

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS, PRAGMATICS AND LANGUAGE TEACHERS?

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South African society is in flux; and consequently many university disciplines are also in flux, seeking a response to the challenges of developing democracy. Such processes must inevitably lead to changes in perception in the proponents of these disciplines. This present paper, while seeking an answer to the question, what might future language teachers require from linguistics, simultaneously documents such a shift, in that I move from a basic acceptance of a linguistics which, while attempting to contribute towards better understanding in society, at bottom remains detached from the forces which actually shape society, to the concept of an engaged or critical linguistics, which acknowledges that it, together with the language it studies, is intimately implicated in the power mechanisms of its society, and, as a discipline in South Africa at these crucial times, must also seek to address this fact.

The starting-point for my deliberations is the likely new language policy for our country. Let us assume that future language planners do not yield completely to the threatening exclusive dominance of English, but rather seek to implement a more egalitarian policy of societal multilingualism, which will of necessity involve empowering the indigenous languages. What roles will language teachers at both schools and institutions of tertiary education need to fulfill with regard to such a policy?

The most visible function of the language teacher is, clearly, facilitating the skilled use of language, whether this be a first, second or foreign language. Crucial to any society's well-being is the development of linguistic and cognitive skills in first languages. More obvious in our present society, however, though not necessarily more important, are problems in the area of second language teaching: English as a second language needs

urgent attention, while a methodology for teaching indigenous languages as second languages has yet to be devised. However, in that our future society is to be multilingual, language instruction must surely have as its purpose not solely developing communicative competence in any one language, but in addition equipping pupils for cross-cultural communication, communication between speakers of different first languages. In all likelihood this will already be necessary in future classrooms, with both teacher and pupils needing to communicate across different languages; although an appropriate education policy remains to be devised, it seems unlikely that classrooms will remain monolingual as in the past. Whether for classroom purposes or beyond, the aim of cross-cultural communication makes a substantial input from pragmatics crucial, as is demonstrated for example by Tannen's (1984b) brief overview of the pragmatics of cross-cultural communication. Tannen exemplifies eight levels of differences, ranging from when to speak and what to say to cohesion and coherence; and it is in this same broad sense of "ways that meaning is communicated in talk" (ibid.:194) that I will here be using the term pragmatics (see also Leech 1983:10).

However, language teachers will hopefully see their role as extending beyond facilitating language competence. In a recent article Anne-Marie Beukes (1991) has pointed to links between language teaching and the politics of language. Drawing on the work of Skuttnab-Kangas & Cummins (1988), she identifies linguisticism as prevalent in South Africa and points to language prejudice as "almost endemic". Hence she argues that "the language teaching profession has a vital role to play in delegitimizing linguistic inequality in a future democratic South Africa" (Beukes 1991:89) To this end she recommends language awareness programmes with the following aims: "to teach pupils to understand the nature and functions of language... to promote understanding of language diversity - a sure way to challenge linguistic prejudice through knowledge and critical discussion... (to) teach our new generations that monolingualism in a multicultural society is not merely intolerable, but that it is a

sure way to cultural sterility and, most importantly, to conflict." (ibid.:98)

Beukes has raised a number of important issues which deserve further in-depth treatment, more than is possible here, though we will touch on some of these again towards the end of my paper. And while concurring with Beukes that language teachers should also contribute towards linguistic equality by means of language awareness programmes, I would doubt whether the average teacher is at present equipped for this role - either by reason of general underqualification, or due to lack of competence in an indigenous language. Indeed, competence alone will not suffice: required are rather detailed knowledge and skills, such as can only be provided by in-depth linguistic studies.

