

Using the Results of Contrastive Linguistics in Compiling Coursebooks

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A foreigner studying Hungarian is often asked why he chose this particular language. It may be connected with his work, he may have Hungarian friends, he may have been to Hungary several times or studies just for fun. And the other question that always comes up is what his opinion is of our language, whether he finds it exciting or simply gives it up after the first lesson classifying it as one of those languages that can never be learnt. Another obvious question: What are those elements of Hungarian that are the easiest to master and which are regarded as nightmare-like phenomena? We are trying to find the answer to questions like these by means of a questionnaire compiled as a part of the Hungarologia project at the University of Jyväskylä. In this form we question Finnish people who study Hungarian at universities, evening-schools, in Finnish–Hungarian friendship societies or privately, about the circumstances of their studies and their knowledge of the language.

In the first part of the questionnaire we collect information about the motivation behind their studies, whereas the second part of it deals with the question of what the students individually find difficult in the grammar of our language. This part of the questionnaire could serve as a collection of possible mistakes for Finnish learners of Hungarian. In the following presentation we can consider this second part merely as a starting point. We cannot refer to its results as we have not received enough completed forms as yet.

In the first part of the form we concentrate on motivation in both the broader (the intensity of the students' relationship to foreign languages in general) and the narrower (the students' relationship to Hungarian in particular) sense. It is also important to know on which level the student places and to what extent he would like to

improve his present knowledge of the language. On the basis of this we can distinguish between communication aimed language learning and knowledge that can be used for special, less communicative purposes as for instance reading or translating. We do not want to suggest that one is better than the other but from the didactic point of view the different motives and aims have to be taken into consideration. So in the first part of our questionnaire we try to investigate the factors that influence the studying of Hungarian. These influences can be divided into five major groups:

- the student's relationship to the language within his or her family, i.e. whether the family is mono- or bilingual, and outside of it, i.e. the quality and quantity of the foreign languages already studied and his own system of learning languages;
- the student's motives for Hungarian studies, i.e. interest in linguistics, Hungarian culture or gastronomy, etc. Of course it is highly important as well whether he or she aims at active or passive knowledge;
- the student's present level and the one he wants to get to;
- the student's particular problems in Hungarian grammar;
- the results already achieved.

Using these pieces of information the method of teaching can be built up. In addition it would be worth applying the contrastive linguistic studies in teaching. A large number of studies and articles on Hungarian and Finnish contrastive linguistics have been published so far. These results should be analysed in the near future, and the theory could be used in practice on the basis of two projects: the compilation of a comparative grammar on the one hand and the writing of a contrastive coursebook on the other. In our presentation we concentrate on the latter.

Coursebooks can be grouped on the basis whether they contain only the target language or the source language as well. In the first case we talk about mono-, in the second about bilingual coursebooks. In the following we present some features of the two types.

a. bilingual coursebooks

The coursebooks written a few decades ago belong almost exclusively to this classical group, although there are some of this type among the more recently published ones as well. There is a basic difference however between the older and the newer ones, namely that whereas the source language was an indispensable part of the earlier publications, the aim of the bilingual coursebooks today is to serve a certain special class of the language learners. Although the number of the countries in which these coursebooks can be used is limited this way, they may have an advantage because of their special, additional features over the monolingual books written with no particular learner in mind. (The fact, that the source language is built into the structure of these books makes it essential to use the results of contrastive linguistics studies.)

The structure of the bilingual coursebooks was the traditional „text, vocabulary, grammar, exercises” order for decades. Sometimes a bit of culture was added, but it never went beyond the teaching of some folk-songs, telling of some jokes or presenting a picture of the Chainbridge or some of the traditional Hungarian peasant cottages. (Actually one of the fundamental problems of the Hungarian publications is that the cultural part is either totally missing or there is too much.) As our language is too much isolated, the language learner has only very limited information about Hungarian culture as well. Most of them include stereotypical knowledge only, which is rarely more than knowing what „gulash” and „puszta” are like. So the task would be doublefold from the beginner level on: a totally unknown language with its enormous number of grammatical problems and difficult words is to be taught on the one hand and cultural information is to be given on the other. We suggest that communication and culture as different objectives of a book should be separated from each other.

