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## CONTENTS

### I. ARTICLES

Gerhard HELBIG, Zur Bedeutung und zu den Grenzen der Linguistik für den Fremdsprachenunterricht . . . . .	5
Rudolf ZELLWEGER, Goethes <i>Fischer</i> und Schillers <i>Fischerknabe</i> . Ein Beitrag zur Rolle der Literatur im Deutschunterricht . . . . .	19
Jerzy BRZEZIŃSKI, Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Programmierung des schriftbildlosen Verfahrens im Deutschunterricht. (Bericht über einen Versuch) . . . . .	29
Stanisław PUPPEL, Phonetic stereotypes and the teaching of pronunciation . . . . .	37
Sammy Beban CHUMBOW, The status of French phonemic length as a pedagogical norm . . . . .	41
Adam JAWORSKI, A note on teaching contrastive linguistics to students of English at Polish universities . . . . .	53

### II. NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

Gyula SZANYI, Wirklichkeit, Sprachwirklichkeit, Konservierung der Sprachwirklichkeit . . . . .	59
Waldemar PFEIFFER, Maria DRAŻYŃSKA-DEJA, Czesław KAROLAK, „Deutsch mal anders“ — Entwurf einer Lehrbuchkonzeption. Diskussionsbeitrag zur Aufbereitung von Lehrmaterialien . . . . .	69
Wojciech PASTERNAK, On glottodidactics as a scientific discipline . . . . .	87

### III. REVIEW ARTICLES

Waldemar PFEIFFER, Rezension der <i>Didaktik des Fremdsprachenunterrichts (Deutsch als Fremdsprache)</i> von Günther Desselmann und Harald Hellmich . . . . .	93
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### IV. REVIEWS

Gerhard Helbig, Sprachwissenschaft — Konfrontation — Fremdsprachenunterricht (Janusz ZYDRON) . . . . .	103
Wolfgang Boeck (Hrsg.), Kommunikativ-funktionale Sprachbetrachtung als theoretische Grundlage für den Fremdsprachenunterricht. Ein Sammelband (Janusz ZYDRON) . . . . .	107
Jürgen Quetz, Albert Raasch (Hrsg.), Fremdsprachenlehrer für die Erwachsenenbildung (Janusz ZYDRON) . . . . .	108

Waldemar Pfeiffer (Hrsg.), Deutsch als Fachsprache. Materialien des Internationalen Symposiums des Polnischen Neophilologenverbandes und des Internationalen Deutschlehrerverbandes, Poznań 3. — 6. 9. 1981 (Rudolf KERN) . . .	110
Erstes Linguodidaktisches Kolloquium. Wissenschaftliche Tagung (Barbara SKOWRONEK) . . . . .	113
Istvan Kosaras, Grundwortschatz der deutschen Sprache. Einsprachiges Wörterbuch (Janusz ZYDRON) . . . . .	117
Rainer Scheckel, Bildgeleitete Sprachspiele (Jan KORZENIEWSKI) . . . . .	119
Maria Grala, Wanda Przywarska, W Polsce po polsku. An Elementary Polish Course for English Speakers und Wanda Przywarska, Maria Grala, W Polsce po polsku. Cours élémentaire de langue polonaise pour les francophones (Barbara SKOWRONEK) . . . . .	121
J.-R. Ladmiral, Traduire: théorèmes pour la traduction (Jacek PLECINŃSKI) . . .	122
Leon Kaczmarek, Nasze dziecko uczy się mowy [Notre enfant apprend la parole] (Krystyna BŁACHNIO) . . . . .	125
Mélanges Pédagogiques (Wanda KUBICKA-PRZYWARSKA) . . . . .	127
Ана Илиева, Методика на чуждоезиковото обучение. Немски език (Tadeusz PA-CHOLCZYK) . . . . .	129
Stanisław P. Kaczmarek, Transferencja gramatyczna w dydaktyce języka obcego [Грамматическая трансференция в обучении иностранному языку] (Marek SZALEK) . . . . .	131
V. REPORTS	
Zum Unterricht der dänischen Sprache an der Adam-Mickiewicz-Universität in Poznań (Holger HERMANSEN, Eugeniusz RAJNIK) . . . . .	133
VI. PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED . . . . .	137