Be this as it may, teachers who hope to contribute to attitudinal change will find insights from pragmatics most useful for this purpose too. For instance, one clear linguistic root of prejudice has been demonstrated by investigations into cross-cultural pragmatics. In several articles Jenny Thomas (1983, 1984) has outlined the concept of pragmatic failure, the "inability to understand 'what is meant by what is said'" (1983:91), which typically may lead a learner to misjudge the level of politeness required or used in an interaction. Thomas points to the more than purely linguistic consequences such failure may have. "Grammatical errors may be irritating and impede communication, but at least, as a rule, they are apparent in the surface structure, so that H is aware that an error has occurred. Once alerted to the fact that S is not fully grammatically competent, native speakers seem to have little difficulty in making allowances for it. Pragmatic failure, on the other hand, is rarely recognized as such by non-linguists. If a non-native speaker appears to speak fluently (i.e. is grammatically competent), a native speaker is likely to attribute his/her apparent impoliteness or unfriendliness, not to any linguistic deficiency, but to boorishness or ill-will. While grammatical error may reveal a speaker to be a less than proficient language-

user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on him/her as a person. Misunderstandings of this nature are almost certainly at the root of unhelpful and offensive national stereotyping: 'the abrasive Russian/German', 'the obsequious Indian/Japanese', 'the insincere American', and 'the standoffish Briton'." (ibid.:96-7) The informed language teacher could well help to combat prejudice of such origin and hence contribute to attitudinal change, by increasing awareness of the pragmatic habits of different languages.

At least these two issues, then, point to the importance of a pragmatics component in future language teaching. I would like to suggest that such a component is best developed in the context of contrastive analyses, in that speakers in our future society need equally to become aware of the pragmatic habits of their own language and of those of the languages around them, so as to be able to participate in cross-cultural discourse on an equal footing. Let us now consider the potential of contrastive analysis as a discipline to provide the requisite insights.

Contrastive analysis (CA) experienced its first major boom in the USA, as a result of the surge in interest in language learning precipitated by the Second World War. (eg.Lado 1957) Its popularity rested to a large extent on the perception that it could be of immediate pedagogical relevance to second language learning, in that it would enable teachers to predict areas of difficulty in a second language. This enthusiasm, based as it was on rather excessive expectations, gave way to a general disillusionment with contrastive analysis in the USA during the sixties and seventies (Alatis 1968), whereas in Europe, although pedagogic interest waned, research continued and a number of major projects were initiated. Although to this day interest in CA has not been rekindled in the USA, the European studies have shown the importance of CA for translation theory, the description of particular languages, language typology and the study of language universals, quite apart from its possible application to language teaching, which has remained somewhat

controversial.

A number of recent publications have discussed and largely refuted the doubts still expressed with regard to language learning. (James 1980; Fisiak 1981a; Sajavaara 1981a, 1981b; Sanders 1981) Clearly, as Sajavaara points out, "linguistic contrastive analysis cannot solve all the problems of language learning because not all of them are linguistic." (1981a:39) Nor are "the immediate findings of contrastive analysis ... for classroom consumption; they are for the text-book writer and the teacher, and many faults attributed to contrastive analysis itself stem from misapplication." (Sanders 1981:22) Or, still in Sanders' terms, "To use the results of CA ... raw in the classroom is rather like presenting a customer in a restaurant with the ingredients and a recipe." (quoted in Fisiak 1981b:8) Fisiak presents the following considered summing-up of the potential of CA for teaching a second language: "When used in the classroom, comparative studies form a useful technique, employing the previous knowledge of the learner, informing him about similarities and differences between his native language and the foreign language he is studying, also warning him about making false analogies and about the potential areas of interference." (ibid.:8).

From this perspective, CA would doubtless prove a useful tool in South African classrooms. However, Fisiak presents the learner into a rather passive role, in which he/she is led by the informed teacher. This should be compared with the more creative method of promoting language awareness, that of the multilingual classroom, as suggested by Agnihotri (1991) at last year's NLP conference: the pupils themselves, on the basis of the languages represented in the classroom, together investigate linguistic phenomena, which will lead to simple CAs of aspects of the languages involved.

