Language description and use

Descriptive studies of particular languages

95–269 Ahulu, Samuel. Styles of Standard English. *English Today* (Cambridge), **10**, 4 (1994), 10–17.

As part of the debate about the true nature of Standard English and the 'New Englishes', this paper looks at some similarities in the English of West Africa and South Asia, in particular in the written English of educated Ghanaians and Indians. A detailed study of the noun phrase reveals six patterns that diverge from Standard English, but which are common to both Ghanaian and Indian English: four relate to the use/non-use of articles, one to the pluralisation of count nouns and one to number realisation in fixed idiomatic expressions. Possible explanations for these divergent tendencies are given, and it is argued that they could be recognised as styles of Standard English rather than seen as features of local/national varieties of English.

Translation

95–270 Leffa, Vilson J. (Federal U. of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil). Machine-translated text: is it comprehensible to proficient readers? *System* (Oxford), **22**, 3 (1994), 391–9.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the possibility of using IBM-compatible microcomputers to produce comprehensible translations from English into Portuguese. A program was designed to store and process information about the English language, including lexical meanings, syntactic constraints and disambiguating rules. This information produced a data structure that was used to parse the English sentences and output a Portuguese text. The comprehensibility of the translated passages was tested with secondary school students by using both machine-translated passages and professional human translations. Each subject answered a reading comprehension test in both conditions. The different passages were balanced between conditions. The statistical analysis of the results indicated that the machine-translated passages, in spite of presenting some incorrect constructions, were understood by the subjects, both in terms of main ideas and details. The implications of the study are also discussed, mainly in terms of what kind of knowledge langauge learners should acquire to be able to interact meaningfully with authentic foreign langauge texts, as suggested by the findings of the investigation.

95–271 Snell-Hornby, Mary (U. of Vienna). Übersetzungswissenschaft zwischen gestern und morgen. Standortbestimmung einer jungen Disziplin. [Translation studies: their development over the last 50 years, and their standing today.] *ZFF: Zeitschrift für Fremdsprachenforschung* (Bochum, Germany), **5**, 1 (1994), 43–56.

This essay traces the development of translation studies from the post-war years to the present day and attempts to define its position in relation to neighbouring disciplines and specifically to foreign language teaching. In the linguistically oriented approach of the 1960s and 1970s, translation studies (*Übersetzungswissenschaft*) was considered to be part of applied linguistics, while the functionally oriented skopos-theory of the 1980s paved the way for its development into a discipline in its own right. Reflecting both intellectual and political trends of the last few years, recent work, as seen in four anthologies presented here, shows a clear tendency towards interdisciplinary co-operation and the integration of approaches from East and West.

95–272 Suyi Xiao and Oller, John W., jr (U. of New Mexico). Can relatively perfect translation between English and Chinese be achieved? *Language Testing* (London), **11**, 3 (1994), 267–89.

It may be hypothesised that translation is always possible among diverse languages or that it is never possible. In order to provide empirical evidence, 250 speakers of English and Chinese were tested in randomly selected blocks of 25 subjects each on one version of an original and another of a translated

text in their respective native languages. A fixed-ratio cloze procedure was used deleting every fifth word from two distinct versions over each text so that every word of both texts was clozed exactly once in one of the five versions. English speaking subjects ($n = 125$) completed two cloze tests in English: one over the text originally written in English and another over the text translated from Chinese. Chinese-speaking subjects ($n = 125$) also completed two tests: one over the text originally written in Chinese, and the other over the translation from English. MANOVA comparisons between originals and translations irrespective of group showed no significant contrast. There was, however, a small but significant ($p < 0.05$) contrast between groups, but none between the passages averaging over the treatment and group. Results support the universality theory (along Peircean lines) and the conclusion that a high degree of translation equivalence is achievable across radically distinct languages and cultural settings.

Lexicography

95–273 Robinson, Peter (U. of Kent, Canterbury). Computers, corpora and language teaching. *Teacher Trainer* (Canterbury) **8**, 3 (1994), 3–8.

Clear definitions of computer, corpus, concordance and concordance programmes are given together with examples. The background to the application of corpus-based study to language teaching is sketched. The main advantages of corpus-aided teaching are that it is learner-centred, since the student becomes a researcher into language, forming and testing hypotheses in relation to authentic data, whilst the teacher becomes a research organiser. Some findings from corpus research are likely to have a profound effect on the organisation of language teaching.

This article discusses the impact on the foundations of the grammatical syllabus of English and thus the order and presentation of language items taught and definitions in dictionaries. Different ways of obtaining a corpus are discussed, including the relative merits of keying in oneself and downloading ready-made corpora via Internet. Six commercially available corpora are described and two software programmes for using the corpora are mentioned. Examples of corpora tagged and parsed for different features are printed out as figures as are two example concordances. [Bibliography.]

Lexicology

95–274 Cumming, Geoff (La Trobe, U.) **and others.** On-line lexical resources for language learners: assessment of some approaches to word definition. *System* (Oxford), **22**, 3 (1994), 369–377.

This paper reports a comparative evaluation of the Phrasal Definition format of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* and the Sentence Definition format of the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary*. Eighty-five intermediate to advanced learners of English as a second language saw single unfamiliar words and a definition in one or other format, with or without a usage example. Production and comprehension performance measures were found not to vary over the four information conditions, but at the end, subjects expressed strong preferences for having usage examples, and for the sentence format of definition. Results are discussed in terms of the need to develop rich tasks and measures for research on the design of lexical resources, especially to take advantage of the possibilities offered by on-line presentation of such resources.

95–275 Grabowski, Eva and Mindt, Dieter. Die unregelmäßigen Verben des Englischen: eine Lernliste auf empirischer Grundlage. [Irregular verbs in English: a frequency-based listing.] *Die Neueren Sprachen* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany), **93**, 4 (1994), 334–53.

For learners of English irregular verbs represent one of the most difficult aspects of English. They are normally presented in the form of alphabetical lists. Alphabetical lists do not, however, take into account the actual occurrence of these verbs. The article presents a new corpus-based learning list, in which the verbs are ranked in their order of frequency in authentic English. The new list ensures that the learner has encountered the most important verbs, no matter whether or at which point the learning process ends. For the author of teaching materials and the teacher the new list supplies an empirical basis for the selection and gradation of irregular verbs in language courses.

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