

SOME MORE REMARKS ON THE PEDAGOGICAL USE  
OF CONTRASTIVE STUDIES

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In one of my earlier papers I already recommended using some of the results of contrastive studies for explicit contrastive comparisons in the classroom, which would take the form of grammatical comments and explanations provided by the teacher before intensive drilling or other forms of language practice (Marton 1973). In this paper I would like to further develop and specify these ideas and to show more explicitly how and in what ways contrastive analyses can be used in language pedagogy.

At the beginning I would like to make it clear that the analysis which follows will be developed within the framework of a broadly conceived cognitive approach and that it will concern only the teaching of syntactic structures. It will also be mostly concerned with teaching them to adults at a certain level of intellectual sophistication, such as high school and university students. This does not mean, of course, that I cannot see the usefulness of contrastive studies in teaching phonology and lexicon, it only means that neither my present interests nor the limits of this paper allow me to consider these other components of language. As the term *cognitive approach to foreign language teaching* is still not a very well-defined notion, I would like to say now what I mean by it, emphasizing those features of the cognitive approach which are particularly relevant to the problems discussed in this paper. In other words, I would like to present some relevant articles of my glottodidactic credo, which, to the best of my knowledge and judgement, are very much in agreement with the basic principles of the cognitive approach.

First of all, I must admit that I believe in language teaching, being thus in opposition to the now very popular "naturalistic" trends in glottodidactics (whose representatives are often referred to as the 'new orthodoxy' group), which manifest their disbelief in the notion of language teaching and empha-



size language learning. Of course, I realize and agree that language has to be ultimately learned by the language student, but I believe that effective teaching helps him and guides him in his learning so that his learning is much more efficient and economical than it would be if he relied only on his own heuristic procedures and learning strategies. I particularly believe in the value of language teaching in the conditions of foreign language learning, in contrast to the conditions of second language learning in which the student has ample opportunities for out-of-school contacts with the language. In my understanding teaching is not only organizing the input to the student's "black box" and providing feedback to the output. It also, or even primarily, consists in steering the student's mental activities during his fulfilment of the learning task and can thus be seen as interfering with the processes within the "black box". Accordingly, I am very much for the use of such pedagogical devices as mediators and algorithms since to me they represent the very essence of teaching.

Secondly, I believe that the native language of the learner should be treated as an ally in the process of foreign language teaching and that it should be consciously used instead of being ignored and avoided at all costs. I am convinced that, from a psychological point of view it cannot be avoided and that, from a pedagogical point of view, it can facilitate learning if used wisely and deliberately. I completely agree with D. P. Ausubel, one of contemporary cognitive psychologists, who condensed all of his educational research and thinking in the following statement (Ausubel 1968 : vi):

"If I had to reduce all of educational psychology to just one principle, I would say this: The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly."

There is little doubt that what the language learner already knows is his mother tongue, through which, more or less consciously, he tries to perceive and assimilate the elements of the target language. Utilizing and controlling this tendency instead of ignoring or fighting it will go a long way towards facilitating learning and ensuring success.

Thirdly, I believe that in learning many syntactic structures of the target language the difficulty is primarily conceptual and not formal, i.e., it is rather connected with learning a new grammatical concept or principle than a new form. Accordingly, the teacher's primary task is to make this concept or principle as clear to the student as possible, and his subsequent task is to help him in assimilating it and making it operative in his attempts at using the language.

Fourthly, I do not believe that language is a set of habits, at least *habits* in the behavioristic sense of the word, i.e., seen as mechanically established

and mechanically reproduced stimulus—response associations. I might agree that there are habits in language performance, but, as far as the use of syntactic structures is concerned, they are different in nature from behavioristically conceived, mechanical habits. They could be rather more appropriately labelled *generative habits*, to use R. Leeson's (1975:7) term, and, as such, they would not be very much different from the notions of a rule or a principle. Anyway, whatever the term, the point is that the conceptual and formal characteristics of a given structure have to be grasped and realized by the student in a flash of understanding before he starts practicing this structure in exercises or other forms of language training. That is why, in my opinion, learning syntactic structures rather resembles concept and principle learning than mechanical conditioning processes used in animal training. This concerns also the low-level syntactic operations, such as, for example, the uses of inflectional endings.

