Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Interlanguage and the Implication to Language Teaching

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Abstract: Students learning a foreign language meet with many kinds of learning problems dealing with its sound system, vocabulary, structure, etc. Linguists try to find out the causes of the problems to be applied in language teaching, to minimize the problems. They propose contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage theory. Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities between the first language and the target language based on the assumptions that: the similarities facilitate learning while differences cause problems. Via contrastive analysis, problems can be predicted and considered in the curriculum. However, not all problems predicted by contrastive analysis always appear to be difficult for the students. On the other hand, many errors that do turn up are not predicted by contrastive analysis. A counter-theory to contrastive analysis is error analysis. A key finding of error analysis is that many learner errors are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language. These errors can be divided into three sub-categories: overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, and the hypo-thesizing of false concepts. Error analysis was criticized for misdiagnosing student learning problems due to their "avoidance" of certain difficult L2 elements. Most researchers agree that contrastive analysis and error analysis alone can't predict or account for the myriad errors encountered in learning English. In the mid-1970s, Corder and others moved on to a more wide-ranging approach to learner language, known as interlanguage. The scholars reject the view of learner language as merely an imperfect version of the target language. Interlanguage is continuum between the first language and the target language. Interlanguage is dynamic (constantly adapting to new information) and influenced by the learners.

Key words: Contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage, learning problem

INTRODUCTION

If someone wants to learn a foreign language, he will obviously meet with many kinds of learning problems dealing with its sound system, vocabulary, structure, etc. This is understandable since the student learning the foreign language has spoken his own native language, which has been deeply implanted in him as part of his habit. Very often, he transfers his habit into the target language he learns, which perhaps will cause errors. Contrastive analysis theory pioneered by Fries assumed that these errors are caused by the different elements between the native language and the target language (Fisiak, 1981: 7). Thus, contrastive analysis followers suggest that teachers do contrastive analysis between the native language and the target language so as to predict the learning problems that will be faced by the students.

However, not all problems predicted by contrastive analysis always appear to be difficult for the students. On the other hand, many errors that do turn up are not predicted by contrastive analysis. This shortcoming has inspired the appearance of error analysis

which was pioneered by Corder in the 1960s. The key finding of error analysis is that many learner errors are produced by the learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the target language.

To overcome the shortcoming of contrastive analysis, it is suggested that teachers accompany contrastive analysis with error analysis. It is carried out by identifying the errors actually made by the students in the classroom.

Selinker (1992) in (Ho, 2003) states that errors are indispensable to learners since the making of errors can be regarded as 'a device the learner uses in order to learn.' Thus, error is a proof that the student is learning. The error is the route that the student must pass to achieve the target language. And, at this stage, the language produced by the student is called interlanguage.

In this paper, the writer will focus on the discussion of what is contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguange; and what's the implication to the language teaching. Thus, the problems in this paper can be stated as follows:

1. What is contrastive analysis?
2. What is error analysis?
3. What is interlanguage?
4. What is the implication to the language teaching?

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Contrastive Analysis was extensively used in the 1960s and early 1970s as a method of explaining why some features of a Target Language were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviourist theories, language learning was a question of habit formation, and this could be reinforced by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language depended on the difference between the learners' mother language and the language they were trying to learn.

The theoretical foundations for what became known as the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis were formulated in Lado's *Linguistics across Cultures* (1957). In this book, Lado claimed that "those elements which are similar to the learner's native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult". While this was not a novel suggestion, Lado was the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical treatment and to suggest a systematic set of technical procedures for the contrastive study of languages. This involved describing the languages (using structuralist linguistics), comparing them and predicting learning difficulties (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_language_acquisition, January 25th 2011). Thus, the languages comparison is aimed at assisting language learning and teaching.

The goals of Contrastive Analysis can be stated as follows: to make foreign language teaching more effective, to find out the differences between the first language and the target language based on the assumptions that: (1) foreign language learning is based on the mother tongue, (2) similarities facilitate learning (positive transfer), (3) differences cause problems (negative transfer/Interference), (3) via contrastive analysis, problems can be predicted and considered in the curriculum. However, not all problems predicted by contrastive analysis always appear to be difficult for the students. On the other hand, many errors that do turn up are not predicted by contrastive analysis. Larsen, et al (1992: 55) states "predictions arising from were subjected to empirical tests. Some errors it did predict failed to materialize, i.e. it overpredicted." This prediction failure leads to the criticism to the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis.

