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Contrastive Analysis

Carl James

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CARL JAMES

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Preface

In the heyday of structural linguistics and the pattern practice language teaching methodology which derived insights and justification from such an approach to linguistic description, nothing seemed of greater potential value to language teachers and learners than a comparative and contrastive description of the learner's mother tongue and the target language. If one could juxtapose the structures of the mother tongue against those of the target language, course designers (and teachers and learners) would be better able to plan their learning and teaching; better able to foresee difficulty and consequently better able to husband resources and direct learning and teaching effort. It was on such a basis that the 1960's saw a range of contrastive analyses published (typically between English and other world languages) and a host of language teaching courses made available. Yet, in the 1970's the bubble seemed to burst; contrastive analysis no longer claimed as much pedagogic attention, although, significantly, the decade saw the establishment of major contrastive linguistic projects, especially between English and European languages; German, Polish and Serbo-Croat. What was the reason for this decline in pedagogic interest?

Undoubtedly for two main reasons, one descriptive linguistic and the other, more complex in nature, psycholinguistic-pedagogic. Linguistically, the basis of contrastive description seemed to be unable to withstand the stresses of constantly changing models of analysis and theoretical approaches. If the substance of structural linguistics was called into question, and if the nature of one alternative, say generative syntax, was itself subject to constant emendation and often quite fundamental alteration, how could there be a stable basis upon which to attempt contrastive description? Psycholinguistically and pedagogically, teachers discovered that the contrastive descriptions to which they had been exposed were only able to predict part of the learning problems encountered by their learners, and that those points of potential difficulty that were

identified seemed to cause various and variable problems among different learners, and between the production and the perception of language. Language learning, in short, was less predictable from contrastive *linguistic* description than teachers had been led to believe. Partial descriptions of complete systems correlated uneasily with the growing system of the target language in the learner, particularly when teachers came upon idiosyncrasies of language unrelated to either the mother tongue or the target language.

In this atmosphere of a certain unfulfilment it is not surprising that contrastive analysis lost some of its pedagogic impact. We should, however, be careful not to associate the value of contrastive analysis solely in practical language teaching terms. There was always more to contrastive analysis than making claims about learner difficulty. Through the major contrastive projects referred to above, and through journals to which the present author has been a major contributor, contrastive analysis has had much to offer to translation theory, the description of particular languages, language typology and the study of language universals. Because of its closeness, however, to language learning and to the more general concept of bilingualism, contrastive analysis has always been regarded as a major branch of applied, rather than pure linguistics, and hence the appropriateness of this new addition to the *Applied Linguistics and Language Study Series*.

Dr James begins by placing contrastive analysis as an 'inter-linguistic' enterprise which looks on language not merely as form but also as function in context, not merely as system to be described but as system to be acquired: a psycho-sociolinguistic study across language boundaries. In Chapter 2, the author examines the psycho-linguistic bases of contrastive analysis, concentrating on the notion of 'transfer' which has been so powerful an element in its pedagogic appeal. Too simple an association of 'transfer' with behaviourist psychology, and too dismissive an attitude towards behaviourism by applied linguists who regarded it as a total rather than partial explanation of learning, have combined to cast doubt on the psycholinguistic bases of contrastive analysis. It is therefore all the more important that Dr James presents a balanced account in this Chapter. Quite properly, in the light of the extensive literature, it is to the linguistic components of contrastive analysis that the author accords the major sections of the book. Chapters 3 and 4 offer the reader both a theoretical framework and a practical methodology for the activity of contrastive analysis. Taking first a microlinguistic 'code' approach, and concentrating on syntax, Carl James examines

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the effect on contrastive analysis of alternative descriptive models, structuralist, transformational-generative, case grammar, while using these as means to the isolation of general grammatical categories of unit, structure, class and system, applicable to all descriptive frameworks. '*Microlinguistic Contrastive Analysis*' then follows as a practical Chapter offering a set of principles for contrastive analysis at various language levels.