Although in these two ways CA generally would be of use, it is specifically the more recent developments in the field which can

provide some of the answers urgently required by our language teachers. Earlier applications of CA were on the whole restricted to the microlinguistic fields of phonology, syntax, and the lexicon, using a structuralist and, in due course, a generative model of language. During the last decade, however, interest has moved towards macrolinguistic contrastive studies, which have investigated speech acts, texts and discourse. James (1980:98-140) had argued for the contrastive analysis of texts and discourse. Simultaneously pleas for a contrastive pragmatics were made by Sajavaara (1981b) and Riley (1981), on the basis of Hymes' concept of communicative competence. As Sajavaara points out, "It is true that grammatical competence is part of a human being's ability to communicate, but it is totally insufficient to explain the phenomena that are involved in language behaviour." (1981b:88) Hence his plea for the contrastive "mapping (of) differences and similarities in various processes taking place in and between the speaker and the hearer in acts of communication." (ibid.:110) Riley pursues this line of thought further in concluding: "Contrastive Analysis has failed to deal with problems of meaning, language use and the various linguistic aspects of interaction... contrastive analysis without a pragmalinguistic dimension is inadequate." (1981:120) Of considerable interest in the local context (as will be shown below) is the fact that Riley sees a need to include in his model "all contributions to communicative interaction, whether verbal, paralinguistic (i.e. vocal non-verbal) or non-verbal. Semantics, with its traditional focus on the verbal component alone, is of little help in the description and analysis of communicative behaviours involving the whole spectrum of sensory categories - paraphonology, key, intonation, gaze, facial expression, gesture, touch, smell, orientation, proxemics, as well as a myriad of social and situational features." (ibid.:123) For even though non-verbal behaviour may often be of no direct illocutionary value, it may well have other functions such as "the regulation and marking of discourse structure". (ibid.:128) Unfortunately this cogent reasoning has been followed only by a minority of subsequent projects; the majority, including several major

investigations, has considered only verbal data. Presumably methodological difficulties are largely responsible for this serious limitation, as too the fact that in the main languages generally familiar to linguistics and to linguists have been contrasted.

The progress achieved during the last decade in the contrastive analysis of pragmatics is documented in Odlin's (1989) recent review of research into language transfer. Odlin discusses contrastive investigations of the concepts of politeness and coherence, which, although doubtless universals, can clearly be implemented in very different ways from language to language. Most recent research into politeness draws on the theory developed by Brown & Levinson (1987). This seeks to explain politeness in terms of Goffman's concept of "face" and elucidates two major sets of politeness strategies which are termed negative and positive politeness. These sets of strategies enable comparison of politeness norms in different languages. A number of speech acts and other discourse features have now been investigated contrastively, in a variety of languages: most comprehensively requests and apologies, but also greetings, formulaic statements and rules governing turn-taking in conversations. Mention must be made of a major international project, CCSARP (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1983; Blum-Kulka et al 1989), which investigated requests and apologies across a number of different languages and devised a coding scheme which permitted detailed comparisons. While CCSARP has enhanced our cross-cultural understanding of the two speech acts concerned considerably, this was unfortunately almost exclusively on the basis of written data, obtained through discourse completion tests, which ignore non-verbal features. Subsequent attempts to apply the CCSARP methodology to typologically dissimilar languages has lead to considerable criticism of the limitations of this methodology. (Atawneh & Sridhar 1991; Hartford & Bardovic-Harlig 1991; Rose 1991; de Kadt 1992b)

Yet isolated speech acts will always tend to remain somewhat

artificial: still more useful would be the analysis of patterns and strategies of discourse. Here cross-cultural research has concentrated on coherence, defined by Tannen as the "organizing structure making the words and sentences into a unified discourse that has cultural significance" (1984b:194). Clearly cross-linguistic variations in discourse also have considerable potential for creating misunderstandings. Given the importance of narration at school, teachers should become aware of possible "culturally specific patterns of narratives and ... (that) cultural differences in narrative form have consequences for language comprehension." (Odlin 1989:59) Research into discourse has recently been given considerable new impetus by relevance theory, as developed by Sperber & Wilson (1986; see also Sinclair & Winckler 1991); however to my knowledge no attempts have yet been made to apply this powerful theory contrastively.

