

María de los Ángeles Gómez González, J. Lachlan Mackenzie and Elsa M. González Álvarez (eds). 2008. *Languages and Cultures in Contrast and Comparison*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. xxii+364 pp. ISBN: 978 90 272 5419 1. (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series)

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Languages and Cultures in Contrast and Comparison is one of the books derived from the Fourth International Contrastive Linguistics Conference (ICLC4) that took place in Santiago de Compostela in September 2005 (see also Mourón Figueroa & Moralejo Gárate 2006 and Gómez González et al. 2008). It brings together twelve papers (besides the introduction) which have in common that they involve some sort of comparison – most of the time between two or more languages, sometimes between native and non-native varieties, and in one case between learners who were taught by means of one of three instruction methods. A variety of languages are covered in the book: English (in all the chapters but one), Spanish (in half of the chapters), German, French, Norwegian, Akan, Dutch, Finnish, Italian, Spanish and Swedish, but also, more sporadically, languages like Greek, Hindi, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese or Yoruba. Pragmatic and cultural aspects also take pride of place in the volume.

After a short but useful introduction, in which the editors provide a brief summary of each article and show how they relate to the main themes of the book, the contributions are divided into three main parts: one dealing with various aspects of information structure, another one concerned with lexical issues and the last one about Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

The first part starts with a chapter by **Anita Fetzer** examining the linguistic realisation of the so-called theme zone in British English and German political interviews. The context of these interviews is very specific, as they were conducted on the night of general elections held in Britain (1997) and Germany (1998) with the losers of the elections. The feature that is of particular interest to the author is the communicative act of non-acceptance: since defeat has not been officially recognised yet, a common reaction is for the politician to refuse to comment on his/her situation or provide a particular piece of information requested by the journalist. The contrastive analysis reveals that English politicians tend to use (very routinised) multiple themes, typically a textual theme followed by an interpersonal theme and then a topical theme (e.g. *Well I think that we...*), whereas German politicians often limit themselves to a topical theme. Negotiation over non-acceptance is also lengthier in English than in German, where acts of non-acceptance are usually negotiated in just two turns. In the next paper, **Mike Hannay** and **Elena Martínez Caro** also deal with the organisation of the sentence from a contrastive perspective, but they concentrate on the clause-final position and compare English with Spanish. As against the view that constituents ending up in final position naturally acquire some kind of relief, they argue that clause-final positioning in English and Spanish may be the result of a communicative strategy on the part of the speaker and they postulate a special position at the end of the clause, P_0 , which has the pragmatic function of Focus. This position is shown to be relevant for both languages, though in different ways. What is particularly commendable about Hannay & Martínez Caro's approach is that the data analysis has theoretical implications, in that it leads to an improvement (and in fact, simplification) of the model used as a framework for the

analysis, the model of Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG). The resulting model adopts a more pragmatically-driven approach to constituent ordering, which is ultimately accounted for in terms of the speaker's intentions, and it thus promotes pragmatic adequacy in FDG. Constituent ordering also lies at the basis of **Jeanette K. Gundel's** chapter, which investigates cleft sentences of the type *It was an elephant (that) I saw*. The perspective is, here again, contrastive, relying as it does on the novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and its Norwegian and Spanish translations. The English-Norwegian analysis builds on an earlier study by the same author (Gundel 2006) and reveals that cleft sentences are more frequent in Norwegian than in English. The present paper adds the Spanish comparison, which suggests that clefts are less often used in Spanish than in either of the other two languages. It is important to note, however, that Gundel focused "primarily" on the Spanish translations of clefts in the original version (p. 77), which means that clefts in the Spanish version which did not correspond to clefts in English are likely to have been missed in the analysis. Considering that in the Norwegian version, as many as 80 clefts did not correspond to a cleft in English, we are left pondering what impact such a methodology may have had on the analysis of Spanish clefts. **Ilse Magnus** is interested in the position of adverbials in French and Dutch declarative sentences. Her analysis is based on the distinction between focusable and non-focusable, which she applies not only to the organisation of the sentence (with some positions having the potentiality to contain focused elements, and others not), but also to adverbials themselves (among the semantic classes that she recognises, characterising and situating adverbials are focusable, whereas comments on the utterance and on the utterance act are non-focusable). Using native speakers' acceptability judgements on some 800 constructed examples per language, Magnus comes to the conclusion that in French focusable adverbials normally occupy focusable positions, whereas non-focusable adverbials are limited to non-focusable positions (unless they cause a prosodic break in the intonation pattern). Dutch, on the other hand, is not characterised by such a correlation between the pragmatic status of the sentence position and that of the adverbial: with only a few exceptions, the different positions can be filled with any type of adverbial.

