Time Works Wonders

Selected Papers in Contrastive and Cognitive Linguistics

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WARSAW

Fundamental principles of structural contrastive studies[1]

Contrastive studies constitute a part of applied linguistics, that is, all those applications of general linguistics which go beyond explaining how languages function or describing a particular language or languages for no other purpose than the description itself (Catford 1965: 19). As contrastive studies do not aim at mere description and comparison of the languages involved but use these procedures as bases for further applications, they are, in addition to theory of translation, a part of applied linguistics.

The term "contrastive" was first introduced in phonological studies, then extended to cover pedagogical comparative studies, first phonological, later also grammatical. Our article will deal only with certain grammatical issues.

The necessity of conducting contrastive studies is thus motivated by Fries (1965: 19): "The most efficient materials are those based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language." These words are based on the following premises:

1. Using a language is a manifestation of a number of linguistic habits;
2. Each language has unique structure and substance[2];
3. The structure of the native language (L_1) is not always helpful in learning the structure of a foreign language (L_2);
4. Any two languages may display similarities in certain places of their structures, as well as differences. The consequence of this is, among other things, that extralinguistic situations are associated in different languages with different linguistic signals. These signals may be formally similar;
5. Places which are similar in L_1 and L_2 are said to be easier to learn than those that are different;

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1 First published in *Glottodidactica* 2: 33-39. 1967.
2 It concerns mainly surface structures of a particular language. It is generally assumed that surface structures of languages display more differences than deep structures. However, in view of the fact that a learner of a foreign language is exposed to surface structures, which he has to mechanize in the process of learning, these surface structures must become the first object of the teacher's interest. I recognize the importance of examining deep structures in linguistics as such, including contrastive studies, but I am of the opinion that deep structure can only be learned through learning the surface structures as language habits are formed only via their oral manifestations viz. surface structures. It is obvious that deep structure has to be learned as well since without it one cannot even talk about "knowing" a language (cf. Chomsky 1965: 47).

6.   Language interference, i.e. transferring linguistic habits of L_1 to L_2 (and possibly vice versa), is an inevitable outcome of the language contact which occurs in the process of learning L_2 (see Szulc 1960);
7.   Language interference is in proportion with the degree of difference between equivalent places in the two L's.[3]

Contrastive studies aim at finding those places in L_2 which may be subjected to the interference of L_1. This aim is attained by comparing congruent and equivalent constructions in the languages involved. The procedure results in discovering such places in the structure of L_2 where the student faces a choice between contrasting forms with no equivalent contrast in his own language or with the contrast which is expressed by different linguistic media.

The opinion quoted from Fries, correct as far as it goes, has been stimulating most of the subsequent proceedings in the area of contrastive studies. However, this fundamental motto seems to require a more concrete and exact rendering when it comes to practical execution. Lado (1957), which is only a semi-theoretical treatment, did not formulate theoretical principles of contrastive studies in such a way as to be entirely unobjectionable. This work conceives of contrastive studies as a comparison of two language systems as entities, though admittedly on three planes: phonological, grammatical and lexical. The procedure, which may be called classical Friesian method, is as follows: first, separate descriptions of the systems of L_1 and L_2 are produced, and next they are juxtaposed to bring out differences and similarities. This procedure is based on a rather erroneous assumption that all places in the systems of the two languages are equally comparable. Yet, it happens too frequently that it is impossible to establish a one-to-one correspondence between particular elements of the two systems to be compared, as may be exemplified in the existence of certain tenses in English vs. a tense in French; moreover, sometimes there is no correspondence between a system in one language and a system in another. Instead, a system in one language may correspond to parts of two or more systems in another, as is the case with the system of Russian aspect, which does not correspond to any one system in English.

The above examples seem to necessitate an introduction of at least two modifications to the classical assumption. They deal with establishing first, whether the systems of L_1 and L_2 can be treated as entities; second, what in L_1 and L_2 is comparable.

