THE DISADVANTAGED NON-MOTHER-TONGUE SPEAKER AS UNIVERSITY STUDENT OF AFRIKAANS: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE LANGUAGE LECTURER'S DILEMMA

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1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally the Afrikaans departments at all the major universities in South Africa[1] direct their main stream courses[2] exclusively at a specific type of student. This student is either a mother-tongue speaker of Afrikaans or at least very proficient in the language, which he may offer as a second language alongside English. Furthermore the student is from a privileged educational background having passed matric Afrikaans, usually in the higher grade with the aid of Afrikaans-speaking teachers. This student therefore has a basic knowledge of formal language study. The language lecturer is in a position to proceed directly with a more advanced study of the syntax, phonology, morphology or whichever aspect of Afrikaans he wishes to address. In such a course the language lecturer usually hopes to attain at least the following four aims[3]:

i.   to have the student acquire certain insights into the aspect of Afrikaans under discussion;
ii. to teach the student how that aspect of Afrikaans can be studied in a manner that leads to insight;
iii. to contribute to the development of the student's critical skills; and
iv. to stimulate the student's interest in the subject.

2.   PROFILE OF THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT

There is, however, a type of student that has never really
figured in the traditional Afrikaans department scenario: the
disadvantaged non-mother-tongue speaker. Yet today this type of
student constitutes the majority in the classes of various big
Afrikaans departments in South Africa[4]. Increasingly, as doors
open, affirmative action requires that the specific needs of such
students be addressed, even in departments where the majority of
students do not as yet fall into this category.

For the disadvantaged student Afrikaans is usually a third or
even fourth language. He has seldom, if ever, had any contact
with mother-tongue speakers. If he has passed matric Afrikaans,
it is in the standard grade, often with a very low symbol[5]. The
orientation of the standard grade school courses, as typical
second language courses, is mainly communicative. The teaching
is done by non-Afrikaansspeaking teachers who are themselves not
proficient in the language.

Educational factors such as these lead to the disadvantaged
student usually being characterised by, in the first place, a low
level of proficiency in the use of Afrikaans. In the second
place he has no knowledge of formal grammar.[6] General
inadequacies in the school system are probably responsible for a
third characteristic of this student: he shows a severe lack of
problem-solving skills. A fourth characteristic of this student,
namely an inability to look at the Afrikaans language
unemotionally and objectively, can be attributed to the
politicalization of Afrikaans at black schools over the past
thirty years[7].

3.   THE LANGUAGE LECTURER'S DILEMMA

In the situation sketched above it goes without saying that the
language lecturer cannot simply proceed with the study of

Afrikaans in the way that he might have done within a more traditional set up. He is faced with the dilemma of trying to resolve the student's practical inadequacies while simultaneously trying to attain the same four goals as his colleague within the more traditional framework. His problem is often compounded by the fact that he does not face a homogeneous group: a small percentage of the students in fact belong to the privileged group sketched earlier. This dilemma is not limited to the teacher of Afrikaans only. A great number of English language lecturers today find themselves in a comparable situation, so that what follows would be valid for their courses as well.

In the past there have been mainly two approaches to the situation with the disadvantaged student:

i.   ignore the student's practical inadequacies and present the course as if to mother-tongue speakers, stressing theoretical insight;
ii.   concentrate on the student's practical inadequacies and teach Afrikaans as a foreign language, stressing language usage.

The first approach, apart from leading to the loss of a significant number of students along the way who cannot cope, has the disadvantage that it results in third year students who know a great deal <u>about</u> Afrikaans but often have great difficulty in formulating a reasonably grammatical paragraph in Afrikaans. The disadvantage of the second approach lies in the fact that it becomes very difficult to distinguish this type of course from what is offered by, for example, a technicon. The generally accepted principle that a university course should be directed at theoretical insight[8] is not adhered to. Especially the better student, whose lack of proficiency can be directly attributed to a lack of practice, and also the more advanced student find this type of course very boring. Eventually many of these courses

simply degenerate into literature courses with no language study being done.   .

4.   A GENERATIVE APPROACH AND THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT

Ideally the disadvantaged student should be confronted with a combination of the two approaches in his language course. It is here where the insights and approaches from present day linguistic theory can profitably be used to overcome the language lecturer's dilemma in a more interesting way.[9]

It is generally accepted today that the Chomskyan revolution radically changed the nature and objectives of linguistic inquiry as an intellectual practice[10]. Within the framework of generative linguistic theory the central objectives of a grammar are description of the underlying linguistic competence and explanation of problematic properties of sentences. The approach to grammatical study is problem-orientated.   In this way generative grammatical research is typical of any empirical scientific research, also displaying the typical aspects of a scientific inquiry such as pre-theoretical description, theoretical description, explanation, projection and justification.

