Language description and use

DESCRIPTIVE STUDIES OF PARTICULAR LANGUAGES

CHINESE

86–134 Cumming, Susanna (UCLA). The sentence in Chinese. *Studies in Language* (Amsterdam), **8**, 3 (1984), 365–95.

An analysis of written and spoken texts in Mandarin Chinese shows that the notion 'sentence', in the sense in which it is used by tagmemicists (a unit bigger than a clause and smaller than a paragraph which shows 'local cohesion'), does serve a useful function in its description. Clauses are divided into three groups: (i) shared argument groups composed of adjacent clauses which share a single understood argument; (ii) part-of groups made up of main clauses and their subordinates and (iii) complement groups which comprise main clauses and their object complement clauses. The 'cohesion clusters' formed by overlapping groups reflect the same cognitive grouping of clauses that sentences tend to reflect. An analysis of English showed a similar distribution of clause groups. While spoken and written Chinese both mark cohesiveness in more or less the same ways, English marks it much more systematically in the written than in the spoken language.

ENGLISH

86–135 Aijmer, Karin (U. of Lund). 'Sort of' and 'kind of' in English conversation. *Studia Linguistica* (Lund, Sweden), **38**, 2 (1984), 118–27.

This paper is devoted to a study of the functions of devices such as *sort of* (*kind of*) which are used in speech to make the reference of an entity vague and less well defined rather than clear and specific. The investigation is based on a selection of texts representing informal conversation from the London–Lund Corpus of Spoken English. The material examined consists of about 170,000 words representing 34 texts each of 5000 words.

Kind of and *sort of* are used without any difference in meaning or function. *Kind of* is, however, used more frequently in America than in Britain. In this material *kind of* was much less frequent than *sort of*. The discussion deals mainly with *sort of*.

It appears from this survey that *sort of* is an important element in conversation. It makes spoken interaction easier, more pleasant and more efficient. It is a convenient device when there does not seem to be a special word for what the speaker wants to say or if the speaker wants to disclaim responsibility for what he says. It is used if personal experiences are looked upon as more important than facts. *Sort of* is also used by the speaker when he hesitates or searches for words; it can be used to regulate and facilitate the interaction betweeen speaker and listener by appealing to common ground, shared experiences or previous context; it can soften or attenuate the impact of a formulation or an utterance which is otherwise too strong or exact.

86–136 Jacobsson, Bengt. Notes on tense and modality in conditional 'if'-clauses. *Studia Linguistica* (Lund, Sweden), **38**, 2 (1984), 124–47.

Using a large corpus of examples from quality written English and the Survey of English Usage, the use and distribution of nonvolitional auxiliary verbs *will* and *would* in *if*-clauses is studied. Examples are: *If it will make you happier, I'll stop smoking*; *If I would hinder you, I had better not go with you.* Such occurrences have usually been ignored in pedagogic grammar and a survey of scholarly studies shows that they have not yet been adequately explained. While the data is too complex to yield a simple formula, the following is concluded: (*a*) Nonvolitional *will* and the corresponding forms of *be going to* are used in *if*-clauses when the speaker makes it quite clear that the reference is to the future or when he wants to mark the future event or state as predictable or probable. (*b*) Where the main clause event is anterior to that of the subclause, the future contingency usually determines the present decision, suggestions, judgement, etc. and evokes *will*. (*c*) Such clauses containing *will* often follow the main clause, sometimes as a kind of afterthought, and can sometimes be analysed as the head of an implied but suppressed condition. (*d*) What applies to *will* also applies to *would* but is shifted backwards in time. (*e*) However, *would* has additional uses, particularly as a polite softener, e.g. *If you would be so kind..., if it would suit you....* and is more likely to occur in both protasis and apodasis. Similar guiding forces seem to be at work in other languages, e.g. German *wenn – würde.*

86–137 Tottie, Gunnel and Övergaard, Gerd (Uppsala U.). The author's 'would' – a feature of American English. *Studia Linguistica* (Lund, Sweden), **38**, 2 (1984), 148–64.

A corpus of American English (Brown) and one of British English (Lancaster–Oslo/Bergen) were searched for lexical realisations of the semantic field 'was destined to'. Occurrences of 'would' were 19 in Brown, 1 in LOB; of 'was/were to' 36 in Brown, 48 in LOB; of other forms 2 and 5. This and other evidence indicates that 'would' in this sense is primarily a feature of American English. It occurs mostly in texts of the category 'belles lettres, biography, essays', and is more likely in sentences containing a time marker.

