

CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS AND THE LINGUISTIC FIELD THEORY

YELENA TARASOVA

University of Kharkov

In recent decades new extensive explorations into language typology have demonstrated the pre-eminence of linguistic content over linguistic form. They have made contrastive linguists increasingly aware of the fact that it is semantic identity that constitutes the principle of linguistic confrontation. In Soviet linguistics, theory in the area of contrastive language analysis has been marked by considerable controversy, yet, there has always been a strong prejudice against form-centered schemata and an obvious bias towards non-formal semantically-based methodology. As a result, predominant on the current linguistic scene is the so-called content typology with its focus on extra-linguistic conceptual properties and their national-specific language realizations, so that the latter be defined, categorized and compared according to their underlying semantic functions.

The theoretical foundation of this approach in which neither formal nor semantic features of the languages compared are neglected, was laid, actually, by the fruitful ideas of Mesaninov (1945), Brunot (1965), Jespersen (1924), Serba (1974), Kholodovitch (1979) which were further developed in recent years by such Soviet linguists as Gukhman (1981), Yartseva (1981), Klimov (1977; 1983), Katsnelson (1986), Balin (1985) and others.

Content typologists today have more or less reached the consensus that one and the same object of the material world does not necessarily find a common, invariantly-determined reflection in the semantics of different languages, but may be differently conceptualized by different speaking communities, and consequently, "conventional expressions for a given conceptual scene may structure this scene in alternate ways taking different perspectives on it, highlighting or omitting different facets" (Langacker 1982:30). It may be

expected that these expressions will vary in a typologically significant manner across languages.

Of course, all this does not for one moment imply assigning language a "dictatorial" role in its relation to thinking – no language can impose a peculiar "vision of the world" on its speakers. Yet, it is now almost universally acknowledged that conceptual distinctions formed by people in the process of thinking interact with the typological structure of this or that particular language.

On the other hand, contrastive typological analysis has also been powerfully stimulated of late by the advances in the field of functionalism, which have made it sufficiently clear, among other things, that thinking processes get materialized in the first place through discourse but not language system proper. So, the study of discourse mechanisms which, it appears, correlate directly with conceptual mechanisms, are becoming a vital necessity in cross-language investigations.

If the semantic-functional principle is to be adopted as the leading one in contrastive analysis we would not be satisfied with mere registering and cataloguing a number of distinctive and co-occurring features – something that has been exhaustively dealt with by the purely taxonomic and transformational methods. This line of approach would call naturally for an acceptable model of linguistic confrontation. What we need is an elaborate and flexible descriptive framework that would allow adequate examination of the universal, typical and individual properties of the languages compared, including the range of their cross-linguistic variation.

According to Halliday (1961) there are four fundamental categories indispensable for contrastive analysis: linguistic unit, structure, class and system. The list, we feel, is incomplete without the concept of the language field.

Theorists may differ in some minor details, but they are all unanimous in treating language fields as highly organized and integrated conceptual spheres whose components mutually delimit one another and derive their significance from the system as a whole. Depending on the particular objectives the contrastive linguist wishes to attain such a field may be treated as a semantico-functional one (Bondarko 1983), a grammatico-lexical one (Guliga and Shendels 1969), the field of a particular part of speech (Admoni 1988), a communicative-functional or a pragmatic one, etc. What matters, however, is that as an instrument of typological characterization of languages (or their subsystems) the language field seems particularly advantageous for the goals and methodology of content typology. And from this angle it deserves a closer attention than it has so far received.

What are the attractions of the field idea for contrastive typological analysis? Let us look into them systematically.

