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Introduction

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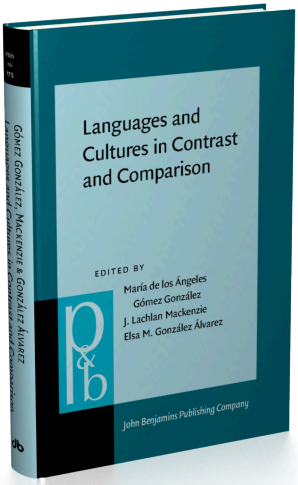

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Introduction

This book is devoted to various explorations of how linguistics and pragmatics together can shed light on the contrasts between languages in their discourse-cultural settings. It arises from presentations and discussions held at the *Fourth International Contrastive Linguistics Conference* (ICLC4), which took place in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain from 20 to 23 September 2005.[1] The twelve chapters analyse linguistic phenomena across different languages, taking into account their co-texts as well as the socio-cultural contexts in which they arise. The first two sections consider various questions of information structure, discourse analysis and lexis; each chapter is concerned in some way with the interplay between, on the one hand, grammatical and lexical organization and, on the other, the contexts in which utterances are used and texts emerge. The final chapters of the book consider how new techniques of contrastive linguistics and pragmatics are contributing to the primary field of application for contrastive analysis, language teaching and learning.

1. Information structure

The first section examines, from different perspectives and with regard to various languages and contexts, strategies deployed by speakers in the presentation of the information they wish to convey. It is now generally accepted across all schools of linguistics and pragmatics that a central factor in the structuring of linguistic messages is the distinction between thematic and rhematic information, no matter what labels each school gives to these categories, no matter what refinements they apply. This opposition between an utterance-initial Theme and a Rheme (composing all or part of the rest of the utterance) underlies all four chapters. Likewise, such related concepts as Topic, Focus, information packaging (the structuring of propositional content in function of the speaker's assumptions about the hearer's information state), information processing (how information is stored and retrieved) and the contrast between Given and New information, to mention but a few, also loom large in the four chapters

1. For further work deriving from the same conference, please see *Current Trends in Contrastive Linguistics: Functional and Cognitive Perspectives* (John Benjamins, 2008), co-edited by María de los Angeles Gómez González, Lachlan Mackenzie and Elsa González Álvarez, and *Studies in Contrastive Linguistics* (Santiago de Compostela University Press, 2006), co-edited by Cristina Mourón Figueroa and Teresa Iciar Moralejo Gárate.

grouped in this section: they all share the view of grammar as a dynamic tool for the packaging of information that allows the speaker to focus the hearer's attention on a particular discourse referent in order to satisfy context-specific communicative needs, and thereby contribute to efficient information exchange.

The notion of Theme takes centre stage in the first of these chapters, by Anita Fetzer. In the tradition of Systemic Functional Linguistics, she studies Theme with regard to its textual function and thus integrates the grammar of the clause into an analysis of discourse. Her focus is on language use in a particular context, that of politicians' reactions to electoral defeat. Admitting defeat during a political interview is, in Politeness Theory terms, a face-threatening act which may be expected to display particular linguistic properties. Since in all cultures it is hard for a politician to concede his or her lack of popularity, this commonality grants the researcher a constant against which to analyse the variable linguistic realizations of shared communicative purposes. Fetzer accordingly devotes close comparative consideration to 12 short dyadic interviews between professional journalists and representatives of the losers of the 1997 General Election in the United Kingdom, the Conservatives, and of the losers of the 1998 General Election in Germany, the Christian Democratic Party and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Democrats. The German data and the British data thus share almost identical external parameters and very similar contextual features. Moreover, the co-participants' argumentation is based on the same premises, namely that they are not in a position to comment on their particular situation as their defeat has not yet been given officially recognized status. Despite these contextual similarities, the linguistic realizations of the British and German non-acceptances differ significantly. These differences are shown to result above all from language-specific preferences regarding the linguistic realization of turn-initial positions and their functions as interpersonal, topical or textual Themes. In English, interpersonal Themes clearly predominate, whereas in German the Theme is very often a negative textual element, setting up a rejection rather than, as in English, negotiating through multiple thematic elements.