To this point the discussion has focused in a 'classically' contrastive way, on phonology and morphology and sentence-syntax; Chapter 5 recalls the author's concern in Chapter 1 for language as function in context and focuses on a novel and macrolinguistic approach to contrastive analysis. Here it is possible for those readers concerned with the applications of pragmatics, and those with interests in text linguistics to see a rich potential for contrastive study. In the examination of the research in contrastive text analysis and in the illuminating suggestions for the as yet hardly disturbed ground of contrastive discourse, we begin to see the contribution that contrastive analysis can make to fields as apparently diverse as literary stylistics and social anthropology. At the same time, for those with primarily a language learning and teaching interest this Chapter provides a useful summary of work in textual structure and conversational analysis.

The final Chapters return to the mainstream of the pedagogical exploitation of contrastive analysis, and hence to the historical issues with which this Preface began. The author is rightly sceptical of any plausible, or even possible, direct application of the results of contrastive analysis to the planning of curricula or the design of teaching materials. He stresses rather its implicational value, its role as a source for experimental studies into the predictability of learner difficulty, its major theoretical contribution to current studies into interlanguage, its need to be combined with Error Analysis as a practical classroom research tool for teachers anxious to adjust their teaching to the state of knowledge of their learners. Throughout the book, Carl James has been at pains to present both a theoretical and a practical case for contrastive analysis. In the final Chapter *Some Issues of Contention* he confirms the characteristic applied linguistic position of contrastive analysis, mediating between theory and practice, and, like applied linguistics itself, a bidirectional rather than unidirectional enterprise.

Christopher N. Candlin
Lancaster, March 1980.

TO THE MEMORY OF
ALAN EDWARD SHARP
1922–1979

Acknowledgements

Ten years ago I began my first paper on Contrastive Analysis with an admission that this branch of Applied Linguistics was 'in the doldrums'. That it is slightly less so now than it was then is due to a small group of individuals who persisted in their search for relevance. Of these may I single out a few, and apologise for omitting the others; R. J. Di Pietro, Jacek Fisiak, Rudi Filipović, Eric Kellerman, Wolfgang Kühlwein, Gerhard Nickel, Wolfram Wilß, and Kari Sajavaara.

This book is very much a product of The University College of North Wales, Bangor. Hundreds of students have shared and nourished my enthusiasm for CA over the last decade. My Head of Department, the late Professor Alan Sharp, diligently encouraged this enthusiasm. And the institution itself seemed to work in partnership with The British Council to send me to the important conferences on CA.

Christopher Candlin patiently read several drafts of the manuscript and suggested numerous improvements and Glenda Roberts made a fine job of the typing. I alone have to answer for the book's faults.

Carl James

U.C.N.W.
Bangor, Wales.
11 FEB 1980

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Bangor
21 AUGUST 1982

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What is Contrastive Analysis?

1.1 The Place of CA in Linguistics

This book is concerned with a branch of linguistics called Contrastive Analysis, the practitioners of which we shall call 'contrastivists'. The first question that arises is where CA is to be located in the field of linguistics.

The term 'linguist' can refer to the following: a person who is professionally engaged in the study and teaching of one or more languages, usually not his own nor that of the community in which he works; a polyglot, who might work as a translator or interpreter; someone interested in 'language families' or language history; a person with philosophical interests in language universals or the relationship between language and thought or truth; and more. This list is not exhaustive, but is representative. Rather than making a list, it would be better to evolve a way of classifying types of linguistic enterprise. Such a classification will involve three dimensions or axes:

i) Sampson has pointed out (1975: 4) that there are two broad approaches to linguistics, the *generalist* and the *particularist*. "On the one hand, linguists treat individual *languages*: English, French, Chinese, and so on. On the other hand, they consider the general phenomenon of human *language*, of which particular languages are examples". Sampson proceeds to warn against seeing either of these approaches as inherently superior to the other, claiming that it is largely a matter of personal taste which approach one favours. He also states that particularists will tend to be anthropologists or philologers, while the generalists are likely to have more philosophical interests.