1. Within the descriptive framework called "field-grammar" language fields are conceived of as dynamic hierarchial configurations with a fine structure whose elements are brought together by common, invariant, cognitively fundamental concepts of different degrees of universality – such as modality, aspectuality, causality, plurality, passivity, duration, temporality and the like. The presence of such an underlying semantic function, inherent, to a larger or smaller extent, in each of the field's constituents, emerges as the key principle of the field-approach to language facts. This basic conceptual domain embodying generalizations which speakers extract from an array of content units, acts as a consolidating force, a source of attraction that permits the field's components to unite in a coherent, integrated composite structure. In this the operational function of the field is manifested, owing to which it reflects the very process of man's conceptualization of objective reality. Thus, in every field, no matter what its specific nature and structure, a sphere of experience is analysed and stratified conceptually and linguistically in a peculiar way which embodies a certain scale of values and a peculiar vision of the world.

If we use the field as an instrument of contrastive analysis we will find, invariably, that its underlying universal semantic substratum will be materialized in typologically-determined surface modifications only belonging to the specific matter of this or that national language code.

2. Being semantically based the field is at the same time a hierarchial multi-layered system of linguistic items, a lexicon-syntax-morphology spectrum whose constituent elements are united by systemic relations. It follows consequently that field-representations of cross-linguistic universals are also consistent with the systemic character of language. Accordingly, we have the morphological nucleus incorporating elements with the maximum degree of grammaticability; the intermediate (or near-nuclear) zone, usually represented by less specialized lexico-grammatical or syntactic devices; and finally, the purely lexical periphery whose components are characterized by relatively minimal abstraction. As we move internally from the nuclear to the periphery areas the constituent units and structures tend to become progressively more "diffuse" and loosely integrated, with the dominant seme being weakened and "overshadowed" by the semes invariant for other "neighbouring", often interseccing fields.

The systemic character of the field-model also makes it taxonomically significant. The taxonomic function of the field is manifested in that showing how heterogeneous language items are integrated to form coherent typologically specific systems, the field schemata inevitably presuppose some sort of classification of the possible solutions different languages find to problems posed by the necessity of communication.

3. It is agreed upon almost uncontroversially that the adoption of functional and pragmatic notions as primitives in contrastive analysis is a fruitful one (Oleksy 1980; Riley 1980; Zeiler 1982). Our claim is that, field-grammar in general being very much a use-centered approach, the language field is, in fact, a functional assembly because the starting point of field-typology lies at the level of discourse whose observable facts serve as primary data for contrastive studies.

The field-model in contrastive analysis provides a functional network, and the field-approach can be viewed, in a manner of speaking, as a variety of the theory of "language as choice" (Halliday 1985).

The functional relevance of field-typology also stems from the fact that it can be regarded as a special variety of "quantitative contrastive analysis" (Krzyszowski 1981). Really, from empirical observations contrastive linguists could make the reasonable inference that different language code systems vary not so much in the inventories of means they have on their respective expression planes – morphological, syntactic, lexical or phonological – as in the communicative values of those items, their distribution in speech and their role in discourse organization (Mrazek 1964; Gak 1983). In this respect, field typology which is based in direct observation of speech facts presupposes a set of important quantitative dimensions with a special emphasis on mathematical procedures applied to the empirical data to be contrasted.

In our view, massive statistical research within the field-framework must involve a two-stage approach, since quantitative analysis in such cases should be performed both intralingually and interlingually. First, the appropriate functional assemblies are modelled intralingually and subjected to an essentially uniform field analysis, because "inside" each field is naturally characterized by a unique matrix of frequencies of occurrence of its constituents. This is to be followed by the interlingual phase consisting in a systematic comparison of the areas of equivalence and divergence in the respective fields with the aim of finding out those quantitative and qualitative parameters which characterize typologically specific performance in the languages compared.

We have in effect operationally effective and empirically adequate typology helpful in indicating typologically significant statistic deviations from random patterning. An added attraction is that the relevant quantitative parameters revealed both paradigmatically and syntagmatically, make the empirical data contrasted suitable or easily adaptable for computer processing.

Thus, the notion of the language field is considered here as a metalinguistic model against which deviations and proximity of individual languages can be measured. The cross-cultural validity of this model lies in its general conceptual base which enables it to encompass various isomorphic and allomorphic aspects of cognition, interaction and communication.