The criticism is that Contrastive Analysis hypothesis could not be sustained by empirical evidence. It was soon pointed out that many errors predicted by Contrastive Analysis were inexplicably not observed in learners' language. Even more confusingly, some uniform errors were made by learners irrespective of their L1. It thus became clear that Contrastive Analysis could not predict learning difficulties, and was only useful in the

retrospective explanation of errors. These developments, along with the decline of the behaviourist and structuralist paradigms considerably weakened the appeal of Contrastive Analysis. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_language_acquisition, January 25th 2011).

Fisiak (1981: 7) claims that Contrastive Analysis needs to be carried out in spite of some shortcoming because not all Contrastive Analysis hypotheses are wrong. To overcome the shortcoming of contrastive analysis, it is suggested that teachers accompany contrastive analysis with error analysis. It is carried out by identifying the errors actually made by the students in the classroom. Contrastive Analysis has a useful explanatory role. That is, it can still be said to explain certain errors and mistakes. He further explains "…error analysis as part of applied linguistics cannot replace Contrastive Analysis but only supplement it." Schackne (2002) states "research shows that contrastive analysis may be most predictive at the level of phonology and least predictive at the syntactic level."

A counter-theory was error analysis, which treated second language errors as similar to errors encountered in first language acquisition, or what the linguists referred to as "developmental errors." By the early 1970s, this contrastive analysis theory had been to an extent supplanted by error analysis, which examined not only the impact of transfer errors but also those related to the target language, including overgeneralization (Schackne, 2002).

ERROR ANALYSIS

Error analysis was established in the 1960s by Stephen Pit Corder and colleagues. Error analysis was an alternative to contrastive analysis. Error analysis showed that contrastive analysis was unable to predict a great majority of errors, although its more valuable aspects have been incorporated into the study of language transfer. A key finding of error analysis has been that many learner errors are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language. Although error analysis is still used to investigate specific questions in SLA, the quest for an overarching theory of learner errors has largely been abandoned. Contrastive analysis emphasized the study of phonology and morphology. It did not address communicative contexts, i.e. contrasting socio-pragmatic conditions that influence linguistic production. Recent work in error analysis has emphasized errors as a source of knowledge of a learner's interlanguage and linguistic hypotheses. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_ language_acquisition).

Brown (1993: 205) differentiates between mistakes and errors. A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or slip in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. All people make mistakes, in both native and second language situations. Native speakers are normally capable of recognizing and correcting such mistakes, which are not the result of a deficiency in competence but the result of some sort of breakdown in the process of production. Corder in Larsen (1992) claims that a mistake is a random performance slip caused by fatigue, excitement, etc. and therefore can be readily self-corrected.

An error is a noticeable deviation, reflecting the competence of the learner. It is a systematic deviation made by the learner who has not yet mastered the rules of the target language. The learner cannot self correct an error because it is a product reflective of his or her current stage of L2 development, or underlying competence (Larsen, 1992: 59).

Error analysis is the study of kind and quantity of error that occurs, particularly in the fields of applied linguistics. These errors can be divided into three sub-categories: overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, and the hypothesizing of false concepts, reflected a learner's competence at a certain stage and thereby differed from learner to learner (findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7571/, January 26th, 2011).

The methodology of error analysis (traditional error analysis) can be said to have followed the steps below:

1. Collection of data
2. Identification of errors (labeling with varying degree of precision depending on the linguistic sophistication brought to bear upon the task, with respect to the exact nature of the deviation.
3. Classification into error types
4. Statement of relative frequency of error types
5. Identification of the areas of difficulty in the target language;
6. Therapy (remedial drills, lessons, etc.).

While the above methodology is roughly representative of the majority of error analyses in the traditional framework, the more sophisticated investigations went further, to include one or both of the following:

1. Analysis of the source of the errors (e.g. mother tongue interference, over-generalization, inconsistencies in the spelling system of the target language, etc.);
2. Determination of the degree of disturbance caused by the error (or the seriousness of the error in terms of communication, norm, etc.).

(vsites.unb.br/il/let/graham/conan, January 27th 2011)

Error analysis was criticized for misdiagnosing student learning problems due to their "avoidance" of certain difficult L2 elements. The result today is that both contrastive analysis and error analysis are rarely used in identifying L2 learner problem areas.

