

Book Reviews

Perspectives in Linguistics: Papers in Honor of P.J. Mistry edited by Ritua Laury et al. Delhi: Indian Institute of Language studies, 2003, Pp. viii + 365, Rs. 600.

With very few Indian publishers willing to publish works on Linguistics, the newly emerging Indian Institute of Language studies deserves special complements for undertaking such publications.

Prof. P.J. Mistry retired from the Department of Linguistics, California State University, Fresno recently and the publication is a sort of tribute paid to him by his associates and students. A look at the names of editors – with one exception – will confirm this. Mistry belongs to the second generation of Indian Linguists who had the advantage of being, ‘first and one of the few’ Indian persons who got training in Linguistics when the discipline was a growing new discipline in the States and an unfamiliar one in India. Fred Bregelman, one of the Mistry’s associates gives a revealing sketch of Mistry’s academic achievements. His closing sentence, “he used his skills and diplomacy and intrigue to fend off our numeral rivals”, would suggest many things to a person who knows the Indian mind. Jagdish Dave’s article shows the creative talent of Mistry. When he says Mistry in his earlier poetry writes about ‘love, nature, post-independence expectations and later the pain and the loneliness of the Indian Emigrants’. He in a way shows the ambivalence of the educated migrated Indian middle-class mind which some people admire for its sensitivity and suffering and some dub it as hypocrisy.

Babu Suthar’s article on Mistry’s contribution to Gujarati Linguistics is an important article in this book. He places Mistry’s work in the tradition of historical- comparative Linguistics followed by the American structuralists. Mistry corrected the error of Pandit and Cardona who treated aspiration in Gujarati as one of the allophones of /h/ by giving the aspirated consonants a phonemic status. For Pandit, murmur and aspiration are the two allophones of /h/. For Modi, it is a no-oral phonation feature. Mistry argues that deoralization of [h] causes the vowels to murmur and gives phonological rules controlling this behaviour. Regarding verb-arrangement in Gujarati, Mistry provides a new syntactic rule: the verb agrees with the subject but when the subject is followed by a marker it becomes unavailable for agreement and then the agreement takes place with the object.

Bregelman’s article on Schoolmaster Linguists in England makes an interesting reading. He shows that there were serious Language studies even before the advent of modern Linguistics and that the grammarians of that period were schoolmasters by profession. James Cornish’s article also is on an entirely new subject – coherence as seen in text-interpretation, he shows how the indirectness in Korean writing is interpreted by American raters. He tries to show that finding coherence or the lack of it in a text is influenced by the cultural conditions that a specific language yields.

Shigeko Okamoto, like Cornish presents data and makes interesting observations on the role of standard and non-standard Japanese in conversations. He shows how speakers use more standard linguistic forms when they speak with their social superiors or unfamiliar persons. They use more regional forms when they speak to friends, family-members. In short, the degree of solidarity decides the use or non-use of regional forms. The data shows that though Japanese is highly standardized, the regional varieties still persist. A close look at the data will also show the reader that formality or informality does not affect the ‘politeness’ in Japanese.

There are quite a few papers on syntax and morphology. Bokyoung Noh in his paper on English Depictive Predicates refers to the distinction made between subject-oriented Depictive (SOD) and object-oriented Depictive (OOD). He suggests a new distinction. Agent-oriented and Theme-oriented Depictives – AOD and TODs. The trouble with such classification – based on contextual clues and semantic oddities based on the speaker’s knowledge of the world – is that it mixes up purely structural elements with usage-

conventions. For example, in ‘Mary left the room angry’, the Depictive ‘angry’ refers to Mary whereas in, ‘Mary bought her food cold’, cold refers to food. Now there is nothing syntactic about it. The adjective ‘cold’ can be easily merged with ‘food’ whereas ‘angry’ is to be merged with Mary. One can argue that on purely structural grounds, both the sentences are ambiguous, a fact borne out by sentences such as ‘John left Mary heart-broken’ where the knowledge of the world can support both the interpretations. Carlson’s definition of the distinction between individual-level predicates and stage-level predicates which the author quotes shows the slipperiness in depending on interpretive efforts as for grammatical categories. It is hard to believe that in a phrase like, ‘a big shop’ ‘big’ is the individual property of shop. But in ‘an empty shop’, it is not – it is a stage of the individual. In that sense in ‘John left his wife dead’, ‘dead’ appears to be more of a stage than an inherent property. One is also reminded of Halliday’s articles on transitivity in which he calls the attribute in ‘He painted the door yellow’ as ‘resultative’.

