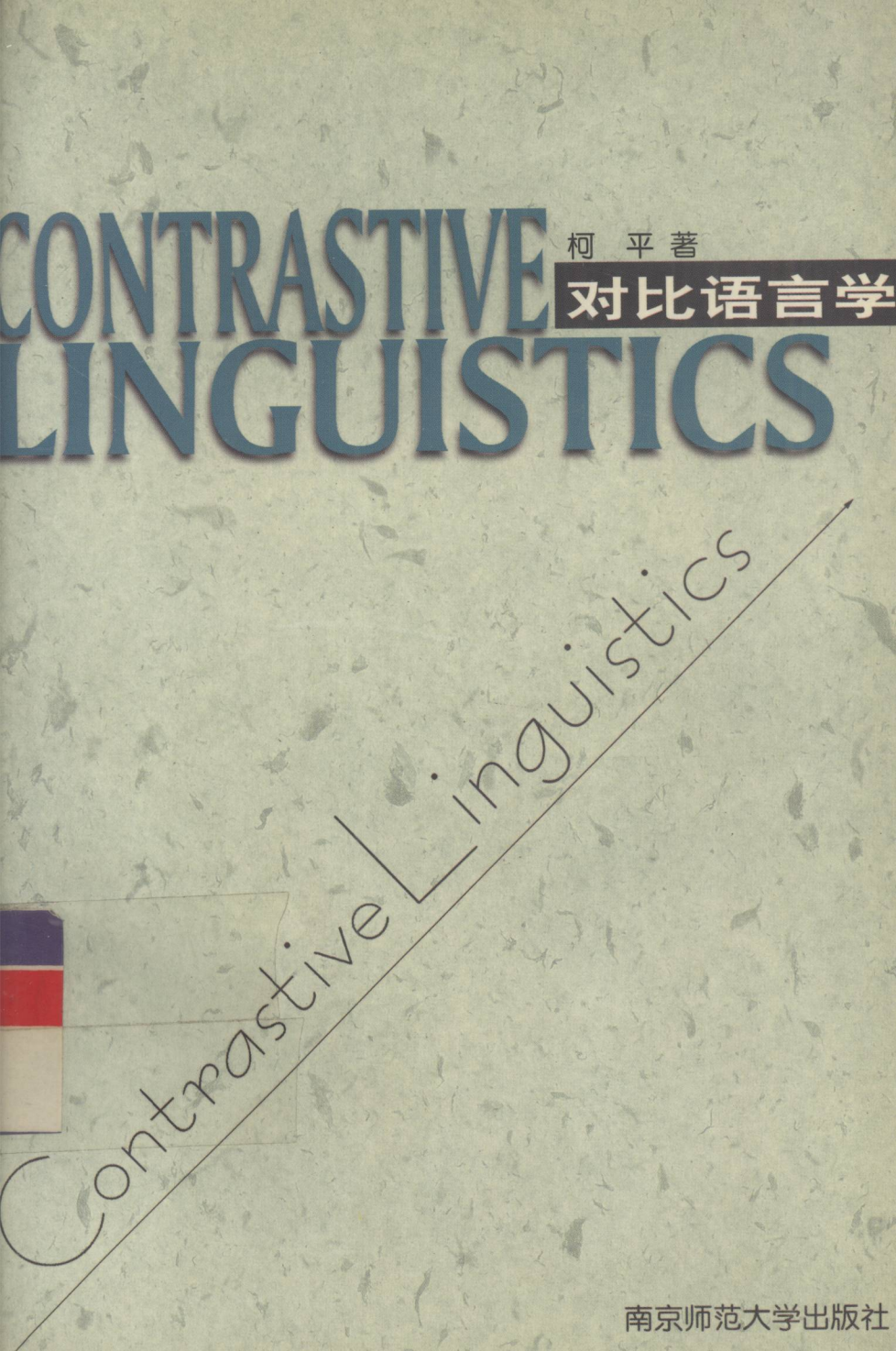
CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS

柯 平 著

对比语言学



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Preface

This work is designed as a textbook for graduate students of English who take the course of Contrastive Linguistics. It may also be used as an introductory reader of contrastive linguistics for students who have little knowledge of linguistics but are interested in the disciplines of contrastive linguistics or applied linguistics, in translation studies, foreign or second language teaching, Chinese as a foreign language, or other subjects of study which involve the use of a second language.