FRENCH

86–138 Candel, D. Ambiguité d'origine polysémique dans une langue de spécialité. [Polysemous ambiguity in Language for Specific Purposes.] *Cahiers de Lexicologie* (Paris), **45**, 2 (1984), 21–32.

A sample of French for Specific Purposes observed in an academic institution is examined. The analysed data were gathered on the basis of answers to questions asked to students and notes issued by instructors summarising and announcing the content of their courses. More precisely, one word of the 'technoscientific' language, *espace* 'space', is studied. Its use by the students and their instructors induces many problems due to the variety of speech acts, 'registers', and 'domains'. The meaning

of the observed word drifts from that of the scientific field (mathematics) towards a meaning typical of another field (related to architecture). This change in meaning corresponds to the relative importance of the two fields in the observed academic institution.

86–139 Delomier, Dominique (U. of Paris III/CNRS). Remarques sur certains faits d'intonation accompagnant les relatives explicatives. [Remarks on certain intonational features accompanying non-defining relatives.] *Langue Française* (Paris), **65** (1985), 41–51.

Previous studies have claimed that the presence of a pause or pauses and a special intonation distinguish non-defining from defining relatives in French. The present corpus, on the other hand, includes defining clauses set off by pauses and non-defining ones without accompanying pauses. However, many non-defining clauses (those that characterise the speaker's attitude to what he is saying rather than those that are purely descriptive), are associated with an intonational configuration characterised by a sudden downward break in pitch, a faster or accelerating tempo, a final sharp rise and (sometimes) a terminal aspiration; such a configuration is characteristic of other parenthetical structures as well. One parenthesis may be embedded inside another or a succession of parallel parentheses may be found. Verbal indicators of personal attitude can also complement the effect of the intonation.

86–140 Spa, J. J. (U. of Amsterdam). Le [ɲ] est mort. Vive le /ɲ/! [The [ɲ] is dead. Long live the /ɲ/!] *Linguisticae Investigationes* (Amsterdam), **8**, 1 (1984), 151–9.

The tendency to pronounce French normative [ɲ] as [nj] is well attested. Phonological rules such as the pronunciation of schwa between CC and C (as in *ensei***gnem***ent* and *ivro***gne** ***dégoutant***) and the optional deletion of yod in words like *baig***n***ions* suggest that they apply to a bi-consonantal sequence [nj]. On the other hand, the phonotactic rules prohibiting the sequence Cji (see *ma***gni***fique*), the absence of lexical stems ending in Cj but the existence of stems ending in a nasal consonant, the absence of words ending in underlying –Cjə but the existence of words ending in an underlying nasal consonant, the phonotactic rules prohibiting the sequence CjwV but allowing $C_{[nasal]}wV$ (e.g. *moi*), all argue for the existence of an underlying segment /ɲ/. The pronunciation /ɲ/ cannot be analysed as a case of /nj/; rather an underlying /ɲ/ is, under definable circumstances, realised as [nj]. It is noted that initial /ɲ/ is found only in [popular] words (*gnon*, *gnaf*), while initial /nj/ is found in words of the general lexicon (*nièce*, *nielle*). Ordered rules are put forward for the pronunciation of /ɲ/.

GERMAN

86–141 Siliakus, H. J. (U. of Adelaide). Some syntactical features of linguistic texts. *ITL* (Louvain), **65** (1984), 57–77.

A comparison of German texts from various disciplines reveals that linguists use fewer nominalisations, pronouns, past tense passives, simple past tense forms and subjunctives but more present tense passive forms.

SIGN LANGUAGE

86–142 Deuchar, Margaret and James, Helen (U. of Sussex). English as the second language of the deaf. *Language and Communication* (Oxford), **5**, 1 (1985), 45–51.

The language of the British deaf community is not spoken English but British Sign Language (BSL), an autonomous language independent of English. English is used as a second language, primarily for communication with hearing people. A knowledge of BSL plays an important role in the deaf community; it is the most easily learned and most naturally used language of deaf people. Deaf children whose parents are deaf learn sign language at least as fast as hearing children learn a spoken language. In contrast, deaf children with hearing parents (90%) must struggle to pick up even the most basic English, because educational policy in Britain is opposed to the use of sign language. Deaf children nevertheless learn English from their peers.

