

Contrastive Linguistics

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I. Introduction

The main purpose of contrastive analysis is to investigate the structural features of languages and find the areas of difficulty in the learning of a second language. It focuses on the intermediate stage between L1 and L2 rather than the target language itself. Though the purpose seems more related to psychology, the only method to reach a description of languages is linguistics. Hence, it is also called contrastive linguistics. The purpose of this paper is to review the contrastive analysis hypothesis, theoretical and applied CA, methods used to contrast language subsystems; in addition to a special focus on the various microlinguistic levels and models of analysis as well as on the macrolinguistic CA approach. Finally, some of the arguments aroused against CA will be discussed in an attempt to illustrate the limitations of CA in order to bridge these gaps in following CA research.

II. **Contrastive analysis hypothesis and transfer theory**

Contrastive research first started in the 1940s by Charles Fries. Then in 1957, Robert Lado developed the contrastive hypothesis stating that contrasting two languages would help predict the features that would represent difficulty or ease in learning a second language due to realizing the differences and similarities between the first and the second language. Lado assumed that second language learners transfer the forms, meanings and the way they are distributed in their native

language to the second language. In the preface of „Linguistics across cultures (1957)“, Lado stated that systematic comparison of languages can help predict and describe the difficult features that can face a second language learner in learning L2. This perspective relied on structuralism as stated by Bloomfield (1933) which further assumed that the structure of any language is finite and hence can be determined and compared to another language (Byung-gon, 1992). The second perspective to guide the contrastive analysis hypothesis was the school of behaviorism due to its assumption that the difficulty or easiness of acquiring a second language is rendered to the already acquired habits of the first language. This, therefore, led to the emergence of another theory called transfer that mainly relied on the assumption of transfer of habits from the native language to the learned one (Corder, 1971 in Byung-gon, 1992). The transfer theory complements the contrastive analysis Hypothesis and serves its applied purpose. It illustrates how certain linguistic features of the second language can be more difficult to acquire than others. Stockwell et al. (1965) claimed that when the features of the contrasted languages are similar, positive transfer occurs; while in cases of different features, negative transfer shows, causing difficulty of acquisition. And in cases of no relation between features, zero transfer takes place. With regards to the prediction of difficulty level in second language acquisition, CAH was claimed to imply strong, weak and moderate versions. The strong version is related to the potentiality to predict the difficulties in second language

according to systematic analysis of language. The weak version is the need to depend on the „best linguistic knowledge available“ (Wardaugh, 1970) in order to detect difficulties in the second language. The moderate version is referred to by Brown stating that confusion may occur more frequently with similar features rather than different or non-existing ones (1987).

III. Theoretical and applied CA

Fisiak (1990) in his article „on the present status of some metatheoretical and theoretical issues distinguished between theoretical and applied contrastive research, equivalence and tertium comparationis, linguistic theory and contrastive linguistics as well as discussing the relationship between contrastive analysis and typology. In the first part, Fisiak (1990) argued for the importance of distinguishing between theoretical and applied contrastive analysis research. The difference mainly concerned the purpose of each. The purpose of theoretical research is to develop models of language analysis, describe languages and explore similarities and differences between languages; while applied CA research aims at examining language for bilingual education, translation or any practical specific purposes; thus, making the latter more relevant to „psych-sociolinguistic settings“ (Sajavaara, 1985 in Fisiak, 1990). Such framework, hence, reinforces the involvement of intrapersonal, interpersonal and organizational levels in the investigations. The intrapersonal level focuses on cognitive decoding and encoding of

messages in the speaker-hearer. The interpersonal level is concerned with the use of language in communication or in other words with discourse analysis and ethno-methodology of speaking. The organizational level is more concerned with the constraints set on a native or a foreign language in the society. In the section on tertium comparationis, James (1980) examined the effectiveness of surface structure, deep structure or the semantic level, and translation which also included pragmatic level and concluded that the semantopragmatic translation equivalence is the most effective criteria for contrasting L1 and L2. In contrast, Krzeszowski (1981) argued for the sentential equivalence which includes semanto-syntactic level rather than pragmatic. He claimed that it is the core syntactic contrastive analysis. A more general argument was proposed by Janicki (1985) that both are valid according to the purpose of the analysis. 6 In his contrast of theoretical and applied CA, Fisiak claimed that theoretical research focuses more on abstract concepts such as, “grammatical categories, rules, functions, and constraints”, like for example using the structure of NPs or constraint on WH-movement; while applied research focuses on psycholinguistic elements that are more perceptual even if the contrasted variables are syntactically incomparable at all. Applied CA research must propose hypotheses and solutions for problems (Fisiak, 1990).