The work grew out of an attempt to rethink my introductory course offered to the graduate students specialized in linguistics, translation studies, and teaching methodology at Nanjing University. It is written with a one-term course in mind although, with the addition of some supplementary readings, it could be used for two terms.

Contrastive linguistics is a relatively new area of study. Although many universities and colleges in China and other countries of the world have included it in their postgraduate courses for many years, the subject of the course remains indeterminate to some extent and many explorations made in this field are still somewhat tentative. While preparing this coursebook, I kept reminding myself that a work providing merely a general survey of the state of the art of this particular branch of linguistics and its general, "standard" theories would not be of much help to the students: contrast and comparison are not ends in themselves; they should serve some meaningful

purposes. The important point is that the contrastive analysis made should lend us useful insights into some real problems in certain areas of language use and study. In my opinion, these areas should include, among others, the theory and practice of translation, second language teaching and learning, general linguistics, and anthropological linguistics. Based on this understanding, this work places greater emphasis on the subject being studied and the significance of the study than on the discipline of contrastive linguistics itself.

For the convenience of students, key terms that are newly introduced into the text, especially when they are defined, are usually printed in boldface type. Each chapter concludes with a "Study Questions" section in which are raised some questions and issues closely related to what has been dealt with in the chapter. By trying to respond to them, students can not only test their understanding of the chapter but also learn to apply what they have learned in the course to the analysis of interlingual problems in the real world.

A book of this kind no doubt draws on a wide variety of sources. I owe a lot to the sources listed in the References. I am also grateful to my students, whose questions, comments, suggestions, and keen interest in the book itself have kept me on the toe and impelled me to work hard to bring it to completion without too much delay. Finally I wish to express my thanks to Mr Fan Hongsheng, who kindly proofread my manuscripts in a meticulous way and helped greatly to reduce the number of errors.

Ke Ping

CONTENTS

PREFACE vii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 1
1.1 What is Contrastive Linguistics? 1
1.1.1 Name and Nature 2
1.1.1.1 Linguistics 2
1.1.1.2 Contrastive Linguistics 5
1.1.2 Classification 10
1.1.2.1 Theoretical and Applied Contrastive Linguistics 10
1.1.2.2 Micro-contrastive and Macro-contrastive Linguistics 16
1.2 Why Contrastive Linguistics? 17
1.3 History and Development 26
Study Questions 33

CHAPTER 2 PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES 35
2.1 Basic Assumptions & Hypotheses 35
2.1.1 Transfer: the Psychological Basis of Contrastive Analysis 35
2.1.2 The Strong and Weak Versions of CA Hypothesis 37
2.1.3 The Predictive Power of Contrastive Analysis 39
2.2 Criteria for Comparison 41
2.2.1 The Surface Structure (SS) 42
2.2.2 The Deep Structure (DS) 45

2.2.3 Translation Equivalence 51
2.3 Procedures 57
Study Questions 58

CHAPTER 3 PHONETIC & PHONOLOGICAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSES 61
3.1 Phonetics and Phonology 61
3.2 Contrastive Phonetics 63
3.3 Contrastive Phonology 67
3.3.1 Phonological Contrastive Analysis 67
3.3.2 Two Phonological Models 69
3.4 Suprasegmental Contrastive Analysis 73
Study Questions 76

CHAPTER 4 LEXICAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS 78
4.1 Contrastive Lexical Morphology 79
4.2 Contrastive Lexical Semantics 83
4.2.1 Motivation of Words 84
4.2.2 Sense Relationships 89
4.2.2.1 Syntagmatic Semantic Relationship: Collocation 90
4.2.2.2 Paradigmatic Semantic Relationships 92
4.2.2.3 Lexical Fields and Lexical Gaps ... 95
4.2.3 Semantic Features 100
4.3 Three Active Areas 105
Study Questions 117

CHAPTER 5 GRAMMATICAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS 120
5.1 Contrastive Analysis of Inflectional Morphology 122
5.1.1 Aspect 124
5.1.2 Case 125