ii) Along a second dimension linguists are divisible into those who choose to study one, or each, language *in isolation*, and those whose ambition and methods are *comparative*. The former are concerned to discover and specify the immanent 'genius' of the particular language which makes it unlike any other language and endows its speakers

with a psychic and cognitive uniqueness. The comparativist (Ellis, 1966), as the name implies, proceeds from the assumption that, while every language may have its individuality, all languages have enough in common for them to be compared and classified into types. 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 they talk of 'synthetic', 'analytic', 'inflectional', 'agglutinating', and 'tone' languages.

iii) The third dimension is that used by De Saussure to distinguish "two sciences of language": *diachronic* as opposed to *synchronic*. De Saussure (1959: 81) explains the distinction as follows: "Everything that relates to the static side of our science is synchronic; everything that has to do with evolution is diachronic. Similarly, *synchrony* and *diachrony* designate respectively a language-state and an evolutionary phase". In ii) above I mentioned typology: the approach here 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, one Baltic, the other Pacific, which could not possibly have ever been genetically related, turn out, typologically, to belong to the same grouping. The diachronic parallel to typology is what is known as philology and is associated with such scholars as Verner, Rask, Bopp and Schleicher. It was Schleicher who 'reconstructed' the Proto-Aryan language or, as Jespersen (1947: 80) called it "die indogermanische Ursprache". Philologists are concerned with linguistic genealogy, with establishing the genetic 'families' of language-groups.

The question we set out to answer was of the nature of CA as a linguistic enterprise. Reference can be made to the above three classificatory dimensions, which are, it must be stressed, overlapping dimensions. We must, then, ask three questions: i) Is CA generalist or particularist? ii) Is it concerned with immanence or comparison? iii) Is it diachronic or synchronic? The answers to these questions, with respect to CA, are not clear-cut. First, CA is neither generalist nor particularist, but somewhere intermediate on a scale between the two extremes. Likewise, CA is as interested in the inherent genius of the language under its purview as it is in the comparability of languages. Yet it is not concerned with classification, and, as the term *contrastive* implies, more interested in differences between languages than in their

likenesses. And finally, although not concerned either with language families, or with other factors of language history, nor is it sufficiently committed to the study of 'static' linguistic phenomena to merit the label *synchronic*. (We return to this matter presently *cf.* 1.2.)

CA seems, therefore, to be a hybrid linguistic enterprise. In terms of the three criteria discussed here we might venture the following provisional definition: CA is a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted (*i.e.* contrastive, not comparative) two-valued typologies (a CA is always concerned with a *pair* of languages), and founded on the assumption that languages can be compared.

1.2 CA as Interlanguage Study

We have so far been assuming that any branch of linguistics has as its object of study human languages, or, which is to say the same thing, human language in general. The languages may be extant and vital, or 'dead', and recorded only in written relics, but they are nevertheless viewed as adequate representations of the languages in question. Now, there are other branches of linguistics which are more specialised, and which are concentrated on *parts* of whole languages. Phonetics, for example, is a branch of linguistics which "is concerned with the human noises by which 'the message' is actualized or given audible shape: the nature of those noises, their combinations, and their functions in relation to the message" (O'Connor, 1973: 10). Phoneticians, then, disregard much of what we normally understand by 'language'. Dialectology is another case of such specialisation: a language can be viewed as being actualised in its dialects, and these dialects vary among themselves. There are furthermore three kinds of dialect with respect to any given language – historical, geographical, and social dialects – so a 'social dialectologist' for example, is a linguist who is concerned, not with *the* language,[1] but with the socially marked varieties which, taken together, constitute that language. All that I am saying is that to qualify as a linguist, one need not necessarily be a student of *the* language as a total entity: one still qualifies by studying that entity in part or some aspect of that entity – in our example of the dialectologist, its capacity for variation.