Such insights from the generative approach to linguistic inquiry can be utilized didactically to develop a modus operandi that will address the problems of the disadvantaged student, while simultaneously making it possible to attain the four goals of any language course. For the purposes of illustration reference is made to a syntax course directed at Afrikaans II students[11]. However, the same method could be followed in the presentation of any course in formal grammar on any undergraduate level.

5. A GENERATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTION IN AFRIKAANS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

There are specific constructions in Afrikaans that non-mother tongue speakers find particularly hard to master. This includes, among others, the negative construction, the WH-question and complex constructions such as complement sentences, relative sentences and conjunct sentences. It is therefore advantageous to the student to concentrate on these constructions in undergraduate syntax courses. The negative construction has been chosen to illustrate the modus operandi in the Afrikaans 11 syntax course.

5.2 COLLECTION AND CLASSIFICATION OF DATA

The method concerned entails setting the students the task of collecting, over a period of approximately three months preceding the start of the course, as many examples as possible of Afrikaans sentences containing the constituent <u>nie</u>. At this stage it is worth the trouble to arrange for contact with mother-tongue speakers and to make available Afrikaans magazines as well as Afrikaans television series on video tape. This extended phase of collecting data addresses especially the disadvantaged student's lack of proficiency in Afrikaans. This is done in two ways:

i.   he is forced to use the language intensively over a period of time so that his confidence and general proficiency improves, and

ii. the concentration on an identified problematic construction leads to an improvement in his command of that construction.

An added advantage lies in the fact that the student who becomes involved in this way starts looking at Afrikaans as an object of study and not just as a political target.

The next step on the way to a pre-theoretical description lies in asking the necessary leading questions with an eye to getting the students to classify their data in such a way that significant generalizations can be formulated. These leading questions can, of course, only be formulated within a specific theoretical framework, of which the lecturer but not the students, need to be aware at this stage. In the inquiry into the negative construction in Afrikaans II, the distinction between sentence negation and constituent negation[12] is pointed out and further classification is limited to sentence negation. The following table provides an example of the classification that such a group of students may arrive at[13]. (Only one sentence per class is provided as an example).

CLASS I : NEGATION WITH <u>NIE</u>

CLASS IA NEGATION WITH A SINGLE NIE	CLASS IB NEGATION WITH A DOUBLE NIE
1. Sentences in which the V is not preceded by an AUX and not followed by any further constituent: **Die kind slaap nie.** *the child sleep not*	1. Sentences in which the V is preceded by one or more AUX: **Hy wil nie slaap nie.** *he will not sleep not*
2. Sentences with a PRO as direct object with no further constituent following PRO: **Ek verstaan dit nie.** *I understand it not*	2. Sentences in which the V is followed by any further constituent: **Die kind voel nie lekker nie.** *the child feels not well not*
3. Sentences with the direct object in sentence initial position: **Verstand het hy nie.** *sense has he not*	3. Sentences in which the verbal element is split: **Hulle werk nie saam nie.** *they work not together not*
4. The main clause of a complex sentence with a negated embedded sentence: **Ek ken nie die boek wat jy nie wil lees nie.** *I know not the book that you will read not.*	4. Any embedded sentence: **Ek ken die boek wat jy nie wil lees nie.** *I know the book that you not will read not.*
	5. The main clause of a complex sentence where the embedded sentence is not negated: **Ek ken nie die boek wat jy wil lees nie.** *I know not the book that you will read not.*

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5.3 FORMULATING GENERALIZATIONS AND PROBLEMS

This specific classification led to the formulation of the following basic generalizations for Afrikaans:

Generalization I: In a negative sentence in which the V (= verb) is neither preceded by an AUX (=auxiliary verb) nor followed by any further constituent, a single nie occurs directly to the right of the V (the sentence final position).

Generalization II: In a negative sentence with a PRO (= pronoun) as direct object and no further constituent following PRO, a single nie occurs directly to the right of PRO (the sentence final position).

Generalization III: In a negative sentence with the direct object in sentence initial position, a single nie occurs in sentence final position.