IV. Methods of analysis in CA

Whitman (1970 in Byung-gon, 1992) has mentioned four steps to analyze languages. First, the researcher writes description of the two

languages, second, forms are selected from the two descriptions; then the two selected forms are compared and finally features of difficulty are predicted. Comparison of the two language subsystems should be through the same model of description. Nevertheless, a dilemma still can occur as the model used can be of favor of one language rather than the other. One proposed solution for this dilemma was to use the translation theory whereby each language can be described by its favorite model then translated into an artificial „etalon language“ (Melchuk, 1963) that can enhance the features of L1 and L2 constructions. Another solution was applying description bias to the second language and how it is used by the second language learner more than the focus on understanding L1. Comparing the two language subsystems involves several steps: First, the gathering of data of the system to be compared in the two languages. CA uses translations of the two languages without worrying about the bias of different meanings due to its focus on general rules or systems rather than the focus on the 7 translated meaning. CA aims at generalizing its findings on the grammatical systems of compared languages. Second, description of the realizations of each grammatical category in each of the two contrasted languages, such as, for instance, determining the realization or the context of using the indefinite article in English and Russian. Third step is the addition of new data with their translation to the corpus and then modifying the rules to include the new data. Finally in step four, a formulation of the found results of the contrasted data is determined either in the form of equations or operations. The formulation was either in the form of a set of instructions that can be applied to both language grammars (Harris,

1954 in James, 1980) transfer rules or equations which differ from transfer rules in that they do not show which language is being converted to the other and hence lack the directionality of the transfer rules. Moreover, equational statements show the phonological representations of the category which helps to reveal the variety of forms for a specific category in contrast to transfer rules which focuses only on structural or syntactic depiction.

V. Microlinguistic analysis

In their effort to reach a reliable contrast of two or more languages, CA linguists set fixed linguistic categories to describe the different languages in an attempt to have constant factors. On the microlinguistic level, the language variables are organized according to three levels- phonology, grammar and lexis and categories- unit, structure, class and system. In the traditional approach of analysis, the linguistic level was described separately without reference to other levels, describing phonological features did not include any reference to grammatical ones, for example. Then merging the description of different levels was found later to be inevitable. In Hetzron (1972 cited in James, 1980) homonymy which was given as a reason to support the syntactic order in Russian. 8 The principle of linguistic level is analyzed by CA to observe the shift from one level to the other. For example, Russian questions are distinguished by their intonations while English questions are formed by the fronting of verb do syntactically. This is described as „a phonology-to-grammar level shift“.

5.1 Grammatical level In the pursuit of reaching fixed organizational framework for the description of languages, Halliday (1961 in James, 1980) set four grammatical categories- unit, structure, class and system- that he described as “universal, necessary and sufficient” for describing any language. The unit category includes the sentence as the biggest unit of analysis which is then followed by clause, phrase, word and morpheme. From this perspective, CA therefore does not analyze more than the sentence level. It may observe, for example, that the same sentence has different number of clauses across the two languages. Structure is the second category and it refers to the order of the components in the sentence structurally or that of sounds in a word phonologically. In English for example the sentence is composed of subject predicate, compliment, and adjunct and phonologically words can be cccvc or vccv. The adjective in French occurs in a post-nominal position while in English it is pre-nominal. The third category „Class“ depends on the place a specific unit may occupy in the sentence structure, eg. Any phrase that can occupy the adjunct is considered one of the class of the „Adverbial phrase“. The last category System includes a variety of options for the same element that can occupy the same place in the sentence, such as plural and singular nouns in English. In Arabic there is also dual.

9 5.1.1 Models of grammatical CA Contrasting languages requires using the same model of analysis because each model focuses on certain features, and hence comparing features analyzed by two different models will make it difficult for the linguist to

determine whether it is a trait of the data or the model. Using the same model contributes to having constants and reliable CA data. A variety of models of analysis are used by linguists, two of which are the structural or the Taxonomic model and the Transformational generative grammar. Through the taxonomy model, structuralists proposed the Immediate Constituent Analysis technique whereby any complex grammatical structure is divided into two constituents AB+C or A+BC according to which parts should be in order or can be omitted. The phrase rather nice girl can have „nice girl“ as one construction but „rather nice“ cannot be accepted as one construction. Such analysis does not account for meaning, it only considers construction types „syntagmatic“ and possible elements for each structural position „paradigmatic“. With the eminence of Chomsky's universal grammar, language is analyzed by the Transformational generative grammar in which a difference between surface structures and deep structures of the sentence is highly considered. Deep structure is considered universal and hence allows only for contrasting different surface structures across L1 and L2. Generative grammar focuses on the intermediate structure where diversion across the two contrasted languages appears. Other models of analysis have also influenced contrastive analysis techniques.

5.2 Phonological level

In acoustic phonetics, contrastive linguistics focuses on sounds that have physical similarities between L1 and L2 and then tries to determine the differences. 10 Similar sounds in two languages can be of different functional importance. For example two allophones in one language can be considered as two different phonemes in the other. Contrasting two sound systems involve four steps. First, a phonemic inventory of the two languages is drawn. Second, phonemes of the two languages are equated. Third, the different phonemes and allophones are listed. Then, the distributional restrictions or on the context of the phonemes and allophones are determined for each language. For example, the sound [ŋ] in English and Spanish in English it is an allophone of /n/ while in Spanish before /h/ and /w/ such as [estran"hero]. Phonemes can contrast in one of the following ways (Politzer, 1972). Two similar phonemes in the contrasted languages does not mean equation of their allophones since one phoneme can have allophones and the other does not show allophones at all. Another contrasting feature shows when the same sound is considered a phoneme in one language and an allophone in the other.