

## A CONTRASTIVE DESCRIPTION OF DEIXIS IN DANISH AND ENGLISH

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On what principles should a contrastive analysis of two languages be based?<sup>1</sup> This is the all-important question which forces itself upon anyone who intends to engage in contrastive linguistics.<sup>2</sup> The present article is based on the assumption that *communicative* rather than *linguistic* competence should be focal in contrastive linguistics. This approach is illustrated by an investigation of certain problems related to nominal deictic expressions in Danish and English.

### I

As a point of departure, let us go back 40 years to Leonard Bloomfield, who is often mentioned as the founder of American structuralism. As American structuralism is characterized by a lack of interest in semantics it would be natural to ascribe this lack of interest in semantics to Bloomfield. This, however, would be wrong. Bloomfield did not mean that semantics is uninteresting or peripheral but that semantics is bewildering and alien to systematic empirical investigation. For this reason, he proposed that a linguistic description should begin with those structures that are most readily measurable — phonological structures — and gradually proceed "downwards" towards semantic structures.

The situation today is analogous. We are becoming more and more unhappy about descriptions of *la langue* because we realize that for a learner of a foreign

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<sup>1</sup> A preliminary version of this paper was distributed and discussed in connection with the 10th International Conference on English-Polish Contrastive Analysis, Lubostronie, 26-28 April, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> A Danish-English project in error analysis, interlanguage studies, and contrastive linguistics was initiated at the Department of English, Copenhagen University in 1976.



language it is almost equally important to know 'how to say something in a given context' as to know 'how to say anything anytime' — what a learner of a foreign language needs is the ability to produce adequate paroles, a communicative competence, not simply a competence of la langue, a Chomskyan competence. However, the task we are thus confronted by is overwhelming — the task is 'nothing else but the contrasting of cultures', as Kari Sajavaara expresses it (Sajavaara 1975). For this reason it is understandable if researchers within contrastive analysis draw back from contrasting communicative competence and concentrate on phonological, syntactic, lexical or even semantic structures instead (and this, in itself, is an ambitious project); however, there remains the danger that the results of the contrastive analysis are difficult to translate into class-room practice because the individual has been left out. I therefore believe that we have to engage in contrastive pragmatics (including socio- and psycholinguistics) if we want our contrastive analysis to be worthwhile with regard to improvement in foreign language teaching. And as pragmatics is still much of a virgin area of linguistics this means that linguists working within contrastive analysis will have to carry out a fair amount of basic research.

## II

Each participant in a communicative event performs verbal acts of various types. It is possible to classify these verbal acts in different ways (one way of doing it could be based on Austin's distinction between verdictive, exercitive, commissive, behabitive and expositive speech acts (Austin 1962)), but here I am not concerned with a classification of utterances but with a description of parts of utterances. I adopt Searle's idea that in performing a speech act, e.g. a command, the speaker simultaneously performs an act of referring (Searle 1969). In other words, reference is an act within an act. We can now formulate the following two questions:

- (1) How is the act of reference related to semantic, lexical, syntactic and phonological features?
- (2) How do SL (source language) and TL (target language) contrast in respect of reference?

We cannot answer the second question before we have answered the first, and before we can do so we have to choose a specific linguistic model. Today it is almost universally accepted that a linguistic model should be 'predictive' and hence generative; in order to verify a linguistic description the description has to be as precise as possible — hence formalization. A formalized generative model also facilitates a description of sociolectal and stylistic variation which can be incorporated into one and the same description by means of 'variable

rules' as proposed by Labov (1970). I assume that the generative description should include transformations; but I shall not embark on a discussion of this assumption here as the relevance of transformations can only be assessed within a discussion of systematic relations between sentences.

By adopting TG we have to choose between a generative semantics and an interpretative semantics variant. Generative semantics is related to formal logic, its object is to reduce human communication to a logical base in addition to operations of various kinds. Even if generative semantics cannot be said to advocate the logical positivists' 'reductional principle' (as exemplified by Quine's 'canonical representation' (Quine 1960)) it is based on the assumption that semantics can be formalized to the same degree and very much in the same way as is the case with syntax. This is something which has not been proved yet; what *has* been established, however, is the fact that a generative semantics model is nearly all-powerful and hence relatively uninteresting — how is it possible to falsify a description couched within generative semantics? I am therefore inclined to adopt the less powerful interpretative semantics variant. The type of interpretative TG which comes closest to the one I am working within is that proposed by Jackendoff (1972). Jackendoff's model is characterized by the fact that semantic interpretation of various types is carried out at different levels from deep to surface structure. However, the interpretative rules I shall advocate are pragmatico-semantic rather than purely semantic.

