

SYNTACTIC AMBIGUITY AND THE TEACHING OF WRITTEN  
ENGLISH TO ADVANCED POLISH LEARNERS — GRAMMAR OR  
STYLE?

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The aim of this paper is to present some results of linguistic investigation, carried out along the lines specified by the present author in the article "Syntactic ambiguity and the teaching of written English to advanced Polish learners" (1974). Accordingly, the following assumptions were accepted as the points of departure for the discussion:

1. In natural languages, syntactic ambiguity occurs more frequently in written than in spoken medium (for discussion, cf. Kooij 1971), and it is its function in the syntax of written language that proves more significant for the investigation of language use. Seen in the context of foreign language teaching, this type of ambiguity must be considered a shortcoming on the part of the language user: in expository prose, in general the only kind of writing employed by non-native writers, the basic requirement on the form is that it does not interfere with understanding the message, i.e., does not present interpretation problems. In this sense, syntactic ambiguity is legitimately viewed as a teaching problem.
2. With ambiguity being an inherent property of natural languages, the purposes of language communication require that it is in the majority of cases resolved by context or situation; the danger of misunderstanding is practically restricted to those cases in which disambiguating factors prove to be inadequate. Consequently, with such an approach, the consideration of the context of an ambiguous sentence becomes a necessity and the analysis of samples becomes token- rather than type-orientated (cf. Kooij 1971, esp. ch.1).

3. When defined as in 1. and 2. above, syntactic ambiguity can become a source of stylistic errors and, consequently, it will constitute a part of error analysis. Thus, explanations will be legitimately looked for among such phenomena as transfer and interference and will call up for contrastive techniques, even though it is the surface structure that will be used as a starting point for the investigation (this approach is well justified by the fact that stylistic errors are found in sentences which are *unacceptable* but *grammatical*). The function of error analysis as a preliminary towards contrastive study aimed at formulating pedagogical suggestions as well as the necessity for a closer link between linguistic research and its practical application have been frequently postulated in recent works on the subject<sup>1</sup>.

It seems that an analysis of syntactically ambiguous sentences as they are produced by foreign (Polish) learners, when carried out in terms of the above assumptions, might prove interesting in view of both linguistic theory and teaching practice<sup>2</sup>. It can supply the linguist with some valuable insights concerning the two languages that are being contrasted, and the teacher — with a starting point for contributions towards the development of more systematic techniques of teaching. The importance of non-ambiguous writing has long been realized by numerous textbook-writers (e.g. Levin 1966 ch. 3; Guth 1965: ch. 1; Arntson 1961: ch. 7; Nichols 1965; Laird et al. 1963; McCrimmon 1963; Kaplan 1968, and many others), even though none of them has offered a systematic description or explanation of this problem.

The analysis presented below resulted from purely practical considerations. When reviewing a textbook of English, written for Polish students by a Polish teacher, I came across the following sentence:

I. *Here is a list of verbs which most often present difficulties given in key sentences with translation into Polish.*

Following the above text, there come some English sentences, each of which is accompanied by its Polish equivalent.

Obvious difficulty involved in interpreting I. fully justifies the search for explanation of reasons of the problem, the two potential possibilities being

1. I. is ungrammatical,
2. I. is grammatical but in some sense unacceptable.

The decision, confirmed by the uniform opinions of three native informants, two Englishmen and one American, seems to be in favour of the second alternative.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., some of the papers read at the 4th conference on contrastive linguistics (the Polish-English Contrastive Project, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see the earlier paper by the present author which was referred to.

The following interpretation was suggested:

Ia. *Here is a list of verbs that most often present difficulties that are given in key sentences with translation into Polish.*

*That* was chosen as surface realization of the two relative pronouns in order to set off the restrictive character of both relative clauses. (For a discussion of *that* as an element of surface structure differentiating between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses, cf. e.g. Stockwell et al. 1968). *That* and *which* will be used to indicate, respectively, restrictive and non-restrictive (appositive) clauses throughout the following discussion.

Ia. is semantically unacceptable, both in view of the context and common sense reasoning (i.e., the low probability of all difficulties that English verbs present for a Polish learner being exemplified and then translated into Polish). Since the only plausible interpretation of I. proves unacceptable, it could not have been meant by the author. The above, in turn, makes one justified in thinking that there is a possibility of an error. Indeed, the most obvious possibility seems to be a mistake in the application of punctuation rules. It must be mentioned at this point that punctuation, used in graphic representation of language, is merely a convention based on the systematicity of grammatical structures. Thus it is only an imperfect and arbitrary reflection of juncture and intonation patterns, this fact being one more argument for the necessity of clear writing.