## A NOTE ON TEACHING CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS TO STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AT POLISH UNIVERSITIES<sup>1</sup>

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Designing a 'threshold' level of proficiency in English, van Ek and Alexander (1975) put the greatest emphasis on the situational use of language in foreign language teaching. They state that:

"...by far the largest group of learners, everywhere, consists of people who want to prepare themselves, in a general way, to be able to communicate socially on straightforward everyday matters with people from other countries who come their way, and to be able to get around and lead a reasonably normal social life when they visit another country. This is not simply a matter of buying bread and milk and toothpaste and getting repairs carried out to a car. People want to be able to make contact with each other as people, to exchange information and opinions, talk about experiences, likes and dislikes, to explore our similarities and differences, the unity in diversity of our complicated and crowded continent" [Europe—A. J.] (p. x).

Without denying the learner's need to "control a certain vocabulary and grammar" (p. x), the authors make it clear that the learner's ability to speak a foreign language will depend on whether he/she, can meet communicative requirements of a specific *situation* meant as "the complex of extra-linguistic conditions which determines the nature of a language act" (p. 7).

Thus, van Ek and Alexander's "model for the definition of language-learning objectives specifies the following components:

1. the situations in which the foreign language will be used, including the topics which will be dealt with;
2. the language activities in which the learner will engage;
3. the language functions which the learner will fulfil;
4. what the learner will be able to do with respect to each topic;
5. the general notions which the learner will be able to handle;
6. the specific (topic-related) notions which the learner will be able to handle;

---

<sup>1</sup> The present paper has been based on the author's own experience from teaching courses in contrastive linguistics at the Department of English at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

7. the language forms which the learner will be able to use;
8. the degree of skill with which the learner will be able to perform" (pp. 8 - 9).

So defined, this approach presupposes teaching the learner a great deal of culture-specific ways of communication through the target language. It is in this mode that many authors have recently stressed the need for expanding the scope of contrastive linguistics by going beyond the analysis of a decontextualized sentence of compared languages, as has been the case with the contrastive studies carried out within the theoretical frameworks provided by structuralism and transformational-generative grammar. The labels covering the new area of contrastive analysis have been numerous. Riley (1981) discusses 'contrastive pragmalinguistics' and Janicki (1981) 'contrastive sociolinguistics', James (1980) talks about 'contrastive macro-linguistics', and Sajavaara (1981) argues for 'contrastive discourse analysis'. Muskat-Tabakowska (1974), in a somewhat different context than the others' mentions 'contrastive stylistics'. Throughout this paper the term 'contrastive sociolinguistics' will be used.

All the above mentioned — and other — authors have been concerned with the pedagogical implications of contrastive sociolinguistics. However, most of these works are fairly programmatic, being a reflection of the situation in which the actual research is still ahead of us. It is my conviction that at a later stage, when adequate research has been carried out and its results made available,<sup>2</sup> the teaching of contrastive linguistics to students of English (potential future teachers of the language to Polish learners and translators or interpreters from one language to the other) will also be revised and the socio-linguistic component will be properly recognized.

An example of an actual and more practical contrastive sociolinguistic analysis has been provided by Marquez (1979). He states that the purpose of his paper "is to suggest one possible way of doing a contrastive analysis of nonlinguistic behavior via a contrastive analysis of linguistic forms and their usage. In other words, systematic cultural contrastive analysis or, perhaps more appropriately, contrastive sociolinguistics, is being proposed here. The suggested procedure is illustrated by analyzing Tagalog [...] and English [...] terms and kinship behavior" (p. 314).

The author concludes that the results of contrastive sociolinguistic studies "should be useful to the language teacher who earnestly wants to teach more than mere grammatical mastery, for such mastery is not enough" (p. 323).

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<sup>2</sup> In the article I am particularly concerned with teaching Polish-English contrastive linguistics, but, obviously, the same may apply to any pair of languages.