With the article by Mike Hannay & Elena Martínez Caro, we shift our attention to the Rheme, and more specifically to constituents in absolute clause-final position, now with regard to Spanish and English. The authors assume that syntactic constituents are ordered by a language-specific linear template. They show that the templates (or functional patterns) for the two languages they examine differ in various respects. Using the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar, they go on to ask whether the behaviour of clause-final focal elements in both languages warrants the positing of special focus positions in their respective functional patterns. For Spanish, the existence of the verb-initial, subject-final order characteristic of thetic statements strongly suggests that a special position for Focus material is indeed required; in English, it is constructions with object-postposing that impose a similar conclusion. Thus both languages can be seen to recognize such a clause-final position, but they put it to quite different uses. The chapter contains an examination of Ian McEwen's exploitation of the clause-final position in his novel *Enduring Love*, which shows how a writer can

employ syntactic strategies for identifiable communicative purposes. Hannay and Martínez-Caro suggest that a decision to postpone a particular constituent can have knock-back effects on the syntax of preceding material.

These notions of Theme and Rheme are also essential to the chapter by Jeanette Gundel, who is one of the major contributors worldwide to the analysis of the information-structural properties of sentences. In this study, she reports on research into the distribution and frequency of the *it*-cleft construction in J.K. Rowling's novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and its Norwegian and Spanish translations. This construction very clearly articulates the clause into a Theme and a Rheme section. The results of Gundel's work support earlier findings that despite cross-linguistic parallels in structure, the frequency of use of cleft constructions can differ considerably across languages. She argues that such differences can only partly be explained by morpho-syntactic or prosodic differences between the languages in question. She proposes instead that the differences in frequency of use reflect differences in the degree to which each language permits direct mapping of information structure onto surface syntactic structure. These differences – Gundel shows – can only be fully understood if a distinction is made between two logically and empirically distinct information-structural concepts: relational givenness/newness, i.e. the familiar linguistic notion of Topic-Focus structure, and referential givenness, which is concerned with cognitive matters, namely the memory and attention status of discourse entities.

The following final chapter of this section, by Ilse Magnus, turns to another grammatical phenomenon which is impacted by information-structural considerations, the syntactic placement of adverbials. More precisely, her study considers the positional tendencies displayed by circumstantial adjuncts in Dutch and French; like Hannay and Martínez Caro, Magnus, assumes that syntactic constituents are ordered by a language-specific linear template. Another important theoretical assumption of hers, influenced by the Role & Reference Grammar approach, is that sentence constituents can be classified as either focusable or not, and that this distinction in potential for Focus assignment is essential for an understanding of the phenomena she examines. A further refinement is her claim that not just individual constituents but an entire sentence can also be classified as <± focusable>. On this basis she lays bare an important difference between the French and Dutch languages: the French clause can be divided into a non-focusable and a focusable section, which are separated by the position for the negative particle *pas*; Dutch is more flexible in permitting the entire clause and its constituents to be focusable, with the important exception of the initial and final positions. This generalization has consequences for the analysis of adverbials, consequences which are tested in an empirical study with informants. In French, there is a strong correlation between the focusability of adverbials and where they can occur in the syntactic sequence: positions within the focusable section of a French clause can only accept focusable adverbials, and positions with the non-focusable section can only take non-focusable adverbials; however, the latter can accept focusable adverbs provided that these are not actually in Focus in the particular context of utterance. The situation in Dutch is

quite different: here the various clause-internal focusable positions can take adverbials of either status; accordingly, it is other factors such as relation to the context and sentence accent rather than clausal position that enable the Focus to be identifiable.

2. Lexis in contrast

The second section moves from grammatical to lexical matters. The comparison of lexical items has long been a central concern of contrastive linguistics and cultural pragmatics, for individual words and phrases reveal the interaction between language and culture society more clearly than culturally more neutral matters like syntax and phonology. The chapters in this section are no exception to this, covering matters such as human perception and emotion, the psychological understanding of 'home' and 'abroad', the development of children's emotional life and the relation between lexical choice and sexual orientation.

Åke Viberg's contribution offers a typologically oriented analysis of Swedish verbs of perception based on data from two translation corpora, the large English Swedish Parallel Corpus and a Multilingual Pilot Corpus consisting of extracts from Swedish novels and their published translations into English, German, French and Finnish. The study focuses on language-specific features forming part of the typological-lexical profile of Swedish, but also casts much light upon the languages with which Swedish is contrasted. Although cross-linguistic variation in the lexical field of perception verbs is constrained by the nature of the human perception system, even closely related languages like those compared can differ quite radically. This is shown for the entire lexical field. Viberg shows how the Swedish verbs *se* and *höra* (lit. 'see' and 'hear') display interesting patterns of polysemy, with several language-specific characteristics. But the most remarkable perception verb in Swedish is *känna* 'feel', whose meaning has extended to touch, taste, smell and bodily perceptions and emotions, as well as a number of cognition meanings such as 'know about an act' or 'know a person'. These meaning extensions parallel the semantic development of verbs of feeling in various geographically adjacent languages.