According to the general rule, frequently formulated in traditional grammars of the English language (e.g., 'Sometimes (sic!) participle phrases should or should not be punctuated according to whether they are linked with the subject or the object in the sentence', Gethin 1965: 43), a comma must be inserted in front of the second of the two relative clauses. Thus we obtain:

II. *Here is a list of verbs which most often present difficulties, given in key sentences with translation into Polish.*

It is easily seen that the comma (intonation), required after the first relative clause, does not facilitate the interpretation of the sentence. Its length is not excessive, such that might make it unacceptable because of the restrictions on memory retention, and moreover, no violations of grammatical rules of English are seen; the unacceptability of II. must, therefore, be the result of its excessive syntactical complexity and/or ambiguity: it is generally recognized that the more heavily transformed the sentence is, the greater is the likelihood of ambiguity.

It will be postulated that the surface realization of II. can be reduced to the following sentences:

II. 1. *A list of verbs is here.* (The matrix sentence that has run through the stylistic transformation of permutation. The sentence-dominated

NP is the genitive derived from, e.g., II. 1. a. *A list contains verbs*<sup>3</sup>, with a middle verb between NP<sub>1</sub> and NP<sub>2</sub>).

II.2. *Verbs most often present difficulties*. (The first insert, realized as a restrictive, non-reduced relative clause).

The non-ambiguous reference of the N[+Wh] in II. is due to the lexical material in II.1. and II.2. Note, however, the recognized potential ambiguity of the construction NP<sub>1</sub>+prep+NP<sub>2</sub>+relativization:

II.3. *A list of verbs that most often present difficulties is here,*

$$\begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Sg \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \quad \begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Pl \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \quad \begin{bmatrix} +V \\ +Pl \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix}$$

but, e.g.;

II.3.a. *Lists of verbs that most often present difficulties are here.*

$$\begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Pl \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \quad \begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Pl \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \quad \begin{bmatrix} +V \\ +Pl \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix}$$

As this kind of ambiguity does not actually occur in II., it need not concern us at this point. However, being a frequent error of style (cf., examples of students' written work, quoted further in this paper), it must not be ignored by the teacher.

The second insert into the matrix II.1., however, is actually in itself at least four ways ambiguous. It will be postulated that this fact is due to the 'intervening' comma, which implies some significant consequences for the semantic interpretation of II. The second insert

II.4. *given in key sentences with translation into Polish,*

is hypothetically reduced to the following underlying structures:

II.4.1. *A list of verbs is given in key sentences...*

II.4.2. *Verbs are given in key sentences...*

The ambiguity illustrated in II.4.1. and II.4.2. is due to the fact that II.4. is a reduced relative clause, which has run through the optional transformation

<sup>3</sup> For discussion, cf. Nagucka (1971). The assumptions concerning application of rules formalized or postulated inside the framework of transformational grammars for contrastive error analysis were formulated in the first part of the present study. The discussion that follows is highly informal; I found it both profitable and economical to avail myself of any TG rules that help to elucidate the points under discussion.

of N[+Wh], be deletion. This transformation erases the surface realization of such features as e.g. number, an important disambiguating factor (cf. II.3 and II.3. a. above)<sup>4</sup>. Another possibility of interpreting II.4. is II.4.3. *Difficulties are given in key sentences...*

The comma (intonation) after the VP-dominated NP in II.3. does not permit the interpretation of II.4. as a restrictive modifier on this NP, cf., II.4.4.\* *...difficulties, that are given...*<sup>5</sup>

However, no grammatical restrictions (cf. Stockwell et al. 1968: 448; Thomas 1965: 156 ff) block the interpretation of II. as a sequence of two conjoined sentences, with the second conjunct inserted into the first:

II.5. *A list of verbs that most often present difficulties is here, and these difficulties are given in key sentences with translation into Polish*<sup>6</sup>.