Ritua Laury’s comparison of adessive case and the adposition ‘pāällä’ and comitative case and the adposition ‘kanssa’ makes the reading interesting. The data consist of twenty narratives and some ordinary conversations. The observation is that adessive case is frequently used but the comitative is replaced by ‘kanssa’. The paper, however, does not offer any explanation. The only paper that takes into account the Chomskyan approach is that of Sarju Devi and Subbarao. It deals with the lexical anaphors in Manipuri and Telugu. The paper is nth version of the paper that was presented in Pune, India, 10 years back – it is a radically revised version. It is a trend in Indian Linguistics to apply the existing theory and find support for it. This has been the practice – especially of those who faithfully follow the Generative model. There is hardly any effort to test the basic assumption in the generative theory. The present paper, for example after giving 55 sentences argues that Manipuri strictly obeys principles A, B and C of the Binding theory while Telugu obeys principle A and B. And how about principle C? It has some exceptions. So where does the paper lead us? To the confirmation of the Binding theory. If the paper had indicated what happens to the Binding theory in the Minimalist Programme is, asked or it would have been truly radically revised version.

Bharati Modi’s paper on gender in Gujarati offers a traditional classification of words in which an attempt is made to correlate phonological endings of nouns with the gender. Such attempts which made by traditional grammarians as well have problems. Modi classifies the Gujarati vocabulary on the basis of historical information. The classification however does not appear to have a place in gender assignment or agreement. For example, Modi tries to show that the Deshi word takes the gender of its parallel Sanskrit word. In Marathi – and Modi rightly finds out similarities in Gujarati, Marathi and Konkani – one can find many counter-examples. The Sanskrit word *vruksha* has masculine gender but the deshi word *za:d* has neuter gender. The argument that because in the speaker’s mind *chor*, i.e. thief is a male, its gender is masculine, is doubtful. One can reverse the cause-effect relation easily. Modi says that in some compounds such as *maa-baap* (mother-father), gender is irrelevant. Does it mean for agreement any gender will do? In Marathi, in such cases either masculine or the gender of the second member is assigned. A more exhaustive classification including all irregularities is found in Damale’s grammar which does not claim to have a structural approach. Modi’s claim that the verb-noun agreement depends on the topic-prominence and patient-prominence would be convincing if the two are alternants. One is reminded here about Mistry’s treatment of agreement which is far more convincing as it is formal and does not resort to any semantic clues.

Yukiko Morimoto takes into account the principles and parameters approach to S-O reversal in Bantu in which the explanation is given in terms of object-raising. He also holds that there is no actual reversal between agent and patient in Bantu – the term reversal is used for descriptive purpose. By using the relational and animacy hierarchies, he convincingly argues how syntactic markedness is expressed through them.

Gerald McMenamin's article has a catchy title – A Forensic Analysis of Writing Style, but the article states the case of two companies – one Japanese and the other Indian – disputing about the genuineness of an agreement signed earlier. The authorship is established on the basis of stylistic markers. It is a case of author-identification. Stylistics is comparatively a neglected area as it requires competency in language and literature. Usually 'literature' in this case means fiction and poetry. The article shows how stylistics can help in practical, mundane problems as well.

Yoko Tada's article on Turn-taking by the visually impaired is a report of the conversational strategies adopted by seven visually-impaired Japanese junior- high school students. The observations are predictable. The utterance 'a:' and the gesture of hand-raising were used for turn-taking. Using a short utterance as a pre-start is already identified by Sacks etc. Hand-raising was not used within the group as all were visually impaired. Simultaneous start and interruption were the two patterns of overlap. The data are quite frugal; the observations are predictable – but he himself modestly says that no conclusive statement can be made.

The editors have seen that all articles follow a particular format; that itself is an achievement. The book shows what kind of linguistic research is pursued especially at the California State University and which issues the non-American, non-mainstream linguists – especially the Japanese, the Indian – interest them. Its publication in India – rather than in the U.S.A. also is significant.

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Joyce Karreman, Use and effect of declarative information in user instructions. (Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2004), Pages: viii, 199 pp., ISBN 90-420-1841-0 Price: U.S. \$ 53.

Book's Purpose and Contents

The book 'Use and effect of declarative information in user instructions' is a PhD thesis by Joyce Karreman, promoted by Michaël Steehouder and Peter Jan Schellens at the University of Twente, Netherlands. This study investigates the effects of different information types in instructions for use.