Generalization IV: In a complex sentence with negated embedded sentence, the main clause is negated by a single nie directly to the right of the first verbal constituent.

Generalization V: In a negative sentence in which the V is preceded by one or more AUX, a nie occurs directly to the right of the first verbal constituent as well as in sentence final position.

Generalization VI: In a negative sentence in which the V is followed by any constituent, a nie occurs directly to the right of the first verbal constituent as well as in sentence final position.

Generalization VII: In a negative sentence in which the verbal element is split, a nie occurs directly to the right of the first verbal constituent as well as in sentence final position.

<u>Generalization VIII</u>: Any embedded sentence is negated by a <u>nie</u> directly to the right of the first verbal constituent as well as by a <u>nie</u> in sentence final position.

<u>Generalization IX</u>: In a complex sentence in which the embedded sentence is not negated, the main clause is negated by a <u>nie</u> directly to the right of the first verbal constituent as well as by a <u>nie</u> in sentence final position.

In formulating an elementary pre-theoretical description the disadvantaged student's proficiency in Afrikaans is addressed once more. He now "discovers" various useful "rules" for the usage of the Afrikaans negative "by himself". In the process he takes cognisance of a wider range of negative constructions in Afrikaans than is covered in most standard text books. Furthermore, he begins to realise that the negative constituent in Afrikaans is rule-governed.

The next step entails focussing the students' attention on the fact that the generalizations actually represent problematic phenomena that need to be explained. Thus the following problems were formulated on the basis of the preceding generalizations:

<u>Problem I</u>: How can it be explained that a sentence in which the V is neither preceded by an AUX nor followed by any further constituent, is negated by a single <u>nie</u> directly to the right of the V (the sentence final position)?

<u>Problem II</u>: How can it be explained that a sentence in which the V is preceded by one or more AUX and/or followed by any constituent, is negated by a <u>nie</u> directly to the right of the first verbal constituent as well as by a <u>nie</u> in sentence final position?

Problem III: Why, if the direct object is a PRO with no further constituent following the direct object, is the sentence negated by a single <u>nie</u> in sentence final position?

Problem IV: Why, if the direct object occurs in sentence initial position, is the sentence negated by a single <u>nie</u> in sentence final position?

Problem V: Why are all sentences in which the verbal element is split, negated by a <u>nie</u> directly to the right of the first verbal constituent as well as by a <u>nie</u> in sentence final position?

Problem VI: Why is the main clause of a complex sentence negated by a single <u>nie</u> directly to the right of the first verbal constituent if the embedded sentence is negated, but an additional <u>nie</u> is required in sentence final position if the embedded sentence is not negated?

Problem VII: Why are all embedded sentences negated by a <u>nie</u> directly to the right of the first verbal constituent as well as a <u>nie</u> in sentence final position?

In order to consider possible solutions to the formulated problems, it becomes necessary at this stage to briefly introduce the student to the methodology of generative linguistic research. It must be pointed out to him that the grammarian of Afrikaans has to formulate an analysis of the negative construction that will offer solutions to Problems I - VII. Such an analysis should consist of a coherent series of hypotheses that will explain Generalizations I - IX. The student is now learning <u>how</u> syntactic phenomena in Afrikaans can be studied in a manner leading to insight into the phenomena.

5.4 PROBLEM-SOLVING THROUGH A NEGATIVE ANALYSIS FOR AFRIKAANS

The phase that follows is of special benefit to the disadvantaged student because his problem-solving skills are exercised in addressing the formulated problems. The main advantages of this phase, however, lie in the acquisition of insight into the structure of Afrikaans and in the development of the student's ability to think critically.

The lecturer selects, from the relevant literature on the topic in English, Dutch, German or other related language, an in depth analysis of the syntactic phenomenon under discussion. Such an analysis is, of course, presented within a specific theoretical framework. Given the student's limited theoretical knowledge, it is often necessary to simplify the chosen analysis considerably. The students are now expected to determine whether the hypotheses of this analysis could in fact be used to solve the problems for Afrikaans[14]. Should some of the problems prove to be unique to Afrikaans, the students must adapt the hypotheses concerned or formulate alternative hypotheses in order to try and solve the problem within the framework of the chosen analysis. If possible the students are presented with a second, alternative, analysis of the syntactic phenomenon in a related language to compare to the first analysis. In this way they must try to determine which of the two analyses is the most successful in solving the problems for Afrikaans.

