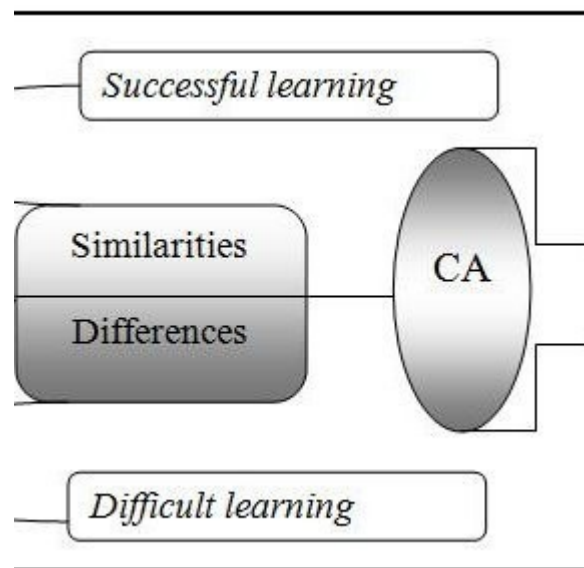


Chapter 2 : Contrastive Analysis

2nd year master
didactic
Centre universitaire-
MIL



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Table des matières



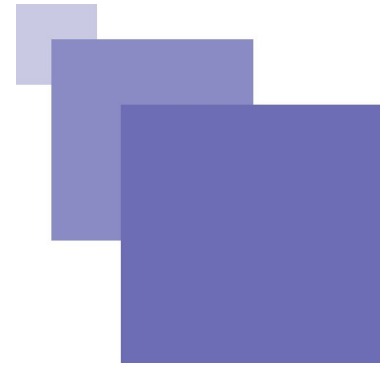
Objectifs	5
Introduction	7
I - prerequisites	9
II - Exercice	11
III - Exercice	13
IV - Exercice	15
V - What is Contrastive Analysis	17
VI - Positive transfer Vs. Negative Transfer	19
VII - Contrastive Analysis Objectives	21
VIII - Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses	23
A. The Strong Version.....	23
B. The Weak Version.....	23
IX - Contrastive Analysis Debate	25
X - Exercice	27
Conclusion	29
Solution des exercices	31
Bibliographie	33

Objectifs

The chapter of "Contrastive Analysis" aims at :

- Defining contrastive analysis
- Explaining the predictive power of contrastive analysis
- Distinguishing between the strong version and the weak version of contrastive analysis.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of contrastive analysis in language teaching

Introduction



Until late sixties, the prominent theory that was used in the study of second language learning was the behaviouristic theory. It suggests that learning is a question of habit formation and thus errors were considered as being the result of the existence of the mother tongue habits in the new language. Because of this, many researches in that period gave most of their attention to the comparison between the learner's native language and the target language in order to predict and explain the errors made by learners.

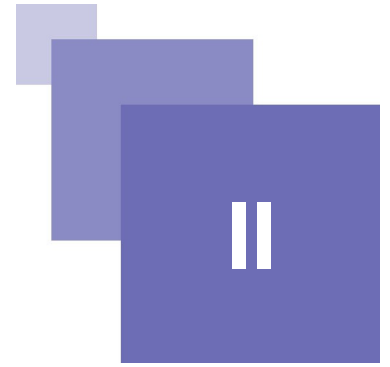
prerequisites



Before dealing with this chapter, it is recommended for you to read about :

- second language acquisition.
- second language acquisition barriers.
- behavioral approach to second language acquisition.

Exercice

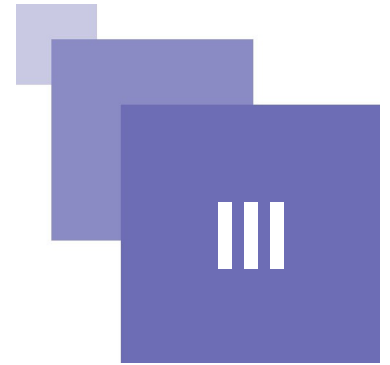


[Solution n°1 p 31]

what is second language acquisition ?

- the way in which people learn a language other than mother tongue
- the way in which people learn their mother tongue
- the way in which people learn dialect

Exercise



[Solution n°2 p 31]

What are the different second language acquisition barriers ?

- syntactic structure
- phonetics
- morphemes
- semantic concepts
- All of them

Exercise



IV

[Solution n°3 p 31]

What is the difference between the behaviourist theory and the cognitive theory to second language acquisition ?