The aim of the present paper is to show a possibility of making use of contrastive sociolinguistics at the present stage of its development.

There are two underlying aims of teaching Polish — English contrastive linguistics to students of English at Polish universities:

1. teaching them in technical terms about the differences and similarities of the two language systems in order to help them in their future work as language teachers;
2. expanding their knowledge about theoretical linguistics, working on the material from both languages, and not only English as in previous years of their studies.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, teachers can make use of the findings of both 'theoretical' and 'applied' contrastive studies.<sup>4</sup> I suggest that due to the lack of practical sociolinguistic contrastive studies (see Janicki 1981 for the term 'pedagogical contrastive sociolinguistics') it is plausible to teach contrastive sociolinguistics with more theoretical aims in mind (corresponding to 2 above). The subject might be viewed as a kind of 'expansion' to the previous courses in linguistics (general linguistics, phonology, transformational-generative grammar) and it might also make the students aware of the importance of the widely stressed social component of language in their future jobs. Even if Sajavaara's predictions turned out to be true the course's bias towards sociolinguistics would not need any further justification:

"Since communicative competence includes a wide range of elements which are outside grammatical competence, it is now evident that traditional contrastive analysis failed to serve the purposes of applied linguistics simply for the reason that contrasting grammatical competence is highly insufficient; even if we wanted to devote our analysis to linguistic elements correlated to the other aspects of communicative competence" (Sajavaara 1981:50).

To many students the teaching of contrastive sociolinguistics often means the first encounter with the very discipline of sociolinguistics or the only possibility for its closer study,<sup>5</sup> which can also be regarded as one of the advantages of a course like that. Secondly, and most importantly, the course will make the students (more) sensitive to certain communicational problems and their practical implications. What I think the students should be able to gain from a course in contrastive sociolinguistics at the present moment are:

<sup>3</sup> The course in contrastive linguistics is taught in the third year of English studies.

<sup>4</sup> The two terms have been introduced by Fisiak (1971) (see also "Introduction" to Fisiak et al. 1978). Sharwood-Smith (1974) uses, in a similar sense, the terms 'first' and 'second order' applications of linguistics.

<sup>5</sup> Only some students can choose sociolinguistics as their M.A. specialization. As a matter of fact, the subject is gaining more and more interest among them.

1. the awareness that it is the whole culture that is a means of communication between people (cf. Hall 1959, 1976);
2. the understanding of cultural relativism and its implications for linguistics (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis);
3. sensitivity to the cultural aspects of language use in their own (learners) attempts at gaining native-like competence in the target language (here English);
4. realizing the need for their use of their knowledge of these problems in their future work (i.e., teaching and translating);
5. ability of developing better relations with foreigners speaking Polish in the Polish culture.

This list is probably not exhaustive and other aims might be added. It seems, however, that they are sufficient to point to certain areas of sociolinguistics which might be worked on in a contrastive framework. These may be:

1. forms of address;
2. kinship terms;
3. taboo expressions;
4. colour terms;
5. social deixis;
6. greetings and farewells;
7. turn-taking;
8. telephone conversations;
9. requesting, commanding, apologizing, inviting, etc.;
10. phatic communion;
11. the 'meaning' of space;
12. the 'meaning' of time;
13. the 'meaning' of silence;
14. shared background knowledge/relevance in discourse.

Again, the list is not comprehensive and a lot of other topics and subtopics could be listed. In actual teaching the available materials from English and/or other languages (cultures) as well as the few (often unpublished) contrastive Polish-English studies concerning the subject should be used (cf. Bieniek 1973, Duczmal 1979, Peck 1975). The scarcity of the teaching material should not be viewed as too big an obstacle in conducting the course, as the students themselves, with the guidance of the teacher, may work out particular problems in a contrastive perspective, which would make them more active and interested in the classes. It would also be plausible to start a course in contrastive sociolinguistics with a number of classes introducing certain theoretical concepts from the field, such as *communicative competence*, *components of the speech event* and the like.

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