

University of Mohammed Boudiaf – Msila Academic Year: 2020-2021

Faculty of Letters and Languages Department of English Level: 3rd Year

Module : Applied linguistics

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Lecture Two: Developments

The first stage was the development of **error analysis** (EA). The idea was that, rather than predicting points of difficulty, one would observe what problems actually occurred, through a systematic study of learners' errors, thereby revealing learners' difficulties. This information could then be used to improve language teaching. CA could be used as *one* way of explaining errors; this approach was sometimes referred to as the weak claim of CA, as opposed to the strong claim of being able to predict learners' difficulties.

But there are problems also with EA, to do with difficulties of identifying, quantifying, and explaining errors. Above all, the observation of errors is not sufficient if we want to identify learners' difficulties, because the most difficult points may be avoided and problems in these areas will not be revealed by EA.

So it became clear that the whole of the learners' performance needed to be studied, both errors and non-errors, through **performance analysis**.

Another development was **interlanguage studies** (ILS), i.e. the study of learner language as a system. The aim was to show the gradual development towards the target language. Here the focus is on the learning process, including a comparison with first language acquisition.

At this stage we have got quite far from the original idea of CA: perform a linguistic analysis and use this to improve language teaching.

The difference in approach could be visualised as in the figure below. CA compares the two languages, while the other approaches are concerned with what language learners actually do in the process of learning.

For a while it looked as if applied CA would die out. Some researchers even denied that the native language plays a role in the learning of a foreign language. Such claims are not made any more. The question is not whether mother-tongue influence exists, but *what kinds* there are, *how much*, and *why*. *Contrastive analysis and learner language*.

Lecture Three: Theoretical and applied CA

Introduction

As pointed out at the outset, the importance of language comparison extends beyond practical/pedagogical applications and is of great interest in a theoretical as well as an applied perspective. It reveals what is general and what is language specific and is therefore important both for the understanding of languages in general and for the study of the individual languages compared.

In spite of the criticism of applied contrastive analysis, contrastive studies were continued, and their scope was broadened. Although Lado (1957) included a comparison of cultures, early contrastive studies focused on what has been described as *microlinguistic* contrastive analysis (James 1980): phonology, grammar, lexis.

Examples of research questions:

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

With the general broadening of linguistic studies in the 1970s and 1980s, contrastive studies became increasingly concerned with *macrolinguistic* contrastive analysis (James 1980.): text linguistics, discourse analysis. Examples of research questions:

- *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?*

When questions of this kind are raised, it becomes increasingly important to base the contrastive study on authentic texts. This is where multilingual corpora come in. But first we need to touch on the notion of equivalence.

The problem of equivalence

One of the most vexing questions in contrastive analysis is the problem of equivalence. How do we know what to compare?

It is not sufficient to contrast formal categories. What is expressed in one language by, for example, modal auxiliaries could be expressed in other languages in quite different ways. Then we do not get very far by a comparison of modal auxiliaries.

One approach is that outlined by Andrew Chesterman (1998) in his proposal for a methodology for contrastive functional analysis:

1. **Primary data:** instances of language behaviour in different languages.
2. **Comparability criterion:** a perceived similarity, of any kind, between a phenomenon X in language A and a phenomenon Y in language B. For a given contrastive analysis, this criterion is then defined operationally in terms of a constraint of relevant similarity.
3. **Problem:** what is the nature of this similarity?
4. **Initial hypothesis:** that X and Y are identical.
5. **Test:** on what grounds can the initial hypothesis be supported or rejected? On what conditions (if ever) does it hold?
6. **Revised hypothesis (if the identity hypothesis fails):** that the relation between X and Y is such-and-such; or, that the use of X and Y depends on such-and-such conditions.
7. **Testing of the revised hypothesis.**

According to Chesterman, the initial hypothesis of identity has the same status as the null hypothesis in experimental studies.

The researcher sets out to reject it, but the main point is to show how the perception of similarity is gradually refined in the process of testing.

Translation is a source of perceived similarities across languages.

Most linguists working in the field have either explicitly or implicitly made use of translation as a means of establishing cross-linguistic relationships.

According to Roman Jakobson (1959), “[n]o linguistic specimen may be interpreted by the science of language without a translation of its signs into other signs of the same system or into signs of another system”, and he continues: “Any comparison of two languages implies an examination of their mutual translatability [...]”.

In his book on contrastive analysis Carl James reaches the conclusion that translation is the best basis of comparison:

Hence, translation equivalence, of this rather rigorously defined sort [including interpersonal and textual as well as ideational meaning].

As translation shows what elements may be associated across languages, **it is fruitful to base a contrastive study on a comparison of original texts and their translations**. At the same time, translations have special characteristics of their own and may deviate from original texts in the target language.

Given an appropriate corpus model it is, however, possible to control for translation-specific features.