- The behaviourist theory sees second language acquisition as a habit formation process while the cognitive process sees it as a reasoned thinking process
- The behaviourist theory sees second language acquisition as a reasoned thinking process while the cognitive process sees it as a habit formation process

What is Contrastive Analysis



V

Contrastive analysis or (CA) for short is the systematic comparison of the native language and the language that the learner wants to learn. In other words, it is the identification of points of structural similarity and difference between two languages (Crystal, 1992). Contrastive analysis flourished in the fifties and sixties and since that, it has played an important role in teaching English as a foreign language. Richard, Platt and Platt (1992,p.83) claim that "contrastive analysis was developed and practiced in the 1950s and 1960s as an application of structural linguistics to language teaching." In addition, contrastive analysis has become one of the most important subjects in the recent history of teaching English as a foreign language because of its theoretical and practical implications (Aarts, 1980). Contrastive analysis was based on the assumption that a learner of a second language will tend to transfer his old habits to the second language. Lado (1957, p.02) writes

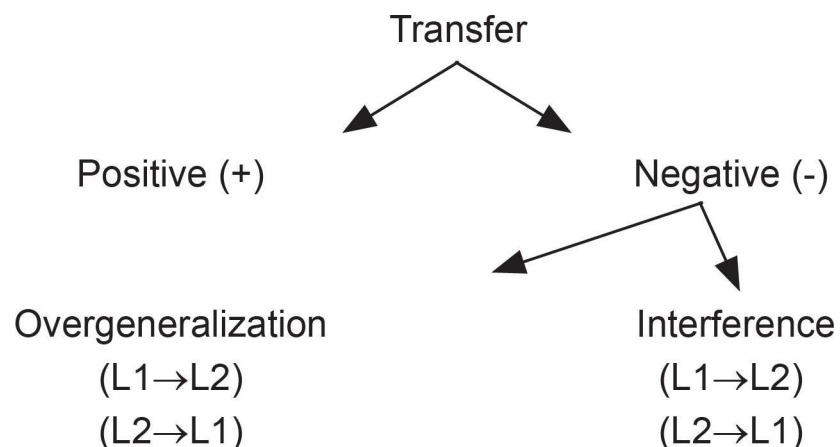
" individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture." Those forms that are similar in the source language and the target language will cause a facilitation for learners, however those that are different will cause a difficulty for them; Dulay et al. (1982) write "contrastive analysis (CA) took the position that a learner's first language "interferes" with his or her acquisition of a second language, and that it therefore comprises the major obstacle to successful mastery of the new language." For example, a German learner of Arabic who learns that امرأة means 'female human' will consider it as 'frau' in German which means also female spouse and thus he will produce erroneously أخذ الرجل إمرأته و أولاده إلى الحديقة.



Positive transfer Vs. Negative Transfer

VI

Positive transfer, on the one hand, refers to the use of old behaviours in new learning situations that results in 'correct performance' in the target language because the old behaviours and the new ones are the same. Negative transfer, on the other hand, refers to the use of old behaviours in new situations of learning that results in errors since the old behaviours and the new ones are different (Dulay et al. 1982). Cristopherson (1973, p.49) claims that: "negative transfer, or interference, is transfer of skill x which impedes the learning or has a negative influence on the command of a skill y because of differences between both skill."



Contrastive Analysis Objectives



VII

Firstly, contrastive analysis is considered as an approach used to predict the problems and difficulties that can face learners as well as errors which can be made by them. Oller (1971, p.79) claims that contrastive analysis is "... a device for predicting points of difficulty and some of the errors that learners will make." According to Christopherson (1973), predicting problems in second language learning can be realized through knowing the similarities and differences between the source language and the target language. That is, providing insights into similarities and differences between the native language and the foreign language will help the linguist to discover the difficulties that can encounter the learner during his process of learning that foreign language.

Secondly, contrastive analysis is considered as an approach that aims at diagnosing errors. It is worth mentioning that this role is only attributed to the weak version of (CA) and not to its strong version since the first has an explanatory function while the second has a predictive one. Thus, the weak version with its explanatory function enables the teacher to use his linguistic knowledge to account for some errors made by learners of a foreign language. James (1980, p. 148) claims that "An important ingredient of the teacher's role as monitor and assessor of the learner's performance is to know why certain errors are committed. It is on the basis of such diagnostic knowledge that the teacher organizes feedback to the learner and remedial work."

Thirdly, contrastive analysis aims at developing course materials for language teaching. Fries (1945) was among those who support converting data from (CA) into teaching programs; he argues that a successful teaching process can be achieved by using course material based on systematic comparison of the source language and the target language. Dulay et al. (1982) writes "... a comparison of a learner's L1 and L2 -contrastive analysis- should reveal areas of difficulty for L2 students, thereby providing teachers and developers of L2 materials with specific guidelines for lesson planning."

Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses



VIII

Studying linguistics will undoubtedly lead you to encounter divergent views and many interesting hypotheses related to language and language function. Among these interesting hypotheses, we have the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). First, it would be useful to start by giving some theoretical assumptions that turn around the Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses:

- 1- Learning a language is a question of habit formation.
- 2- The old habits of the foreign language learner may interfere with their new learning task.
- 3- Comparison of the native language and the target language can show the similarities and differences between them.

A. The Strong Version

The strong version or priori version claims that the difficulties that will face learners can be predicted by the contrast of the two languages. Richards (1974, p.60) argues that " the strong version states that the learner's behavior is predictable on the basis of a comparison of LS and LT." In addition, the priori version claims that the differences between the source language and the target language can lead to the prediction of (L2) learning problems (Christopherson, 1973).