The main problem of the old texts was that real, authentic life was totally missing from them. It was possible for the beginner to read several lessons without meeting any other verbs than the the one „to be”, inspite of the fact that without verbs communication is impossible. But he was really perfect rattling off such typicaly drill-sentences as for example: „*Mi ez? Ez szék.*” These old coursebooks usually contain descriptive texts, sometimes pseudo-dialogues, but

we can rarely find real, authentic dialogues and situations. And in certain cases the chosen topic itself does not reflect real life either.

The grammar part of these books has an advantage over the monolingual ones, namely the latter, having no source language to help, have to make use of tables, diagrams, sometimes exaggerated symbols, whereas the former can give the explanations of grammatical problems in the source language. This problem can easily be solved however by publishing Hungarian grammars in different languages.

As the exercises of these coursebooks concentrate on the text and the grammar (filling in, answering questions, translating) communicational skills are not developed. It is very difficult to find a balance if there is no separate workbook, because the ones within the book may not be enough for effective drilling but too much as compared to the length of the lessons. And the structure of these books does not reveal who is to use them, whether they were written for courses or private learning.

b. monolingual coursebooks

The greatest advantage of coursebooks containing only the target language is that they are not restricted to only one language area. But the disadvantages have to be taken into consideration as well. These books cannot give contrastive information, the interference between the target and the source language cannot be shown. As it is very difficult to present grammatical phenomena without the source language, these books are built upon a very strict structure, i.e. the grammatical construction, the order of the grammatical phenomena presented is very important. The other consequence is that in addition to the coursebook itself, separate exercise- and drill-books and other means of practising (like a descriptive grammar or a glossary) need to be developed.

Considering the grammatical construction of the Hungarian coursebooks we see that in most of the cases it is built up on the basis of the inner grammatical structure of Hungarian. In the case of the monolingual ones this is obvious and natural, for without the source language they cannot take the features of the student's mother tongue into consideration. Unfortunately most of the bilin-

gual coursebooks have been constructed this way as well. They use the other language only in the grammatical descriptions, the instructions of the exercises and in the vocabularies but do not respect it in constructing the grammatical framework. A coursebook in which only the instructions like „*Tedd többes számba!*” (put into the plural) „*Fordítsd le németre!*” (translate into German) are given in German, but the features of the German language are not considered in the structure itself is not any better for the Germans than the one that uses only Hungarian.

As Hungarian is an agglutinative language, quick results cannot be expected. In order for the learner to be able to communicate even on a very limited level he has to study a lot of grammatical rules and phenomena. The communicative coursebooks usually try to coordinate the presentation of grammar and the practice of situations. The abundance of sentences containing no verbs in the older books is a direct result of the fact that they have not paid enough attention to communication. Obviously the lack of the communicative aim determines the presentation of grammar too. In the books of the „*Mi ez? Ez szék.*” type the conjugation of the verbs comes very late (there is one in which it is only in the thirtieth lesson that the system of subjective conjugation appears). And even when this important grammar is presented, every single type with all its rules, isolated from other grammatical phenomena, is showered upon the learner. In other words verbal syntagms remain in dark for a long time.

The seemingly obvious and easy rule, that unexplained grammatical phenomena should never be „thrown” at the poor learner, is rarely followed. The other extremity is when the authors try to fulfill this principle by force. This is how such terrible sentences come about that, although grammatically correct, would never be uttered by a native speaker. It would be very important for a coursebook to take the relationship between the grammatical sequence and the subsystems into consideration. For instance the plural of the verb and the plural of the noun or the objective conjugation and the objective suffix should be dealt with close to each other in the book. It is surprising that some of the coursebooks totally separate the categories of verb and noun from each other.