Accordingly, I do not believe in habit formation in teaching grammar and I particularly do not believe that any syntactic habits can be formed in the phase of drilling or pattern practicing, as our audio-lingual colleagues tended or still tend to think. The relevant point is that in drills and pattern practices it is the syntactic form itself which is the stimulus to which the student is trained to respond, while in any communication activity it is the overall semantic plan of the utterance which triggers the choice of particular syntactic structures. The conclusion is that actual syntactic habits, if we still want to use this term, can be formed only in communicative activities, be they real or simulated, in which the student is supposed to express his own meanings and not to just manipulate sentences made by someone else. This again does not mean that I see no use for grammar exercises, it means only that I see their functions very differently from audio-lingualists. I think that, first of all, they should serve the function of the clarification of a given syntactic concept or principle introduced by the teacher or the textbook, being thus, psychologically, the continuation or prolongation of the phase of perception. I see them also as serving the purpose of hypothesis testing, but in this case I do not have in mind hypotheses arrived at completely by the student himself but rather hypotheses formed by him with the help of the teacher, which, in spite even of the teacher's skill, can be and very often are erroneous.

Having presented some of the relevant articles of my glottodidactic faith I would like now to pass on to explaining what types of contrastive studies I do have in mind discussing here their pedagogical uses. Of course, I am very much aware of the distinction between theoretical and applied contrastive studies, introduced and supported by J. Fisiak (1973 : 8), and it is undoubtedly the latter which would form a theoretical basis for all kinds of pedagogical applications. Yet within the category of specific applied studies, still using



J. Fisiak's (1973 : 8) terms, I would see a place for a pedagogical contrastive grammar, in a rather restricted sense of the word *pedagogical*. The point is that very often this word is used in the sense synonymous with the word *simplified* and although the term *pedagogical contrastive grammar* has been often used lately it is quite clear that the only pedagogical notion it has utilized has been the notion of simplification, which, in turn, has been most often meant as getting rid of the formidable technical apparatus with the help of which linguistic facts are presented in contemporary theoretical studies. Yet in my understanding of the term and in accordance with the principles sketched above, we can call pedagogical only such materials which are arranged according to a definite pedagogical theory and which utilize special pedagogical devices helping the student to assimilate the learning material in the most economical way. In other words, a pedagogical grammar should aim at something more than just presenting a necessary minimum that the student is supposed to know, it should also strive to shape the student's learning activities and guide him in his learning, thus guaranteeing him a certain measure of success. Since, to the best of my knowledge, no such pedagogical contrastive grammar exists, in this paper I will use as examples facts and statements taken from theoretical contrastive studies, mostly published in the periodicals *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* and *Papers and Studies in Contrastive Linguistics*. At this point it has to be admitted that rather few of the contrastive analyses published so far in these periodicals and in other places lend themselves to any pedagogical uses. This is not so much caused by their high level of theoretical sophistication, which, after all, should never be an obstacle for the writer of a pedagogical grammar, but rather by two other facts. One of them is that the studies published so far have striven to establish correspondencies at the deep structure level and to compare corresponding transformational derivations, which is rather less important to the learner than the comparison of surface structure differences and similarities. The other reason is that these studies deal very often with structures which do not cause much conceptual difficulty and which do not require the strategy of meaningful learning. The point is that not every syntactic structure requires a contrastive presentation in teaching. Generally speaking, it is useful and profitable to contrastively present these structures which are conceptually difficult to grasp by the student of a given language background, or, in other word, such structures whose usage is rather specific for the given language and not immediately obvious to the learner. On the other hand, there are structures in the target language which are more economically acquired in a rote fashion since either the learning problem they represent is purely formal in nature (i.e., the student has only to learn a new form while the concept or principle is the same as in his own language) or their syntactic analysis, although possible, is not necessary since, psycholinguistically speaking,

they are probably stored and recalled as ready-made stereotypes rather than rules or principles. As a good example of the latter category we might mention nominal compounds in English, which can be analyzed syntactically in terms of relationships holding between their constituents (cf. Marton 1970) but it is rather doubtful whether showing these relationships to the Polish student and comparing them with the relationships in equivalent Polish compounds would really help in the learning and retention of these units.