There is a branch of linguistics, which I shall call 'Interlanguage Study', which is likewise not primarily concerned with languages in the conventional sense. This branch of linguistics is interested in the *emergence* of these languages rather than in the finished product. Now, CA belongs to interlanguage study, and, since 'emergence' is an

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evolutionary concept (in De Saussure's sense), it follows that CA is to be viewed as diachronic rather than synchronic in orientation. However, interlanguage study is diachronic in a slightly different sense of the term than that intended by De Saussure. He was thinking of language evolution in the historical or phylogenetic sense, which pertains to change which spans generations and centuries; I am using the term diachronic in the sense of ontogeny, or change within the human individual. Some examples will make this clear. First, there is the study of language acquisition in infants, summarised recently in Brown (1973). Slobin (1971) entitled an anthology of writings in this field: *The Ontogenesis of Grammar*. Since the child progesses from zero knowledge of the language spoken around him to adequate mastery by the age of five, and since there is only *one* language involved, child language study is not strictly speaking a form of interlanguage study. But the study of second-language or foreign-language[2] learning is concerned with a monolingual becoming a bilingual: two languages are involved, the L1 and the L2, so we have here a true case of interlingual diachronic study. Another branch of linguistics that is concerned with the transition from one language to another is translation theory, or the study of how texts from one language are transformed into comparable texts in another language. Here, however, the focus of interest is not on learning, as in the previous example, but on the process of text-replacement: the process can be enacted inside a bilingual's brain or inside a computer, according to whether one's interest is in human or 'machine' translation.

There are thus *three* branches of two-valued (2 languages are involved) interlingual linguistics: *translation theory* – which is concerned with the processes of text conversion; *error analysis*; and *contrastive analysis* – these last two having as the object of enquiry the means whereby a monolingual learns to be bilingual. Fig. 1 illustrates what I mean by interlanguage studies. Although the point of departure for such studies is the two languages concerned (NL and FL in the case of language learners, SL or 'source language' and TL 'target language' in the case of translation), the focus of attention is on the *intermediate space* between the two. The 'language' which comes into being in this intermediate stage is called by Mel'chuk (1963), in a discussion of translation theory an 'interlingua': it is a system which encompasses, as is desirable for translation, the analysis characteristics of the SL and the synthesis characteristics of the TL text. There is one interlingua for each pair of texts. By contrast, it is

suggested by error analysts that the learner, in progressing towards mastery of the FL, develops a series of 'approximative systems' (Nemser, 1971a) or 'transitional dialects' (Corder, 1971), which are successive and intersecting, such that each stage has unique features as well as features which it shares with the immediately preceding and the immediately succeeding approximative system: this is shown by the intersecting circles in Fig. 1.

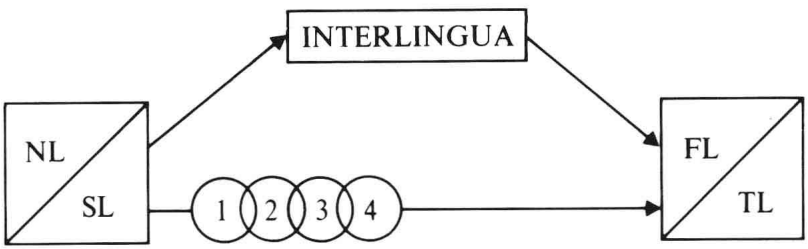

Fig. 1: The field of interlanguage studies

I shall not be discussing further translation theory: the reader is referred to Wilss (1977). But in Chapter 7 I shall be discussing 'translation equivalence' as a basis for language comparison in CA. Also in Chapter 7 I shall explore further the nature of the relationship between error analysis (EA) and CA.

1.3 CA as 'Pure' or 'Applied' Linguistics

In our attempt, in 1.1, to allocate the various branches of linguistics to an overall plan, it seems that one important dimension was overlooked: the distinction commonly drawn between 'pure' and 'applied' linguistics. Since the difference between these two is widely appreciated, I shall not attempt here to define 'applied linguistics', but merely refer the reader to Corder's extensive account of the field (Corder, 1973). It is necessary to point out, however, that in some recent work, including Corder's, doubts have been voiced over the legitimacy of considering the existence of a discipline called 'applied linguistics'. Corder suggests that 'applied linguistics' is not a science in its own right, but merely a technology based on 'pure' linguistics:

> "The application of linguistic knowledge to some object – or applied linguistics, as its name implies – is an activity. It is not a theoretical study. It makes use of theoretical studies. The applied linguist is a consumer, or user, not a producer, of theories" (Corder, 1973: 10).

