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AN OVERVIEW OF CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

BY

Wasiu Adeniyi Adeleye: Department of General Studies, College of Nursing Sciences, Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), Idi-Araba, Lagos, Nigeria; E-mail: abdulwaxzy@gmail.com

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Abdulgafar Babatunde Aroyewun: Lagos State Ministry of Education (District IV); E-mail: aabdulgafar34@gmail.com

Abstract

Contrastive Analysis (CA) has played an important role in practical linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA) research. CA, which is based on structural linguistics and behaviourist psychology, was initially designed to forecast learner difficulties by systematically comparing the linguistic structures of a learner's first language (L1) to those of the target language (L2). Although the "strong version" of CA's prediction claims were later questioned, its contributions to the study of language transmission are still significant. This work examines CA and language teaching. It provides an overview of CA, the nature of language instruction, the importance of CA, and its criticism in foreign language teaching. It also investigates the role of CA in teaching Yoruba speakers English under agreement relations in both languages, with the goal of identifying the salient features of agreement relatives, problems associated with mastery of English agreement features, and providing reasons for and potential solutions to these problems. The study observed that learners confront numerous obstacles due to the more complex level of English agreement elements than those of the Yoruba language.

Keywords: Contrastive analysis, Second language acquisition, First language and Target language

Introduction

Language is a distinct human feature. Although other animals have ways of communicating, they are thought to be instinctual and limited in scope. Human language, on the other hand, is traditional, symbolic, complicated, and contains an endless number of options. Only the human mind is designed in a way that allows it to acquire (such) language. Language teaching has long relied on insights from theoretical and practical linguistics to improve instructional methods, curriculum creation, and student outcomes. Among these ideas, Contrastive Analysis (CA) has been especially useful, particularly in the context of second language acquisition (SLA). CA, which began in the mid-twentieth century, was founded on the notion that a systematic comparison of a learner's first language (L1) and target language (L2) may forecast learning difficulties and influence pedagogical tactics (Lado, 1957). The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), particularly in its strongest form, proposed that linguistic disparities would cause learning errors while similarities would aid acquisition. Although subsequent breakthroughs in SLA research have criticised the strong form of this hypothesis, the comparison framework of CA continues to provide useful insights, particularly when utilised wisely within modern teaching situations.

Recent research emphasises the continuous significance of CA in multilingual education, particularly in light of increased global mobility and language learner variety (Almulla, 2023). Ellis (2022) also emphasizes the role of CA in raising learners' metalinguistic awareness, particularly in instructed SLA settings. Today's educators are encouraged to use contrastive approaches not just to predict errors, but also to promote metalinguistic awareness and cross-linguistic comprehension. When combined with communicative and task-based language education, CA can be used as a diagnostic tool, allowing teachers to create materials that meet individual student needs and interlanguage patterns.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Provide a historical overview of CA and its theoretical foundations.
2. Examine the role of CA in predicting learner difficulties in language teaching.
3. Investigate the relevance of CA in teaching Yoruba speakers English under language.

Research Questions

In view of the objectives of the study; the following questions will guide the study:

1. What is the historical development of Contrastive Analysis in applied linguistics?
2. How does Contrastive Analysis explain language learning difficulties?
3. What is the relevance of CA in teaching Yoruba speakers, English language.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative descriptive research approach with CA as the central theoretical framework. The design is appropriate since the study aims to present an overview of CA in language education, including its historical evolution, theoretical underpinnings, applications, criticisms, and ongoing relevance in modern SLA. Some structural characteristics of

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Yoruba and English are used in the application of CA, and their pedagogical implications in language instruction are examined. The assertions of CA are illustrated by comparing the agreement relations in the two languages.

An Overview of Contrastive Analysis (CA)

In the mid-20th century, Contrastive Analysis (CA) emerged as a dominant framework in second language teaching, grounded in structuralist linguistics and behaviorist psychology (Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957). Fries asserted 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". Building on this foundation, Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957) formalized the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), proposing that similarities between L1 and L2 facilitate learning, while differences predict difficulties. During the 1960s and early 1970s, CA was widely adopted for curriculum design and the development of teaching materials. However, by the 1970s, empirical investigations such as those by Dulay & Burt (1974), challenged its predictive power, revealing that not all anticipated errors occurred, and numerous unpredicted errors emerged. Consequently, CA's strong version that all L2 errors stem from L1 interference fell out of favour, giving way to Error Analysis (EA) and subsequently Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972). These frameworks recognized learner errors as part of a dynamic interlanguage continuum beyond mere L1 transfer.