The debate over contrastive analysis and error analysis has virtually disappeared in the last ten years. Most researchers agree that contrastive analysis and error analysis alone can't predict or account for the myriad errors encountered in learning English (Schackne, 2002).

INTERLANGUAGE

In the mid-1970s, Corder and others moved on to a more wide-ranging approach to learner language, known as interlanguage. It is a term coined by Selinker (1972). Interlanguage scholars reject the view of learner language as merely an imperfect version of the target language (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_language_acquisition, January 27th 2011).

Interlanguage is a continuum between the first language and the target language along which all learners traverse (Larsen, et. al., 1992: 60). The term 'interlanguage' was firstly used by John Reinecke in 1935. He always used 'interlanguage' to refer to a non standard variety of a first or second language, used as a means of intergroup communication.

Many of the utterances produced by language learners are perceived as ungrammatical. They contain a lot of mistakes in lexis, pronunciation, and grammar. Ellis (1989: 135) mentions the characteristics of learners' talk as follows: interlanguage is dynamic (constantly adapting to new information) and influenced by the learners. Ellis (1994: 351) quoted Selinker's idea about the characteristics of interlanguage as follows:

(1) Language transfer (some, but certainly not all, items, rules, and subsystems of a learner's interlanguage may be transferred from the first language)
(2) Transfer of training (some interlanguage elements may derive from the way in which the learners were taught)
(3) Strategies of second language learning (Selinker talks about an 'identifiable approach by the learner to the material to be learned)
(4) Strategies of second language communication (an identifiable approach by the learner to communication with native speakers of the target language)
(5) Overgeneralization of the target language material (some interlanguage elements are the result of a 'clear overgeneralization' of target language rules and semantic features)

An interlanguage is developed by a learner of a second language who has not become fully proficient yet but is approximating the target language: preserving some features of their first language, or overgeneralizing target language rules in speaking or writing the target language and creating innovations. The interlanguage rules are shaped by: L1 transfer, transfer of training, strategies of L2 learning (e.g. simplification), strategies of L2 communication (or communication strategies like circumlocution), and over-generalization of the target language patterns.

Interlanguage can fossilize in any of its developmental stages. Interlanguage fossilization is a stage during second language acquisition. It refers to a permanent cessation of progress toward the TL. This linguistic phenomenon, IL fossilization, can occur despite all reasonable attempts at learning (Selinker, 1972). Fossilization includes those items, rules, and sub-systems that L2 learners tend to retain in their IL, that is, all those aspects of IL that become entrenched and permanent. It has also been noticed that this occurs particularly in adult L2 learners' IL systems (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_language_acquisition, January 27th 2011).

Interlanguage is a theoretical construct which underlies the attempts of SLA researchers to identify the stages of development through which L2 learners pass on their way to L2 (or near L2) proficiency (Ellis, 1989: 42). The research result indicated that there were strong similarities in the developmental route followed by L2 learners. The errors made by the learners are routes that that must be passed. An error is a proof of hypothesis testing.

The hypothesis testing is not only done by foreign language learners but also by children learning their mother tongue. The child builds up his knowledge of his mother tongue by means of hypothesis testing. The child's task is connecting his innate knowledge to the language he is learning. Thus, both L1 and L2 learners make errors in order to test out certain hypotheses about the nature of the language they are learning. Making errors is a strategy, evidence of learner-internal processing. Making errors constitutes a strategy or attempt to master the target language. And mastering the TL (or near TL) can only be achieved by good learners.

Good language learners will always make attempts to practice the target language they learn, and, then, their target language mastery will approach the standard one. Ellis (1989: 122) mentions a list of characteristics of good learners as the following:

(1) Be able to respond to the group dynamics of the learning situation so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhabitations
(2) Seek out all opportunities to use the target language
(3) Make maximum use of the opportunities afforded to practice listening to and responding to speech to meaning rather than to form
(4) Supplement the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from the use of study technique (such as making vocabulary lists)- this is likely to involve attention to form
(5) Be an adolescent or an adult rather than a young child at least as far as the early stages of grammatical development are concerned
(6) Possess sufficient analytic skills to perceive, categorize, and store the linguistic feature of the L2, and also to monitor errors.
(7) Posses a strong reason for learning the L2 which may reflect an integrative or an instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong 'task motivation' (i.e. respond positively to the learning tasks chosen of provided)
(8) Be prepared to experiment by taking risks, even if this makes the learner appear foolish
(9) Be capable of adapting to different learning conditions.