5.1.3 Gender 126
5.1.4 Mood 127
5.1.5 Number 127
5.1.6 Person 127
5.1.7 Tense 128
5.1.8 Voice 128
5.2 Syntactic Contrastive Analysis 133
5.2.1 Structuralist Approach (Surface-structure Contrasts) 134
5.2.2 Generative Approach 140
5.2.2.1 Transformational Grammarian Approach (Deep-structure Contrasts) 140
5.2.2.2 Case Grammarian Approach (Deeper-structure Contrasts) 149
Study Questions 157

CHAPTER 6 TEXTUAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS 159
6.1 Text and Discourse 162
6.2 Defining Characteristics of the Text 163
6.3 Contrastive Analysis of Textual Cohesion 166
6.3.1 Semantic Cohesion 168
6.3.1.1 Reference 168
6.3.1.2 Substitution 172
6.3.1.3 Ellipsis 173
6.3.1.4 Conjunction 176
6.3.1.5 Lexical Relationships ("Lexical Cohesion") 181
6.3.2 Structural Cohesion 182
6.3.2.1 Parallelism 183
6.3.2.2 Comparison 188
6.2.2.3 Information Structure 189

6.3.3 Different Languages Preferring Different Cohesive Devices 201
6.4 Contrastive Analysis of Textual Coherence 203
Study Questions 213

CHAPTER 7 PRAGMATIC CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS 215
7.1 Speech Act Theory (Unilateral Communication) 215
7.1.1 Speech Acts 216
7.1.2 Felicity Conditions 218
7.2 Conversational Interaction (Bilateral Communication) 220
7.2.1 Structural Components of Conversation 220
7.2.1.1 Openings 221
7.2.1.2 Maintaining Conversation 223
7.2.1.3 Closings 229
7.2.2 Principles of Conversational Organization 231
7.2.2.1 The Principle of Cooperation (Be Clear) 232
7.2.2.2 Rules of Politeness (Be Polite) 237
Study Questions 242

REFERENCES 244
INDEX 254

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This book is written in a plain and direct style. It consists of seven chapters. In the first two chapters, we discuss the name, nature, classification, and history of contrastive linguistics, as well as the general principles of and procedures for contrastive analysis. By doing that we get some basic ideas about the subject of our study: its status, its theoretical background and assumptions as well as its methodology.

The remaining chapters, which make up the main body of this book, will be devoted to contrastive analysis at various linguistic levels. We shall first take a "classic" contrastive look at languages, concentrating on lexis and grammar; and then assume a macrolinguistic approach to contrastive linguistics, treating language as function in context, and looking into such topics as contrastive text linguistics and pragmatics. The emphasis of these chapters will be placed on the contributions contrastive linguistics can make to fields as diverse as translation studies, language learning and teaching, writing, and general linguistic theory.

1.1 What is Contrastive Linguistics?

When we take up any subject for study, we usually start by investigating its nature, its relevance to us, and the way to study it.

In other words, we ask three basic questions: (a) what it is, (b) why it is needed or important, and (c) how to do it. In this section we shall try to answer these three basic questions about contrastive linguistics.

1.1.1 Name and Nature

Apparently contrastive linguistics is something related to or included under linguistics. So let us, as the saying goes, begin from the very beginning and start with an examination of the name and nature of linguistics.

1.1.1.1 Linguistics

Apparently contrastive linguistics is something related to or included under linguistics. So let us, as the saying goes, begin from the very beginning and start with an examination of the name and nature of linguistics.

Language is used by us everyday. It is a reality, that is, it is something actually seen or experienced by us. Generally speaking, we may distinguish three aspects of reality — physical, social, and psychological — and at least five modes of or approaches to knowing reality, that is, philosophical, mathematical, theological, humanistic, and scientific. Various disciplines, in light of the aspects of reality they are interested in, approach their subject matter largely from the point of view of one of these five modes.

We may consider the following facts about language and approaches to the reality of language before we come to characterize the nature of linguistics.

(1) Language is socially acquired and used. As a social phenomenon, it obviously has social reality;

(2) As human behavior, language has psychological reality. Two major linguistic schools in the 20th century have been structuralist linguistics and generative linguistics. Both of them analyze language in terms of human behavior (that is, "verbal behavior" — structuralist linguist Skinner wrote a book in this very title).