Another problem is that most of the books do not follow the principle of gradualness. In the first phase of the studies it is not ne-

cessary to present for example all the types of the plural of the nouns or all the sub-types of objective conjugation. It would be sufficient to give only the main categories. A lot of the coursebooks cannot handle the contradiction between producing and using. Let us take an example: in possessive suffixation it is easier to study the plural of the possession first (*ház-aim, ház-ai, kalap-jaim, kalap-jai*) and the singular forms later (*ház-am, kalap-om, ház-a, kalap-ja*), for in the plural paradigm the semivocal *-j-* is present everywhere and the connecting vowels do not have different variants. It would be very difficult to show the whole system at the beginning of the studies but by giving only the main features the learners are able to produce actively what they have studied.

Let us turn now to the idea of a contrastive coursebook: A book of this type would be slightly different from the ones written for „everybody”. As it would use the results of contrastive linguistics in a direct way its learner has to know his mother tongue on a very high level. In other words lecture notes should be written for those students who study linguistics and who are familiar with grammatical terms and different linguistic systems. For example in the case of a book written for the Finnish, the requirements of the curriculum concerning the students majoring in Finnish are to be considered, i.e. a publication like this could be a part of a one semester Hungarian language and culture course. These notes would be different from the ones used nowadays as they would use the advantages (and disadvantages) of both the normal communicative coursebooks and the ones that describe the grammar of the language from the linguistic point of view. We want to make it clear that such a publication is to be used not instead of the traditional coursebooks and the descriptive lecture notes, but as a supplement to them. As one semester is far from being enough for teaching the Hungarian language, a book like this would involve only the first phase of the beginner level. (Later on of course other parts could be added.) The grammar of Hungarian would be put not into abstract and uninteresting or literary texts but into drill-like dialogues that arouse the interest of the students.

What would the structure of such a beginner level, communicative, contrastive coursebook be like? A system of Hungarian

vowels and consonants and the rules of sound combination would be left out completely. When there is a tape connected to a coursebook, it is usually not more than the audio version of the texts in the book. A contrastive book can concentrate on the phonetic differences and similarities in the two languages, and can develop even a whole series of tapes that deal only with the problematic phenomena (Báthory-Varga 1994). It is also important that most of the students have studied other foreign languages before, the sounds of which can also be referred to. A typical example is the pronunciation of the sound *s* [š] which seems to be problematic for the Finns when they study Hungarian, but they pronounce it without any difficulties in English. On the contrastive basis it is relatively easy to determine the group of sounds that are complicated for a certain group of foreigners. In the case of the Finnish the sibilants, the affricates, the palatalized consonants and the sounds of the *a*-type are the most problematic ones. It is useful to compile exercises that help notice and pronounce these difficult sounds (Keresztes 1983, 46).

The notion of vowel harmony is natural for the Finns, but in the description of verb and noun suffixes, the labial-illabial correlation is to be emphasized (*o/e/ö*). This does not mean that the palatovelar correlation is to be left out completely, for, although this phenomenon is an indispensable part of the Finnish sound system, it does not automatically appear in a foreign language, so especially on the beginner level they usually misuse the vowels (**ház-ben, *kert-ban*).

The consonant groups on the morpheme boundaries usually cause trouble. Unfortunately most of the coursebooks do not deal with this problem at all, although the precise pronunciation of these consonants is basically important in Hungarian. The fact that such problematic sounds as the ones on the morpheme border in words like *tanítis, értsd, anyja*, etc. must be pronounced clearly, makes the task of the Finnish students even harder.