In fact, the comma actually blocks the interpretation of II.4. as being restrictive on any head NPs of either II.4.1. or II.4.2. This seems to illustrate the systematic difficulty involved in such usage of comma. Namely, if a (reduced) relative clause is preceded by a comma, inserted in order to prevent the clause from being interpreted as restrictive on the last (i.e. rightmost) noun of the main clause, this relative clause must be interpreted as an appositive. It was noticed by R. H. Gethin (1965: 47), who says that by inserting this type of comma 'we have willy-nilly begun to turn the relative clause into a non-defining [i.e. appositive — EMT] one and we must complete the process by placing [another] comma [at the end of it]'

Finally, II.4. can be interpreted as a sentence modifier, i.e. the appositive relative clause that modifies the entire proposition. Thus it would be treated as a reduced clause; an absolute construction that expresses time and/or cause relationship<sup>7</sup>. Unlike full temporal clauses, such reduced adverbials are not permuted freely with the main clause. Though rules of this type of permutation have not yet been formalized, sentence-initial position or the position immediately following the S-dominated NP, is generally accepted to be most regular, also with participles. In case of phrase-heading participles, however, extraposition to the end of the sentence is considered acceptable (cf. e.g., Pasicki 1972: 104; Schwartz 1968: 759).

It will also be noticed that each of the above four interpretations involves an additional case of structural ambiguity, resulting from the fact that II.4.

<sup>4</sup> Consequences of this type of deletion (i.e. grammatical neutralization) for the interpretation of sentences are given in Kooij 1971.

<sup>5</sup> A discussion of this property of restrictive clauses is found in Stockwell (1968: 448).

<sup>6</sup> This derivation hypothesis is discussed in Stockwell (1968: 448).

<sup>7</sup> Frequent overlapping of these two interpretations, as well as the surface identity of resulting sentences, is discussed in Pasicki (1972: 96, 97).

is in itself ambiguous, because of the ambiguity involved in the derived nominal *translation*. Any attempt at suggesting its derivational history, in view of the controversy in this respect between the transformationalist and lexicalist approach<sup>8</sup>, goes well beyond the scope of the present discussion. As a frequent source of ambiguity, nominals would require a separate and more detailed study. For the purposes of the present argument, it will suffice to mention that the lack of specification of the nominal as it occurs in II. theoretically allows for any of the following readings:

II.4.a. ... given in key sentences, with translation of

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| } | verbs         |
| } | list of verbs |
| } | difficulties  |
| } | key sentences |

Such a type of ambiguity is believed to be a highly universal property of natural languages (cf., the discussion on neutrality in Kooij 1971: ch. 4).

What makes the situation even more complicated is that the nongerundive nominal in II.4.a. also seems to imply still another possibility of ambiguity, which is maintained to be systematic for transformationally derived nominals i.e., the opposition between the 'manner' and 'object' sense. The context obviously calling for the second of these, disambiguating would require the addition of the plural morpheme<sup>9</sup>, cf., the nonambiguous (in this respect!) sentence

II.4.b. ... given in key sentences, with translations...

Out of the four possibilities implied by II.4. (each of them additionally burdened with the ambiguity shown in II.4.a.), some are ruled out, either for semantic or syntactic reasons. Thus II.4.3. is impossible in view of the context (cf., the discussion on I. above), while the interpretation shown in II.4.2. is blocked by the restriction on English relativization, formulated in Stockwell (1968: 520): 'in a series of relative clauses, if the first clause is not reduced, none of the following clauses may be reduced if they are also on the same noun'. Moreover, the ambiguity of II.4.a. is resolved by the context of II., in favour of the last of the possibilities shown above. The other interpretations, which might be acceptable in different contexts, are attested in the following paraphrases, offered by the native informants:

<sup>8</sup> In his earlier works on transformational derivation Chomsky considered nominals to be products of nominalization transformations which operated on sentences of the type **SOMEBODY DID SOMETHING** (cf. Chomsky 1965). This position, however, has been since revised (cf. Chomsky 1968) towards the acceptance of the lexicalist hypothesis, at least for the derived nominals.

<sup>9</sup> For details, see the discussion of Lees' *Grammar of English nominalizations* (1964: 124).

II.a. *Here is a list of verbs which most often present difficulties, when given in key sentences that are followed by translations into Polish.*

In II.a., II.4. was interpreted as an absolute temporal clause, i.e. a sentence modifier; II.4.a. was disambiguated by means of restrictive relativization, with the potential ambiguity of the nominal (cf. above) removed by adding the plural morpheme. All the same, II.a. was still considered 'awkward' and 'unclear'.

II.b. *Here is a list of verbs which most often present difficulties; the list is given by means of key sentences with Polish equivalents.*

In II.b., II.4. is interpreted as a reduction of II.4.1., which, in view of the restriction on reduction in a series of relative clauses, is the only possibility. Potential ambiguity of the nominal was resolved by replacing it with a synonymous plural noun. Yet II.b. was also considered 'difficult to make out'.

