SERIES ON

# ISSUES IN SECOND LANGUAGE RESEARCH

under the editorship of

**Stephen D. Krashen** and **Robin C. Scarcella**

*ISSUES IN SECOND LANGUAGE RESEARCH* is a series of volumes dealing with empirical issues in second language acquisition research. Each volume gathers significant papers dealing with questions and hypotheses in areas central to second language theory and practice. Papers will be selected from the previously published professional literature as well as from current sources.

# LANGUAGE TRANSFER IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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*We dedicate this book to:*

*Gertrude Zemon-Gass*
*Sarah Heafitz Gass*
*and to the memory of Mary Goldman Zemon*

*AND TO*

*Donald S. Boomer*

*whose contributions to Applied Linguistics Studies*
*have for too long gone unrecognized*

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# PREFACE

It all began on a typically cold January day in Ann Arbor. We realized that the intellectual climate was ripe for a serious reconsideration of the phenomenon of language transfer in language learning. In fact, it appeared appropriate to us that a conference fully devoted to this topic was long overdue.

We intended this conference to bring together overseas and American researchers in language transfer studies for an exchange of the most recent results in thinking to what we felt had been a long-neglected, yet crucial, area in second language acquisition research. To this end, we used the vehicle of the series of Applied Linguistics Conferences of the University of Michigan, of which the Language Transfer in Language Learning conference was the ninth. Ann Arbor, in fact, was an appropriate place to hold this conference, since many of the classical notions in contrastive analysis and language transfer were born here in the forties and fifties.

We intended this conference to cover a wide spectrum of theoretical issues in language transfer as well as to cover data from a representative sample of 1) language learning situations (in terms of the situation in which the second language is learned) and 2) languages involved as both L1s and L2s. What we can report and what this volume attests to, we believe, is that the study of language transfer has once again received renewed serious interest in terms of the range of issues covered. However, most research in the area of language transfer still deals with English as either an L1 or an L2 (primarily the latter); we hope that this bias in our current data base will be remedied in future research.

The conference was held on March 1 and 2 of 1981. The quality of the papers and the enthusiastic participation of the large number of those in attendance from the United States and abroad attest to the vitality and interest of the topic. Additionally, we feel that this conference succeeded in helping to bring closer European and American research on second language acquisition, in particular, on language transfer.

The present volume includes: (1) an extended introduction to the topic (Chapter 1), (2) four earlier papers (Chapters 2 through 5) which we reprint with the intent of putting the history of language transfer studies in perspective, and (3) 16 selected revised papers from the Ann Arbor conference (Chapters 6 through 21). We hope that the readers of this volume will come away with a feeling of the rich array of both theoretical and empirical investigations dealing with the phenomenon of language transfer that have taken place in recent years. We also hope that readers of this volume will appreciate the importance of the concept of language transfer and, if they wish to conduct research in this area, will find this book useful in organizing their work.

The editors would like to express their appreciation to Chris Cartwright of the University of Michigan Extension Conference Bureau for contributing significantly to the success of the conference. We would also like to thank Alan

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# LANGUAGE TRANSFER IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

# SECTION ONE

# *INTRODUCTION*

# CONTENTS

# 1

# INTRODUCTION[1]

*Susan Gass and Larry Selinker*

In 1957, Robert Lado claimed:

> that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture—both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practised by natives. (Chapter 2, this volume)

This quotation and the work it came from have proved to be influential in the field of second language acquisition. It was the source of hundreds of empirical studies in contrastive analysis (CA) in language contact situations. Because of its important impact, we begin a discussion of our topic by reprinting representative excerpts from Lado's book as Chapter 2.

Fries (1945) formulated the need for contrastive analyses through observations such as:

> 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. (p. 9)

These remarks have, in fact, often been quoted to justify the need for a particular contrastive analysis. In 1954, a translation-type model in a generative framework was proposed by Harris; the model was called "transfer grammar." His point was that, whereas in a purely structural comparison of languages:

> many constructions and subdividings had no parallel, . . . we can find—on a translation basis—a parallel in one language to almost anything in the other. (p. 267)

Harris had several purposes in proposing his model, including the supposition that his "method may also be relevant for the learning or teaching of foreign languages" (p. 259). Thus, early on, some notion of language transfer had been important to the understanding of how second languages are learned.[2]

The field of contrastive analysis, without a doubt, received its major push through a consideration of pedagogical requirements. Lado proposed a potentially rigorous contrastive model, "addressed primarily to the trained teacher of foreign languages." (1957, preface, and Chapter 2, this volume) in his pioneer effort, which contained a wealth of examples as part of step-by-step procedures for comparing two sound systems, two grammatical structures, two vocabulary systems, two writing systems, and two cultures in contact. These and other developments have been traced in great detail by Dingwall (1964), who himself proposed an alternative model which incorporated a transformational component into the contrastive grammar.