It is impossible to compare two language systems as wholes since language is a system of subsystems and only the latter ones can be compared with equiva-

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3   These assumptions are sometimes only implicit in works by Fries and his successors.

lent subsystems in another language, provided the principle of equivalence has been clearly stated. Here is what Halliday et al. (1964: 113) says on the subject: "There can be no question of, say, 'comparing English and Urdu'. Each language is a complex of a large number of patterns, at different levels and at different degrees of delicacy: a 'system of systems', in one well-known formulation. There can be no single, general statement accounting for all of these, and therefore no overall comparative statement accounting for the difference between two languages. One may be able to compare, for instance, the nominal group of English with the nominal group of Urdu, or English clause structure with Urdu Clause structure; but one cannot generalize from these two comparisons. In no sense can it be said that English clause structure is to Urdu clause structure as the English nominal group is to the Urdu nominal group."

The above quotation explicitly states one of the main principles of contrastive studies, i.e. that only comparisons of structures of particular systems are possible. Another important principle had been earlier recognized by Fries and his followers: before any comparison, one must avail oneself of descriptions of the systems to be compared (see Fries 1945: 5). This leads us to our second modification reflecting a problem which has not received proper attention from the classical Friesian school. It is the technique of selecting comparable constructions, elements of comparable systems. Let us once more quote Halliday et al. (1964: 113-114): "Every comparative statement presupposes three steps: first, the separate description; second, the establishment of comparability, third, the comparison itself." The second step "establishment of comparability" and hence, establishment of what in L_1 can be compared with what in L_2, has been neglected by Fries and his successors. The reason might have been that the first contrastive studies were done with languages which were typologically similar when it was easy to establish analogies between particular systems intuitively. For example, English and French personal pronouns are clearly analogous, which is easy to see as they are formally similar. However, it would be impossible to find any formal correspondences between the system of English articles and any system in Polish since none of partially corresponding Polish systems occupies an analogous position in the economy of Polish text. It does not follow that the system of English articles cannot be compared with anything in Polish. But in order to effect any comparisons one must consider the notion of *equivalence*. The simplest way is to rely on translations. Catford (1965: 20) defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language."[4] From his subsequent discussion of equivalence it follows that texts are equivalent when one may be substituted for

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4   Catford distinguishes several kinds of translation which are not relevant in contrastive studies. The kind defined above is called "total free translation".

the other in a given situation. In order to establish whether particular texts are equivalent we must rely "on the authority of a competent bilingual informant or translator" (Catford 1965: 27).[5]

We may, then, consider as *equivalent* such pairs of texts and their components (i.e. constructions) which may result from translating one into the other. If the texts or the constructions are at least partially equivalent, they are comparable. If we consider Polish and English systems of personal pronouns, we shall be able to note that they are comparable not only because of formal similarities, but also on account of the fact that their elements are equivalent as they are constituents of equivalent constructions:

> Sophy has taken *his* book.
> Zofia zabrała *jego* książkę.
> Sophy has taken *her* book.
> Zofia zabrała *swoją* (*jej*) książkę.

In the above examples the equivalent constructions exhibit formal similarity since they consist of formally corresponding elements. Another set of equivalent constructions consists of:

> He *was* severely *punished*.
> *Został* srodze *ukarany*.

They are equivalent as may be attested by a competent bilingual informant; in addition they exhibit formal similarity since they both make use of the elements of the systems of English and Polish primary auxiliaries (English system BE, HAVE, DO; Polish system BYĆ$_1$, BYĆ$_2$, ZOSTAĆ, BYWAĆ). The two equivalent constructions employ elements of the systems of primary auxiliaries in the structure of the passive voice. Formally similar equivalent constructions such as the ones quoted above may be called congruent. There may be constructions which are equivalent but not congruent since they do not exhibit formal similarities. "On pójdzie" – "He will go" may serve as an illustration of this type of constructions.

