**CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS**

**1. A Historical Background to the Field of Contrastive Analysis**

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 إمرأة 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.

Transfer theory is then considered as the psychological basis of contrastive analysis within a behaviourist learning theory; Corder (1971, p158) writes “ one explanation of (SL) errors is that the learner is carrying over the habits of his mother-tongue into the second language … clearly this explanation is related to a view of language as some sort of habit-structure.”

**\* Positive transfer Vs. Negative Transfer**

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. In other words, positive transfer occurs when the similarities between the source language and the target language can facilitate the learning. Dulay et all (1982, p.97) argue that “… "positive transfer" (is) the automatic use of L1 structure in L2 performance when the structures in both languages are the same, resulting in correct utterances.” For example, using the verb ' justify ' by a French learner in an English context is a positive transfer since the prior learning affects positively subsequent learning

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 wich impeds the learning or has a negative influence on the command of a skill y because of differences between both skill.” Errors due to interference are found at the different levels of language .

**2.Contrastive Analysis Objectives**

Contrastive analysis, as a field of research, has a number of fundamental objectives developed to help teachers in their task of teaching a foreign language. The main objectives are: predicting (L2) problems, diagnosing (L2) errors and developing course materials for language teaching.

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.”

**3.Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses**

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.
4. Differences between the native language and the target language will cause problems, while similarities will not.
5. On the basis of the differences between languages, contrastive analysis can predict the difficulties that students can face in their learning.

These points are the major claims of the contrastive analysis hypothesis that “ was drawn from principles of behaviourist ( stimulus-response) psychology that were the accepted learning principles at that time” (Dulay et al, 1982, p.98).

Contrastive analysis hypothesis was distinguished by Wardhaugh (1970) into two versions; the first one is called the strong version and the second one the weak version.

**3.1 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).

The strong version of Contrastive Analysis has been made under two important assumptions: The first one is that differences between languages lead to errors caused by interference (ibid), Spada (2006, pp.78,79) notes that “ errors were often assumed to be the result of transfer from learners’ first language”. The second one is that similarities between languages lead to facilitation and ease in learning ( Christopherson, 1973). Therefore, where there are similarities between the first and the second language, the learner will find ease and where there are differences the learner will face a difficulty ( Lightbown& Spada 2006). Lado (1957, p.01) argues that “ … in the comparison between native and foreign languages lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning.”

The strong version of contrastive analysis was adopted by many researchers. Fries ( 1945, p.09), for example, states 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.” Lado (1957 ) also writes “we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and the culture to be learned with the native language and the culture of the student.” Therefore, the difficulties that foreign language learners will face can be predicted by contrasting the two language systems ( grammar, phonology and lexicon).

The strong version, however, was criticized by others. Wardhaugh (1970), for example, argues that the strong version of contrastive analysis exclude from consideration the speakers of the two contrasted languages and focus only on the grammars they are using.

**3.2 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.” It demands of the linguists to explain the similarities and differences between the two language systems after observing the interference phenomena ( Wardhaugh, 1970). Thus, the weak version of (CAH) has an explanatory function and not a predictive function as the strong version has. Wardhaugh (1970: ) writes “ the weak version leads to an approach which makes fewer demands of contrastive theory than does the strong version.”

Wardhaugh (1970) who considers the weak version of contrastive analysis hypothesis as a part of error analysis argues that a large number of contrastive analysis agree with the demands of the weak version and not the strong one. In order to support his view, Wardhaugh presents the example of the text of ‘ The Sounds of English and Spanish’ written by Stockwell and Bowen (1965). He argues that these two linguists did not try to predict the problems that can face English learners. They use, instead, their linguistic knowledge to account for observed problems.

According to Wardhaugh (1970) both strong and weak versions of (CAH) have common and different claims. They are common in the assumption of (L1) interference phenomenon, but different since the strong version claims predictive power while the weak one claims the ability to diagnose the committed errors.

**4. Contrastive Analysis Debate**

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 [t] 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.

The fourth criticism was against the claim which states that what is different is difficult and what is similar is easy. According to Corder (1973), difficulty is a psycholinguistic matter rather than a linguistic one and this makes it difficult to predict which (L2) features are difficult and which are easy. So, there is no relation between difficulties and differences. Furthermore, Corder (ibid) insists on learning similarities between (L1) and (L2) rather than learning just the differences because similarities sometimes create special problems for learners such as the problem of false cognates. For example, the similarity between the French word ‘lecture’ and the English word ‘lecture’ causes a problem for learners who believe that these two similar words in English and French have the same meaning while it is not the case.

The fifth criticism was about the claim that linguistic differences lead to interference. Although interference is considered as an explanation of a large number of errors made by (L2) learners, it is not the only source of error and difficulty in (L2) learning. James

(1980, p.146) writes “ there are, of course, purely quantitative limitations on the number of learners errors that CAs can predict, limitation stemming from the fact that not all errors are the result of L1 interference, i.e. interlingual errors. Other major source of errors … are of a ‘non-contrastive’ origin.” So, many errors are not due to interference. They are, instead, the result of other sources like in the case of developmental errors. According to Richards (1974) developmental errors has nothing to do with the learner’s mother tongue. They are, instead, produced due to intralinguistic factors. He (Ibid, p. 173) writes “ rather than reflecting the learner’s inability to separate two languages, intralingual and developmental errors reflect the learner’s competence at a particular stage, and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition.” He continues to claim that developmental errors are the result of the failure to learn how to apply the target language rules correctly because of the learner’s limited experience in the classroom.

According to Lightbown and Spada (2006) this type of errors is called ‘developmental’ errors because they are often similar to those made by children learning the same language but as their mother tongue. For example, it was observed that the omission of ‘is’ by learners of English in sentences like ‘that very good’ is also common among speakers of English as their native language. Furthermore, it was argued by Richards (1974) that the same kind of errors can be produced by (L2) learners of different backgrounds or by native speakers, and this proves that both first and second languages are acquired through a gradual discovery of the language system.

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