There is one further possible influence on differing discourse forms which is merely mentioned by Odlin: literacy. (1989:68). Given the transition from orality to literacy which is presently taking place in South Africa, the clarification of discourse patterns typical to primary oral as opposed to literate cultures would doubtless be of great relevance. As Ong has pointed out, "writing restructures consciousness" (1982:78), and the thought processes of functionally literate human beings "do not grow out of simply natural powers but out of these powers as structured, directly or indirectly, by the technology of writing." (ibid.:79) According to Ong, thought and expression in primary oral cultures has a mnemonic base and tends to the following characteristics: it is additive rather than subordinative, aggregative rather than analytic, redundant or 'copious', conservative or traditionalist, empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced, situational rather than abstract. Certainly, we no longer have a primary oral culture in South Africa, in spite of our still very high quota of non-literates, yet it is quite possible that the differences in thought processes Ong describes still play a substantial, though generally unrecognized role. As Ong points out, "passing acquaintanceship with literate organization of

knowledge has ... no discernible effect on literates. Writing has to be personally interiorized to affect thinking processes." (ibid.:56) On the other hand, "it only takes a moderate degree of literacy to make a tremendous difference in thought processes." (ibid.:50) While Ong's claims have been disputed and still require considerable clarification, orally influenced discourse patterns may well offer some explanation of different speaking and writing patterns of black students.

Clearly, detailed knowledge about the pragmatic habits of different South African languages would be most beneficial to teachers who wish to take cross-cultural communication and multilingualism seriously. Unfortunately, this is an area of research which, with some few exceptions, has been little developed in South Africa. Chick (1985, 1991) has done some pioneering work into verbal interaction in English between speakers with different first languages. The CCSARP project has spawned some investigations of requests and apologies. (Greyling 1989; Hodge 1990) However, the greatest gap in our knowledge is about the pragmatics of our indigenous languages, and of English as a second language. In view of the undeveloped nature of the field, I will report briefly on my own research project, which seeks to compare requests across English, Zulu and the English of Zulu-speakers ('Zulu English'). (de Kadt 1992b, 1992c)

The pilot study of this project was also based on CCSARP, and hence used data obtained from written discourse completion tests. However, the results have forced me to query the general applicability of Blum-Kulka et al's (1989) findings, which saw politeness primarily as a function of indirectness: the more indirect the request, the greater the degree of politeness. In the Zulu responses I collected, on the contrary, there was a markedly high degree of directness, which, according to the theory, would contradict the speakers' self-perception of politeness. Hence the hypothesis on which my present larger project is based, that while politeness in English (and possibly in other European languages) might well be a primarily verbal

category, this is not the case in Zulu. Rather a setting of politeness is created primarily by a considerable number of non-verbal factors such as posture, gesture, direction of gaze etc., as well as by ritualized greetings, health enquiries etc., in the context of which it is quite possible to put a markedly direct request without appearing impolite. This hypothesis would enable me to explain some of the "un-English" features of requests collected in Zulu English in terms of transfer from Zulu. While these results must still be considered tentative, they do point to most interesting perspectives which might go far to explaining some present difficulties in communication between first- and second-language speakers of English in South Africa. They also indicate the validity of Riley's (1981) insistence on including paralinguistic and non-verbal features in his model of language use, as discussed above. The potential of research of this type is enormous: as well as considering individual speech acts contrastively, a broader analysis of discourse structures and strategies in languages which are likely to be juxtaposed in actual social intercourse in South Africa would be most useful. A few comparative projects have recently been initiated in other African countries (Katesi 1986; Adegbija 1989), on which South African research might be able to draw.