Recent scholarship, such as Al-Rickaby (2023), has re-examined the CA from a more moderate perspective. Reinterpreting Lado's original aims, this work argues that contrastive analysis remains valuable, especially when used to enhance learner metalinguistic awareness and cross-cultural competence; though not as a sole predictor of learner error. Contrastive linguistics studies, compares the phonological lexical and grammatical systems of languages with a view to predicting difficulties which might face native speakers of one language trying to learn another. Malmkjaer, (2002) opines that, there have to be somewhat differently constructed teaching grammars for students according to the principal typological differences of their own languages, since these to a large extent determine the sort of errors, in pronunciation and grammar, to which they are most prone. The need to tackle the problems of mother tongue interference gave rise to what is today known as contrastive linguistic or contrastive analysis (CA). As the name implies, the emphasis is on the contrast or differences between the learner's mother tongue and the language to be learnt. Differences usually lead to the impediment of learning processes while similarities usually facilitate the learning processes (Igboanusi, 2000). In the view of Sajaavara (2000), "CA is an area of comparative linguistics which is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages or subsystems of languages to determine the differences or similarities between them, either for theoretical purposes or for purpose external to the analysis itself. As originally formulated by Charles Fries (1945) and developed and popularized by Robert Lado (1957), the task of contrastive analysis was seen as the comparison of the structure of two languages and the mapping of points of difference; these differences are 'the chief source of difficulty' for the language learner, and they can form the basis for the preparation of language texts and tests, and for the correction of students learning a language (Lado, 1957).

Language Teaching

Teaching and learning are two concomitant activities. Wherever teaching really takes place, learning is expected to occur. Contemporary research demonstrates that language learning is fundamentally an integrated interplay between linguistic structures and cognitive – psychological processes. Cognitive linguistics, which has significantly influenced second language pedagogy since the 1990s, highlights this interaction by framing grammar and vocabulary not merely as abstract systems but as meaning-rich constructs deeply rooted in learners' mental models and experiences (Qin, et al 2024). Recent pedagogical interventions inspired by cognitive linguistics; such as conceptual metaphor, construction grammar, and embodied cognition employ multimodal visuals, enactment tasks, and interactive dialogues to foster both semantic understanding and psychological engagement (Liu, et al 2024; Littlemore, 2023). Commenting on this, Qin, et al (2024) posit that, this integration has been shown to significantly enhance learning outcomes across diverse contexts. They stress further that, a systematic review of 62 empirical studies found that 93.5% demonstrated measurable gains in learner comprehension and retention when instruction was grounded in cognitive principles. Moreover, psycholinguistic findings; such as those from embodied cognition research indicate that comprehension is supported by sensorimotor simulation mechanisms during language processing, reinforcing the view that linguistic acquisition and cognitive processes are co-dependent (embodied cognition studies). Together, these strands of research underscore that effective language learning transcends rote memorization, thriving instead on the dynamic synergy between structural linguistic knowledge and cognitive – psychological engagement.

Learning a language involves technical and mechanical processes. From psychological postulations, motivation, attitude and intelligence play a great role in the learning process. Language exposed to a learner in a well-structured manner moving from simple to complex and from known-to-unknown. There is the teacher - learner dichotomy and most of the time in a highly specified environment called classroom. The teaching of second and foreign language is a major international enterprise. For the purpose of this paper, we shall tailor our discussion towards the teaching of the English language as a second or foreign language.

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Language learning is not a fragmentary process but rather follows a detailed systematic procedure. Ogunsiji (2004) highlights the four basic skills involved in learning a language. These include listening, speaking, reading and writing. Reading and listening are regarded as receptive language skills while speaking and writing are considered as productive language skills. He further explains that receptive skills suggest 'decoding' language while productive skills suggest 'encoding' it. All the above language skills are prerequisites for a second learner to be competent. It is therefore necessary to point out that L1 and L2 learning take very different processes. L1 is to a great extent coincident with formation of concepts and to some extent conditions the learning of L2. It is important to point out that under normal classroom conditions, the learner of L2 is confronted not with the primary linguistic data of L1 or source language but with secondary linguistic data of the target language (Nickel, 1997). It is now left with the language teacher to know the proper methodic and didactic programming of L2. By methodic programming, what is meant is how it is to be taught while didactic programming refers to what is to be taught. The language teacher's knowledge of the age, educational levels and socio-cultural backgrounds of the learners will enable the teacher to use relevant and appropriate method of teaching. In considering relevant aspects of language teaching and preparing adequate teaching materials, the language teacher should be able to suppress the task of inhibiting effects of the first language on the internalization of the second language system.