As far as sentence phonetics is concerned, one of the most difficult phenomena is the intonation of those interrogative sentences in which there is no interrogative particle. On the basis of our experience we may say that the right intonation is achieved on the intermediate level, until then it is utterly difficult for the students to pronounce and understand such questions. Unfortunately we cannot

really model the Hungarian intonation structure (eg. *Ez Pécs? Ez Szeged? Ez Budapest? Ön finn? Önök finnek? Ön angol? Önök angolok?*), so the only solution is that this phenomena has to be practised a lot.

Paradoxically enough in the first phase of the studies the greatest problem for the Finnish students is that they have to study an agglutinative language. In this respect the fact that their mother tongue is agglutinative as well does not help too much. As Hungarian is always the second or the third foreign language for them it is very difficult to switch from the isolating and inflexional languages to an agglutinative one. They have to get used to the fact that the production of even a very short and simple sentence means studying a lot of rules and exceptions.

In a beginner level coursebook, the verb „to be” and the subjective and the objective conjugation and their use is to be presented within the verb phrase. The total paradigm of the subjective conjugation is to be shown in order to avoid the abundance of nominal sentences, i.e. the „*Mi ez? Ez szék*” type of anticommunication. As the objective suffixation is not as difficult as some people think it can be practised very early. This would be useful because the use of the two paradigms would be clear for the students very soon and thus the over- and misuse of subjective conjugation could be avoided. As a special advantage of the contrastive point of view it would be important to refer to the relationship between the partitive-accusative correlation and the Hungarian objective conjugation.

The problem of the definite-indefinite articles should be mentioned here. Although the definiteness or indefiniteness of the article helps a lot in deciding which paradigm to use, a lot of students are not able to decide which article should be chosen in a certain construction. This is due to the fact that in his mother tongue there is no article at all and the languages studied before do not give enough help for the Hungarian system.

While teaching the verb „to be” special emphasis should be laid on the *Ő diák/Hän on opiskelija* type of sentences, although this is problematic not only for the Finns, as in this respect their language follows the pattern of the indoeuropean languages. It is especially difficult to make the Finnish understand that they cannot answer such a question as *Ott volt?* simply with the verb, *Volt*.

Obviously some of the prefixes have to be presented as well, but only in their easiest „movement” meaning (*be-*, *ki-*, *le-*, *fel-*, *el-* etc), avoiding the abstract examples. On the beginner level the perfective meaning of the prefixes can be left out. The presentation of their position changes however in the interrogative and negative sentences cannot be avoided.

In the noun phrase category the suffixes of the plural, the objective case-ending and the suffixes explaining different spatial relations need to be presented. The use of the objective-case and the nominative plural is clear cut in Hungarian, whereas there is functional overlap in the use of the Finnish accusative-genitive, the plural nominative-accusative and the partitive. As opposed to the relative simplicity of the function of the Hungarian plural suffix and the objective case, their formal richness renders studying more difficult. It is very important to teach that the plural form for the linking vowel is the same in the accusative and the plural suffixes. We have to point out here that the seeming helter-skelter of the Hungarian linking vowels makes a colourful but logical system. For example the variation of the linking vowels in the forms *ablak-ok*, *ablak-ot* but *ablak-ok-at* *bőrönd-öt*, *bőrönd-ök* but *bőrönd-ök-et* is very difficult at first sight. It is enough however to know the rule that only the low, palatovelar (*-at/-et*) forms of the objective case ending is connected to the relative stems ending in a consonant (Keresztes 1992, 72).

For the Finns the richness of the base-types may seem frightening, so on the beginner level it may be enough to describe in its full length only the system of the vowel-lengthening bases, and mention some basic examples of the vowel-dropping and vowel-shortening ones (eg. *étterem*, *levél*).