It is research of such types, I would argue, which would enhance the preparation of our teachers for both first and second language teaching, and would better enable them to equip pupils for a multilingual society: it would facilitate communication between speakers of different languages, and would also help to break down long-term prejudices based on differing cultural habits. Yet such research would require something of a paradigm shift on the part of linguists. It requires linguists themselves to become multilingual and to acquire at least one of our indigenous languages, or at least to work in conjunction with a black linguist. It also requires the acknowledgement that second-language varieties of English and Afrikaans have at least as much validity in our country as first-language varieties. Would this not then be something, at least, of what the South African

language teacher requires?

And yet I am left with an uneasy feeling, which I will attempt to explore during the remaining minutes. It is not that I doubt that knowledge acquired from CA will be of benefit - it is rather that the very act of comparison I propose requires an artificial juxtaposition of the languages being compared in a kind of social vacuum. Putting them on a par in this way suggests their equality, and hence reinforces our tendency to forget the uncomfortable fact that in our context languages are by no means equal. Two of our languages are empowered - all others are disempowered; and with them, first-language speakers of these languages are empowered or disempowered. When we speak of achieving an egalitarian language dispensation, this is the central issue we need to address. By attempting to remedy inequality as expressed in communication deficits on a personal basis, such as through improved communication skills, we make it all too easy to overlook the fact that there are, at least in part, structural reasons for these deficits. And so we are faced with a dilemma, in that a field of linguistics which can doubtless facilitate improved teaching skills and inter-cultural relations, simultaneously may well contribute to a perpetuation of inequality by helping to cover up the real issues. I would assume that this dilemma is by no means limited to CA, but also applicable to many other branches of linguistics.

Let us at this point once more consider points raised by Beukes, such as the category of linguistic prejudice, which she hopes to overcome by "promot(ing) understanding of linguistic diversity" (1991:98). Prejudice of many kinds doubtless plays a major role in race relations in South Africa, and I would doubt whether one can clearly separate out linguistic prejudice, as Beukes seems to suggest. To my knowledge this question has not yet been investigated in our local context. The studies by van Dijk (1984, 1987) into ethnic prejudice against minorities in the Netherlands and the States have identified a hierarchy of ethnic group attitudes, based on a fixed order according to which prejudices

against minorities seem to be acquired: the hierarchy is headed by appearance and origin, followed by socioeconomic position; only in the lower half come sociocultural properties, including language, and finally personal characteristics. Furthermore, in that prejudice functions generally as a gate-keeping mechanism at the political and economic levels, it seems likely that it can only finally respond to socio-political change. Hence my serious doubts as to whether language awareness programmes alone will be able to defuse prejudice.

Another concept mentioned by Beukes, *linguicism*, is central to any consideration of language in South Africa. Linguicism is defined by Skuttnab-Kangas as "the ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, affectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (i.e. of their mother tongue)." 1988b:13) In a considered appraisal of linguicism against the background of a theory of linguistic imperialism, Phillipson (1988) draws on the concept of hegemony, "the organization of consent through invisible cultural dominance rather than visible political power" (Tosi 1988:91), to explain the continuing global spread of English in the post-colonial phase. Phillipson concludes: "It is of the essence of hegemony that injustices are internalized by both the dominant and the dominated groups as being natural and legitimate. However, neither the structures nor the ideologies are static. Hegemony is lived experience which is in a constant process of negotiation, recreation and adjustment. It is therefore open to contestation. An anti-linguicist strategy presupposes an analysis of what the source of the power of the dominant language is, and what the structures and ideologies are that maintain linguistic inequality. An active anti-linguicist policy in favour of dominated languages is needed at a variety of levels and in each context of linguistic inequality." (1988:343) It is such an analysis, I would suggest, that should become a priority here in South Africa; it is a prerequisite for any new egalitarian language policy.