II.c. *Here are English verbs which most often present difficulties. They are in key sentences, foll by translations into Polish.*

II.c. was produced by the native informant after the intended meaning of II. has been explained. It was considered grammatically correct, as well as nonambiguous, by all the three informants. Potential ambiguity of II.3. was removed by simplifying the head NP of the first matrix sentence, which is fully justified in view of the context. The non-restrictive modifier on the same NP was represented as a separate sentence, disambiguated in respect of II.4.a.

The above analysis enables us to formulate several reasons that can make a sentence like II. unacceptable. The first of these is potential ambiguity of structures exemplified in II.3., seemingly a very frequent source of ambiguity, cf.,

1. ...*the sail of the boat that he left...*
2. ...*the variety of language which is superior...*<sup>10</sup>,  
which also occurs in Polish, cf.,
3. *Żagle okrętów, które zostawił...*
4. *Rodzaj języka, który jest używany...*

Due to the inflexional system, however, this type of ambiguity is less frequent in Polish than in English (nothing but such a tentative hypothesis can be put forward until a systematic contrastive analysis has been completed). Generally recognized as one of the cases of ambiguous reference, the problem is dealt, with in numerous textbooks of written English (cf., e.g. Guth 1965: 35 ff). It cannot be treated as a result of systematic interference, apart from those cases in which an unambiguous structure is rendered into an ambiguous one through direct translation. It is only in the context of other transformations that it can result in a systematic error.

<sup>10</sup> All examples of English sentences that are quoted below come from students' papers.

Similarly, no contrastive explanation of the ambiguity exemplified in II.4.a. can be offered. The inherent ambiguity of the Polish nominal *tłumaczenie* corresponds to that of its English equivalent. The fact that Polish *tłumaczenie* corresponds to both gerundive and derived nominals in English (i.e. *translating* v. *translation*) has no bearing on the problem of ambiguity, as the restriction on the occurrence of the plural morpheme is the same for the two languages. The reasons for ambiguity, as well as suggestions for stylistic improvement, would therefore be identical in both cases. The 'negative' result of the analysis, however, can prove valuable for a language teacher in one particular respect: reference to pupils' native language can help to explain the nature of the mistake.

Yet it is only through contrasting II. with its Polish counterpart that we arrive at the following two conclusions, which I hope to prove to be crucial for the present discussion:

1. II. is in fact ungrammatical;
2. the ungrammaticality is systematic for the type of structure exemplified in II. and it is due to interference.

In order to prove these statements a Polish sentence will be analysed. Sentence III. below is an attempt at the maximally congruous rendering of II., with full consideration for the original author's intended meaning:

III. *Oto lista czasowników, które najczęściej sprawiają trudności, podanych w angielskich zdaniach wzorcowych wraz z polskimi odpowiednikami*<sup>11</sup>.

Though structurally complex and stylistically awkward, III. is considered acceptable and nonambiguous. The surface realization can be reduced to the following sentences:

III.1. *Oto lista czasowników.*

Its derivational history corresponds to that of II.1. (cf. p. 100 above).

III.2. *Czasowniki najczęściej sprawiają trudności.*

III.2. is congruent to II.3. (cf. p. 100 above). It is inserted into the matrix to produce

III.3. *Oto lista czasowników, które najczęściej sprawiają trudności.*

III.3. is nonambiguous in respect of reference of the N[+Wh] form. (For the discussion of potential ambiguity, both for English and Polish, see p. 102 above.) Still, III. 3. is ambiguous in the sense that the relative clause can be either restrictive or appositive. With a full (non-reduced) clause, this type of ambiguity seems systematic in Polish: the rules of punctuation which require that every two clauses in a series be separated with a comma (cf. Jodłowski, Taszycki 1971: ch. 19) render this distinction impossible in written Polish. The rules of intonation, however, require different patterns for these two types of clauses. Compared with English, the rules of punctuation

<sup>11</sup> The ambiguity involved in the Action Nominal has been resolved (cf. II. a., II. b., II. c.) in order to facilitate the following discussion: for our present purposes, this particular instance of ambiguity is found to be irrelevant.

in Polish seem more arbitrary, i.e., less consequently relying on the deep structure. The two types of clauses are distinguished as, respectively, "przydawkowe" (attributive) and "rozwijające" (developing) in works on Polish syntax (cf., e.g. Klemensiewicz 1963: 86, 100).