4. Finally, there is, in our view, an additional bonus of the field modelling for contrastive cross-language studies which has to do with the didactic side of this methodology, and it seems that the didactic function of the field-model has not been sufficiently appreciated. Within the schemata outlined here, important generalizations can be made concerning the organizational principles, as well as semantic, functional and often pragmatic variables in the areas chosen for interlingual examination. All this makes the field-model very suitable to the demands of class-room typology and helpful in devising practical solutions to some teaching problems. The field's usability for language teaching is strengthened by the fact that field modelling and contrasting of communicatively important areas in, for instance, one's mother tongue and a foreign language does not only provide for an accurate description of the chosen subsystems, but also helps to increase learners' communicative competence (and, to a certain degree, their translation skills).

The fact that contrastive analysis in such cases is supported by quantitative data will certainly stimulate an easier and a more natural choice by the learner of the speech strategies appropriate in concrete communicative situations and, possibly, provide a more adequate level of explanation in investigating various phenomena connected with what T. P. Krzyszowski (1981: 106) calls "errors of avoidance" and "errors of abundance". There are also reasons to expect that the field-model will work reasonably well in characterizing native and non-native performance in a foreign language.

All the above features, we believe, cooperate to build up an integrated content-based use-centered approach to cross-language description in which theoretical feedback and practical permeation are crucially involved.

The methodology adopted here is not a preliminary network into which research "had to be fitted" but has been shaping in fact alongside of actual descriptive work in the process of studying variation across languages in encoding time concepts. We will attempt now to present a fragment of that research in which the Grammatico-Lexical microfields (GLmFs) of the Past time in English and Russian are contrasted. Like all the other temporal notions the linguistic past is a universal category which speakers of different languages tend to conceptualize at varying levels of abstraction.

Already from the composition of the microfields' morphological nuclei it can be seen clearly that the past is grammaticalized differently and different notions are distinguished formally in English and Russian. The table below contains the relevant data.

In the English microfield, its nucleus is constituted by a rather complex system of graded past tenses including the simple past, the past continuous, the past perfect and the past perfect continuous. Here we have a significant contrast with only one central morphological form of the past in Russian – the standard form in – *π* (though it may occur in perfective and non-perfective

The Grammatico-Lexical Micro-field of the Past in English			The Grammatico-Lexical Micro-field of the Past in Russian		
1			2		
		%			%
The nucleus	The past simple	61.48	The nucleus	Прошедшее время (совершенного и несовершенного вида)	62.05
	The past continuous	2.28			
	The past perfect	10.21			
	The past perfect continuous	0.22			
The near-nuclear zone	The present simple	5.75	The near-nuclear zone	Настоящее время	21.60
	The present perfect	96 4.93		Будущее время	91.34 0.36
	The present continuous	1.36			
	The present perfect continuous				
	Participle I	2.34		Причастие (действит. и страдат.)	2.14
	Participle II	0.98			
	Infinitive	0.40		Деепричастие (соверш. и несоверш. вида)	4.22
	Gerund	0.61		Сослагат. наклонение	1.35
Lexicogrammatical constructions	Used + infinitive	0.89	Syntactic temporality	Синтаксическое прошедшее время	7.16
	Would + infinitive	162 0.73			
The lexical periphery	Modal verbs + infinitive	0.71	The lexical periphery	Лексические индикаторы прошедшего времени: наречия, прилагательные, предложные сочетания	1.13
	Won't/wouldn't + infinitive	0.13			
	Direct lexical past-time indicators	143 0.59			

aspects): делал-сделал, читал-прочитал, видел-увидел. With only one categorical grammatical form available, the past in Russian appears to be conceptualized as an integral "unsegmented" semantic sphere, so that past events are not further specified with reference to the moment of speech as "distant past", "recent past", "before past", etc.

But despite their formal variety not all the nuclear constituents of the English microfield are equally active from the functional viewpoint. Out of the total use of the nuclear components the simple past occurs in 94.5% of all cases, so that the remaining three analytical structures only make up collectively 5.5%. In the whole of the microfield's total the share of the simple past is 61.48%, its statistical prevalence certainly justifying its unquestionable status of the microfield's dominant.