The chapter by Thorstein Fretheim and Nana Aba Appiah Amfo devotes an in-depth analysis to one single concept, one that is of crucial importance for language users' understanding of themselves and their place in the world, namely the inherently deictic concept 'abroad' and the its associated semantic field, as well as its antonym 'home'. Although several languages are passed in review, the analysis focuses on the language-pair Norwegian and Akan, the dominant indigenous language of Ghana. What emerges is that the expressions corresponding to 'abroad' in Akan have a denotation very different from the European "equivalents", and moreover are highly laden with connotations that arise from the traditions and geopolitical status of Ghana. To a Ghanian, for example, another African country such as Togo is typically not regarded as being 'abroad', at least not when the speaker is using Akan. Adopting the

presuppositions of Relevance Theory, Fretheim and Amfo defend the position that it is cultural connotations that lie behind the metonymies and ambiguities that are characteristic of words for 'foreignness' in European languages, too.

With Gabrina Pound's chapter, we move on to the question whether linguistic analysis of the lexical content of fairy tales will permit an analysis of their emotive content. More specifically, could such analysis be applied contrastively to reveal similarities and differences in how emotion is expressed in different cultural settings and in different languages? Drawing on the methodologies of discourse analysis and insights from social psychology and in particular on the lexical work of Wierzbicka's Universal Semantic Metalanguage, Pound's analysis of three fairy tales in English and Italian covers both linguistically expressed emotions and also emotion-arousing events in the tales. She observes how these stories play a role in the emotional development of children, providing a "safe" environment in which powerful emotions are played out. Differences were discovered through an analysis of the wording of versions of the shared fairy tales in the two languages: the more frequent reference to emotions in the Italian stories is seen to reflect a cultural emphasis on ethical concerns, whereas the versions in English are more oriented to inculcating strategies for problem-solving, generating (rather than representing) emotion, and developing the reader's vocabulary.

The section concludes with Felix Rodríguez's analysis of the lexical production of effeminate gay men using tools afforded by lexicography and sociolinguistics. The study scrutinizes a catalogue of words, idioms, expressions and metaphors which evoke the femininity of gays, both in Spanish (e.g. *maricón, marica, violeta, rosa, moña,* etc.) and in English (e.g. *pink*, *flower*, *daisy, nancy, sissy-boy*), explaining and contrasting their usage, connotations and semantic evolution. Of particular interest is Rodríguez's demonstration of the use of such language by gays themselves as a reflection of the self-perception of the swishing sector of the homosexual community and of the counter-culture which they see themselves as forming. The comparison of English and Spanish lexis in this area yields a picture of markedly greater variety in English: the author associates this with, on the one hand, the greater visibility of gay subcultures in the English-speaking world and, on the other, with a higher prevalence there of homophobia.

3. Contrastive perspectives on SLA

Contrastive linguistics has been closely associated throughout its post-war history with the study of the acquisition of foreign languages. In earlier days researchers tended to believe that contrastive linguistics could show exactly where/how the structures of L1 and L2 differed and thus yield direct input to the processes of teaching and learning foreign languages in a cultural environment that is not that of the L2. Current work is more oriented to differences between groups of the language learners, focusing on their overall communicative competence as well as to examining possible parallels

with first language acquisition. The four chapters in this section are, each in its own way, valuable contributions to these newer pathways of research.

The first chapter of this section is by Andreas Jucker and concentrates on 'movie narratives', that is, stories in which narrators summarise the contents of a movie, usually a silent movie. This technique has been used for several decades by psycholinguists interested in studying verbal interaction in a tightly controlled manner, and Jucker adopts their experimental methodology. His subjects are native speakers of English (mostly students in California), speakers of English as a foreign language (students at Giessen University in Germany), and speakers of German (the same students in their native language). The focus is on the different ways in which English native speakers, EFL speakers, and speakers of German respectively sequence narrative elements through the appropriate choice of tenses; on how they introduce characters into their narrations; and on how they report acts of thought and speech. What emerges is that the subjects differ significantly with respect not to the mastery of grammatical correctness but to the frequency with which grammatical techniques are deployed: the German learners basically continue to use their native language's communicative strategies, while committing few grammatical mistakes. The challenge for language teaching and learning, then, is to discover and then orient to the lines of attack used by native speakers in carrying out communicative tasks.

