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 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 construct 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 misconstrued 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 (Białewsko, 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 (idiomatic, 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 linguists; instead, I should like to consider in somewhat greater detail some linguistic mismatches 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*).

The works are being completed (by the scientists).

(2) **Dokonano prace** (*przez uczonych*).

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 denoted". 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 prace**
(2a) **Dokonano prace**

are the only grammatical phrases according to standard norms (cf. Slownik poprawnej polszczyzny, Slownik synaktyczno-generatyczny czasowników polskich, etc.). From the semantic point of view the collocation of **dokonać + prace** sounds conventionally 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 made

(cf. Marzylam, aby dokonać czynów bohaterstw — 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. It should be noted in passing that Comrie could have used **wykonan** instead of **dokonan**, 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 carried out

The syntactic evidence provided by (1c) and (2c), which are unquestionably 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 poręczu**

But here the fact is that the case 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:

Notice that Comrie took and adapted these sentences from Wiesio's article.
dotknąć + N_acc — hurt, touch, dotknąć + N_gen — touch in the physical sense. 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 Bultler 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 mianowaci — 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) Mołódł się, by wybrać go prezesem.
he prayed REFLEX 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 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 woman 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; Bultler (1970:54, 180) is very tolerant and assumes both constructions equally legitimate [wybwać prezesem, [wybwać na prezesina], ] Saloni and Świżna (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 wyłaczona 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 phrasological 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 kawę. (= He spoke in a direct, straightforward way; told the truth)
He laid out coffee onto the bench.

(13) Zadali 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 re-formulating 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 a 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 is John (Borsley and Jaworska 1981:82)

(17) Maria rozważała z takim przystojnym mężczyzną, z jakim Armą.
(Borsley and Jaworska 1981:83)

(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 choices.

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 Bömecke (1978) as an examination question (or a courtroom question) — compare the examples she quotes:

A zasadywcy 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. 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, conjoint 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-

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* If (15) were meant to be a question it should have been construed differently; for Polish constructions with reported questions see Szwedzik (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' assertion that "there is just one AP determiner inflected in
some circumstances and uninflected in others" (81), i.e., jak - 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
constructed; 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 szeroka

(21b) Ta rzeka nie jest głębsza niż szeroka.
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 Butlcer et al. (1973:374-5), Słownik poprawnej połeczozyny,
Szczepański (1980:100 ff.), etc. For example, compare the authors' re-
mark "in standard Polish, jak normally occurs in negated comparatives"
(90) with "po wyrażenich z przecenaniem używamy zarówno spójnika niż,
jak i spójnika jak: Czuł się nie gorzej niż (jak) dawniej" (Słownik poprawnej
połeczozyny) (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.J). 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, jak 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, jak kupił samochód.
you met Ann after this how you bought car
"You met Ann after you bought the car." (Jaworska 1982:163)
The word jak 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 jakłeś are the
alternatives. Jakżeś 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 -ś 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 com-
prehensible, appropriate to the context, and generated by the rules of gram-
mar, in other words, to be fully acceptable and perfectly grammatical.

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