In the Afrikaans II course on the negative construction the students were presented with a simplified version of the analysis of the English negative by Klima (1964). This analysis, although outdated, has been described as "...one of the major treatises on negation within any framework"[15] and it has various didactic advantages.   It is a reasonably simple, accessible analysis within a theoretical framework that the students were familiar with[16] at the time.

In essence, Klima's transformational analysis entails postulating a deep structure constituent NEG for all sentences subject to sentence negation. NEG is base generated in sentence initial position. A transformational rule of NEG Movement then moves NEG into the required position in the sentence. It was pointed out to the students that the position of NEG in the deep structure is an issue hotly debated in later works within the same framework[17].

The seven problems formulated for Afrikaans were systematically discussed with the students in the light of Klima's analysis for English. To illustrate the modus operandi, the first two problems are briefly addressed.
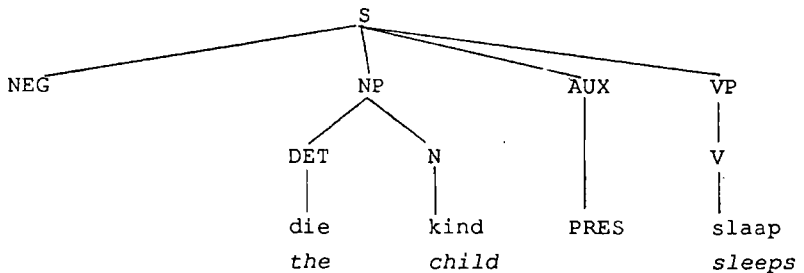
<u>Hypothesis to solve Problem I</u>
Problematic phenomenon:
1.   <u>Die kind slaap nie</u>.
     the child sleeps not

Proposed Deep Structure for (1):
2.

```
                              S
        _____/ |_____
       /                      |        \           \
  NEG                        NP        AUX          VP
                            /  \        |            |
                         DET    N       |            V
                          |     |       |            |
                         die   kind    PRES        slaap
                         the   child                sleeps
```

To derive the surface structure of (1), the transformational rule of NEG Movement must move NEG into sentence final position:
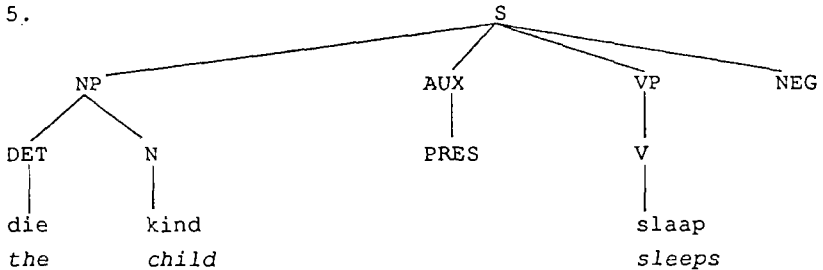
3.   die kind PRES slaap NEG
     the child   sleeps

NEG is eventually spelt out as <u>nie</u> by the morphological rules.

It is brought to the students' attention that should it be postulated for Afrikaans that NEG is base generated in sentence final position, it would be unnecessary to formulate a rule of NEG Movement. Suppose, for the moment, therefore that Afrikaans commands a base rule such as the following:

4.   S ⟶ NP AUX VP (NEG)

The deep structure for (1) can then be represented as in (5):

5.

```
                                    S
                          ┌─────────┼──────┬──────────┐
        NP                         AUX    VP         NEG
     ┌───┴───┐                      │      │
    DET      N                    PRES     V
     │       │                             │
    die     kind                         slaap
    the     child                        sleeps
```

Structure (5) corresponds to the surface structure of (1) in all respects relevant to the present discussion.

In this way it is explained why a sentence in which the V is not preceded by an AUX or followed by any further constituent, is negated by a single <u>nie</u> in sentence final position.
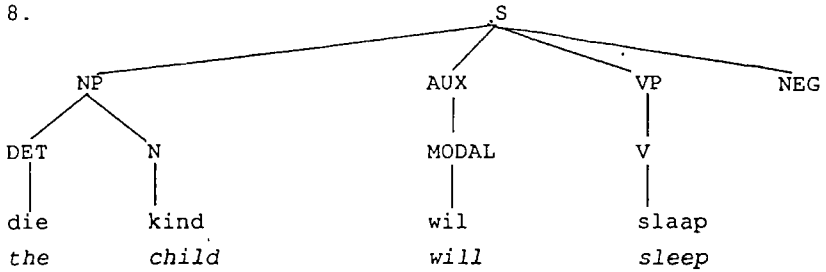
<u>Hypothesis to solve Problem II</u>
Problematic phenomenon:
6.   <u>Die kind wil nie slaap nie.</u>
      the child will not sleep not
7.   <u>Die kind slaap nie in sy eie bed nie.</u>
      the child sleeps not in his own bed not