It is no mere coincidence that the communicative value of the simple past appears to be practically equivalent to that of its Russian counterpart – the dominant of the Russian GLmF. Their shares in their respective microfields are 61.48% for the past simple and 62.05% for прошедшее время.

A significant role in expressing past reference in both languages is assigned to the forms of the present. In the English GLmF they constitute collectively close to 14% of the total. Really, the semantics of the simple and the continuous present, as well as the perfect – simple and continuous, do presuppose a sort of temporal overlap with the past, which testifies to a good deal of functional isomorphism between the GLmFs of the past and the present observable in the two languages. Their zone of intersection, however, is noticeably narrower in English than in Russian. Empirical analysis has shown a remarkable functional prevalence of the present in the Russian microfield – 21.6% of the selection studied. This means that the Russian present (настоящее время) – and there is only one form of the morphological present in Russian: *сиджу, читаю, мечтаю* etc. – comes second in frequency after the microfield's dominant.

In the English GLmF of the past the present tense forms constitute a lower quota of 13.7% although they demonstrate greater formal variety.

We have also undertaken to compare the two structural correlates of the present in English and Russian in terms of semantics and functioning and found out that as constituent of the past time microfield, they behave, on the whole, with great uniformity. Both the English simple present and the Russian настоящее время are semantically "elastic" and relatively independent of the lexical meaning of the predicative verb; both can be easily transposed into the past; both are being extensively used in atemporal functions – to express all sorts of generalizations which are usually possible on the basis of past experience.

But alongside of a really remarkable functional equivalence observable between the English and the Russian present, they also show some minor dissimilarities, mainly of quantitative nature. These are confined to instances of transposition and the relative use of these tenses.

The most common variety of the present forms interpolated into the past is known as *praesens historicum*, and it is in this function of the present that the two languages show a most striking quantitative variation. Indeed, in contrast to a very low incidence of slightly over 1% observed in the English GLmF of the past, the share of the historical present in its Russian counterpart comes up to 11.2%. So, what is remarkable about the Russian настоящее время is that, being the second most important device of expressing past reference in that language, in nearly 52% of its usage it is realized as historical (dramatic, annalistic) present.

Another typological peculiarity of the Russian настоящее время is its habitual use to denote relative past reference which happens, as a general rule, in

object and some other kinds of subordinate clauses in utterances like Я и не подозревал тогда, что ты живешь в соседнем доме. Я наблюдал, как он готовится выйти на сцену. Since unlike English, Russian has no special morphological verbal forms to constitute a special grammatical category – that of Taxis (Order) such notions as priority, simultaneity and posteriority are expressed as secondary functions of the basic forms of the category of tense.

Coming back to transposition, it should be pointed out that the transposed use of verbal temporal forms in a past time context seems to be more typical of the Russian language which also allows, though only in a stylistically strongly marked context, the transposition of the future forms into the past: Приду на берег речки, сяду на берегу. Вода не шелохнется. Даже птица тишину не потревожит. Радостно станет на душе.

The morphological constituents that make up the microfield's nucleus and the near-nuclear zone certainly differ in the degree of their specialization in grammaticalizing the underlying temporal concept.

For the former the temporal seme of the past is the paradigmatic one. Whatever additional semantic connotations the nuclear grammatical structures may acquire in speech – aspectual, stylistic or pragmatic ones – their past referential function is invariably predominant.

The latter (the near-nuclear elements) contain no paradigmatic seme of the past and can only realize their past referential function syntagmatically, if supported by corresponding lexico-grammatical environment.

There is obvious surface parallelism between English and Russian in the functioning of the grammatical components which form the near-nuclear zones in the GLmFs contrasted (see the table). In both languages the near-nuclear constituents include the present tense forms, the non-finite forms of the verb, and also the subjunctive mood structures, all of which share one feature in common: their time referential functions are secondary and context-dependent.