The power of language is, as is often stated, a function of the power relationships pertaining in society generally; and the complexity of modern society and the lack of a generally accepted definition of power make such an analysis an extremely vexed issue. It is only recently that the discipline of linguistics has begun to turn its attention to this topic, and an adequate theory of linguistic power in the context of developed societies has yet to be devised. Hence it is not surprising that South African linguists have barely made a start on a rigorous analysis of language and power, although the overt domination through apartheid makes this a fascinating and most necessary topic. My own first approximation to such a model (de Kadt 1992a) has sought to differentiate three separate but intertwined strands of linguistic power: pragmatic power based on the communicative dimensions of language, symbolic power drawing on the emotive and symbolic aspects of language, and signitive power which a language exerts covertly over its speakers, in that it propagates a particular interpretation of reality and sets of concepts and values. When applied to English in South Africa, these three categories allow some explanation of the enormous power wielded by English in our society - and also of the dangers of an exclusive domination by English.

Such an analysis of the power of our dominant languages becomes all the more important for teachers, in that English is used as teaching medium in the majority of our classrooms. The fact that speakers of our indigenous languages are demanding education for their children in a foreign tongue points to the inverted form that linguisticism has assumed in South Africa. It is imperative that teachers become aware of the power located in their own professional situation and the possibly unwittingly linguistic dimensions of certain professional objectives, which at present are taken for granted.

Just one example of this. The aim of second language teaching is ideally considered to be communicative competence in the target

language. Is this not perhaps one of the ways in which English maintains its dominance in our society? (see van Zyl 1987) First, the likelihood of pupils in the underequipped and understaffed black education system actually achieving this aim is virtually nil - which immediately disqualifies pupils as failures. Second, the goal of communicative competence in the dominant language involves internalising the world view of this language, which, for South African English, is one still located in the context of colonialism, capitalism and apartheid. Together with this, norms and standards of behaviour will be internalised. Yet as Thomas has pointed out, "It is not the responsibility of the teacher qua linguist to enforce Anglo-Saxon standards of behaviour, linguistic or otherwise. Rather, it is the teacher's job to equip the student to express her/himself in exactly the way s/he chooses to do so - rudely, tactfully, or in an elaborately polite manner. What we want to prevent is her/his being unintentionally rude or subservient." (1983:96) Second language students must be equipped and given the right to 'flout' (ibid.:110), both linguistically and otherwise. Clearly competence in English will remain necessary in our society; but it should be a critically aware competence in both first- and second-language speakers. An analysis of the power dimensions of our languages would at least equip teachers to make their own critically informed judgements about their professional objectives.

And so I look back on contrastive analysis and am forced to conclude that traditional contrastive analysis alone will not suffice to equip the language teacher in the sense I would find desirable. Indeed, the very potential of modern CA to improve cross-cultural communication might well blind the teacher to the structural issues which lie at the root of many of our language problems. Early microlinguistic CAs in particular operated in a vacuum, isolated from the realities of the actual use of language in everyday situations and concerned solely with language structures. The macrolinguistic CAs which have become popular during the last decade have, to a certain extent, breeched this isolation, in that they deal more with language use in specific

situations. Brown & Levinson (1987) for example include the social variables P(ower) and D(istance) in their model of politeness, in order to accommodate social differences. Yet this is still far from the analysis of the power of language which I see as necessary to our language teacher. P and D refer to the societal power of specific people who happen to be speaking this language. In contrast to this, I would argue that it is rather the analysis of the power of the language itself, as compared to that of other languages (or varieties) in the broader societal context, which in the final analysis is crucial to our linguistic future. Certainly it might be possible to compare the power quotient of two languages and ~~the~~ ways in which this is encoded linguistically, but this would go beyond the scope of contrastive analysis in the normal sense.

And yet we must not forget that the primary function of language teachers is simply that, teaching language. Although I must argue that insights into the power dimensions of our present multilingualism are essential to create the critically aware teachers South Africa requires, equally essential are insights from linguistics which would enable teachers to perform their language teaching function better. Contrastive pragmatics, in the sense discussed here, can provide some of these.

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