## III

Now let us take a look at the syntactic, the pragmatico-semantic and the lexical levels of a contrastive description of deixis in English and Danish.

Although we distinguish between syntactic structures and pragmatico-semantic interpretative rules, logical considerations should not be rejected as a means of establishing deep syntactic structures. Only, logical reasoning will have to be subject to empirical verification based on studies of language acquisition, language typology, experimental cognitive psychology, linguistic change and possibly studies within other areas as well. This means that logical reasoning only constitutes an *initial*, deductive stage in a dialectic description of language.

As all verbal acts contain acts of referring it is natural to expect language to offer specific means for carrying out these acts. Let us postulate that reference is a pragmatico-semantic primitive which has as its syntactic counterpart the noun phrase (NP). This, incidentally, is a simplification as other syntactic items (adverbs and tense suffixes) may also be associated with reference; but in this paper I shall only be concerned with reference carried out by means of NP's.

The speaker has at his disposal the possibility of carrying out his act of referring in different ways. He can refer generically or partitively (i.e., he can



refer to a whole class of objects (generic reference) or to a subclass (partitive reference))<sup>3</sup>; he can refer definitely and indefinitely, dependent on his presupposing whether his hearer or hearers will be able to identify the intended referent or not. He can refer numerically to one object or to more than one object. Some of these types of reference are expressed by specific syntactic items (e.g. definite — indefinite reference); others (e.g. generic — partitive reference) have no specific syntactic expression but are rather expressed by an interaction of nominal and verbal characteristics (generic reference is thus typically carried out by means of non-progressive present tense verb form in connection with specific types of NP's). Here I shall only discuss definite, partitive reference to singular objects.

When is definite reference used? The speaker employs a NP containing a marker of definiteness whenever he assumes that the hearer or hearers can identify the intended referent by means of the NP in question. By 'identify' I mean that the hearer can offer an alternative way of performing the same act of reference (i.e., the speaker says 'Mary' and the hearer says 'your wife?').<sup>4</sup> The typical case of definite reference is reference to objects which are visible to the hearer at the time of the speech event; this type of reference, which is related to gestural reference (hence the name 'deictic reference'), constitutes the most *extensional* type of reference. When reference is carried out to objects which are not easily pointed out the definite marker is accompanied by an element which specifies the intension of the referent — extensional reference gives way to intensional reference. It is possible to set up a hierarchy of definite NP's ranging from a maximum of extension to a maximum of intension as illustrated by figure 1:

|            |             |            |                           |                |
|------------|-------------|------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| <i>I</i>   | <i>this</i> | <i>he</i>  | <i>Peter</i> <sup>5</sup> | <i>the</i> + N |
| <i>you</i> | <i>that</i> | <i>she</i> | ⋮                         |                |
|            |             | <i>it</i>  | <i>Mary</i>               |                |
|            |             |            | ⋮                         |                |

Figure 1

<sup>3</sup> The term 'partitive reference' is perhaps infelicitous as it is not intended to be narrowed down to phrases such as *some butter*, *some girls*. It is used here to cover all types of NP's which are not generic. In the article *Aspects of Generic Reference* I have discussed the opposition between generic and partitive reference in some detail.

<sup>4</sup> It follows that I am only concerned with 'referential', as opposed to 'attributive', definite expressions (see Donnellan 1966). 'Attributive' expressions (such as *the murderer must be 2 foot 4 inches*) are not deictic expressions as they lack the extensional element (see below).