Probably the kind of contrastive study which lends itself best to pedagogical applications is one dealing with a chosen semanto-syntactic category and showing how this category is syntactically realized in the two languages under comparison. As a good example of this type of study we might mention here the two articles by A. Szwedek (1974), entitled "Some Aspects of Definiteness and Indefiniteness of Nouns in Polish" and "A Note on the Relation between the Article in English and Word Order in Polish", both dealing with the category of definiteness and indefiniteness and revealing how the use of the articles in English corresponds to the use of other syntactic devices such as word order, sentence stress and pronominal reference in Polish. Actually, Szwedek's articles are also very useful for language pedagogy for the reason that they discover certain facts and correspondencies by no means obvious to the Polish teacher of English and Polish materials writer. This does not mean, on the other hand, that when such correspondencies are fairly clear and can be easily discovered by the teacher acting as an amateur comparativist, contrastive analyses have nothing pedagogically worthwhile to offer. It is my belief that they can always help the teacher and the materials writer by systematizing their knowledge, showing some additional facts that they may be not aware of and providing good examples. This last function is by no means insignificant since good examples have a great pedagogical value which lies in this that they can be used as very powerful mediators facilitating the learning and retention of a more abstract principle.

And now, using some facts and examples from Szwedek's papers I would like to demonstrate how contrastive information can be utilized in the teaching/learning process. For the sake of order and convenience this process will be seen here as consisting of the four natural stages which can be distinguished in it irrespective of what approach or method we are trying to follow and which can be named as (a) the stage of presentation of a new material (b) the stage of exercises (c) the stage of communication (d) the stage of reviewing and testing. Let us assume then that we want to teach some of the basic uses of the English articles which constitute a great conceptual difficulty to the Polish learner.

First the very concept of definiteness and indefiniteness of nouns in Polish could be introduced in the initial part of the presentation stage in the form of an advance organizer. The advance organizer is a pedagogical device, very



much supported by D. P. Ausubel (1968 : 148 - 9) and other cognitive psychologists, whose function is to present some relevant concepts and ideas in advance of the learning material itself so as to bridge the gap between what the learner already knows and what he needs to know before he can successfully learn the task at hand. These organizers have to be distinguished from previews of the learning material to follow because, in contradistinction to previews, they are presented at a higher level of abstraction, generality, and inclusiveness than the learning material itself. In our hypothetical case the advance organizer would be introduced before the presentation of the language material containing some examples of the basic uses of the definite and indefinite articles. As far as the format of this advance organizer is concerned, it certainly would not be commendable for the teacher to deliver a lecture on the category of definiteness and its realization in Polish syntax since a procedure like this might only confuse the learner and waste the precious classroom time. But the teacher might instead put on the board the two following sets of sentences, taken from Szwedek's article (1974a : 206, 208):

W pokoju siedziała dziewczyna.

Wszedł chłopiec.

Chłopiec wszedł.

Do domu, który obserwowałem, wszedł mężczyzna.

O 3 : 00 mężczyzna wyszedł.

O 3 : 00 wyszedł mężczyzna.

Then the teacher through asking appropriate questions might make his students aware of the relationship between word order and definiteness of nouns connected with the phenomenon of anaphoric reference. Actually, his task would be simply to introduce and clarify the very concept of syntactic definiteness, which his students might know intuitively as part of their knowledge of Polish and which could yet not be available to them in their attempts to understand the principles guiding the use of the English articles. The teacher would finish his presentation by telling the students that in English the definiteness and indefiniteness of nouns are marked in a different way and that their next task would be to discover this way in the language material to be subsequently presented. Certainly, in his presentation and discussion of these examples the teacher would not use all these metalinguistic terms and would try to make his presentation as simple and as brief as possible.