Structuralist linguistics adopts a behavioristic approach towards language, treating it as a product of the stimulus-response mechanism of the human kind. This approach has been proved to interpret incorrectly or inadequately the nature of the phenomenon of language. The limitations of behaviorism as a method of explanation of human behavior have been severely criticized by the generative schools of linguistics led by Chomsky.

Chomsky argues that the basic mistake of behaviorists is that they did not postulate any mental mechanism underlying organized human behavior, linguistic behavior included. The transformational theory of language assumes the existence of such an underlying mental structure which, it asserts, is common to all people. The study of language makes access to this mental reality possible. Thus, the linguistic theory is supposed to contribute to the general knowledge about the mental capacities of man rather than to the knowledge of his linguistic behavior.

Although the structuralist and generative linguists harbor different views about the nature of the mental mechanism from which language is produced, it is not difficult to see that they all regard language as something related to human mind and treat language as a psychological reality.

(3) Philosophical, mathematical, and theological approaches to the reality of language are evidently relevant only in rather limited ways.

(4) Neither is a humanistic approach of much use to the linguists. The **humanistic approach** lays emphasis on the individual characteristics. The typical method it employs is called *verstehen* ("understand [from within]"). This is a term used in Germany from the late 19th century on to denote the understanding of a subject of study from within, by means of empathy, intuition, or imagination, as opposed to getting to know it from without, by means of observation or calculation. The humanistic approach was thought by some to be characteristic of the social sciences as opposed to the natural sciences; by others, to be characteristic of history and literature, as opposed to the social sciences. Linguists, however, are not like philologists; they are not interested in the individualistic traits as seen in the use of language, but in all the properties which are common to all the users of a given language, and further, in all the properties which define the notion of human language as such. Neither do linguists apply the *verstehen* method, because this method is based on the principle that we can understand the behavior of men by being able to share their "state of mind" — it is certainly not a method of verification and can hardly be used as a scientific tool. (By verification we mean the

establishment of a belief or proposition as true. According to the Logical Positivists, if a proposition is to be significant, it has to be verifiable by sense-experience, or by attention to the meaning of the words that express it, or, indirectly, by induction or demonstration.) So linguistics is definitely not much associated with the humanistic approach to the understanding of reality.

(5) What is left, then, is the scientific approach. Linguistics claims to be an empirical science and as such it aims at true (in the sense of "verifiable" and "falsifiable") statements by means of formulating testable hypotheses.

Based on the analysis made above of the features of language and the relevant approaches to it, we may depict the nature of linguistics as follows:

> **Linguistics** is a scientific study of language, which exists mainly as social and psychological realities.

1.1.1.2 Contrastive Linguistics

What, then, is contrastive linguistics? Apparently, contrastive linguistics is a kind of or a branch of linguistics. As its name suggests, contrastive linguistics involves *contrast* or *comparison*. Comparison is one of the basic ways by which we study objects and get to know them, just as the saying goes, "only by comparison can one distinguish." The method of comparison is widely used in linguistics. Almost all the branches of linguistics involve comparison of one kind or another, since to identify and elaborate on a particular feature of the human language, linguists usually

have to make an explicit or implicit comparative or contrastive analysis of the various forms in which the feature finds expression and the parallels of these forms in some related systems. For instance, to establish the **plural allomorph,** (that is, all the different forms of the plural morpheme in a language) in English, linguists have to take into account the different forms it may take: */s/* (as in *cats* /kæts/); /z/ (as in *dogs* /dɒgz/); and /ɪz/ (as in *classes* /klɑːsɪz/).

We may come to a better understanding of the nature of contrastive linguistics by putting it in the perspective of a general framework of comparisons within and between languages.

Comparison may be conducted intralingually or interlingually, on a synchronic basis or on a diachronic basis. So four types of comparison may be distinguished:

(1) ***Synchronic intralingual comparison***. This is the comparison of the constituent forms of the phonetic, phonological, lexical, grammatical and other linguistic systems within a particular language during a specific period of its evolution. For instance, to identify and describe the phonetic system of a **particular** language, linguists need to compare the places of articulation (e.g. for vowels: front as /iː/ in *beat*, back as /əʊ/ in *boat*, high as /ʊ/ in *put*, low as /ɒ/ in *pot*) and manners of articulation (e.g. unrounded as /e/ in *bait*, rounded as /uː/ in *shoe*, voiced as /d/ in *den*, stopped as /t/ in *team*) of all the phonemes within the system, the acoustic qualities of these phonemes as well as their distributions in the syllables.