Some, more categorical than Corder, have even questioned the utility of applying linguistic knowledge at all for the solution of pedagogical problems, claiming that linguistics has no relevant contribution to make towards the solution of these problems (Johnson, 1970; Lamendella, 1970). They endorse Chomsky's (1966) disavowal of any pertinence of linguistic theory to problems of language teaching. Less extremely, Politzer (1972: 15) adopts the attitude that "'applied linguistics' is ultimately a habit, a way of using linguistic conceptualisation to define and solve pedagogical problems. It is a 'how', not a 'what' type of subject". His view is evidently germane to Corder's. Wilkins (1972: 220) seems likewise bent on devaluing the currency of the term 'applied' linguistics, preferring to talk of linguistics providing *insights* and having *implications* for language teaching.

I would like to take the opposite view, and to argue that there *is* a science of applied linguistics, so endorsing Malmberg's statement that

> "The applications of linguistics can, and should, be looked upon as sciences in their own rights . . . we must be very careful not to mix up practical applications with purely scientific research" (Malmberg, 1971: 3).

Corder, recall, bases his conviction that applied linguistics is not a science on the claim that it does not produce, or add to, theory, but 'consumes' theory. Now a consumer, whether of baked beans or of theories, must be selective: he must have standards against which to evaluate, as a potential consumer, the various alternative theories that are offered to him. Where does he get the standards from but from some theory? His selections are guided by a theory of relevance and applicability.

A further reason why I think it necessary to postulate the existence of a science which is called 'applied linguistics' is slightly paradoxical: applied linguistics is a hybrid discipline, constituted not only of linguistics but also of psychology and sociology. In assessing the relevance of any 'pure' linguistic statement, the applied linguist must assess not only its linguistic validity, but its psychological and/or its sociological validity. In fact, I cannot name one single branch of 'applied linguistics' that relies exclusively on 'pure' linguists: all

supplement linguistic theories with insights from the other two disciplines I have mentioned. CA, we shall show in Chapter 2, relies very strongly on psychology. I feel justified in assigning it to a science of applied linguistics for two reasons: first, that it is different from 'pure' linguistics in drawing on other scientific disciplines; and secondly, because linguistics is the science it draws most heavily upon.

It is an undeniable fact, however, that 'pure' linguists, especially during the last decade, have been practising something very much akin to CA. Their interests are not comparative, contrastive, or typological, but lie in the universals of language. The purpose of establishing universals (or what is common to *all* languages) is to achieve economy:

> "Real progress in linguistics consists in the discovery that certain features of given languages can be reduced to universal properties of language, and explained in terms of these deeper aspects of linguistic form" (Chomsky, 1965: 35).

So the linguist is called upon to look at other languages for the confirmation of any tentative universal suggested to him by the deep analysis of any single language. But it is unreasonable to expect any individual linguist to check his tentative universal by looking at *all* the world's languages: the most he can do is to gather confirmatory evidence from the one or two other languages he might know. In so doing he in fact engages in CA. For example, Ross (1969) suggested that, universally, adjectives are derived from NPs in deep structure, as in i). He checked this claim against data from German and French, as in ii) and iii).

i) Jack is clever, but he doesn't look *it*.
ii) Hans ist klug, aber seine Söhne sind *es* nicht.
(*Lit.:* Jack is clever, but his sons aren't [it])
iii) Jean est intelligent, mais ses enfants ne *le* sont pas.

So far, so good: the claim seems to hold, for the pronouns *it*, *es*, *le* certainly refer to the adjectives in the antecedent clause, and so it appears adjectives are 'nominal' in nature. But, as Fedorowicz-Bacz (forthcoming) shows, a CA of the English sentence with its Polish equivalent (iv) introduces conflicting evidence: in the Polish, *taki* is not pronominal, but adjectival.

iv) Jacek jest bystry, choć na takiego nie wygląda.
(*Lit.:* Jack is clever, although as this not looks)

What we have here is very reminiscent of CA, but Ross is doing 'pure', not 'applied' linguistics.