After the introduction of the advance organizer the essential part of the presentation stage follows. It is not the purpose of this paper to describe each of the four stages of the teaching process in detail so let it suffice to say

that in our hypothetical case the cognitively oriented teacher would introduce a text or a dialog containing some illustrative examples of the usage of the articles and would then try to elicit the principle from his students by the technique of guided discovery, i.e., by asking them appropriately framed questions about these examples. Discovering the principle should not prove too difficult to the students since they would have been already prepared for this task by the introduction of some relevant ideas and facts in the advance organizer, and, of course, the teacher might consciously refer to these ideas and facts in discussing the examples. The guided discovery technique would, of course, eventually lead to the formulation and verbalization of the principle of usage, which could be done either by the teacher himself or by one of the brighter students. The principle would thus represent a fragment of the conscious knowledge about the language which would have to be subsequently converted into a functional rule or stereotype readily available to the student in his attempts at constructing utterances in the target language. This would have to take place since the rule in its totality would take too long to recall and would be too cumbersome to have any operational value in very rapid processes of speech production. This is also where many believers in the traditional grammar-translation techniques fail since they erroneously assume that the presentation of the rule and its understanding by the student will automatically result in the transfer of the rule to all the mental operations performed in the process of speech production. The truth is, however, that, as any experienced teacher will confirm, in very many students this transfer never seems to occur. Probably these students, when called upon to construct sentences in the target language in real or simulated communicative conditions, i.e., under considerable time pressure, find it too difficult to refer to the fragments of conscious knowledge about the language stored in their minds and naturally fall upon various simplification strategies in the fulfilment of their communicative task. The point is, then, that the student should be deliberately trained in this transfer and reduction of his conscious knowledge and, being here in complete agreement with L. K. Engle's (1974), I think that this is where mediators have a particularly relevant function to fulfill. By a mediator I mean in this case some condensed and visually representable form of the rule which might mediate between the student's stored knowledge about the language and his use of this knowledge in a communication task. The purpose and the limits of this paper do not allow us to discuss all possible types of mediators in language learning but the point I want to make here is that very often these mediators, just like advance organizers, can be contrastive in nature and can refer a given target language element to its functional correspondent in the native language. Very often, as I have already said, typical and illustrative examples of the usage of a given structure can function very effectively



as mediators. For instance, taking again advantage of Szwedek's (1974a: 207) data, we might construct the following mediator with reference to the use of the articles in English:

Widziałem w oknie kobietę.  
 ↓  
 (nieokreślona → a)  
 Kobieta wyszła na ulicę.  
 ↓  
 (określona → the)

After the presentation of new language material the teacher and his students pass on to the next stage which might be called the stage of exercises. Again, discussing all the types and the whole sequence of grammar exercises agreeable with the principles of the cognitive approach would take us beyond the purpose and the scope of this paper so I want just to repeat what I have already said before that I see the primary function of these exercises as gaining by the student a clear understanding of a given principle and its accompanying concepts and relating this principle to the other elements of the target language system that the student already has in his cognitive structure. Accordingly, as an essential type among these exercises I consider a problem-solving task in which the student has the opportunity of testing and correcting his own hypotheses about the rule or principle being learned. Giving the student this opportunity is necessary because even though his hypotheses are formed with the help of the teacher in the stage of presentation, this fact does not guarantee that the student grasped the full scope and all the implications of the rule being acquired. Among these hypothesis-testing and problem-solving exercises a translation exercise from the native into the target language should certainly play a prominent role since this type of exercise controls the student's natural tendency to rely in his learning on his intuitive knowledge of the native language. As translation exercises have lately fallen from favor with many language teaching methodologists I would like to emphasize that I do not consider them to be the only type of grammar exercise but, on the other hand, I would see at least one good translation exercise as a necessary element in the whole sequence of grammar teaching techniques. And since a grammar translation exercise is par excellence a practical contrastive analysis there is no doubt that contrastive studies can provide very good models for the construction of such exercises. For instance, coming back to our case of teaching the English articles, we could find in Szwedek's (1974a: 207) paper many interesting sets of simple sentences in Polish which would be ideal for a translation exercise, like the following two pairs:

Na podwórzu bawił się piłką chłopiec.  
 Chłopiec dał piłkę kotu.