Contrastive analysis was greatly aided by a fundamental assumption which allowed analysts to ignore complexities while achieving impressive results. This assumption is expressed in the quotation cited at the outset of this chapter. Although results obtained through a contrastive analysis are perfectly valid within the framework of this assumption, difficulty does arise from an attempt to interpret the CA hypothesis itself in terms of learner behavior and centers, most especially, upon the word "tend." What does it mean, for example, to state that the English-speaking "learner" of Italian:

> tends to unvoice the first member of the clusters [zm zn zl], and adjust them to the English clusters /sm sn sl/. (DiPietro 1964, p. 225)

Prediction of learner behavior in contrastive statements such as this one is based, in fact, upon certain observations of some speakers under unspecified conditions. If the word "tend"[3] does not appear in contrastive statements or is removed from their interpretation, these statements then are in fact being used for a purpose which transcends their original framework, the purpose being the prediction of *actual* second language speech behavior. This difficulty becomes even more apparent when two (or more) alternatives in the second language are recognized as being open to the learner, e.g., the case of Italian [zb] when:

> either a "support" vowel is inserted . . . or *both* members of the cluster are unvoiced. (DiPietro 1964, p. 225; emphasis in original)

by the English-speaking learner. Knowledge of which one of these possibilities is in fact chosen and under what conditions is a prerequisite to a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Classical CA statements provided predictive statements without careful descriptive and analytical studies of actual second language learners under clearly specified conditions.

However, contrary to what many researchers have believed, Lado long ago realized that:

> The list of problems resulting from the comparison of the foreign language with the native language . . . must be considered a list of *hypothetical* problems until final validation is achieved by checking it against the actual speech of students. (Lado 1957, p. 72, and Chapter 2, this volume; emphasis added)

The importance of this statement was one of the major impetuses which led to experimental investigations of actual second language learner speech behavior (cf., for example, Selinker 1966).

On the other hand, there were many attempts to apply this principle, stated so well by Lado, which leave much to be desired. Kleinjans (1959), for instance, tested his predictions, thus systematically combining theory with observation, but his "psychology" is clearly after the fact and is not a part of his experimental design. What Kleinjans did was try to adjust his data after the data were in to fit Osgood's "transfer paradigm" and "transfer surface" model (Osgood 1953, pp. 520 ff.). What was not realized at the time was the inapplicability of this design because it is quite impossible to find a control group which "rested," i.e., did not learn a native language, while the experimental group learned task A, i.e., the native language. (For a fuller discussion the interested reader is referred to Selinker 1966, footnote 7; 1969, pp. 17-18, and Chapter 3, this volume).

In 1962, Moulton made one of the earliest attempts at a general statement in which behavioral observations were added systematically to contrastive analysis statements. For Moulton, two methods of analyzing pronunciation problems in a second language exist: (1) listening to errors, noting them, and arranging them in an order especially designed for learners; and (2) analysis of the phonological structures of the two languages, noting points of agreement and disagreement, and predicting errors on the basis of disagreements. Moulton suggested a combination of the two methods, especially when a consideration of pedagogical purposes was paramount.

While CA statements may at times prove useful for pedagogical purposes, pedagogical needs are not the only ones existing for these analyses. Harris (1954), for example, used CA for machine translation. Diebold (1965) was one of the first who explicitly noted that:

> for theoretical purposes, continued pursuit of contrastive analyses will greatly increase our knowledge of language universals and typology. (p. 210)

Some researchers (e.g., Fisiak 1980) in the area of contrastive studies have claimed that purely descriptive contrastive analyses, i.e., with no systematized behavioral evidence, should be on an equal footing with other types of linguistic descriptions.

> Contrastive linguistics may be roughly defined as a subdiscipline of linguistics which is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages (or subsystems of languages) in order to determine both the differences and similarities that hold between them. (Fisiak 1980, p. 1)

But in terms of language transfer, DiPietro (1964) had earlier stated that contrastive analysis is important:

> as a preliminary step to understanding the range of transfer from one linguistic structure to another. (p. 224)

For us, one important preliminary step to understanding language transfer is, at the very least, a native language-target language comparison, which often leads to insightful hypotheses concerning language transfer phenomena (cf. Adjémian, Chapter 15, for an instantiation of this methodology).

In addition to pedagogical influences, linguistically oriented bilingual studies were also influential on the work of early contrastive analysts. Perhaps the most well-known and influential of these works are those by Haugen (1953) and Weinreich (1953). They began a trend which enabled analysts to bring descriptive linguistic techniques to bear on the language contact situation, a situation which went beyond the limiting assumption of traditional linguistics that "each community should be considered linguistically self-contained and homogeneous" (Martinet in Weinreich, 1953, p. vii). Bilingual speech situations have been analyzed in terms of the linguistic code while at the same time researchers have attempted to account for at least some of the relevant nonlinguistic variables. In fact, Weinreich stressed that not all sources of "interference"[4] which occur when bilingual speakers switch codes are linguistic. Among other factors listed, Weinreich includes age of learning, motivation, loyalty to a language, language aptitude, and attitude. As descriptive and theoretical tools have improved, researchers have brought them to bear on these problems. DiPietro (1961), for instance, demonstrated that contrastive analysis techniques could be used as tools of analysis in language contact studies.

Major interest in linguistically oriented bilingual studies has traditionally been twofold: (1)

> those instances of deviation from the norms of either language, which occur in the speech of bilinguals . . . as a result of language contact. (Weinreich 1953, p. 1)

and (2) the impact of these deviations upon:

> the norms of either language exposed to contact. (Weinreich 1953, p. 1)

It is clear to us that there are difficulties with this type of approach. First and most important, a reconstructed form of the source language has to be inferred. For example, Haugen (1953), DiPietro (1961), and Diebold (1963) attempted to discover deviations that occurred in Norwegian, Sicilian, and Greek respectively upon contact with American English in a second language environment. Although research methodology was not stated in every case, it was generally as follows: a comparison of the "source" language (Norwegian, Sicilian, or Greek of, say, 1900) with the "recipient" language (American Norwegian, American Sicilian, or