The following chapter, by Raquel Fernández Fuertes, Juana M. Liceras & Esther Álvarez de la Fuente, also reports (partially) on experimental research, but with very different theoretical presuppositions, data sources and purposes. The authors employ Chomsky's Minimalist Program and notion of parametric variation to explore the lexico-grammatical patterns produced by bilingual twins as they simultaneously learn their first languages Spanish and English as well as those found in the speech, spontaneous and experimentally induced, of adult sequential Spanish-English bilinguals. The research focuses on a set of phenomena that are well-suited to establishing whether the specific nature of bilingualism is determined by the innate mental representation of language: code-mixing in Determiner Phrases, null vs overt subjects, the positioning and omission of articles and clitics, and deverbal compounds in Spanish. The results show marked differences between the two groups of experimental subjects, which the authors ascribe to the children's using a bottom-up strategy that accesses the formal morphological features furnished by their innate grammatical capacity while the adults use a top-down learning strategy that concentrates on words and phrases and makes morphological adjustments construction by construction.

The goal of Edward Dalley Benson and Pilar García Mayo's chapter is to address the issue of *Form-Focused Instruction* (FFI) with regard to Spanish-speaking students' consciousness of the intricate relationships between orthography and pronunciation in English. Can we help our students to learn by raising their awareness of the rules that linguists posit? The authors seek to answer this question with regard to a morphophonological regularity that is perennially difficult for Spanish learners: the various forms adopted by the English past tense and participial ending *–ed*: /t, d, ɪd/. This

is done by experiment, comparing a group exposed to FFI with one not so exposed. The experimental results indicate that greater awareness does indeed correlate with greater learning. What remains to be tested is whether the FFI-taught students also displayed better phonological performance in spontaneous use and whether the improvement was sustained.

The final chapter of this section and of the book, by Francisco Gutiérrez, remains in the sphere of phonology, but now with regard to suprasegmental phenomena; at the same time, it returns us to some of the issues of information structure dealt with in Part I. The chapter is concerned with the analysis of errors in intonation committed by Spanish learners of English as a Foreign Language. These are divided into those that are phonetic and reflect a stage in the student's linguistic development and those that are phonological and pertain to deeper-lying divergences. Using Halliday's tonetic approach, Gutiérrez points to learners' particular difficulties in associating tonicity (pitch movement) with the pragmatic focus of the utterance. The core of the chapter is an empirical analysis of learner errors from which language teachers may draw considerable inspiration. Indeed, the author ends by making a plea for schoolteachers to devote much more attention to prosodic aspects of pronunciation, emphasizing how there is a relatively straightforward correlation between focus and tonic syllable.

4. Acknowledgements and concluding remarks

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our plenary speakers, the Conference participants, the members of the Organizing and the Scientific Committee, as well as our collaborators from other Departments of the Faculty of Philology at the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC): their involvement in and assistance on the occasion of the celebration of ICLC4 were the first contribution towards this volume.

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It is our contention that the contributions gathered in this volume bring to light various hitherto unexplored or under-explored relationships between languages and

the discourse-cultural settings in which they are used. In some cases, it appears that the relationship goes from language to culture, with syntactic or lexical properties determining the interactive and cognitive possibilities of the language community, as in the articles by Hannay & Martínez, Gundel, Magnus, Viberg, Fernández Fuertes *et al.* In others, it is more clearly the other way round, with variations in cultural conventions impinging upon how people communicate with each other, as in the contributions by Fetzer, Fretheim & Amfo, Pound and Rodríguez. And in yet other cases, we see the position of the learner struggling with both language and culture, in an effort to reconcile rivalling discoursal, morphological and phonological strategies, as detailed in the chapters by Jucker, Benson & García Mayo and Gutiérrez. Although they display a wide range of methodologies, the articles together point to the multiple interactions between language use and the various communicative settings in which it is situated. As a whole, the book thus unravels more of the complexity that is inherent to both language and culture and to the myriad relations between them.

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