Relevance of CA in Language Teaching

There are two kinds of CA: theoretical and applied. The former look for the realization of universal category X in both language A and B while the later are preoccupied with the problem of how a universal category X, realized in language A as Y, is rendered in language B. Applied CAs, therefore, are interpretation of theoretical CAs. This shows that the pedagogical exploitation of CA has tended to be in form of 'insights' and 'implications' and not of classroom application. It has been in the form of 'background reading for teachers rather than pedagogic materials for learner (James, 1980). Addressing the relevance of CA, Carroll J.B cited in Nickel (1971), looks at contrastive linguistics from the point of view of the psychology of learning. He and others have called attention to the well-known fact of interlingual convergence and divergence phenomenon and language learning process. He observed that convergence phenomenon is advantageous in encoding, but disadvantages in decoding. As such CA will be relevant to the designing of teaching materials for all age groups and the practical application of such results will make it possible for teacher of the target language to have a knowledge of the structure of the source language.

James (op. cit.) asserts that CA subsumes a study of bilingual competence and a performance of an individual in a second language. He further stated that within CA, it is assumed that learners of a second language will tend to transfer features of their L1 to their L2 utterances. CA therefore, establishes point-to-point relations between differences and similarities of the respective system (L1 and L2) with the aim of explaining and possibly helping teachers of a language to remedy errors made by second language learners. The important function of CA then is to facilitate the teaching of meaning by juxtaposing equivalences in the structures of the L1 and L2. For instance, on the Contrastive Analysis of Yoruba and the English language with respect to the aspects of agreement relations in each, Lamidi (2004) states in his studies that Yoruba agreement system is not elaborate as that of English. In his words,

> *English combines both structural and semantic features in its agreement feature and only learners who can think the English way will know when conjoined nouns refer to a singular item and when a singular noun refers to more than one thing (p. 51)*

The foregoing is based on the notion that structural comparisons between L1 and L2 can anticipate or explain learner difficulty. Although its predictive scope has shrunk over time, CA remains influential, especially when paired with corpus-informed and computational methods that expand its usefulness.

Contrastive Analysis of Yoruba and the English language

Numerous academics, including Banjo (1969), Lamidi (1996), Ojo (1996), and Lamidi (2004), have conducted in-depth analyses of the Yoruba and English languages. We will highlight some characteristics of agreement relations in each and compare various structures to highlight variations in agreement relations in order to demonstrate the claims of CA in this study. Note that we simply looked at number, gender, and person agreement.

Person Agreement

Person agreement refers to verbs (and sometimes pronouns or other elements) must align with the grammatical person of their subject – namely, first person (I, we), second person (you), or third person (he, she, they, it). In English for instances, when NPs occur in either the first, second, or third-persons forms, the verb following must agree with the subject as in:

1. (a) I am writing
   (b) You are writing
   (c) He is writing

A quick look at structures of Yoruba language may show the task ahead of a learner;

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2. (a) Emi ni oluko re
'I am his teacher'
(b) Iwo ni oluko rè
'You are his teacher'
(c) Oun ni oluko re
He/she is his teacher.

Let consider some structures from Lamidi (2004)

3. (a) Mo gbo iroyin náa
'I heard the news.'
(b) O gbo Iroyin naa
'You heard the news.'
(c) O gbo iroyin naa
'He/she heard the news.'

The above examples show the Yoruba verbs are invariant wherever they occur with different NPs in different persons. Therefore, Yoruba learners of English will have to put in more effort in learning English verb with its peculiarities and apply this knowledge to the rules of agreement as it concerns the pronouns while the language teacher will have to lay more emphasis on the teaching of this aspect of grammar.

Gender agreement

Gender agreement on words is perceived as the concord relation holding between entities that shares the same gender. These are masculine, feminine and neuter (neutral). Although, these are not morphologically realized on nouns, gender distinctions are inherent in words such as king, boy and lion (Masculine); queen, girl and lioness (Feminine); and child, parent and spoon (neutral). Nevertheless, pronouns in English show theses distinctions (Lamidi, op. cit.).

Let consider the following:

4. (a) She looked at herself in the mirror.
(b) He cut himself with razor.
(c) It hurt itself
5. (a) Kemi washed her cloth.
(b) Jay-jay broke his leg.
(c) The dog bit its tail.

The above examples show reflexives in (4) agree in gender (and number) with the subject of each sentence. In (5) the pronoun also agrees in person and number with the features of the NP subjects. In contrast to the English structures above, Yoruba has no gender specification of pronoun though the distinctions are inherent in such nouns that refers
to the three genders. Consider the following:

6. (a) O toju ara re
'He/She/It took care of himself/herself/itself,
(b) O wo ara re
'He /She / It looked at himself / herself / itself.