In the beginner level coursebooks it may be enough to present only the first two groups out of the nine Hungarian local case endings (elative, inessive, illative, delative, supressive, sublative) As the three-way opposition of directionality is present in Finnish as well, the presentation of the previously mentioned endings can be a good starting point for understanding the whole system, and according to our experience this method works well. The situation is more complicated as far as the internal/external relations are concerned. The basic function of the Hungarian inner set is realized by

the Finnish inner counterpart. In theory the Hungarian external set meaning „be on the surface of sg” „come or be taken off the surface of sg” is expressed by the Finnish external set, whereas the meaning of the Hungarian external set „be next to or in the vicinity of sg.” and „come from beside or from the vicinity of sg” is usually rendered by Finnish expressions containing postpositions. Naturally the real situation is more complicated not only in expressing abstract relations but in rendering primary spacial ones as well (Maticsák 1993, 56–68). On the beginner level it is enough to show the similarities and differences in expressing concrete spatial relations. We mean the geographical names on the one hand and the *városban/kaupungissa, képen/kuvassa, postán/postissa* types on the other. But it is not useful on this level to present such words that, because of the different attitude of the two languages require different cases (*talál valahol/löydä jstk, marad valahol/jäädä jhk*).

In the book we may dwell on the problem of agreement. In Hungarian the premodifiers of quality and quantity do not normally agree with their heads, whereas in Finnish the premodifiers of quantity are followed by partitive, and there is agreement between the premodifier and the head. The incongruence of the premodifier of quality is usually not problematic for the students, except in two cases: the agreement of the demonstrative pronoun confuses them (**ez magas házban*) and they are not certain in the use of the plural forms (**magasak házak*). It is difficult for them to get used to the fact that Hungarian uses nominative singular after numerals (**két lányok*) The basic problem of writing coursebooks is that the absence of certain grammatical phenomena is more difficult to describe than the presence of them. It would be much easier to teach such structures as **nagyban házban, *három fiúk*, etc.

On the beginner level the problem of word order in interrogative and negative sentences as well as in the answers given to a question are to be dwelt on. As the Hungarian word order with its whole system raises difficulties even on the advanced level, in our coursebook we can show and teach only the basic constructions. Unfortunately there is no one to one correspondence between the free word order of Hungarian and that of Finnish. Understanding of the basic difference between the S-V-O and the S-O-V sentences is of only little help in solving this really difficult problem. It is enough to

have a look at the following examples: *Pista a szobában olvas, A szobában olvas Pista, Pista olvas a szobában, A szobában Pista olvas, Nem Pista olvas a szobában, Nem olvas Pista a szobában, Nem a szobában olvas Pista, Pista nem a szobában olvas, A szobában nem Pista olvas*, etc. Obviously the beginner student need not be frightened with all the beauties of Hungarian word order (Lallukka 1991, 35–41)

We consider these statements and the description of problematic grammatical phenomena only a starting point, and this list cannot replace the laborious framing of the grammatical structure of a contrastive coursebook.

Naturally besides the grammatical framework the construction of the right thematic structure is important. Following from the nature of contrastivity the most important thing, that is the proper reproduction of communicative situations, ones that occur to a foreigner in Hungary every day (introducing oneself, travelling, asking for information, making phonecalls, going to restaurants, shopping, posting letters, exchanging money, inviting guests etc.) cannot play an important role in compiling the book. We are of the opinion that on this level we do not have to insist on giving information about Hungarian culture. Instead of a Hungarian civilization course, we can give information about Hungary in a more indirect way with authentic situations put into real Hungarian environment. Although we talk about university lecture notes, it would be essential not to let the grammar occupy the whole book, and the dialogues should reflect everyday language use. On this level of language learning there is no need to read abstract texts, artificial situations, the description of a conference for instance or to show the different types of official letters. It is desirable that these situations would be presented by dialogues that are short, based on each other and, even on this level of language knowlegde, easy to remember and use. Through these situations the basic types of greeting, thanking or addressing, that are so radically different in the two countries, can be shown. One cannot master these only with coursebooks, the authentic language environment is needed too. Comparisons of cultural life, customs of behaviour and other extralinguistic phenomena can appear parallel to the linguistic studies in a later phase of contrasting studies.

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