THE IMPLICATION TO LANGUAGE TEACHING

Teachers of languages are aware of the same errors appearing so regularly. Errors are indispensable to learners since the making of errors can be regarded as 'a device the learner uses in order to learn' (Selinker, 1992 in Ho, 2003). Language learners cannot correct their errors until they have sufficient knowledge. These errors occur in the course of the learner's study because they haven't acquired enough knowledge. Once they acquire additional knowledge, they will be able to correct their errors and the more errors the learners correct the more conscious of language they will become. The teachers need to ask to themselves how to help learners to correct their errors: (a) at what level of error does the teacher correct?, (b) what methodology should be used to correct? It is not easy to find a systematic method that helps learners.

There is a danger in too much attention to learners' errors. Too much attention on the learners' errors may cause the correct utterances in the second language go unnoticed.

Prodromou (1995) in (vsites.unb.br/il/let/graham/conan.htm, January 27th 2011) put forward method of correction as follows: (a) Putting responsibility for error correction primarily on the student. This balanced approach offers the learner the chance to participate in the process of bringing performance closer to standard production, while giving room for the teacher to exercise the responsibility of guiding, informing and explaining. The student's discovery of patterns of error would be more effective. (b) Post-lesson feedback. Correcting every single error is avoided by giving the feedback to both written and spoken production after the event. There is absolutely no point in correcting one student in front of the rest of the class – this is demotivating and inefficient.

The teacher encourages the learners to take risks for making mistakes, losing marks and thus slipping down the classroom hierarchy. Research into the good language learner has highlighted the fact that these risk-takers are able to learn from their mistakes.

Brown (1993: 219) claims that one of the keys to successful learning lies in the feedback that a learner receives from others. The feedback can be cognitive, affective, can be negative, positive. The feedback given can be termed as "green light", "red light", "yellow light." "The green light" of the affective feedback such as "I like it" allows the sender to continue attempting to get a message across. A "red light" feedback such as "I don't like it" causes the sender to abort such attempts. The traffic signal of cognitive feedback (such as "I understand", "I don't understand") is the point at which error correction enters in. A "green light" here symbolizes non corrective feedback that says "I understand your message." A "red light" symbolizes corrective feedback that takes on a myriad of possible forms and causes the learner to make some kind of alteration in production. Note that fossilization may be the result of too many green lights there should have been some yellow or red lights.

Cognitive feedback must be optimal in order to be effective. Too much negative cognitive feedback – a barrage of interruptions, corrections, and overt attention to malformations – often leads learners to shut off their attempts at communication. The students perceive that so much is wrong with their production that there is a little hope to get anything right. On the other hand, too much positive cognitive feedback – willingness of the teacher hearer to let errors go uncorrected – serves to reinforce the errors of the speaker learner. The result is the persistence, and perhaps the eventual fossilization of such errors.

The task of the teacher is to discern the optimal between the positive and negative cognitive feedback: providing enough green lights to encourage continued communication, and providing enough red lights to call attention to those crucial errors. What we must avoid is the punitive reinforcement, or, correction that is viewed by learners as an affective red light – devaluing, dehumanizing, or insulting their personhood.

CONCLUSION

From the previous discussion, some conclusions can be drawn as follows: contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their differences and similarities with the assumption the different elements between the native and the target language will cause learning problems, while similar elements will not cause any problems. Contrastive analysis hypothesis is criticized for not all problems predicted by contrastive analysis always appear to be difficult for the students. On the other hand, many errors that do turn up are not predicted by contrastive analysis.

Error analysis was an alternative to contrastive analysis. Error analysis was criticized for misdiagnosing student learning problems due to their "avoidance" of certain difficult L2 elements.

Interlanguage is a continuum between the first language and the target language along which all learners traverse. It is dynamic (constantly adapting to new information) and influenced by the learners.

Some methods for error correction are: putting responsibility for error correction primarily on the student, post-lesson feedback. The cognitive, affective, negative, positive feedback should be given sufficiently and appropriately. We must avoid is the punitive reinforcement.

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