It is necessary to note one important aspect of the similarity of certain constructions. We have been quoting examples of constructions consisting of elements that do not necessarily display *lexical* correspondences. For example the personal pronoun *swój* does not have any one lexical equivalent in English. Another illustration may be found in the following sentences:

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5   It seems obvious that a linguist engaged in contrastive studies may himself act as "competent bilingual informant".

The book *was* written in 1918.
Książka *została* napisana w roku 1918.

The two constructions are equivalent (translation) and formally similar (an auxiliary to form the passive voice); therefore they are congruent. However, they differ in so far as the lexical meaning of the auxiliary verbs appearing in them is not equivalent. BE is not a lexical equivalent of ZOSTAĆ, which a Pole may associate with such English verbs as *leave*, *remain*, etc. It is fairly probable that congruent constructions which display lexical correspondence of particular elements are easier to learn than those which do not display such correspondence. Congruent constructions displaying lexical correspondence are exemplified in:

Who came?
Kto przyszedł?

In such constructions the question is signalled by lexically equivalent "kto" – "who".

What we have said so far makes it possible to draw a conclusion that equivalence is the most crucial criterion of selecting particular constructions for comparison. In order to make sure that certain constructions and hence, certain systems are comparable, we must establish equivalence of their elements and then compare them formally. Halliday et al. (1964: 115) is of the opinion that "If the items are not at least sometimes equivalent in translation, they are not worth comparing."

Having established equivalence of constructions we may undertake the comparison itself. The object of this procedure will be to find differences between the constructions and systems involved. We have been using the term "formal similarity", saying that elements occupying analogous places in the economy of texts in the compared languages are formally similar. Let us develop this definition by recollecting that structural meanings, i.e. meanings that are associated with formal similarities or differences, can be signalled in all languages by means of the following kinds of grammatical signals: word order, morphophonemic elements, correlation of forms, function words, and suprasegmental elements. If equivalent constructions contain signals of the same kind, they are formally similar, and therefore congruent. If they contain signals of different kinds, they are not similar and not congruent. Here are some examples. One type of question in English is signalled by word order which is characterized by the inversion of the finite auxiliary. They are questions such as "Must you produce so much noise?", "Could they do it for me?", "Has she been doing it for a long time?" (when expressed orally they have appropriate intonation, i.e. a suprasegmental signal which we ignore for simplicity's sake). Equivalent questions in Polish are not congruent as they are not formally similar: "Czy musisz

robić tyle hałasu?", "Czy oni mogliby to dla mnie zrobić?", "Czy ona już to długo robi?". In the English constructions the question is signalled by means of word order whereas in Polish by means of the function word "czy". Another example: "I shall go" – "Pójdę." The future is signalled by different formal media viz. a function word (auxiliary in this particular case) in English and morphophonemic operations in Polish.

In conclusion we have to say a few words about practical applications of contrastive studies. The main object of contrastive studies is to constitute a rational basis for preparing materials for teaching. For a long time teachers all over the world have been making use of comparisons as a help in proper grading of the material, without perhaps being fully aware of this procedure. It is beyond any doubt that such intuitive comparisons were not always effective. Therefore, even the teachers and linguists who do not share the enthusiasm of those attributing an immense role to comparative studies will admit that in order to be effective, contrastive analyses must be exact and strict. Generally, it is admitted, however, that teaching foreign languages cannot be effected without the solid basis provided by exhaustive and exact contrastive analysis of L_1 and L_2.

To sum up we may say that the aims of contrastive studies are: first, to find contrasts in L_2 which have no equivalent contrasts in L_1; second, find contrasts in L_2 reflecting meanings which are also signalled in L_1 but by different media. These aims are accomplished by means of comparison of equivalent constructions and systems in L_1 and L_2. Each comparison presupposes three steps: 1. separate descriptions for L_1 and L_2; 2. establishing equivalence of the material selected for comparison; 3. Comparison proper.

Contrastive studies provide a basis for applying a method of teaching foreign languages effectively counteracting language interference. A method like this may be called programmed contrastive as opposed to, for example, programmed non-contrastive such as graded direct method.

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