Na podwórzu bawił się chłopiec z kotem.  
 Chłopiec dał kotu piłkę.

In the next stage of the teaching process, the stage of communication, the student is supposed to have practice in expressing his own meanings (however trivial they might be) and in constructing his own utterances in the target language. According to the assumptions of the cognitive approach this is also the stage in which actual language habits or, to use a somewhat different terminology, schemata (Herriot 1970: 163) are formed in response to stimuli, which have the form of meanings originating in the student's mind. There is no doubt that communicative activities in this stage are very difficult for the student who, trying to encode his meanings into the signs of the target language, is faced with many difficult choices and decisions at a time. Yet in nearly all the teaching techniques suggested for this stage so far no real help has been offered to the struggling student except for the teacher's occasional prompting and correction of errors. Still it is the stage in which the student needs a lot of help which would facilitate transfer from the activities in which he was involved in the two preceding stages to the activities of spontaneous utterance construction. This help should be offered to him in the form of mediators of all kinds and even simple language production algorithms, which should be displayed in the classroom, right in front of the student, on specially prepared charts or on the board. The student should not only be allowed but even encouraged to consult these special cognitive aids when in doubt about the use of a given grammatical rule or principle in his attempts at spontaneous speech production. Since many of these mediators might have a contrastive format utilizing in this way the results of contrastive analyses, we can see now that these results could be pedagogically useful even in the third stage of the teaching process.

As far as the fourth stage, that of revision and testing, is concerned it is fairly obvious that contrastive studies can again provide good models for translation tests, very similar in format to the translation exercises used in the second stage, the main difference being that they would serve not a learning but a testing purpose.

Talking about translation exercises based on the models provided by contrastive analyses, it is also worthwhile to mention that some of these exercises could be particularly useful and appropriate for the advanced level of language teaching. Their usefulness is connected with the fact that advanced learners are often marked by a certain syntactic rigidity and fixedness in their performance in the target language. This rigidity can be described in this way that they functionally overload some of their syntactic schemata, constantly choosing certain structures to the exclusion of other syntactic possibilities, very often, but not always, guided in their preferences by the



criterion of formal congruence holding between the native language and the target one. To teach these students some more flexibility in their handling of the target language syntactic structures the performance of syntactic and semantic paraphrases of target language sentences should be highly recommended, perhaps along the lines suggested by L. A. Jakobovits in his popular book *Foreign language learning* (1970: 21 - 22). The relevant point is that some contrastive studies very well reveal what are the possible syntactic correspondents in the target language of a given native language structure and thus provide very good models for the construction of appropriate translation exercises. For example, in M. Grala's (1974) study of negated adverbial participles in Polish and their corresponding forms in English I found some Polish sentences accompanied by sets of their possible translational equivalents in English, which could be directly incorporated into an exercise of this kind. Here are two of these sentences (Grala 1974: 282)

Janek był bardzo zmartwiony nie zdawszy egzaminu.

John was very upset	}	a) not having passed the exam
		b) at not having passed the exam
		c) at failing the exam
		d) not to have passed the exam
		e) because he didn't pass the exam
		f) as he failed the exam
		g) to have failed the exam

Nie lubiąc ludzi nie znajdziesz przyjaciół.

Not liking people	a)	} you won't find friends.
Without liking people	b)	
Disliking people	c)	
If you don't like people	d)	

To conclude this discussion I would like to say that it was supposed to demonstrate to the reader that if we get rid of the fear of using our student's minds in their task of foreign language learning and if we adopt at least some of the cognitive principles, we will be able to find many more pedagogical uses for the data provided by contrastive studies than it has been suggested so far.

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