<sup>5</sup> The position of proper names between personal pronouns and the definite article within the hierarchy is very tentative. Although it is the case that the class of proper names contains a much larger number of items than the class of personal pronouns it is far

On the basis of this hierarchy we can establish the fact that the only thing which is common to definite NP's is a marker of definiteness. It therefore appears to be natural to represent definiteness in the syntactic deep structure by a symbol, a proposal which has been made by John Lyons (1974). In this paper he proposed that NP's in deep structure contain the constituent D (for 'deixis'). I have discussed this proposal within a generative semantics framework in the article 'Deictic NP's and Generative Pragmatics' (Faerch 1975). The obligatory character of the D element within definite NP's is expressed by the phrase structure rule

$$NP \rightarrow D ((X) N (S))$$

which is an abbreviation of the following rules:

$$NP \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} D \\ D N \\ D X N \\ D N S \\ D X N S \end{array} \right\}$$

where X stands for one or more adjectival premodifiers and S is a restrictive relative clause.

Now let us consider how these syntactic specifications can be employed within the lexicon of a description of English (figure 2) p. 66.

Personal pronouns are used as unmodified heads, proper names as heads of NP's in which adjectival premodification is possible. Demonstrative pronouns are used as heads or as modifiers; if they are used as modifiers they can co-occur with adjectival premodification and/or with postmodification consisting of a restrictive relative clause. Finally, the definite article exactly corresponds to the demonstrative pronouns when these are used as modifiers.

This description does not pay attention to the fact that some of the personal pronouns may co-occur with postmodification: *you over there*, *he who's guilty of an offence*; I shall ignore these cases. The description does not pay any attention either to the fact that most of the lexemes have stressed and unstress-

from evident that this implies that proper names are characterized by a higher degree of *intension* than personal pronouns. In some cases this may be so; if, for instance, the speaker wants to single out a girl standing in the middle of a crowd of girls, he or she can do so by using a proper name (and *not* by using a personal pronoun). But even if there is only one girl present, the speaker may still prefer to refer by means of a proper name rather than a personal pronoun as proper names are often considered more polite than personal pronouns, especially in middle and upper middle class circles. (Child: 'She says she's hungry'. Mother: 'You don't say she! Say Aunt Mary' Child: 'Aunt Mary says she's hungry'.) So it may be the case that proper names can only be adequately described if we pay attention to various sociolinguistic features. See also below, footnote 7.



|              | Syntactic distribution | <Contrast> | <Human>                    | <Male> | <Proximate> | <Speaker><br><Hearer> |
|--------------|------------------------|------------|----------------------------|--------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <i>I</i>     | [-]                    | +/-        | +                          | ø      | ø           | <speaker>             |
| <i>you</i>   | [-]                    | +/-        | +                          | ø      | ø           | <hearer>              |
| <i>he</i>    | [-]                    | +/-        | +                          | +      | ø           |                       |
| <i>she</i>   | [-]                    | +/-        | +                          | -      | ø           |                       |
| <i>it</i>    | [-]                    | -          | ø                          | ø      | ø           |                       |
| <i>James</i> | [(X)-]                 | +          | +                          | +      | ø           |                       |
| <i>Joan</i>  | [(X)-]                 | +          | +                          | ø      | ø           |                       |
| <i>this</i>  | [-((X) N (S))]         | +          | {-//[-]<br>ø//[-(X) N (S)] | ø      | +           |                       |
| <i>that</i>  | [-((X) N (S))]         | +          | {-//[-]<br>ø//[-(X) N (S)] | ø      | -           |                       |
| <i>the</i>   | [-(X) N (S)]           | -          | ø                          | ø      | ø           |                       |

Table of deictic lexemes in English

Figure 2

ed variants. As some of the lexemes (*it* and *the*) do not carry main stress in their normal uses it is necessary to indicate in the lexicon whether stress assignment is possible or not. Stress is normally associated with contrasting, which is a pragmatico-semantic concept — hence stress-assignment should be formulated in a way so that the pragmatico-semantic interpretative rules can take stress into consideration. I therefore propose that we operate with the feature <contrast> in the lexicon. If a lexeme is marked as <±contrast>, either value can be chosen when the lexeme is inserted into a syntactic string. Lexemes marked <+contrast> are stressed later on by the stress-assignment rules. Proper names and demonstrative pronouns are marked as <+contrast>. This is due to the fact that they are inherently contrastive; by this I mean that the use of a demonstrative pronoun or a proper name is always associated with contrast (*this* rather than *that*, *Peter* rather than *Paul*),<sup>6</sup> whereas personal pronouns are not always used in this way (*he* may be in contrast with *she*, but it can also be a variant of *she*, used when reference is performed to certain types of objects). This leads me on to another point: contrast is frequently expressed by nouns or adjectival modification, but this does not affect the character of the deictic lexemes; to see this, consider the following example:

*the old man was smiling, the young man crying*

<sup>6</sup> But see footnote 5 above.

