

SOME COMMENTS ON LANGUAGE DATA
IN CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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If the essential insights of the theory of contrastive linguistics are to be preserved, what is badly needed is some "method" of distinguishing between various degrees of grammaticality and acceptability of language material. Just as the native speaker has at his disposal linguistic knowledge of his language that enables him to make judgements about the well- or ill-formedness of sentences, so anyone dealing with contrastive studies should be expected to have at his disposal linguistic knowledge of two languages. This idea seems to be uncontroversially taken for granted; however, how to measure this knowledge, judgement or intuition is not likely to be ever formalized by a simple and reliable method. It should be emphasized that in the absence of explicit evaluative means we have to appeal for caution in dealing with language material; my main thesis is that one cannot manipulate language data *ad libitum*, there are certain limits beyond which one must not go. In writing this article, I had just this point in mind. While the theory of contrastive linguistics finds it easy to set requirements necessary for a contrastive analysis (e.g. the authority of a bilingual speaker, translational competence, and the like), practice finds it hardly possible to satisfy these requirements. In other words, in a number of cases the contrastive linguists, especially those who are theoretically minded, strangely enough tend to view the language material as of secondary importance. Assuming a certain rule, for example, they sometimes tend to construe sentences to support a suggested thesis allowing them to be incorrect in one way or other. It seems to me that these facts are alarmingly frequent and obviously related with the failure to go beyond one's own intuition.

In view of this rather unwelcome tendency to tolerate anomalies and erroneous expressions in contrastive analyses, the obvious criteria for deciding

whether a given sentence falls into the category of grammaticality or acceptability would be not only the linguist's ability to understand properly the utterances he uses, but also his ability to check competently his linguistic knowledge by consulting the informants and informative written sources such as dictionaries. Since some of my comments and remarks have been misinterpreted and misinterpreted which became clearly evident during the discussion after the presentation of this paper at the 18th International Conference on Polish-English Contrastive Linguistics (Błażejewko, 2-4 December 1982) I feel compelled to clarify the following points in order to avoid further misunderstanding: (1) by *norm*, *normative*, *standard* I mean this variety of language which is the means of communication of the nation as a whole, which is free from individualized variations (idiosyncratic, dialectal, regional, professional and so on), and which does not easily tolerate deviations, arbitrariness and violations of various kind; (2) a nonstandard or individualized type of language, restricted in its scope to a social or regional group of speakers is perfectly legitimate as long as it is treated as such, but it should not be taken for a representative of the whole language (standard type); (3) the examples I am going to question are lacking in a general linguistic significance because each of them violates some degree of acceptability and/or grammaticality; I do not share a view that anything that is uttered and can be understood is correct and representative of a standard variety of the language; (4) the Polish native speakers-informants I have consulted have been: students of English philology with some linguistic background, Polish linguists of the consulting group (advice on "correctness") in the Institute of Polish Philology of the Jagiellonian University, and a number of people not linguistically educated. I shall not attempt to postulate any new "theory" of how to view the basic assumptions set by contrastive linguistics; instead, I should like to consider in somewhat greater detail some linguistic misfits of various kinds found in linguistic literature. For obvious reasons, being a native speaker of Polish, I shall limit my account to Polish examples.

In his article on the impersonal passive, Comrie (1977:49) points out that in the Polish sentences

- (1) *Dokonuje się prace (*przez uczonych).*
is-completed works by scientists
'The works are being completed (by the scientists).'
- (2) *Dokonano prace (*przez uczonych).*
was-completed works by scientists
'The works have been completed by the scientists.'

"it is in fact impossible to give overt expression to the underlying subject, i.e. this subject must be deleted rather than demoted". This observation is correct except for the fact that it is illustrated by misconstrued sentences: neither (1) nor

(2) is correct. The verb *dokonać* obligatorily takes an object in the genitive:

- (1a) *Dokonuje się prac*
(2a) *Dokonano prac*

are the only grammatical phrases according to standard norms (cf. *Słownik poprawnej polszczyzny*, *Słownik syntaktyczno-generatywny czasowników polskich*, etc.). From the semantic point of view the collocation of *dokonać* + *prac* sounds conversationally objectionable without a broader context and/or additional information. The verb *dokonać* implies not only the completion of some action but also accomplishment and achievement, e.g.