The next constituent,

III.4. ..., *podanych w angielskich zdaniach wzorcowych...*

is also nonambiguous in respect of reference:

III.4.1. \**Oto lista..., podanych...*

$$\begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Sg \\ +Nomin \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} +V \\ +Pl \\ +Genit \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix}, \text{ (cf. II.4.1.)}$$

III.4.2. *Oto lista czasowników, podanych...*

$$\begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Pl \\ +Genit \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} +V \\ +Pl \\ +Genit \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix}, \text{ (cf. II.4.2.)}$$

III.4.3. \**...powodują trudności, podanych...*

$$\begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Pl \\ +Acc \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} +V \\ +Pl \\ +Genit \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix}, \text{ (cf. II.4.3.)}$$

Moreover, III.4. cannot be interpreted as a sentence modifier (cf. II.5), because of rules of agreement and permutation, cf.

III.4.4. *Oto lista czasowników, które, (gdy czasowniki są) podane*

$$\begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Pl \\ +Nomin \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} +N \\ +Pl \\ +Nomin \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} +V \\ +Pl \\ +Nomin \\ \cdot \\ \cdot \end{bmatrix}$$

*w angielskich zdaniach wzorcowych, najczęściej powodują trudności.*

As a case of a "developing" clause which, semantically, conveys a restriction of relative clauses ("organizuje się przy treści wypowiedzenia nadrzędnego in the second NP of the matrix, i.e., the noun modified by the first of the two

jako swoim podmiocie", Klemensiewicz 1963 : 100), the reduced temporal (causative) clause (i.e., "przydawka w funkcji równoważnika zdania podrzędnego", Jodłowski, Taszycki 1971 : 155) must follow immediately the S-dominated noun of the clause in relation to which it is subordinate; the rules of agreement required of surface structure subjects must also be obeyed.

It will be noticed that III.4.2., whose English counterpart was defined as ungrammatical (cf. p. 6 above), is the only plausible interpretation of III.4. An explanation of factors which account for the fact that restriction on reduction in a series of clauses exists in English and does not exist in Polish goes beyond the scope of the present discussion. One of the reasons might be that the participle in Polish retains the features of number, gender, case etc., thus reducing potential ambiguity.

It must be added at this point that the rules of punctuation in Polish do make it possible to distinguish between restrictive and appositive *participial phrases*, which result from the reduction of relative clauses and perform, respectively, the functions of 'przydawka wyodrębniająca' (the isolating attribute) and "przydawka dopowiadająca" (the additive attribute), cf. e.g., III.5.1. *Oto lista czasowników podanych w angielskich zdaniach...* against III.5.2. *Oto lista czasowników, podanych w angielskich zdaniach...*

Yet the second of the two commas in III., necessary to separate the first relative clause from the second one, automatically implies accepting III.6.2. as the only possible interpretation. This is confirmed by the requirements imposed by the context, as III.5.1. would suggest that what is given is the list of verbs that had been used in key sentences at some other place. The non-restrictive character of III.4, entails the disambiguation of the relative clause in III.3. in respect of its relation to the matrix. Namely, if both III.4. and the relative clause in III.3. were appositive, then it would be possible to conjoin them by means of *and*<sup>12</sup>:

III.6. *Oto lista czasowników, które najczęściej sprawiają trudności i które są podane w angielskich zdaniach wzorcowych...*

The result is clearly semantically unacceptable in view of the context.

The above analysis leads to the following conclusions:

1. It is not always easy to state whether a sample of linguistic performance that is under consideration is erroneous in respect of style (i.e., is syntactically unacceptable) or grammar (i.e., is ungrammatical). With utterances which are syntactically complex, linguistic analysis on the supra-sentence level might prove necessary.
2. There are cases when a description and/or explanation of a given error can be offered only as a result of contrastive analysis, even though some

<sup>12</sup> For the application of this test to two relative clauses on the same noun which are both appositive or both restrictive, cf. Stockwell et al. (1968 : 448) and Klemensiewicz (1963 : 86).

errors will prove more or less 'universal' and thus render contrastive study inapplicable in any practical sense. For instance, potential ambiguity involved in the usage of Action Nominals is 'universal' in respect of English and Polish. Such a negative result, however, will certainly prove useful when any attempt of classification of pupils' errors is being made: eradication of such errors will require equally 'universal' techniques and so they must constitute a separate category.