The non-finites in a past time context in the English and Russian GLmFs constitute 5 and 6.3% respectively: Just fancy! To die in his sleep like this! Прожить двадцать лет за границей и не выучить ни одного иностранного языка! (infinitive). Staying married to a hopeless drunkard for twenty years! No wonder she is a nervous wreck by now (gerund). Он спорил, оживленно размахивая руками (деепричастие).

The forms of the subjunctive in a past time context are not outstandingly frequent either in English (0.73%) or in Russian (1.35%). This dangerous lunatic would've done a lot of damage if the police hadn't interfered. Если бы полиция не вмешалась, этот псих натворил бы много бед.

With the degree of abstraction in expressing the temporality of the past lessening as we move from the nuclear to the marginal areas, an intermediate position between the morphological centre and the lexical periphery in the English GLmF will belong to the combinations “used – infinitive” and “would

– infinitive” (1.62%): He used to play the violin when he was young. She would sit motionless for hours. These inter-level complexes can be described as semi-grammatical constructions with their first (verbal) element only partially demotivated.

The Russian microfield of the past contains no co-occurring inter-level items but manifests some typologically relevant peculiarities of its own. Thus, the linguistic expression of time in Russian is greatly dependent on the so-called syntactic temporality which emerges as a crucial systemic feature responsible for appreciable contrasts in the ways in which English and Russian encode universal temporal notions.

Syntactic temporality (syntactic past included) is expressed on the sentence level and not by individual forms – lexical or grammatical. The time reference of an event is signalled by the sentence patterns – nominal, adjectival or adverbial. В то время он уже студент Московского университета. Вчера – сухо и душно, а сегодня с утра – ливень. Quite often we come across incomplete or interrupted realizations of such patterns in informal speech: За что ты ее так? Представляешь? Ночью вдруг звонок. Ваня то Ваня! Чудеса, и только. Since the predicative verb in such cases is absent (hence – another possible term – implicational temporality) the temporality of the utterance also becomes dependent on such syntactic devices as connectives, word-order (clause-order in a complex sentence), or can be specified lexically or macrocontextually.

As distinct from Russian (where the contribution of the syntactic devices is about 7.2% of the microfield's functional total) implicational temporality in English cannot be regarded as a regular component of any of the time-fields in that language. In English it is a very rare occurrence of a nominal element used either independently or as an adjunct and referring an event to the temporal plane indicated in the preceding sentence: “He didn't gamble at all? – An occasional flutter” (Fowles).

To complete our field analysis of the ways in which the concept of the past is encoded in English and Russian, let us examine the lexical peripheries in the GLmFs contrasted. What came as a surprise was a rather low degree of lexicalization observable in both English and Russian linguistic expression of the past. Really, the functional contribution of purely lexical past time specifiers appears to be extremely modest – 1.13% in the Russian and 1.43% in the English GLmF.

In general, our claim is that the scope of the lexical periphery in any temporal field correlates directly with the degree of paradigmaticization in the corresponding nuclear elements. In English, for instance, the lexical periphery was found to be the most extensive and best-developed in the GLmF of the Future – close to 30% in the corpus studied. A great number and variety of the future-expressing lexemes and phrases there can be accounted for by incomplete grammaticalization of the central shall/will structures. In contrast to this, in

Russian where the categorial grammatical status of the central forms of the future has never been disputed the lexical periphery in the respective microfield is much less developed.

We can now make a few conclusions:

1. The linguistic expression of past reference in English and Russian shows a number of typologically marked dissimilarities in the nomenclature and types of the coding devices and strategies employed, as well as their communicative values in discourse.