- (1b) *Dokonuje się ważnych odkryć*
Important discoveries are being made
(2b) *Dokonano ważnych odkryć*
Important discoveries have been/were made

(cf. *Marzyłam, aby dokonać czynów bohaterskich* — *It was my dream to achieve heroic deeds.*)

We may say that examples (1) and (2) are grammatically incorrect and semantically rather deviant, or at least clumsy.¹ It should be noted in passing that Comrie could have used *wykonać* instead of *dokonać*, and so have avoided all the anomalies mentioned above:

- (1c) *Wykonuje się rozkaz*
The order is being carried out
(2c) *Wykonano rozkaz*
The order has been/was carried out

The syntactic evidence provided by (1c) and (2c), which are unquestionable grammatically, would unquestionably support Comrie's thesis.

Of much the same type of error is the following:

- (3) *Dotknąłem poręcz.* (Zabrocki 1981:135)
I-touched handrail

where the inflectional case of the grammatical object, *poręcz*, is normatively improper: *dotknąć* governs the noun in the genitive, thus the correct form should be

- (3a) *Dotknąłem poręczy*

But here the fact is that the ease of using *dotknąć* with the accusative and not the genitive by a native speaker of Polish may be explainable by some more recent syntactic changes affecting the government of some ambiguous verbs:

¹ Notice that Comrie took and adapted these sentences from Wiese's article.

dotknąć + N_{acc} — *hurt, touch*, *dotknąć* + N_{gen} — *touch* in the physical sense.² In this light, the difference between the sentence (3) and the sentence (3a) is not so much a matter of acceptability, neither is it a matter of pragmatics, since both are understood in the same way and used in the same situation; the contrast, which is of a grammatical nature, could be seen as exemplifying a process of restructuring, a gradual elimination of the genitive in its function of a direct object of the verb, but only in the case of nonhuman nouns since it does not create any problem of ambiguity. (For an interesting discussion on this structure see Buttler 1976). In any case, though partially justifiable, this innovative and unconventional usage of the accusative in (3) should have been acknowledged and commented on by the author.

While this discussion has been concerned with the accusative/genitive objects, it might also be noticed that the same hesitations apply to the instrumental/prepositional phrase. For instance, Polish allows the inflected (instrumental) objective predicative with *mianować* — *nominate, zrobić* — *make*, etc.

- (4) *Mianowano go dyrektorem*
He was nominated director
(5) *Zrobiono go dyrektorem*
He was made director

but in the case of *wybierać* — *elect*, a prepositional phrase is normatively required

- (6) *Wybrano go na dyrektora*
He was elected director

According to the lexicographers of Polish normative dictionaries, as well as according to some Polish linguists, an example used by Zabrocki (1981:69) must be considered incorrect:

- (7) *Modlił się, by wybrać go prezesem.*
he-prayed REFL to-elect him chairman

The situation, however, is much more complex. To begin with, there are a number of utterances that constitute counterevidence to the normative usage

² For an explanation of this process see Buttler et al. where we read "Mnożą się mianowicie doraźne użycia czasownika *dotknąć* w znaczeniu dosłownym, ale w konstrukcji biernikowej ("*Bramkarz gości dotknął piłkę...*") która dotychczas stanowiła wykładnik zupełnie innej jego treści: 'urazić, obrazić' (*dotknąć siostrę*)" (1973:317). (There are more and more occasional uses of the verb *dotknąć* (touch) in its literal meaning but in the accusative construction (*Bramkarz gości dotknął piłkę...* — The visitors' goalkeeper touched the ball), which hitherto has been used to express a completely different meaning 'hurt, offend' (*dotknąć siostrę* — hurt one's sister) (translated by R. N.). See also 318, 444.

which are found in colloquial Polish as well as in the language of press, radio and television, e.g.

- (8) ...*kobieta zostaje wybrana prorektorem*
...a women has been elected prorector
Najlepszym technikiem turnieju wybrano J.C.
J. C. was considered (chosen) the best technician of the tournament

But prepositional phrase objective predicates are also found on the same occasions, e.g.

- (9) *Na I sekretarza KMG wybrano K.Z.*
K.Z. has been elected the First Secretary of KMG

Further, Polish linguists are not in agreement on the correctness of the instrumental variant: the authors of the dictionaries would not admit the instrumental with the verb *wybierać* (*Słownik poprawnej polszczyzny, Słownik języka polskiego*) while some other linguists do not seem to object to it; Buttler (1976:54, 180) is very tolerant and assumes both constructions equally legitimate {*wybrać prezydentem*}, {*wybrać na prezydenta*}, Saloni and Świdziński (1981) apparently prefer the instrumental when they use such an example: *To Marię wybrano prezesem* (241). Semantically speaking no clear difference is felt between these two structures, although some explanation of the use of the prepositional phrase rather than the instrumental might be speculatively claimed. But, such considerations would lead us too far. What I want to show is that the illustrative material used in contrastive analysis to prove or disprove a more general rule, principle, etc. should be absolutely certain, not arguable as to its grammaticality and acceptability.