The second part of the volume consists of lexical studies, such as **Åke Viberg's** study of verbs of perception in Swedish. This paper seeks to establish part of the lexical typological profile of Swedish by comparing its use of perception verbs in corpus data with those found in other languages, in an attempt to identify the language-specific characteristics of Swedish. The most developed comparison is that between Swedish and English, which relies on bidirectional translations from the English Swedish Parallel Corpus (ESPC) and takes the form of detailed tables with the major translational equivalents for Swedish and English, and the percentages they represent in the corpus. In addition, the Multilingual Pilot Corpus (MPC) provides data for original Swedish and translated English, Finnish, French and German. The analysis, which is abundantly illustrated with corpus examples, brings to light uses that are shared by all the examined languages, for example the semantic extension of the verb *see* (and its equivalents in the other languages) to cover imaginary perception (cf. *in her mind's eye she saw...*). Perhaps more importantly, however, it also shows that some uses are more language-specific (e.g. the use of Swedish *höra på*, literally 'hear on', to refer to the activity of listening) and thus convincingly demonstrates that "languages that are similar at a general level can contrast in a striking way with respect to usage patterns" (p. 170). In the next chapter, **Thorstein Fretheim** and **Nana Aba Appiah Amfo** study the term 'abroad' and semantically related terms in some European languages (including English, Norwegian,

French and German) and in Akan, a Kwa language of the Niger-Congo family spoken in Ghana. The most interesting point of the paper is that, while English *abroad* may be interpreted either as ‘away from the subject referent’s country’ or as ‘away from the speaker’s/writer’s country’, the main Akan equivalent, *aburokyiri*, can only refer to the latter, and is especially used for countries that are dominated by white men (literally, *aburokyiri* means ‘the white man’s homeland’). The authors also underline the importance of context, showing for instance that the term *foreigner* and its Norwegian equivalent *utlending*, unlike *abroad/i utlandet* and *foreign/utenlandsk*, tend to have negative connotations, and that these “may be strengthened in some contexts and weakened in others” (p. 183). In **Gabrina Pounds’** paper, the context is that of fairy tales, and the topic is the expression of emotion. The data for the analysis come from various English and Italian modern adaptations of three traditional fairy tales, viz. *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Three Little Pigs*, and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. The author distinguishes between six main types of emotion (anger, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise, love) and between direct and indirect expression of emotion – the latter corresponding to verbal processes, action processes, bodily (re)action processes, experiential processes, thought processes, or a combination thereof. What is common to English and Italian fairy tales is that direct reference to emotion is rare and usually limited to positive emotions. Negative emotions, by contrast, tend to be expressed indirectly, especially through verbal processes (reported speech). Where English and Italian differ is in the frequency of references to emotion encoded in the fairy tales: overall, the Italian versions contain more of them. In addition, the Italian fairy tales tend to contain an explicit moralising message which is often lacking in the English versions – a difference which the author explains by referring to the different educational contexts of English and Italian nursery schools. The last paper specifically dealing with lexical issues is by **Félix Rodríguez González** and examines the feminine stereotype in English and Spanish gay characterisation. After claiming that discrimination against homosexuals is reflected in language itself, the author distinguishes between feminine references (the use of terms related to effeminacy to refer to homosexuality or homosexuals) and feminine language (the use of specific linguistic features such as phonetic variation, feminine morphosyntactic items or non-verbal language). Each of these categories is illustrated through concrete examples, whose association with femininity and homosexuality is explained by referring to mythology, historical origin, metaphor or metonymy (e.g. the word *drag*, which originally designated the female dress worn by a male actor at the theatre). It appears that associations are often similar in English and Spanish (names of fruit, for instance, are common in both languages to refer to gays), but that the two languages also present differences in gay characterisation, for example the greater propensity in Spanish to address gays in the feminine.

The third and final part of the book is devoted to contrastive perspectives on SLA. It starts with **Andreas H. Jucker’s** paper, which compares retellings of the Charlie Chaplin film *The Immigrant* by native speakers of (American) English, native speakers of German and German learners of English. Three communicative tasks are examined, namely sequencing of the events into narrative episodes (with appropriate choice of tense), introduction of the characters, and representation of the characters’ thoughts and utterances. It turns out that, even though the German learners of English are advanced learners who make relatively few grammatical errors, they are largely influenced by their mother tongue when it comes to pragmatic strategies such as those involved in the three communicative tasks. Thus, unlike the native speakers of English, they tend not to

