

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

CONTEXT

When we learn a foreign or second language, we may make mistakes because of influence from our mother tongue – mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, and other levels of language – often referred to as *interference*. This is why language learning books designed for students with a particular mother tongue tend to focus a lot on differences between mother tongue – or *L1* – and target language – or *L2*.

Being aware of these differences is essential to learn the correct and idiomatic use of an *L2*. Without such awareness, we tend to see and hear things from familiar lenses, according to our *L1*'s structures. And this comes to no surprise, as it is the way we deal with the world; we engage the unfamiliar from a familiar perspective.

HISTORY

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is the systematic comparison of two or more languages, with the aim of describing their similarities and differences. The rationale behind CA is that the most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner (Fries, 1945). The plan is to predict and describe the patterns which will cause difficulty in learning and those that will not cause difficulty (Lado, 1957) and use the results to improve teaching materials.

In the 1950s and 60s, examples of CA research questions included:

- What are the consonant phonemes in languages X and Y. How do they differ in inventory, realization, and distribution?
- What is the tense system of languages X and Y?
- What are the verbs of saying in languages X and Y?

In those early years, we find a large number of contrastive studies in the US and in Europe, but gradually there was some disenchantment with CA, perhaps because contrastive linguists had made exaggerated claims or because teachers had expected too much. The limitations of CA were essentially that:

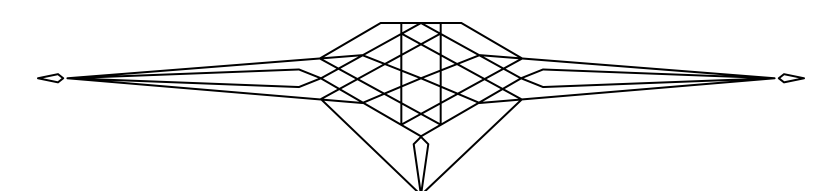
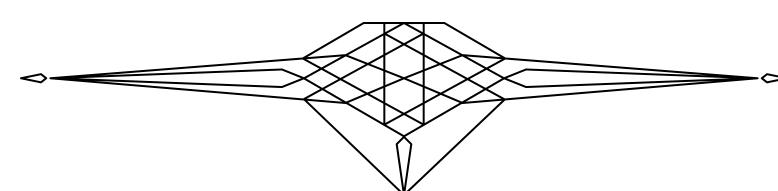
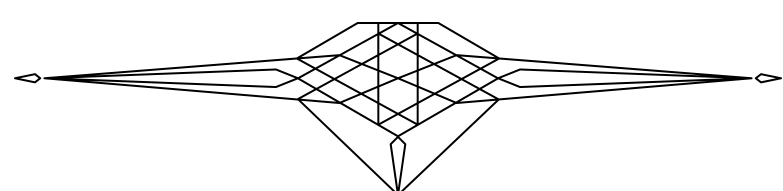
- only part of the learning problems can be predicted,
- many problems are shared irrespective of the *L1*,
- predictions may vary depending on the linguistic model,
- there is a complicated relationship between difference and difficulty, and
- a comparison of *L1* and *L2* implies that the whole of the two languages get contact; in actuality, the meeting of the languages in the learner's mind depends upon the stage of learning (Ringbom, 1994).

The underlying problem is that language learning cannot be fully understood from a purely linguistic view. Therefore, many who were concerned with language learning turned instead to the new disciplines of error analysis, performance analysis, or interlanguage. CA was rejected as an applied discipline.

In spite of the criticism of applied contrastive analysis, contrastive studies were continued, and their scope broadened. Although early CA focused on microlinguistic elements, its scope was broadened in the 1970s and 80s, as it became concerned with macrolinguistic elements (James, 1980). Then, example of CA research questions included:

- How is cohesion expressed in languages X and Y?
- How are the speech acts of apologizing and requesting expressed in languages X and Y?
- How are conversations opened and closed in languages X and Y?

Questions like these require conducting contrastive studies on authentic texts. This is where multilingual corpora come into play.



Adapted from Johansson, S. (2008). Contrastive analysis and learner language: A corpus-based approach.

REFERENCES

- Fries, Ch. C. 1945. *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- James, C. 1980. *Contrastive Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Lado, R. 1957. *Linguistics Across Cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ringbom, H. 1994. Contrastive analysis. In R. E. Asher and J. M. Y. Simpson (eds), *Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, Vol. 2. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 737-742.

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OBJECTIVES

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is the systematic comparison of two or more languages, with the aim of describing their similarities and differences. Completing this assignment will enable you to:

- Describe and compare the L1 and L2 of a learner
- Predict points of difficulty
- Use the results to improve teaching materials

DESCRIPTION

For this assignment, you will choose a language other than English and compare two or more of its aspects to those of English. Let your selection be guided by the kind of learners you are teaching now or learners you are planning to teach in the future.

Aspects of the language you could focus on include the following:

- Sound inventory
- Phonological patterns
- Syllable structure
- Prosody (stress, intonation, pauses, tone, etc.)
- Affixation
- Word formation processes (compounding; clipping; borrowing; calques; etc.)
- Lexis (times of the day; meals of the day; words and their correspondences; cognates and false cognates; etc.)
- Classes of verbs (cutting and breaking verbs; posture verbs; verbs of perception; etc.)
- Tense, Aspect, and Modality
- Passive Constructions
- Prepositions/Postpositions
- Word Order (SOV; SVO; etc.)
- Relative Clauses (Restrictive and non-Restrictive)
- Expressions of basic emotions
- Speech Acts (Requesting; Apologizing; Thanking; Complimenting; Etc.)
- Rhetorical organization of texts
- Etc.

After comparing those aspects of your selected language and English, predict points of difficulty for a learner learning English. Then, use those points of difficulty to make suggestions about how to improve teaching materials or help learners from that L1 background.

DELIVERABLES



Presentation

A 20-minute presentation supported with visuals.



Handout

A one-page well-designed handout, which summarizes the content of the presentation. You should print out a copy for the professor and each of your classmates.

