**Lecture 5: Approaches of Applied Linguistics**

**A/ Contrastive analysis**

After the second world war, the need for the military forces to communicate with allies and enemies arose. Consequently, researchers from different fields of studies ( mainly linguistics, but also psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and language teaching methodology) were called to collaborate and come up with the most effective and economic methods and techniques for teaching foreign languages. One of the pioneering attempts to reach these ends- which prevailed for a long time in language teaching- is contrastive analysis.

**1/ Definition**

 Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of two or more languages with the aim to identify their structural differences and similarities. It is of two types: theoretical and pedagogical.

**2/ Basic Assumption**

 As far as 2nd language acquisition is concerned, behaviourist psychologists along with structural linguists believed that native language habits which are acquired during childhood interfere with the acquisition of the 2nd language habits which are quite different from the habits of the mother tongue.

 According to Lado (1957, p. 2)

« individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture, both productively when attempting to speak the language and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language...as practised by the natives.»

**3/ Transfer**

The transfer made by the learners is of two types, positive and negative. The former is when an old habit from the learner’s first language results in facilitating the formation of a new habit of the target language while the latter is when an old habit hinders the formation of a new one.

**4/ the CA Hypothesis**

The concept of transfer resulted in the development of a hypothesis suggesting that the difficulties and errors in learning a second language can be predicted by comparing the linguistic elements of the learners first language L1 and the target language L2, be it a second or foreign one. Hence, the greater the differences between L1 and L2, the more challenging it will be for the learner to acquire L2.

**5/ Levels and procedures of Analysis**

 Contrastive analysis is founded on the assumption that languages can be compared. The comparison is systematic in a way that renders a reliable descriptive account of the two languages. These are to be compared at different levels: *phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, and pragmatics.* The comparison is done following five main steps: *selection, description, comparison, prediction, verification*. After a thorough comparison that undergoes all these steps, the difficulty of learning an L2 can be predicted based on a **hierarchy of difficulty** *(transfer - coalescence - under differentiation - reinterpretation - over differentiation - split) .*

**6/ Criticism**

The contrastive analysis hypothesis, CAH, was criticised for some reasons**:**

- CAH attributes all errors to the learner’s L1

- many difficulties predicted by CAH do not show at all in the learner’s performance.

- many errors that do appear are not predicted at all.

- there is no correlation between learning difficulty and the differences between l1 and l2.

- CAH holds a negative attitude towards learner’s errors.

**7/ A weak version?**

Although CAH was heavily criticized for its strong claims, no one can deny that L1 can influence L2 performance either negatively or positively. Therefore, researchers suggested to accept a weaker version of CA that does not hypothesize about L1 transfer and learning difficulty, a version that is more tolerant with learner’s errors, a CA version instead of a CAH.