The second category will include those errors which are shown to be the direct consequence of mutual interference between the two languages. In such a case, one can legitimately predict their more or less systematic occurrence, as well as put forward hypotheses suggesting remedial procedures.

3. The sample analysis carried out earlier in this paper has shown the error under investigation to be due to interference. Consequently, one is justified in making the following predictions:
  - a. Polish learners will tend to disregard the restriction on reduction in a series of relative clauses, since the appropriate rule, valid for English, does not operate in Polish (cf. II.4.2. and III.4.3.);
  - b. they will also tend to ignore the fact that reduction of relative clauses increases the likelihood of ambiguity, since the deletion erases from the surface structure such disambiguating factors as, e.g., tense or number, which are retained in corresponding Polish participial phrases (cf. II.4.1., II.4.2., II.4.3. and III.4.1., III.4.2., III.4.6.).

Both a. and b. are actually attested in such examples of students' written performance as:

5. \**He found the sail of the boat that he left the previous night, torn by the wind* (Year I student).
6. \**He told them a story about a girl who was attacked by the bull, saved by people from the village* (Year I student).

Moreover,

- c. because of the lack of strict delimitation between restrictive and appositive clauses in written Polish, learners might not realize that the 'intrusive' comma, inserted into a sentence in order to avoid the type of interpretation exemplified in I.a. above, prevents the second of the two clauses from being restrictive. When it is the restrictive clause that is required for semantic reasons, a change of intended meaning can result, e.g.,
7. *Standard dialect is a variety of language which is superior to other dialects, accepted by the majority of the people* (Year I student; the intended meaning was: ... *that is superior to other dialects and that is accepted by...*).
  8. *The Pardoner uses "exempla", stories from various sources, meant to bring the point he is making home to the listeners* (Year IV student; both clauses reduced, the first intended as appositive, the second — as restrictive)

In examples 5, 6, and 7, the commas were inserted by the students only after the necessity was explained to them. Sentences like 8 are usually punctuated correctly, which is due to the instruction that Polish learners are usually given. Following the practice of numerous authors of textbooks of written language, the students are told that appositive clauses are set apart by commas while restrictive ones are not. They are also told that a comma must be placed before a (reduced) clause if the clause modifies any but the last noun in the preceding constituent. Sentences like I.a. above result from the clash between this latter rule and the rule for the restrictives.

At this point any definite proposition concerning remedial procedures would probably be felt premature. It seems fully justified, however, to put forward the following suggestions:

1. Punctuation rules for relative clauses should be taught, and it seems advisable to replace the prescriptive 'surface' rules presented in traditional text-books with explanations which are in fact based on the deep structure of sentences. One such proposition was made by Owen Thomas (1965: 175), who suggested that the system of "three levels of definiteness" (which conditions the choice between a restrictive or an appositive) is introduced instead of the traditional opposition between definite and indefinite. He maintains that the awareness of the three levels "will assist in teaching proper punctuation".
2. If an extensive linguistic analysis confirms the hypothesis that results from the discussion presented above, the absence of the restriction on relative clause reduction in a series of clauses in Polish will be shown to be to the system of Polish flexion which makes it possible to retain an adequate number of disambiguating features in reduced participial phrases. It might be shown, consequently, that Polish counterparts of English sentences which are ambiguous and/or unacceptable because of the level of their syntactical complexity can be still judged as acceptable. In view of the above, grammatical and stylistic exercises in written English, meant for Polish learners, should combat rather than encourage the tendency to construct long and complex sentences. That the tendency exists, is frequently confirmed by the teaching practice. Thus exercises of the type "take each of the groups of sentences given below and combine the separate statements into a simple well-constructed sentence", even though doubtlessly beneficial for students, must be applied (and corrected) with a great amount of care.

That many things remain to be done in this respect is clearly proved by the report that the English Institute of Kraków received on a group of its three top students of years III and V, who participated in an intensive course of English in Britain. Their British tutors wrote: "Weaknesses of style were common... syntax was over-complicated and meaning was sometimes obscured

by the use of too many dependent clauses... Mr X (year V) was less effective on paper because of a sometimes tortured syntax and an apparent unwillingness to use the obvious construction... Mr Y's (year V) composition was often marred by errors resulting from a too complex sentence-structure... Mr Z's (year III) written English suffers from an over-complex sentence-structure which occasionally results in misplaced clauses". Not enough to generalize, perhaps, but certainly enough to start thinking about possible reasons.

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