(2) ***Diachronic intralingual comparison***. This kind of comparison occurs where the history of a given language is

involved. A diachronic comparison of English, for instance, reveals that the language has undergone four stages of evolvement: Old English (up to 1150), Middle English (1150-1500), Early Modern English (1500-1700) and Late Modern English (1700 onwards), with its grammar becoming increasingly analytic, that is, the number of inflected word endings drastically decreased and grammatical meanings are increasingly expressed by word order and function words such as prepositions. Diachronic intralingual comparison is the principal method employed by the researchers of language history, etymology and other related branches of linguistic study.

(3) ***Diachronic interlingual comparison***. When comparison crosses language borders, we get a very important branch of linguistics that developed in modern times. This is the so-called **(comparative) historical linguistics** (also known as **philology** which started in the late 18th century and evolved into a dominant branch of linguistic study in the 19th century. The (comparative) historical linguists (or philologists), such as Verner, Rask, Bopp, and Schleicher, were concerned with **linguistic genealogy**, or the establishment of the genetic "families" of language-groups. They achieved the objective through a comparison of the linguistic systems of different but usually related (**cognate**) languages in the various stages of their historical development. By means of comparing historically related forms in different languages, they tried to postulate or *reconstruct* the **proto-language** of a group of related languages. For instance, the English orientalist Sir William Jones compared Sanskrit with Greek and Latin and pointed out in 1786 that the former bore a strong affinity to the Latin. For

example, /p/ in Sanskrit is found to be systematically related to /f/ in English, as *pita* "father" and *father*. Based on the findings of Jones, some German scholars, notably Schleicher, reconstructed the **Proto-Indo-European** (or **"Indo-Aryan," "Indo-Germanic"**) language, the family of languages that was postulated to have been spoken for at least the last 3 000 years over the greater part of Europe and extended into Asia as far as northern India, and hence to be the common **ancestor language** to languages used in Europe and India.

(4) ***Synchronic interlingual comparison***. According to the purpose of comparison, three kinds of it may be distinguished:

(a) The first kind of synchronic interlingual comparison is carried out with a view to finding out the common features of and the laws governing the structures of all the languages in the world. Its goal, in other words, is to find out the **"language universals"** or **"linguistic universals"**. This is something which generative schools of linguistics headed by Transformational Grammar have been endeavoring to do.

(b) The second kind of synchronic interlingual comparison is conducted for the aim of finding out the typical differences between all the languages in the world in their structure so that these languages can be classified according to their formal features. This approach, called **"linguistic typology"**, has established a classificatory system for the languages of the world into which individual languages can be slotted according to their preferred grammatical devices: so now we can talk about "synthetic," "analytic," "inflectional", "agglutinating," and "tone" languages.

The approach adopted in this kind of comparison is synchronic in that languages are typologically grouped according to their present-day characteristics, no reference being made to the histories of the languages, not even to their historical relatedness: thus it might happen that two languages, such as Swahili and Hungarian, which could not possibly have ever been genetically related, turn out, typologically, to belong to the same grouping. (So far as Swahili and Hungarian are concerned, both belong to the so-called "agglutinating languages.")

(c) The third kind of synchronic interlingual comparison is conducted within the scope of usually two languages, although more languages may be involved. The aim of this kind of comparison is to find out the discrepancies and, to a lesser degree, the similarities in the structures of the languages being compared. This is exactly what contrastive linguistics undertakes to do (Xu, 1992: 3-4).

We may then characterize contrastive linguistics in the following way:

> **Contrastive linguistics is a branch of linguistics which studies two or more languages synchronically, with the aim of discovering their differences and similarities (especially the former) and applying these findings to related areas of study.**

Contrastive linguistics is also known as "**contrastive analysis**" (**CA**) or "**contrastive studies**". These three terms are largely interchangeable. In the United Kingdom and the United States, "contrastive analysis" is a regular term, but in Eastern Europe, China and some other parts of the world, the name "contrastive