In the above examples, there is no gender distinction in the personal and reflexive pronouns of Yoruba language. This explains why learners of English make mistake on gender distinctions saying' he when they mean she' or vice versa. We may say that the personal pronoun 'O' and the reflexive 're' which combine the three genders interfere in learners' performance. These are some of the problems encounters by the Yoruba learner of the English language.

Number Agreement

Number agreement is another area which tenders of English as second language need to take cognizance of while teaching. Number is the quantity of subjects in an expression. Words can be singular or plural. This is usually reflected on English NPs by plural affixes such as '–es', '-s', '-ies' and zero morpheme. The number agreement can take different forms.

i. Subject – Verb Agreement

Here, if the verb must agree with its subject, a singular subject must take a singular verb. Likewise, a plural subject must take a plural verb. However, when a learner imbibes this rule, he may have problems with the following examples:

7. a. I eat three times daily
b. You eat three times daily
c. We eat three times daily
d. He eats three times daily

According to Lamidi (op. cit), in effect confusion will set in because the number marking on verbs is reflected on verbs which co-occur with the third person singular subject and this is the area the teacher should emphasis of subject –verb concord. This is because the verb forms in Yoruba do not display such distinction as seen in the following examples:

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8. (a) Ade n rin
'Ade walks/is walking'
(b) Ade ati Bayo n rin
'Ade and Bayo walk/are walking'
9. (a) Mo n rin
'I walk/am walking'
(b) O n rin
'You walk/ are walking'
(c) A n rin
'We walk/are walking'
(d) Won n rin
'They walk/are walking'

In essence, whether the subject (or NP) is singular or plural as in (8) the verb and its ancillary remain uninflected in Yoruba. The same is also true of pronouns irrespective of whether they are singular (9a & b) or plural (9c & d). It follows that the errors of subject –verb concord especially in the area of third person singular emanate from the Yoruba Mother-Tongue interference. This problem is also seen in subject-complement and object-complement agreements, tense agreement, proximity and notional concord.

By the way of summary, let us point out that applied contrastive linguistic does not aim at drawing the pupils' attention constantly and systematically to language contrasts. Its objective, rather, is to aid the textbook author in collecting and arranging his material and help the teacher in presenting his subject matter. Both author and teacher require a knowledge of contrastive grammar in order to be able to predict, explain, correct, and eliminate errors due to interference between source and target language (Nickel, 1971).
On the other hand, contrastive linguistics has its critics and must of the arguments state that the discipline has taken the issue of language predictability for granted. Let us cite just one example.

> *The major contribution of the linguistic to language teaching was seen as an intensive contrastive study of the systems L2 and the Li of the learner ... Teachers have not always 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 the contribution of the linguist has provided them with any significantly new information. They noted for example that many of the errors with which they were familiar were not predicted by the linguistic anyway. (Nickel, 1971 citing SPA Corder, (1967)*

In fact, there has been a lot of argument against CA in respect of the claims made by CA as great value for foreign language teaching. These arguments were refuted by Carl James (1971) in his paper, 'The Exculpation of Contrastive Linguistics".

However, one of the stands of Contrastive Linguistics on these arguments is that "... it must, of course, be conceded that many foreign language teachers have long recognized difficulties caused by interference from the source language. However, on the other hand, it does not hold good for all teachers, and on the other hand a systematic comparison of two language systems permits of a finer grading of difficulties. In the second place, contrastive linguistics is not all committed to the view that all mistakes made by learners of foreign languages are caused by interference from the source language. Mistakes may, of also arise from the fact that the system of the target language is not impressed with sufficient firmness on the learner's memory — a situation which leads to the infrastructural confusing and conflation of distinct rules of the target language (e.g. in the form of over generalization of new rules, hypercorrectness, etc.) ..., mistakes may have 'physiological' and 'psychological' organs, e.g. lack of attention. The linguist is not responsible for predicting errors of the later kind." (Nickel, op. cit.).

Conclusion
This paper has discussed contrastive analysis and language teaching. It has shown a brief account of contrastive analysis as a great value for foreign language teaching, a synopsis of nature and scope of language teaching, the relevance of contrastive analysis in language teaching and the critics against CA with little refutation stating the stand of the contrastive linguistics in language teaching.

Recommendations
The following recommendations were made from the study:
1. The results of contrastive analysis are not the only factors to be considered in designing teaching materials.
2. Modern foreign-language teaching must be up to date in all respects.
3. Dialogues, for instance, must deal with modern topics in a modern manner. And it must be emphasized that predicting errors as one of the contributions of CA to the design of teaching programmes is not its only task.

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