Proposed Deep Structure for (6):

8.

```
                                        S
               _____/|_____
              /                      |   \               \
            NP                      AUX   VP              NEG
           /  \                      |     |
         DET   N                   MODAL   V
          |    |                     |     |
         die  kind                  wil   slaap
         the  child                 will  sleep
```

In order to derive the surface structure of (6) from (8),the NEG in sentence final position must be copied directly to the right of the AUX. Formulating such a rule of NEG – Copying is very problematic within the framework of this type of analysis for negation in Afrikaans.The rule must meet the following requirements:

i.   If AUX is lexically filled with a modal auxiliary (MODAL) or the auxiliary expressing past tense <u>het</u> (PAST), then NEG must be copied directly to the right of the first AUX, as in (6);

ii. If AUX has not been lexically filled, then NEG must be copied directly to the right of the V, as in (7);

iii. NEG is copied directly to the right of V only if V is followed by another constituent such as a PP, NP or AP (i.e. the rule must not be applied to a structure such as (5));

iv. NEG must not be copied if the direct object NP is a PRO:

     9(a) <u>Ek ken hom nie.</u>
           I know him not
      (b) *<u>Ek ken nie hom nie.</u>
           I know not him not.

Ignoring requirements (iii) and (iv) for the moment, the rule of
NEG - Copying could be formulated as follows:

10.
```
              ⎧ COP   ⎫
      NP      ⎨ PAST  ⎬   X     NEG
              ⎪ MODAL ⎪
              ⎩ V     ⎭
      1         2        3     4
      1         2+4      3     4
```

The application of the rule is obligatory.

Applied to Structure (8) this rule derives a correct surface
structure that can be represented as follows:

11. die kind wil NEG slaap NEG
     the child will   sleep

A correct surface structure for (7) could be arrived at in the
same way.

Nothing, however, prevents the application of Rule (10) to a
structure such as (5),with the following result:

12. die kind slaap NEG NEG
     the child sleeps

This result could be prevented by placing a condition on Rule
(10) such as X ≠ φ. With this condition on Rule (10) it is
correctly predicted that the following sentences are grammatical
(*no constituent follows the first verbal constituent, i.e.*
X = φ, and NEG is therefore not copied):

13. Hy wil nie.

He will not.
14. Hy het nie.
    He has not.
15. Hy lag nie.
    He laughs not.

In the derivation of the surface structure of the following sentence NEG is copied because X = V (<u>dans</u>):

16. <u>Hy mag nie dans nie</u>.
    He may not dance not

The condition on Rule (10) would, however, be <u>ad hoc</u> and would reflect negatively on the generality of the analysis. (At this stage the opportunity is used to briefly discuss with the students the question of the justification of hypotheses in general with the emphasis on specific concepts such as <u>ad hoc</u> and <u>generality</u>.)[18]

Alternatively, of course, Rule (10) could be left in its general form and a further transformational rule of Double-NEG-Deletion could be formulated to delete a NEG where two NEG's are adjacent as in (12) above. This rule could be formalized as follows:

17. NEG   NEG
    1   2
    ϕ 2

Formulating a further transformational rule would however have the disadvantage that it reflects negatively on the simplicity of the analysis. At this stage there is no basis for a choice between the two alternative analyses. Both represent an attempt to explain why a sentence, in which the V is preceded by one or more AUX and/or followed by any further constituent, is negated by a <u>nie</u> in sentence final position as well as by a <u>nie</u> directly to the right of the first verbal constituent.

By constantly pointing out the shortcomings of each hypothesis and by researching possible alternatives, the student is not only schooled in how syntactic research is done but more importantly for the disadvantaged student, his problem-solving abilities as well as his critical abilities are developed. Following the pattern for Problems I and II, each of the problems formulated around the negative in Afrikaans are discussed in terms of Klima's analysis. From a discussion of Problem III for example, it becomes clear that a further ad hoc condition must be placed on Rule (10) to prevent NEG from being copied where X = PRO as in (9) above, repeated here as (18):

18. (a) Ek ken hom nie.
        I know him not
    (b) *Ek ken nie hom nie.
        I know not him not

6. CONCLUSION

It is clear that by following such a problem-orientated approach to language study the student is continually forced to either consider critically another linguist's solution to a problem or to try and formulate his own hypotheses which must then be critically tested and revised. Both his problem-solving skills and his ability to think critically are developed. For the disadvantaged student especially this is a benefit that works through into his other studies.

