system of gender roles, a simplistic equation is established: if a man likes another man, he must be a woman, and if biologically he is not, then he is effeminate’ (cf Enguix 2000) (p 223). He also adds differences in non-verbal speech as a striking feature of the language of gay people, as well as phonetic variation in gay speech. The interested reader can follow-up on these lexical differences using a Spanish–English dictionary for gay language, which is soon to be published by the author of this study.

Andreas Jucker is the author of the first study of the third part of this book. This part covers topics on L2 acquisition. Jucker’s study investigates movie narratives in English as a foreign language and in German. In this study, narratives were elicited from the informants after they had watched a Charlie Chaplin silent movie. The different narrative subtasks the informants had to solve were the introduction of individual characters, the reporting of characters’ thoughts and utterances, and the sequencing of the events into narrative episodes. The differences found between the English and German speakers were that, even though the German non-native speakers of English had an excellent command of English, they still used pragmatic strategies from their native language to solve the tasks. One of these subtle differences is the introduction of a new entity by referring to the new person as this guy in contrast to a guy.
in English. The German non-native speakers of English preferred a customer or a man and did not use this guy. Therefore, L2 speakers of English gave preference to an ‘indefinite this-construction’ (p 271). According to Jucker, there are no obvious reasons why German speakers do not use this construction in the narratives and he suggests that the normality of the experiment situation might have contributed to this difference (p 266).

The study by Fernández Fuertes, Líceras and Álvarez de la Fuente investigates simultaneous and sequential English/Spanish bilingualism in a universal grammar framework (Chomsky 1989/2000, 1999). Simultaneous bilingualism is the ‘acquisition of two first languages from birth in a natural context’ (p 276). Sequential bilingualism is the ‘acquisition of an L1 [first language] from birth, latter acquisition of a L2 which starts being acquired in an institutional context in the majority of cases’ (Wei 2000, among others) (p 276). The authors compare bilingual twins, with adult sequential bilingualism in spontaneous and experimental production. Four different types of structures are analysed: code-mixing with determiner phrase, null and explicit subjects, Spanish definite articles, and accusative clitics and deverbal compounds. The authors conclude that there are clear-cut differences between native and non-native production. They suggest that differences in input access of the two groups are related to the production and interpretation of these structures. The two different strategies used by L1 and L2 speakers are the bottom-up strategy versus the top-down strategy. L1 speakers follow the bottom-up strategy, that is, they ‘deal with the morphophonological material that enables them to activate the abstract features’ (p 294). L2 speakers, however, employ a top-down strategy, which means that they process larger units such as, for instance, words or whole phrases (Líceras and Fernández Fuertes 2003) (pp 294–5).

The third chapter in this part of the book looks at form-focused instruction in the raising of student awareness of English pronunciation rules. In particular, Dalley Benson and del Pilar García Mayo look at the pronunciation rules of the syllable structure –ed in English verbs and how these are learned by Spanish speakers of English. Three different ways of teaching the rules for the syllable structure –ed are compared: the deductive approach, the inductive approach and the recast approach. Before and after the teaching period, tests were conducted. Overall, the results show that the students who were taught according to the deductive approach could apply the pronunciation rules for –ed best after the tuition period. However, a closer look at the three groups shows that the inductive group had the highest gain between pre-test and post-test, followed by the deductive group. Furthermore, the inductive group is the only one that shows a statistically significant improvement in the paired sample t-test (p 315). The authors also demonstrate that the variability of performance of the subjects is greater in the deductive group than the inductive group. This leads them to conclude that, ultimately, it might have been the inductive group that learned the rules best. The study shows that greater awareness of linguistic rules leads to better results for L2 learners, since the recast group showed the lowest performance.

The last study, by Gutiérrez Diéz, investigates intonation errors made by Spanish learners of English. He explains inference errors, from the native language of the learners, and developmental errors by comparing the tonality, tonicity and onset placement in Spanish and English. Ramírez (2003) has shown in a longitudinal study that intonation is not learned automatically, since no progress could be found in the English intonation by Spanish learners after three years of language instruction at university. Gutiérrez Diéz finds that the learners are particularly unsuccessful in the correct insertion of tone-unit boundaries (p 343). He also states that tonicity, the intonation signalling information focus, is the reason for the most persistent phonological errors for Spanish learners, and claims that tonicity should be explicitly taught (p 350). He gives lack of oral fluency as one reason why L2 speakers produce a higher number of tone units than L1 speakers. However, since fluency should increase over time, this error is only developmental and should be corrected with time. Gutiérrez Diéz also found many errors of onset placement, some of which he classified as developmental and others as interference errors. Gutiérrez Diéz also gives a further reason for the poor performance of the learners. He claims that prosodic instruction, or, rather, the lack thereof, is to blame for the low results and with better instruction the performance of the learners could improve.

The division of the book into three parts, covering the main topics of information structure, lexis and L2 acquisition, provides a good basic structure. The topics presented in the different
studies are quite broad, giving the reader a good overall overview of possible research areas related to the three main parts of the book. However, by reading the title one might have expected to also find articles related to a social perspective on languages and language learning in this book. Nevertheless, it was interesting to find several studies that presented research conducted on languages other than English. Studies on Spanish feature quite prominently, which, as a teacher of Spanish, I welcome, since this language is becoming increasingly important globally. However, one could claim that in the third part of the book on L2 acquisition, the focus on Spanish might be a bit too prominent and it would have been interesting to include studies on the acquisition of, for instance, Asian languages like Mandarin. Overall, Languages and cultures in contrast and comparison is an interesting collection of studies that cover topics from a great variety of languages and topics and is a valuable contribution to this field of study.

References


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