2. At the same time, despite important structural divergence in the corresponding GLmFs, considerable functional parallelism has been observed:

a. In English and Russian the preterite field model intersects over vast segments with that of the present, revealing noticeable isomorphism on the content plane as well as the expression plane. The equally high semantic potentials of the correlated categorial forms of the present, in particular, enable them to "usurp" similar past-expressing functions in the languages contrasted.

b. A really remarkable characteristic that English and Russian evidently share is that the expression of the past in these languages is highly grammaticalized. So much so that the English GLmF of the past is more than 96% purely morphological, while the share of the morphological sector in its Russian counterpart is only a little smaller – 91.3%. In this respect the past time microfield in both languages shows noticeable dissimilarity to the other two functional temporal subsystems – those of the present and, especially, the future – which places a better balanced emphasis on both morphology and lexicon in encoding time-concepts.

Of course, the application of the field-model in contrastive typological research may not be completely uncontroversial, yet undoubtedly, it presents the contrastive linguist with a wide range of possibilities in his search for unifying generalizations that underlie variation across languages in expressing universal concepts.

REFERENCES

- Admoni, V. G. 1988. *Grammatičeskij stroj kak sistema postrojenja i obšaja teorija grammatiki*. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Arakin, V. D. 1983. *Strukturnaja tipologija ruskogo i nekotorih germanskih jazykov*. Moskva: Višaja škola.
- Balin, B. M. 1985. „O problematike, metodologiji i metodike contrastivnikh issledovanij”. *Principi i metodi issledovanja jedinic jazyka*. Voronješ: Voronješki Universitet. 3-12.
- Bondarko, A. V. 1983. *Principi funkcionalnoj grammatiki i voprosi aspektologiji*. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Brunot, F. 1965. *La pensée et la langue*. Paris: Masson et Cie.
- Fisiak, J. (ed.). 1980. *Contrastive linguistics. Prospects and problems*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Gak, V. G. 1983. *Sopostavitelnaja tipologija francuzskogo i ruskogo jazykov*. Moskva: Izd. Prosvešeniye.

- Gukhman, M. M. 1981. *Istoričeskaja tipologija i problemi diakhroničeskikh constant*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Guliga, A. V. and Sendels Y. I. 1969. *Lexico-grammatičeskije polja v sovremennom njemeckom jazyke*. Moskva: Izd. Prosvešeniye.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1961. "Categories of the theory of grammar". *Word* 17. 241-92.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1985. *An introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Jespersen, O. 1958. *Filosofija grammatiki*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Kacnelson, S. D. 1986. *Obšeje i tipologičeskoje jazykoznanije*. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Kholodovič, A. A. 1979. *Problemi grammatičeskoj teorii*. Leningrad: Izd. Prosvešeniye.
- Klimov, G. A. 1977. *Tipologija jazykov aktivnogo stroja*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Klimov, G. A. 1983. *Prinčipi kontensivnoj tipologiji*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Krzyszowski, I. P. 1981. "Quantitative contrastive analysis". *Studia Linguistica* 35. N1-2. CWK Gleerup.
- Langacker, R. W. 1982. "Space grammar, analysability, and the English passive". *Language* 58. 22-57.
- Mešaninov, I. I. 1945. "Ponjatijnije kategorii v jazykie". *Trudi vojnogo instituta inostrannikh jazykov* N 1. Moskva 5-17.
- Mrazek, P. 1964. "Sintaksis ruskogo tvoritel'nogo". *Strukturnosravnitelnoje issledovanije*. Praha. 17-34.
- Oleksy, W. 1980. "Towards pragmatic contrastive analysis". In Fisiak, J. (ed.). 1980. The Hague: Mouton. 349-364.
- Riley, Ph. 1980. "Towards a contrastive pragmalinguistics". In Fisiak, J. (ed.). 1980. The Hague: Mouton. 385-401.
- Serba, I. V. 1974. *Jazykovaja sistema i rečvaja dejatel'nost*. Leningrad: Nauka.
- Vorderner P., Groeben N. (Hrsg.). 1982. *Issues in the theory of universal grammar*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Yartseva, V. N. 1981. *Kontrastivnaja grammatika*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Zeiler, H. 1982. "Language Universals". In Vorderner P., Groeben N. (Hrsg.). 1982. Tübingen: Narr. 78-88.