As much as unintentional grammatical deviations and distortions are unwelcome illustrative examples in any linguistic research, so semantic anomalies and erroneous presuppositions of what is said are also strongly objectionable. It is immediately apparent that such Polish utterances as

- (10) *Kawa została wyłożona na ławę przez niego.*
Coffee was laid out onto the bench by him.
(11) *Bób został nam zadany przez niego.*
Beans were given to us by him. (Zabrocki 1981:130)

are very strange semantically, and that the linguistic competence of the linguist himself is insufficient. Neither of the sentences could be easily acceptable. The associations with the phraseological expressions they come from are too strong to be ignored. According to my intuitive knowledge of

Polish and the reactions of other native speakers I have consulted, Polish idiomatic expressions such as

- (12) Wyłożył kawę na ławę. (= He spoke in a direct, straight-forward way; told the truth)
He laid out coffee onto the bench.
- (13) Zadał nam bobu. (= He harmed us, taught us a lesson).
He gave us beans. (Zabrocki 1981:130)

cannot be broken syntactically; thus the passivization of (12) and (13) into (10) and (11) respectively is impossible, no matter whether the transforms retain their idiomatic meanings or not. The sentences (10) and (11) are simply freak sentences, funny and odd. It seems hardly possible to imagine contexts in which they would be acceptable and literally and seriously comprehensible. In such circumstances the author's conclusion that "passivizable idiom is specified twice in the lexicon, both in its active and passive form" (130) is at best suspect and requires revision. I am afraid there are many more examples of this sort used by the author which also ask for serious rethinking and perhaps even substantial reformulating of the theoretical issues.

It is a mistake to believe that the Polish language, owing to its rich inflection, is not susceptible to any rules of sentence word order, and it is perhaps a still more serious mistake to believe that any variety of Polish is good enough to support the author's claim. In consequence of the negligence of the grammatical system we come across such deviant sentences, considered unacceptable by some Polish informants, as:

- (14) Jan napisał o jakim polityku
John wrote about wh-politician (Horn 1978:106)
- (15) Komu Bill mówił Jan dał prezent
To whom did Bill say that John gave a present (Horn 1978:109)
- (16) Jakim przystojnym mężczyzną jest Jan?
how handsome man is John (Borsley and Jaworska 1981:82)
- (17) Maria rozmawiała z takim przystojnym mężczyzną, z jakim Anna.
(Borsley and Jaworska 1981 : 88)
- (18) Jan jest taki, jak jest Piotr. (Borsley and Jaworska 1981:93)
- (19) Jan jest takim mężczyzną, jak jest Piotr. (Borsley and Jaworska 1981 : 93)
- (20) Jan jest takim dobrym szefem jakim dobrym ojcem.
John is so good boss how good father
'John is as good a boss as a father.' (Borsley and Jaworska 1981:86)
- (21) Ta rzeka nie jest bardziej głęboka jak szeroka.
this river not is more deep how wide
'This river isn't more deep than wide.' (Borsley and Jaworska 1981: 90)

Each of the examples (14) through (21) posits a somehow different problem which I shall try to discuss briefly. It should be noted right now that despite a possible occurrence of these structures in a colloquial, spontaneous, and very often careless speech, or stylistically marked utterances, they all go far beyond the limits of standard grammatical language. If for some reason or other a contrastive linguist decides to make use of these sentences he should, I think, warn a reader of their colloquial character and justify their choice.

From (14) it would appear that the structural context is informal, possibly classroom-like; it is not an uncommon type of the colloquial variety which would probably be classified by Bóniecka (1978) as an examination question (or a courtroom question) — compare the examples she quotes:

A zasadniczy akcent pada na sylabę którą?
Ten tutaj jaki byłby? (153)

In terms of structural comparability, one could also talk about a similar colloquial question in spoken English which would be, I assume, on the same scale of acceptability as its Polish equivalent:

(14a) John wrote about which politician?

The author does not seem to share this view. If (14) is not a question — no question mark is provided by the author — it can never be interpreted as a sentence.

For the sentence (15) no sensible interpretation has been suggested by my informants; it is simply not a sentence in Polish, because it is neither structurally describable, nor semantically explainable.³ There are a number of ways Horn's sentence could be taken if additional information were added through such indicators as punctuation marks, word reordering, conjoining markers, etc. Without something like these signals, (15) is uninformative and of no relevance to the basic form

(15a) Bill mówił że Jan dał prezent Adamowi
Bill said that John gave a present to Adam (Horn 1978 : 109)

because (15) being ungrammatical cannot "show that the rule of wh-movement can apply to either NP in the embedded sentence" (Horn 1978 : 109).