B. The Weak Version

The weak version or posteriori version, on the other hand, claims that some observed learning problems can be accounted for by the differences between the source language and the target language (Christopherson, 1973). Richards (1974, p.61) claims that " the weak claim of contrastive analysis is that of accounting for learner behavior."

Contrastive Analysis Debate



IX

During the second half of the 1960s, some assumptions of contrastive analysis began to be criticized by many linguists such as Mackey (1966), Ritchie (1967), Newmark and Reible (1968) and others. Thus, the claim that was made by Lado (1957) and Fries (1945) concerning the predictive power of contrastive analysis and the relation between first and second language acquisition came under attack. In addition to that, contrastive analysis relevance to the teachers and language learning was questionable because many language problems were not solved by using the (CA) approach. Corder (1967, p.162) writes

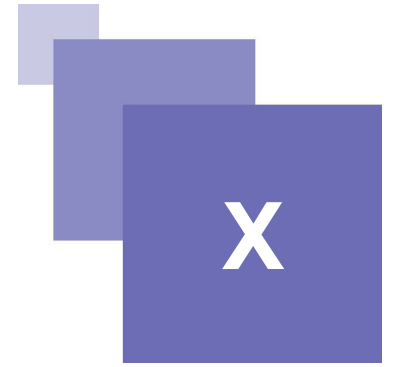
Teachers have not always been very impressed by this contribution from the linguist for the reason that their practical experience has usually already shown them where these difficulties lie and they have not felt that the contribution of the linguist has provided them with any significantly new information. They note, for example, that many of the errors with which they were familiar were not predicted by the linguist anyway.

The first criticism against contrastive analysis was that the predictions of students' errors made by this approach are not reliable. Mackey (1966) argues that the errors predicted by a linguist who relies on (CA) in his study are less reliable than those predicted by experienced teachers. Baird (1967) explains how (CA) prediction about the pronunciation of the Indian dental [t] and retroflex [ɖ] in English was not true. According to (CA), these two Indian allophones will be substituted for the English phoneme [t]. However, this was not the case since the retroflex was substituted for /t/ while the dental for /θ/. In this regard, Baird (1967, p.21) writes " it is unlikely that a contrastive study of the phonology of Hindi or Urdu and English would have enable the teacher to predict this choice with any certainty."

The second criticism was that of Newmark and Reibel (1968) who criticize those who believe that interference is the only cause of errors made by learners. They argue that the real cause of such errors is the ignorance of (L2) items and thus they present the "ignorance hypothesis" as an alternative for the interference hypothesis. Newmark and Reibel (1968, p.160) claim that " the problem of "interference" ... reduces to the problem of ignorance, and the solution to the problem is simply more and better training in the target language."

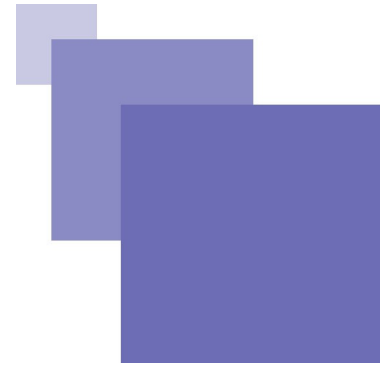
The third one states that interference strength is not determined by the typological differences between the first and the second language as it was assumed by contrastive analysis. Lee (1968) speaks about his experience during his learning of Chinese. He noticed that the various differences between his first language and Chinese helped him avoid interference since there was nothing to fall back on. So, learning a different language may not cause problems for learners because there will be no false associations and thus no interference.

Exercise



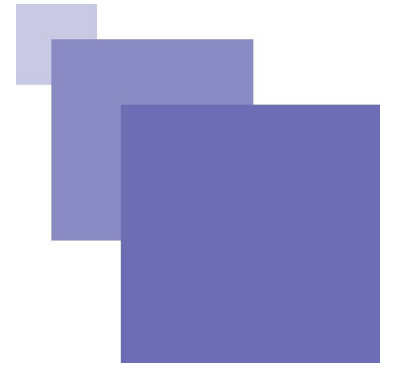
Is contrastive analysis still relevant in language teaching ?

Conclusion



In this section, we have discussed contrastive analysis hypothesis which claims that the principle barrier to the second language acquisition is the interference of the first language system with the second language system and that a structural comparison of the two languages in question would enable people to predict the learning problems. However, it was argued that learners' errors are not only due to interference they are also due to intraligual and developmental errors which reflect the learner's competence in a particular stage in learning the second language. From this, we can say that contrastive analysis has lost much of its credibility which has been "seriously damaged by the 1970's." (Odlin, 1989: 19).

Solution des exercices



>Solution n°1 (exercice p. 11)

- the way in which people learn a language other than mother tongue
- the way in which people learn their mother tongue
- the way in which people learn dialect


>Solution n°2 (exercice p. 13)

- syntactic structure
- phonetics
- morphemes
- semantic concepts
- All of them

>Solution n°3 (exercice p. 15)

- The behaviourist theory sees second language acquisition as a habit formation process while the cognitive process sees it as a reasoned thinking process
- The behaviourist theory sees second language acquisition as a reasoned thinking process while the cognitive process sees it as a habit formation process

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