The fact that the subject NP's are used to refer contrastively does not imply that the definite article should be marked as <+contrast> in these cases; the NP's, not the definite articles, are inherently contrastive.<sup>7</sup>

In connection with definite reference, the act of contrasting can thus be carried out in the following ways:

- (1) by means of a stressed variant of a deictic lexeme
- (2) by means of a deictic lexeme which is inherently contrastive
- (3) by means of nouns and adjectival modification.

Proper names and the personal pronouns are easily subcategorized by means of the features <human> and <male> (see figure 2, columns 3 and 4). With the definite article these features are irrelevant (marked in figure 2 with ø). With the demonstrative pronouns we have to indicate that *this* and *that* are restricted to non-human reference when used as unmodified heads, whereas there are no restrictions in other cases. *This* and *that* are kept apart by the feature <proximate>. Finally, *I* and *you*; these are the most primitive deictic lexemes in that they are used to refer to objects which constitute the speech situation itself. It is therefore justifiable to treat them as primitives by characterizing them as <speaker> and <hearer>, respectively.

The pragmatico-semantic rules operate on the syntactic string after lexicalization has been performed. Consider the example given in figure 3:

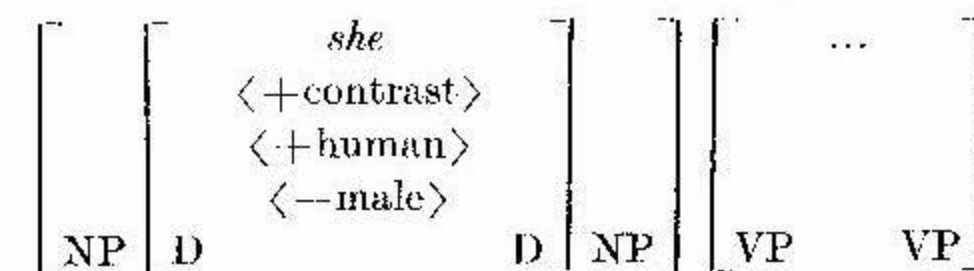


Figure 3

Four pragmatico-semantic interpretative rules operate on *she*; they specify that a speaker can use *she* (or its phonological equivalent, which has been left

<sup>7</sup> The concept of 'inherent contrast' is admittedly vague and demands further explanation. The problem is related to that mentioned above in footnote 5: the fact that a linguistic expression (proper name, adjective or noun) belongs to a large, possibly open, class of items does not imply that an utterance of the expression is associated with contrast. If we distinguish between NP's used to refer only and NP's used to refer and to describe at the same time (the distinction can be exemplified by NP's containing restrictive and parenthetical relative clauses, respectively), then we can say that a non-contrastive use of a proper name, adjective or noun is connected with description within the NP. If description within the NP is represented in DS as apposition, then *my old Dad* can be derived from (NP (my Dad) & (my Dad old) NP), whereas *my old suit* (not *my new suit*) is derived from (NP my suit (my suit old) NP). The communicative function of appositional structures is probably to draw attention to something which the hearer or hearers already know, for which reason it is not considered appropriate by the speaker to treat the description as a predicate.



out in fig. 3) to carry out contrastive, definite reference to a female, human being. What exactly is meant by 'contrastive', 'definite' etc. is specified in a general, universal component, for which reason this need not be stated in language-specific descriptions.

Now let us take a brief glance at Danish deictic lexemes. Here we are confronted by a new problem which we have to consider before we can carry out a description of the entire system.

Modern colloquial Danish contains, at least in its spoken variant, compound lexemes consisting of pronoun + deictic locative adverb: *ham der* ('him there'), *den her* ('it/this here'). Similar lexemes are found in several substandard types of British and American English. We can deal with them in (at least) two different ways:

- (1) we can treat them as individual lexemes
- (2) we can treat them as the result of lexicalization of two deictic lexemes within the same NP.

The former approach fails to express why two compound lexemes containing the same deictic locative adverb are both specified by the same value of the feature <proximate> (i.e., *ham her* and *den her* are both <+proximate>). I shall therefore adopt the latter approach; this leads to a smaller number of deictic lexemes and a more restricted use of the feature <proximate>; but at the same time it leads to a complication of the syntactic specification of lexemes as we now have to describe which lexemes can co-occur within the same NP.