As an interrogative sentence (16) is ungrammatical for most speakers of Polish in spite of the fact that the same wording is perfectly grammatical when uttered with an emphatic connotation, *jakim* being treated as an in-

³ If (15) were meant to be a question it should have been construed differently; for Polish constructions with reported questions see Świdziński (1978).

tensifier

- (16a) Jakim przystojnym mężczyzną jest Jan!
What a handsome man John is!

The difference between (16a) and (16) is not only that one is grammatical while the other is not, but also, and above all, that (16a) and (16) (taken for a question by Borsley and Jaworska) would be neither semantically nor pragmatically synonymous. In consequence, neither would serve the purpose, i. e. to illustrate the author's claim that "with questions involving attributive adjectives... it seems that the left branch condition can be violated if *jak* is inflected" (82). In connection with this problem it should be added that the authors' assumption that "there is just one AP determiner inflected in some circumstances and uninflected in others" (81), i.e. *jaki* — *jak*, is dubious, intuitively unconvincing and speculative in character when confronted with actual Polish data. This may be also the reason why the authors have interpretive difficulties with such sentences as (17)

Maria rozmawiała z takim przystojnym mężczyzną, z jakim Anna.

which they assume to be perfectly acceptable but have no idea why this should be so (88). The answer is simple: the sentence is not acceptable.

To continue our discussion, something is clearly wrong with the sentences (18), (19), (20) and (21), which like (17) are meant to illustrate various aspects of Polish equative constructions. First, in (18) and (19) the second use of the copula *jest* is unnecessary; then (20) with *takim...jakim* is wrongly construed; by substituting *takim...jakim* by *równie...jak* acceptability is obtained:

(20a) Jan jest równie dobrym szefem jak ojcem.

Here again, (20) is discussed as a counterexample to some constraint; the authors try to account for it but fail, saying: "in either case, however, they will violate the suggested constraint. Why, then, are they grammatical?" (86). The irony is that such sentences are not grammatical and the problem does not exist. Finally, in (21) the use of the analytic comparative does not sound proper and we would rather say

(21a) Ta rzeka nie jest głębsza jak szersza

or

(21b) Ta rzeka nie jest głębsza niż szersza.

By the way, the remarks on the uses of *jak* and *niż* in comparatives do not seem to agree in details with Polish authoritative sources such as *Kultura języka polskiego* by Buttler et al. (1973:374-5), *Słownik poprawnej polszczyzny*, Szupryczyńska (1980:100 ff.), etc. For example, compare the authors' re-

mark "in standard Polish, *jak* normally occurs in negated comparatives" (90) with "po wyrażeniach z przeczeniem używamy zarówno spójnika *niż*, jak i spójnika *jak*: Czuł się nie gorzej niż (jak) dawniej" (*Słownik poprawnej polszczyzny*) (after negated phrases we use both the conjunction *niż* and the conjunction *jak*: Czuł się nie gorzej niż (jak) dawniej — He was feeling not worse than before" (translated by R.N.)). Borsley and Jaworska use a number of examples which are doubtful and in spite of their occurrence in colloquial Polish cannot be treated as good illustrative examples. The last point is best illustrated by the following sentences used by Jaworska on another occasion. They are:

- (22) Poznałeś Annę przedtem, jakś kupił samochód.
(you) met Ann before-this how (you) bought car
'You met Ann before you bought the car.' (Jaworska 1982:163)
- (23) Poznałeś Annę potem, jakś kupił samochód.
(you) met Ann after-this how (you) bought car
'You met Ann after you bought the car.' (Jaworska 1982:163)

The word *jakś* is nonexistent in Polish, no dictionary makes any record of it, and one may wonder on what grounds the author says that "speakers vary in the realization of this phenomenon with *jak*: *jakżeś* and *jakeś* are the alternatives. *Jakś* has been chosen here for the sake of simplicity" (Jaworska 1982:162). If she means a colloquial, dialectal or some other variant of phonetic realization of the enclitic particle *-eś* then *jakś* should be transcribed phonetically in order to avoid misunderstanding. As it is it may legitimately be assumed that *jakś* is a normal correct formation, which is not the case.

To conclude these remarks I should like to make an appeal to contrastive linguists for a more careful selection of Polish language data which they use as normatively correct (unless specified otherwise). It seems clear in principle that a linguist is responsible that the examples he chooses should be comprehensible, appropriate to the contexts, and generated by the rules of grammar, in other words, to be fully acceptable and perfectly grammatical.

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