The work of Ummelen (1997) serves as the starting point for many researchers studying reading and learning from texts and Karreman is not an exception. In the lines of Ummelen (1997), information in instructive texts can be either procedural or declarative. Information types that are directly related to the functioning of the product, for example, "actions" that must be performed to get a product working, conditions for actions and results from these actions are "procedural" whereas all other (explanatory) information about the internal workings of the device, trouble-shooting tips etc. are "declarative". Previous studies have shown that adding declarative information in an instructive text helps to improve the task performance (Kieras and Bovair 1984; Smith and Goodman 1984; Payne 1988) in a number of ways. The types of declarative information used in these studies were: information about how a system works; metaphorical and information about the interface (p.43). Karreman extends research in this area with the goal 'to investigate whether particular types of declarative information lead to specific positive effects during the process of learning to work with a device' (p.3).

The study is presented in the form of five chapters.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the literature on using instructive texts. It describes two general theories on reading text: Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) and ACT* theory of Anderson (1983). Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) distinguish three models of mental representation, viz., surface representation, propositional representation and situational model. After a careful analysis of these three representations of text comprehension, the author concludes that this theory cannot be directly applied for describing the process of operating devices by using instructive texts. However, the author finds the

Chapter 4 investigates the effect of system information on the “transfer of knowledge”. The author presents a brief overview of previous research on the theory of ‘structure mapping’ that discusses the role of analogy and similarity in human cognition along with a review of some empirical studies on this concept. Karreman prefers to use the terms ‘structural similarities and superficial similarities’ (p.135) for her study to investigate if system information about one device will result in a higher degree of transfer when learning to operate structurally similar devices. She conducts three experiments which are extensions to the series of experiments conducted by O’Reilly and Dixon (1999, 2001 and 2002). Each experiment is based on previous research on problem solving and transferring knowledge to new tasks. The main finding is that order of devices affected the degree of transfer (p. 167). Karreman reports the observations of these experiments at length.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, summarizes the results of her experiments, conclusions and discussions. It also provides answers for the three research questions raised in the previous chapters. The questions are:

1. Are system and utilization information read?
2. Do system and utilization information affect knowledge, cognitive load, confidence and appreciation?
3. Do system and utilization information affect task performance?

Her main conclusions are that declarative information has a weak effect on task performance and had some unexpected effects on user's confidence in performing a task. She outlines some directions for future research in this topic.

Lastly, the author presents a neat compilation of the references running into seven pages.

Overall Comments

This book is a good starting point for researchers interested in information in instructional texts. The author provides a good presentation of various methods and techniques used in investigating the use and effect of declarative information. The language is clear and effective and the text material is supported by tables and graphics wherever needed. The chapters are arranged in such a manner that the findings of one chapter serve as a stepping stone for the next one. Most of the experiments reported in the chapters 2, 3 and 4 have been also previously published by the author and her co-authors Steehouder and Dixon (see the book for references). As pointed out by the author herself in many places, her findings provoke several interesting hypotheses that need further investigation from a cognitive point of view.

Though it was not within the scope of the study, the author could have written a short section on potential guidelines as how to write useful and effective instructive texts in general and what kind of system and utilization information should be included in an instructive text. Such guidelines could be of great help to user-manual writers.

The book has a minor flaw in typesetting which changes the meaning of the sentence the author intended to convey: on page 132, in line 22, the word “cannot” should have been “can not” (‘These users cannot only execute tasks that are explicitly formulated ... ; they can also ...’). Besides this, there are other minor presentation issues, for example, repetition of hypotheses (shared between two experiments) on p. 152 could have been avoided by simply providing reference to the list given on p. 142. The section 4.2, titled ‘First Experiment’, goes on to describe O’Reilly and Dixon’s experiments before she sets her own hypotheses for the desired experiment (p. 138-142). This spoils the readability of the text at least for this reviewer who feels that this could be avoided by moving this portion of the text to the subsection on literature review on p. 137 and Karreman could have provided justifications for her motive to build upon O’Reilly and Dixon’s hypotheses. The book also lacks a subject-index for reference purposes to concepts, techniques and domain-specific vocabulary mentioned in the book.

Overall, this book should appeal to those interested in research on learning from texts. It could also serve as a course material for students designing experiments on information texts.

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(For other references mentioned in this review, please see Karreman's book).

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