Also the student's technical knowledge of his subject, his insight into the structure of Afrikaans, cannot help but improve by following the problem-orientated approach. Despite all the imperfections of the analysis concerned, within this approach it has the following advantages:
1 Solutions are offered to significant problems.
2 The analysis makes it clear that the structure of negative sentences in Afrikaans is governed by rules.

3 Explanations are offered for problematic phenomena.

4 It is clear how the explanations for the various problematic phenomena interrelate.

5 It is shown which generalizations are unique to Afrikaans and which occur also in other languages.

6 The hypotheses in the analysis can be tested, justified and revised. The <u>ad hoc</u> hypotheses can be replaced by better proposals.

A problem-orientated approach leads to progress in the acquisition of insight into the structure of Afrikaans. In this way the interest of the better student is also stimulated.

The approach constantly illustrates <u>how</u> a specific aspect of Afrikaans should be studied in order to gain insight into that aspect. The student learns that judiciously classified lists of data are useful as a basis for formulating well-formed significant syntactic problems. He learns that a syntactic analysis consists of hypotheses that are postulated in order to solve problems. He learns that hypotheses are constantly revised when new data results in counter examples. Above all, he learns that the study of Afrikaans syntax is as objective and scientific as a study of the physical properties of the atom, for example.

The period of intensive data collection as well as the constant involvement with the data of Afrikaans improve language proficiency considerably - again a special benefit to the disadvantaged student.

More important still, such a problem-orientated approach involves even the disadvantaged student as "researcher". The involved student is the one who is eventually interested in continued study of the Afrikaans language, thereby ensuring a future for the study of Afrikaans.

FOOTNOTES

1. At for example the Universities of Stellenbosch, Western Cape, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Natal, the Orange Free State and Pretoria, as well as at the Rand Afrikaans University, UNISA and Witwatersrand.

2. "Special" or "practical" courses directed exclusively at the acquisition of the language or improvement of language usage are not considered here.

3. Cf. (Maartens 1980:56) for further discussion of these aims.

4. At for example the Universities of Durban-Westville, the North, Zululand, Fort Hare and Vista.

5. 80% of all Afrikaans I students at UDW over the past three years obtained a D-symbol or lower for matric Afrikaans.

6. At the start of the academic year 80% of the Afrikaans I class at UDW in 1991 could not identify the verb in a simple Afrikaans sentence.

7. Specific reference is made here to contentious matters such as obligatory instruction through medium of Afrikaans and the enforced teaching of Afrikaans at school. (Lyons 1968:2) refers to this type of problem: "Nor is it merely our intuitive or practical familiarity with language that stands in the way of its objective examination. There are all sorts of social and nationalistic prejudices associated with language ..."

8. Cf. (Swanepoel 1990:31-33) for an in depth discussion of the difference between the teaching of Afrikaans at universities and at technikons.

9.   Cf. (Brookes and Hudson 1982:54-55) on "The linguistic approach to the study of language".   .

10.   Cf. (Botha 1978:400-401) for an explication of the changed aims of generative language study.

11.   These students do have a basic proficiency in Afrikaans.

12.   As explained in (Stockwell, Schachter and Partee 1973:231-291)

13.   UDW Afrikaans II 1991.

14.   It is necessary to explain to the students that because Afrikaans is a Germanic language, there are certain structural properties it shares with the other Germanic languages. Because of this, any syntactic analysis done for one of the other Germanic languages is of interest for a study of Afrikaans.

15.   (Stockwell, Schachter and Partee 1973:231) describes Klima's analysis as "... one of the major works in the field of transformational studies of English, and one of the major treatises on negation within any framework."

16.   These students were familiar with a "standard" transformational framework, more or less as set out in (Fromkin and Rodman 1983:200ff)

17.   Cf. (Stockwell, Schachter and Partee 1973:261-266) for a discussion of this debate.   `

18.   Cf. (Botha 1978 Ch. 9) for the type of explanation needed here. (Du Toit and Orr 1987:41 ff) also offer useful material in a popular workbook to improve problem-solving and critical abilities.

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