Let me make it clear that this book is concerned with 'applied' CA and not with its 'pure' counterpart. I am dealing therefore with what some feel to be the *central* component of applied linguistics, or at least the most obvious component. As Wilkins (1972: 224) says:

> "It is one of the few investigations into language structure that has improved pedagogy as its aim and is therefore truly a field of applied language research."

Politzer (1972) is less explicit, but the fact that CA claims one of the four chapters of his book on pure and applied linguistics speaks for itself: for him, CA is a central and substantial component of applied linguistics.

The answer to the question is CA a form of 'pure' or of 'applied' linguistics? is – of both. But while 'pure' CA is only a peripheral enterprise in pure linguistics, it is a central concern of applied linguistics. From now on I shall intend 'applied CA' whenever I use the term CA.

1.4 CA and Bilingualism

I have characterised CA as being a form of interlingual study, or of what Wandruszka (1971) has called 'interlinguistics'. As such, and in certain other respects, it has much in common with the study of bilingualism. Bilingualism, by definition, is not the study of individual single languages, nor of language in general, but of the possession of two languages. If it is the possession of two languages by a single community we speak of *societal bilingualism*; if we study the person who has competence in two languages we are dealing with *individual bilingualism*: CA's concern is with this second category. Bilingualism refers to the possession of two languages by an individual or society, whereas CA is concerned with how a monolingual becomes bilingual: his bilingualisation, if you like. We can call this difference between the two a concern with *extant* bilingualism on the one hand, and with *incipient* bilingualism on the other (Diebold, 1961).

I shall not attempt to reconstruct the history of CA: Di Pietro (1971: 9) finds an early example of CA in C. H. Grandgent's book on the German and English sound systems, published in 1892. For me, modern CA starts with Lado's *Linguistics across Cultures* (1957). It was, however, two earlier books on the linguistic integration of

immigrants to the USA which indubitably gave Lado his impetus: I refer to Weinreich (1953) and Haugen (1956): these are studies of immigrant bilingualism. This is the historical link between CA and bilingualism study.

Some have cast doubt on the legitimacy of this link, claiming that Weinreich's and Haugen's studies are analyses of how the second language (American English) influenced the immigrant's command and maintenance of the NL, whereas CA is concerned with the effects exerted by the NL on the language being learnt, the FL: the *directionalities* are different. Thus Dulay and Burt (1974: 102) support this caveat by quoting Haugen (1956: 370): "... it is the language of the learner that is influenced, not the language he learns". In reply, one might note that Weinreich makes no issue of directionality, speaking of "... deviation from the norms of either language" and even observing that the *strength* of interference is greatest in the direction NL → FL, which is the concern of CA; he says:

> "It is the conclusion of common experience, if not yet a finding of psycholinguistic research, that the language which has been learned first, or the mother-tongue, is in a privileged position to resist interference" (Weinreich, 1953: 88).

There is a further difference between the two types of study that merits attention: we have already referred to it (p. 4) in terms of the ontogenesis: phylogenesis distinction. CA is concerned with the way in which NL affects FL learning *in the individual*, whereas Weinreich's and Haugen's work studied the long-term effects, spanning a generation, of language contact. CA is concerned with 'parole', their work with 'langue'; CA with 'interference', they with 'integration'. This being so, there does seem to be a substantial difference involved: after all, why would De Saussure have bothered to insist on the langue: parole dichotomy unless it was of fundamental importance for linguistics? My answer is that a necessary dichotomy for linguistics need not be equally valid for 'interlinguistics', to use Wandruszka's term again. In fact, there is a growing body of evidence that interlinguistically the processes that bring about language change in contact situations spanning generations are very similar to those processes determining an individual's acquisiton of a FL in a time-span of weeks. The historical stages in the pidginisation and creolisation of languages (Whinnom, 1965) are similar to those a FL learner undergoes. Initially there is a process of simplification

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