

DRAFT

Introduction

Gaëtanelle Gilquin
Université catholique de Louvain

Szilvia Papp
University of Portsmouth

María Belén Díez-Bedmar
Universidad de Jaén

Most of the papers collected in this volume were presented at the workshop “Linking up contrastive and learner corpus research”, held in September 2005 in conjunction with the 4th International Contrastive Linguistics Conference that took place in Santiago de Compostela (Spain). What these papers have in common is that they all use learner corpora (i.e. large computerised collections of authentic data produced by learners of a foreign/second language) and that they do so from a contrastive perspective. “Contrastive”, here, means several things. It can refer to “contrastive interlanguage analysis” (see Granger 1996), which involves either the comparison of learner language with native language (as exemplified by Ädel’s study) or the comparison of several learner languages (as in Lozano & Mendikoetxea’s chapter). While the former type of comparison makes it possible to highlight features of non-nativeness in the learners’ production, such as misuse, overuse or underuse, the latter may point to problems which are shared by learners from different mother tongue backgrounds and hence are likely to be developmental (age-related, proficiency-related, etc). Another sense in which the approach in this volume may be described as “contrastive” is that several studies combine learner corpus analysis with contrastive analysis, comparing the target language and the learner’s mother tongue (see e.g. Demol & Hadermann’s paper). This dual approach, exemplified by the “integrated contrastive model” (Granger 1996, Gilquin 2000/2001), sheds light on the place of the mother tongue in the acquisition of the target language and foregrounds the notion of language transfer.

The volume is divided into four parts, which correspond to four fields of investigation. The first part deals with methodological issues. After setting the scene for the combination of contrastive and learner corpus research, **Gaëtanelle Gilquin** proposes a model for the study of transfer-related phenomena, namely the Detection-Explanation-Evaluation (DEE) transfer model. This model, which relies on two existing frameworks for transfer research (Granger 1996 and Jarvis 2000), uses corpus data and combines contrastive analysis and interlanguage analysis. By drawing a number of comparisons between the mother language, the target language and the interlanguage, the model aims to detect cases of transfer, explain them and evaluate their pedagogical relevance. The DEE transfer model is illustrated by means of a case study of the use of *even if* by French-speaking

learners, which shows how and why this expression displays traces of transfer and what consequences, if any, it should have on the foreign language teaching curriculum. Some limitations of the model are also discussed, with a view to further improving it and thus gaining an even better understanding of transfer. In the second paper, **Annelie Ädel** tackles the issue of corpus comparability and demonstrates that differences in foreign language production attributed to the learner's mother tongue may in fact result from discrepancies in task setting (i.e. how much time is available) and/or intertextuality (i.e. whether access is given to secondary sources). Focusing on the presence of involvement features in the written production of Swedish learners of English, Ädel compares corpus data differing along the two parameters of task setting and intertextuality, and shows that the degree of involvement in learner writing is reduced when learners are involved in untimed tasks and when they are given secondary sources as input. In particular, the first factor turns out to affect the presence of first person pronouns, whilst the second factor is shown to have an influence on features such as disjuncts, questions and exclamations. The paper ends with some recommendations for testing practices in language teaching.

In the second part of the volume, which focuses on learner lexis, **John Cross** and **Szilvia Papp** study verb + noun combinations as used by Chinese learners of English. By comparing their corpus data with similar data for Greek learners (Giovi 2006) and German learners (Nesselhauf 2003), they discover that Chinese learners use more non-native combinations than German and Greek learners. They also argue that Chinese learners are less creative in their production of verb + noun combinations than the other two groups of learners, who use such combinations in more experimental and innovative ways. Cross and Papp offer several explanations for this difference. Besides the influence of the mother tongue and the lack of exposure to the target language, they suggest that environment-related factors might be at work, including general beliefs widely held in the Peoples' Republic of China and, more importantly, teaching and learning practices such as the memorisation and (inappropriate) recall of chunks of language.