select a specific tense for each narrative element, but use the same tense throughout or switch tenses within one and the same narrative element; they mostly introduce a new character by means of the indefinite article *a* (*a customer*), rather than using the more native-like *this* (*this guy*); and they are less likely than native speakers of English to reproduce the characters' utterances. All of these characteristics are reflected in the German native speakers' retellings. The next chapter, by **Raquel Fernández Fuertes**, **Juana M. Liceras** and **Esther Álvarez de la Fuente**, seeks to compare simultaneous bilingualism (i.e. the acquisition of two first languages from birth) and sequential bilingualism (i.e. the acquisition of a first language from birth and the later acquisition of a second language) in English and Spanish. The authors focus on four different phenomena, namely mixed Determiner Phrases (Spanish determiner with English noun or vice versa); null/overt subjects; definite articles and accusative clitics; and deverbal compounds. Several variables are involved in the comparison, among which the type of data (spontaneous vs. experimental), the age of the subjects (child vs. adult) and the degree of expertise in linguistics. The problem, however, is that these variables are not systematically investigated for each of the two bilingual systems, and that the authors sometimes end up comparing results which may not be comparable at all. It should also be pointed out that, of the four structures under study, only one is examined in both simultaneous and sequential bilingual systems – a comparison which leads the authors to conclude that the two groups of bilinguals differ in how they access the input: following a bottom-up strategy in L1 acquisition and a top-down strategy in L2 acquisition. Unlike the other chapters in the book, that by the late **Edward Dalley Benson** and by **María del Pilar García Mayo** concentrates on one single language variety, viz. the English produced by Spanish-speaking students. The contrast here is between students who were taught via three different form-focused instruction (FFI) techniques: deductive, inductive and recasts. The focus is on the pronunciation of the past tense *-ed* ending and students' awareness of the morphophonological rule governing it, and the experimental design is made up of a pretest, a one-hour treatment and a posttest one week later (the tests consisted in reading aloud individual and contextualised forms, and formulating a rule for the correct pronunciation of the *-ed* ending). After having established clear objectives and research questions, the authors put forward three hypotheses: (1) the deductive group will gain more awareness of the rule than the inductive group, which itself will improve more in rule awareness than the recast group; (2) students who are aware of the rule will perform significantly better than those who are not; (3) scores on the posttest will be highest in the deductive condition, intermediate in the inductive condition and lowest in the recast condition. The first two hypotheses appear to be fully confirmed by the experiment, while the third one is only partially confirmed, in that the scores are ordered as predicted, but the results tend not to be statistically significant. In the last chapter of the book, **Francisco Gutiérrez Díez** considers intonation errors made by Spanish learners of English in secondary education. The study is based on the reading aloud of a short text in English by one native speaker of English and fourteen Spanish students, and examines tonality (division of speech into tone units), tonicity (intonation signalling of information focus) and onset placement. The contrastive analysis between English and Spanish is used as a way of predicting and explaining difficulties among Spanish learners, and also serves to distinguish between interference errors (due to the influence of the learners' mother tongue) and developmental errors – although one may regret that the interference explanation was not confirmed by other types of data (most notably, data produced by learners from other mother tongue backgrounds). Interestingly, the author relates the

learners' low performance to the institutional context, and more precisely the fact that in Spain English pronunciation is not included in the university entrance examination. He also proposes pedagogical remedies, suggesting that teachers should be concerned with phonological errors (i.e. those that violate constraints with respect to the signalling of syntactic categories, for instance the tone-unit boundary in *It gave him the confidence // he needed*) and that phonetic errors (those that are non-functional) will gradually disappear without any special treatment.

Together, the twelve chapters of the book give a good overview of how contrastive analysis (taken in a broad sense) can be exploited to investigate a wide diversity of topics such as discourse, lexis, phonology or bilingualism. The theoretical frameworks within which the studies are carried out also add variety to the book: Functional Discourse Grammar, Relevance Theory and Minimalist Program are but some of the theories that are represented. This is one of the strengths of the book, since it contributes to its theoretical richness, but it also involves a risk that readers not familiar with a specific theory will find it difficult to understand the paper if the theory is not explained in sufficient detail. Another important aspect of the book is its empirical basis. All the studies rely on naturalistic or experimental data: corpora (monolingual or bilingual, native or non-native), acceptability judgment tests, reaction times, read-aloud tasks, etc. In a number of cases, however, the empirical basis is very thin (a corpus corresponding to nineteen minutes of speech, one book translated by one translator, three informants per language, one native speaker to establish the norm), and the authors are not always cautious enough when drawing conclusions on this basis. Sometimes the collection of data seems to be rather opportunistic (and the sources of the examples obscure), and one cannot be sure how reliable the findings emerging from these data are. In yet other cases, the link between the data and the results is not very clear, as when an acceptability judgment test with the options 'acceptable', 'doubtful' and 'unacceptable' translates into statements about the existence or not of particular patterns and the presence or not of certain prosodic breaks. These limitations notwithstanding, the book should make for interesting reading for a wide and diverse readership. Besides the variety of languages, themes, approaches and data represented, its assets include the extensive use of glosses to help understand non-English examples, a well-balanced structure (four articles in each part) and detailed indexes. Particularly noteworthy too is the inclusion of under-researched topics, as well as the consideration for SLA and cultural aspects (although the emphasis on the latter is probably not as strong as might be expected from the title). More generally, the book does a good job of showing that contrastive linguistics is opening up to new fields and new themes, and will hopefully encourage researchers to develop these (and other) relationships even further.

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