Figure 4 contains a table of Danish lexemes, parallel to that set out for English in fig. 2.<sup>8</sup> I shall now discuss some of the more important contrasts between Danish and English within this area of the grammar.

The obvious contrasts are associated with the Danish gender system, all Danish nouns being either common or neuter, and with the Danish definite article which has an enclitic variant (cf. the last two lexemes in fig. 4). These contrasts rarely cause problems for Danish learners of English.

The personal pronouns *han* and *hun* ('he' and 'she') can both co-occur with the deictic lexemes which are at the same time marked by the features <human> and <male>, characteristic of personal pronouns, and by the feature <proximate>, characteristic of demonstrative pronouns:

*hende her er tungere end hende der*  
( 'her here is heavier than her there' )

<sup>8</sup> Fig. 8 does not give a faithful impression of the multitude of possible deictic combinations in colloquial Danish. It is possible to split up the compound deictic lexemes and place the locative particle after the noun: *den mand her* ('this man here'). Furthermore, the more formal simplex deictic lexemes *denne/dette* ('this'), found almost exclusively

|            | Syntactic distribution  | <Contrast>          | <Human>     | <Male>      | <Proximate> | <Speaker><br><Hearer> | <Common gender> |
|------------|---|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| <i>jeg</i> | [ - ]   | + / -               | +           | ø           | ø           | <speaker>             | ø               |
| <i>du</i>  | [ - ]   | + / -               | +           | ø           | ø           | <hearer>              | ø               |
| <i>han</i> | [ - ([Lok D]) ((D (X) N (S)))<br>(S)]                               | + / -<br>+          | +           | +           | ø           |                       | ø               |
| <i>hun</i> | - // -  | + / -<br>+          | +           | -           | ø           |                       | ø               |
| <i>den</i> | [ - ([Lok D]) ]<br>[ - ([Lok D]) X N (S) ]<br>[ - ([Lok D]) N (S) ] | + / -<br>+ / -<br>+ | -<br>ø<br>ø | ø<br>ø<br>ø | ø           |                       | +               |
| <i>det</i> | - // -  | + / -<br>+ / -<br>+ | -<br>ø<br>ø | ø<br>ø<br>ø | ø           |                       | -               |
| <i>her</i> | [ Lok ]   | +                   | ø           | ø           | +           |                       | ø               |
| <i>der</i> | - // -  | +                   | ø           | ø           | -           |                       | ø               |
| <i>-en</i> | [ (D) - N (S) ]   | -                   | ø           | ø           | ø           |                       | +               |
| <i>-et</i> | - // -  | -                   | ø           | ø           | ø           |                       | -               |

Table of deictic lexemes in Danish

Figure 4

If we look at figure 2 we will not find any English lexemes marked in the same way; thus Danish learners either have to disregard some of the features which specify the Danish complex lexemes or employ a NP containing a noun which supplies the features which are not expressed by the deictic lexeme:

*hende her* →  $\begin{cases} \textit{she} & \text{(less marked than Danish equivalent)} \\ \textit{this girl} & \text{(more highly marked than Danish equivalent)} \end{cases}$   
( 'her here' )

There is a third possibility in English which I have not considered yet: demonstrative pronoun followed by the 'prop'-word *one*:

→ *this one* (less marked than Danish equivalent)

The Danish lexemes *den* and *det* may function as personal pronouns, as demonstrative pronouns and as definite articles. When they function as personal pro-

in the written language, can be combined with both *her* and *der* in the spoken, very colloquial language: *denne her / der* ('this here / there'). The difference between *den* + locative particle and *denne* + locative adverb is stylistic (and possibly sociolectal), not semantic.



nouns they correspond to *it*, but as I mentioned earlier *it* is not readily used to express contrast: the stressed variant of *it* is *this* or *that*, normally in connection with the 'prop'-word *one*. In Danish, *den* and *det* can be stressed to express contrast; this means that in Danish contrast can be expressed without explicitly marking the proximity of the referent (cf. English stressed *he* and *she*). In figure 5 I have indicated some English translation equivalents of Danish sentences containing *den*:

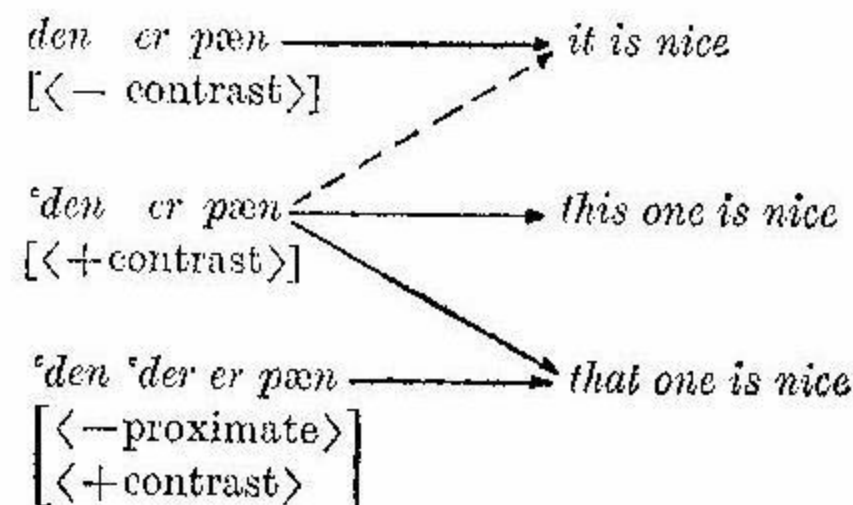


Figure 5

Danish teachers of English are often surprised at the difficulty Danes have in learning the English <±proximate> lexemes; they are surprised because Danish also knows the contrast between <+proximate> and <-proximate> (expressed by *her* ('here') and *der* ('there'), respectively), so why the difficulty? The reason is, of course, that contrast can be expressed in Danish by means of stressed *den* and *det*, without any indication of the proximity of the referent; in situations in which these lexemes are used a Dane is not accustomed to choose between a+ and a-<proximate> marker as he will have to do in English.

If we look at the use of *den* and *det* as definite articles we can describe another well-known difficulty for Danish learners of English. Unstressed *den* and *det* are used instead of the enclitic article in connection with adjectival premodification:

*huset*  
(‘house-the’)

*det gamle hus*  
(‘the old house’)

The stressed *den* and *det* may directly precede the noun:

'*det hus*  
(‘{this  
{that} house’)

The same distributions also occur in cases where the noun is postmodified by a restrictive relative clause:

*huset jeg boede i*  
(‘house-the I lived in’)

*det gamle hus jeg boede i*  
(‘the old house I lived in’)

'*det hus jeg boede i*  
(‘{this  
{that} house I lived in’)

The sentence containing the stressed *det* again exemplifies a dilemma for the Dane: he is used to express contrast by the deictic lexeme; but this specification of contrast is frequently redundant as contrast is inherently expressed by the restrictive relative clause. (This observation is supported by the fact that sentences containing stressed *den/det*+N+restrictive relative clause are frequently interchangeable with sentences containing N+enclitic article+restrictive relative clause — *huset jeg boede i*). In English, this redundancy is avoided; thus the most normal translation equivalent of '*det hus jeg boede i* is *the house I lived in*. Here, then, we face a contrast which causes difficulty for the Dane; and the problem even spreads to NP's containing premodification (*that old house I lived in*), although *den* and *det* in the Danish sentences of this type are only stressed in cases where contrast goes beyond what is expressed inherently by adjective+restrictive relative clause.

## IV

The approach to contrastive analysis I have illustrated above with a tentative description of a limited part of deixis in Danish and English lies within the tradition of notional grammar, if 'notional' is taken to comprise 'communicative' or 'functional'. Notional grammar, going back to Jespersen, seems to be undergoing a renaissance, not only in descriptions of individual languages (cf. Leech & Svartvik 1975), but also in connection with contrastive analysis (see, e.g., Marton 1972). I believe that the way from theoretical description to pedagogical practice can be shortened if we adopt a notional (=communicative) approach. But before it is possible to make positive suggestions as to how a certain problem can best be dealt with in the class room it is necessary to investigate the problem in connection with an analysis of learners' approximative systems (Nemser 1969). As I have not carried out this part of the work yet my article must necessarily remain theoretical.

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