The next four papers investigate learner syntax. **Cristóbal Lozano** and **Amaya Mendikoetxea** examine the properties that govern the occurrence of postverbal subjects in English texts produced by Spanish and Italian advanced learners, and argue that postverbal subjects can only be accounted for by considering three interfaces, namely the lexicon-syntax interface, the syntax-phonology interface and the syntax-discourse interface. For each of these interfaces, they propose a hypothesis, which they then test on the basis of learner corpus data. The results of the analysis confirm the three hypotheses, namely that Spanish and Italian learners of English produce postverbal subjects with unaccusative verbs, not unergative verbs; that they tend to produce heavy subjects in postverbal position and light ones in preverbal position; and that they consistently produce focus subjects in postverbal position and topic subjects in preverbal position. No significant differences were found to exist between the two groups of learners regarding the conditions under which postverbal subjects

occur. **John Osborne**'s paper is devoted to adverb placement, and more particularly Verb-Adverb-Object order, in the written production of learners of English from a variety of L1 backgrounds. The author shows that non-native-like adverb placement is still likely to occur at a post-intermediate stage, although more so among learners whose mother tongue has obligatory verb-raising (Romance languages), which may suggest a transfer of syntactic patterns. However, the fact that speakers of V2 Germanic languages, which also permit V-Adv-O order, produce very few such sequences and that speakers of non-raising Slavic languages produce some of them proves that transfer is not the only explanation and that other factors must be at work too. These, according to Osborne, include semantic and phraseological factors, as evidenced by learners' tendency to produce V-Adv-O sequences with "lighter" NPs and "weaker" V-Adv collocations than native speakers would do. The paper closes with some desiderata for enriching the potential for contrastive studies based on learner corpora. **María Belén Díez-Bedmar** and **Szilvia Papp** are interested in the use of the English article system by two groups of learners, one having no article system in their mother tongue, viz. Chinese-speaking learners, and the other having an article system slightly different from the English one, viz. Spanish-speaking learners. Using Bickerton's (1981) semantic wheel and Huebner's (1983) subsequent taxonomy, as well as the theory of definiteness within pragmatics, the authors combine a contrastive analysis, which highlights the differences between the article use in English, Spanish and Chinese, with a contrastive interlanguage analysis, in which they test the hypotheses put forward on the basis of the contrastive analysis. The results of the contrastive interlanguage analysis show, among others, that, as predicted by the contrastive analysis, Chinese learners exhibit more non-native features in their overall use of the English article system than Spanish learners. In her paper, **Christelle Cosme** focuses on the use of adverbial and adnominal present/past participle clauses. Using comparable and translation corpus data, she examines whether the underuse of participle clauses by French- and Dutch-speaking learners of English observed by Granger (1997) may be explained by cross-linguistic influence, considering the common claim that English makes greater use of participle constructions than French and Dutch. Her data suggest that transfer may be put forward as a plausible explanation for Dutch-speaking learners. In the case of French-speaking learners, on the other hand, transfer seems to be at work only with present participle clauses. Cosme's paper ends with a caveat that other factors may contribute to the underuse of participle clauses by French- and Dutch-speaking learners and should therefore also be investigated.

The last part of the volume includes three papers, which all deal with learner discourse. **Marcus Callies** considers the phenomenon of raising constructions, adopting a functional-typological approach to second language acquisition. After reviewing the literature on the topic and highlighting the high degree of typological markedness of English raising constructions, he examines the frequency of occurrence and contextual use of raising constructions in the written production of advanced German and Polish learners of English. It