Research has shown that BSL has a grammatical structure of its own and operates a full linguistic system. Sign languages used in different countries are not the same. The iconic properties of signs are less important than their more abstract structural properties. Signs are made up of at least three components: 'tab' (the place the sign is made), 'dez' (the hand configuration used), and 'sig' (the movement involved in making the sign). Linear order of signs is less important than order of words, but there are rules concerning direction of movement, which can indicate an active or passive verb. BSL verbs do not inflect for tense but external time is marked by separate adverbial signs such as BEFORE, TOMORROW. Durative aspect is marked by rapid repetition of the movement of a sign. Negative inflection is made by a change in movement of the hands (upward and opening) or by head-shaking while signing a proposition. A question can be distinguished from a statement by the position of the eyebrows.

Although BSL is not the official medium for teaching deaf children, the children still communicate with each other by signing. When they leave school they master adult BSL quickly, suggesting that they have already learned a similar system on the basis of very little input. They are probably producing a creole.

Official recognition of BSL as deaf children's first language would constitute recognition of the deaf signing community as a linguistic minority: this would have educational and political implications concerning mother-tongue education and the right of the deaf community to have information and education provided in their own language. In Britain, attitudes are becoming more liberal.

INTERPRETING

86–143 Coughlin, Josette. Controlling the bilingual switch mechanism. *Babel* (Budapest), **31**, 1 (1985), 20–6.

A switch mechanism has to be posited which allows the bilingual to perceive, comprehend and produce two or more languages at will. The input switch, unlike the output switch, is automatic. Perception always precedes production but is not

necessarily followed by it. Interpreters, like other multilinguals, can perceive and process with near-native ability a larger number of languages than they can produce.

The crucial role of anticipation in the functioning of the switch mechanism constitutes the essential difference between the trained conference interpreter and the untrained bilingual. Anticipation, derived from practice and experience, uses a combination of automatism and intelligent educated guessing. Feedback is analogous to anticipation. While uttering an interpretation the simultaneous interpreter is constantly receiving new information which confirms or modifies the choice of terms made. When processing language input, the more information the interpreters possess the shorter their response time (RT). Unnaturally slow speech consequently poses problems for interpreters.

LEXICOGRAPHY

86–144 Ilson, Robert (University Coll., London). The linguistic significance of some lexicographic conventions. *Applied Linguistics* (Oxford), **6**, 2 (1985), 162–72.

The article assesses the linguistic significance of conventions employed by lexicographers, and reports on ways in which lexicography offers practical approaches to various major concerns of linguistics, particularly through the development of techniques of definition which are rigorous and exhaustive.

The following areas, for which examples are taken from Webster's *Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Merriam–Webster, 1983), are used to demonstrate developments in both linguistics and lexicography: word formation, syntax, semantics, and collocation. Lexicographic practice supports linguistic theory in relation to distinctions in word formation in that the word defined is followed closely by its inflected forms, and new words formed from it are located at the end of the dictionary entry. Linguistic theory holds that inflexions are simply different forms of the same word (*national/s*), whereas derived forms (*national*) are new words.

The notion of transitivity in verbs is extended to other parts of speech, such as prepositions, and is represented by lexicographers. It is also recognised by certain linguists. The dictionary entry indicates the 'incompleteness' of such verbs, prepositions and so on, which require an object. Transitivity also illustrates selectional constraints, that is, that only certain objects can be combined with certain verbs. In this case the lexicographer uses brackets to indicate possible combinations. Adjective/noun combinations are also defined in this way. Identification of a special and disparate group of 'viewpoint' adjectives represents a contribution of lexicography to linguistics. Such adjectives are defined in terms of the necessary relation between the adjective and the associated noun (born leaders/natural athletes). The form of definition of these adjectives is in certain respects similar to that of transitive verbs.

The question of collocation is for the lexicographer a development of the notion of constraints which operate in the co-occurrence possibilities for verbs and adjectives. A system of five degrees of dependency between words has been identified in an attempt to categorise collocational complexities. It is argued that the insights of linguists and of lexicographers are mutually beneficial.