emerges from this analysis that raising constructions, and in particular *tough*-movement (or object-to-subject raising) constructions, are problematic for both groups of learners, being as a rule underrepresented and misused in terms of information structuring and thematic progression. Callies concludes that the use of raising constructions by learners is the result of a complex interplay of factors including avoidance, transfer of training and unawareness of raised structures' discourse functions. **Mike Hannay** and **Elena Martínez Caro**'s paper investigates the theme zone in the written production of Dutch and Spanish learners of English. Dutch and Spanish differ from English with regard to the structure of the theme area, and they also differ from each other. Yet, the authors show that the two groups of learners construct the beginning of their sentences in essentially the same way, using the various thematic patterns in comparable proportions (including an overuse of more complex structures). The differences that do exist point to a higher degree of grammatical competence among the Dutch learners, as well as a more elaborate use of the thematic options available in English. The Spanish learners, by contrast, produce a number of ill-formed structures, some of them possibly resulting from transfer, and they tend to exhibit a more limited range of functionalities. In the final chapter, **Annemie Demol** and **Pascale Hadermann** study discourse organisation in written narratives (film retellings) produced by French and Dutch native speakers, French-speaking learners of Dutch and Dutch-speaking learners of French. Alongside a contrastive analysis (French vs. Dutch), they are thus able to perform a contrastive interlanguage analysis, comparing the learner varieties with the native varieties (to detect possible traces of transfer), as well as the two interlanguages (to identify any common strategies). Their hypotheses concern the degrees of packaging, dependency and integration of the narratives. One important difference emerging from the analysis is the higher frequency of present participles in secondary predication in French as compared to Dutch, which may explain the tendency of Dutch learners of French to underuse this type of structure. The comparison of French L2 and Dutch L2 reveals no clear organisational pattern typical of interlanguage, although they both display slightly less complex discourse organisation than the native varieties in terms of average number of words per sentence and proportion of simple sentences.

Although they deal with different topics, the ten papers brought together in this volume all underline the relevance of linking up contrastive analysis with learner corpus research. This is indeed the case if the goals and methods of contrastive linguistics are applied to learner corpora, as numerous studies in the past have already made clear and as confirmed by this book. But this is also true if contrastive data (ideally in the form of parallel and/or comparable corpora) are actually integrated into the analysis of learner corpora, a trend which has been relatively discreet until now but whose potential has been illustrated by several of the papers in this volume. Judging by the present collection and the workshop from which it originated, the combination of contrastive and learner corpus research is likely to stimulate more research studies in the near future and provide new insights into second language acquisition. Such insights could benefit

professionals working in the field, such as language teachers, materials writers or language testers. In fact, it is our hope that some of the findings described in this volume may also lead to practical applications in the classroom, so that the ground-breaking research reported here can be linked up with teaching.

References

- Bickerton, D. (1981), *Roots of Language*. Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Press.
- Gilquin, G. (2000/2001), 'The Integrated Contrastive Model. Spicing up your data', *Languages in Contrast*, 3(1): 95-123.
- Giovi, C. (2006), *The use of verb-noun collocation by Greek advanced learners of English using corpora analysis and some implications for teaching*. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Portsmouth.
- Granger, S. (1996), 'From CA to CIA and back: an integrated approach to computerized bilingual and learner corpora', in: K. Aijmer, B. Altenberg and M. Johansson (eds) *Languages in Contrast. Papers from a Symposium on Text-based Cross-linguistic Studies. Lund 4-5 March 1994*. Lund: Lund University Press. 37-51.
- Granger, S. (1997), 'On identifying the syntactic and discourse features of participle clauses in academic English: native and non-native writers compared', in: J. Aarts, I. de Mönnink and H. Wekker (eds) *Studies in English Language and Teaching. In Honour of Flor Aarts*. Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi. 185-198.
- Huebner, T. (1983), *A Longitudinal Analysis of the Acquisition of English*. Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma.
- Jarvis, S. (2000), 'Methodological rigor in the study of transfer: identifying L1 influence in the interlanguage lexicon', *Language Learning*, 50(2): 245-309.
- Nesselhauf, N. (2003), 'The use of collocations by advanced learners of English and some implications for teaching', *Applied Linguistics*, 24(2): 223-242.