# CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS AND ERROR ANALYSIS- IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

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**Rezumat**: *Există o serie de factori care interacţionează şi influenţează performanţa lingvistică a celui care învaţă o limbă străină. Unul dintre aceştia este relaţia dintre $L_1$ (limba maternă) şi $L_2$ (limba care urmează a fi învăţată).*

*Lucrarea evidenţiază faptul că analiza contrastivă a început să fie reevaluată deoarece ea poate anticipa posibile dificultăţi pentru cei care învaţă $L_2$. Multe din aceste dificultăţi pot fi atribuite fenomenului de interferenţă cu probleme care cer o atenţie deosebită în învăţarea limbii engleze.*

Different approaches to the phenomenon of language, different linguistic theories and schools of thought influence our methods of teaching. Structural linguistic and the behaviouristic movement in psychology resulted in the audio lingual method.

The transformational approach, with its stress on the analytical element in language learning, reintroduced rational, cognitive methods, but regardless of our view of language, we must somehow solve a whole series of problems in the process of teaching a foreign language. One of these problems is the relationship between the $L_1$ (the learner's native language) and $L_2$ (the language to be learned).

"A contrastive analysis consists of a series of statements about the similarities and differences between two languages" (4). There has always been an element of contrastive analysis in foreign language teaching. Some thirty years ago it was believed that foreign language learning consisted mainly, if not exclusively, in learning the contrast between $L_1$ and $L_2$. Today contrastive analysis is being reassessed, and its applicability to language teaching is viewed in a different light. During the last decades, a systematic contrastive analysis has been advocated as a means of predicting the difficulties in learning a foreign language. It is now recognized that contrastive analysis should be used to explain difficulties. In other words, analysis contrastive should be used as part of the explanatory stage in error analysis.

Nevertheless, the results from Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis would be incomplete without awareness of the deep level of semantic categories. Different languages and their grammars may be regarded as autonomous, but when it comes to ***Semantics*** it seems that it is the core of the languages and a common or universal basis that they share, regardless of the differences in their grammars. Therefore it is very important for a translator of a foreign language teacher to be aware of the interaction of the level of semantic categories and the level of formal exponents.

We must point out that the value of contractive analysis beyond its importance in explaining the learner's difficulties. The confrontation of two

languages is important from the point of view of translation theory, language typology and study of language universals.

Contrastive analysis of two languages point at the specific features of each language system in its major areas: phonology, morphology, lexicology, syntax , text analysis. The knowledge about the kinds and degree of differences and similarities between languages on a number of linguistic levels helps in the process of anticipating possible difficulties with $L_2$ learners.

The most widely recognized source of foreign language learning errors is that of $L_1$ interference. Those elements that are similar to the learner's native language, will be simple for him and those that are different will be difficult and will, by implication, be likely to produce errors.

We may say that one of the undoubted merits of contrastive linguistic is the fact that it offered a natural, even if only partial explanation to the errors made by foreign language learners. Contrastive analysis considered most errors to be the result of a phenomenon of interference, when patterns existing in the learner's mother tongue were transferred as such into his/her use of the language to be learned. Viewed from this point of view, error analysis had no proper status, it was a mere addition to contrastive analysis.

But not all errors made by learners of a foreign language are due to the differences existing between the structures of the two language in contact. There are indeed a certain number of errors due, primarily, to this cause, especially with beginners but there are, of course, many others whose explanation should be looked for somewhere else.

Scholars engaged in the study of foreign language learning, try, by various methods, to identify the process and strategies which might be considered responsible for the students mistaken utterances.

They distinguish:

**a.** Errors which might be explained by contrastive analysis, the so-called "interlingual errors" or

**b.** Errors due to the evolutive character of the acquisition of a foreign language, the "interlingual errors".

It is the duty of the foreign language teacher both to identify and classify the typical errors and to apply remedial strategies, to find adequate methods to eliminate them both at the individual and group level.

The methodology of error analysis has generally followed a uniform method of investigation consisting of the following steps:

– collection of data (either from "free" compositions by students on a given theme or from examination papers);
– identification of errors (labeling the exact nature of the deviation, e.g. dangling preposition, anomalous sequence of tenses, etc.);
– classification into error types (e.g. errors of agreement, articles, verb forms, etc.);
– statement of relative frequency of error types;
– identification of the areas of difficulty in the target language;

–   therapy (remedial drills, lessons, etc.).

While the above methodology is roughly representative of the majority of error analyses in the traditional framework, the more sophisticated investigations went further, to include one or both of the following:

–   analysis of source of the errors (e.g. mother tongue interference, over-generalisation, inconsistencies in the spelling system of the target language, etc.);

–   determination of the error in terms of communication, norm, etc.

The analysis of mistakes based on adequate material will clearly show that is most troublesome for the learners concerned and thus where they need support most. However, it is not only remedial work which can be guided thus, but the whole of a language course, and at every stage. Writing is the obvious basis for analysis but mistakes in speaking can be noted to with the help of the teacher. Some of the mistakes which our students make in learning. English are based on false analogies within the foreign language but the majority of the mistakes result from carrying over into the English language the speech habits of Romanian, habits of pronunciation, of morphology, of syntax. Analysing the kinds of mistakes students make, we shall have a basis for supporting nearly every step of the language teaching instead of continually improvising and teaching by intuition.

In her article "Contrastive Linguistics in Textbook and Classroom", Wilga M. Rivers states: "It may appear that the contrastive technique 'par excellence' in foreign language teaching is the translation exercise. Here the student is confronted with native language forms and structure and required to produce the contrasting forms and structure of the foreign language" (5). The translation in which exact meaning is transferred from one language to another demands a thorough knowledge of areas of contrast in form and function and it is for this reason, being a very profitable exercise of the students'control of the foreign language at an advanced level.

Methodologists consider that in the early stages of learning a foreign language, translations of short patterns and simple forms may be a quick way to check whether students have ascribed the appropriate meaning to that they are practicing. At intermediate and advanced levels, equivalents of expressions, sentences, and even paragraphs may be necessary, and such practice could well lead to skill that we should help our students to acquire.

One effective way of eliminating error is self-correction. This can be done if the teacher uses certain symbols (T = tense error, Sp = spelling; SgPl = singular and plural concord wrong etc.), explanatory comments in the margin of the written paper or only underlines the mistakes. Giving back written work with brief comments is a good way for the student to correct his own mistakes.

Another procedure is to offer the students the possibility to examine their errors and discuss them with each other. After a few minutes, they are encouraged to ask questions if they still have doubts. The other students are asked to help, if they can, by giving examples. This procedure offers practice and reinforcement of

material (For example it can be successfully applied in contrasting the Present Perfect to the Past Tense).

From our short experience we have reached the conclusion that in language areas, for which generalizations which are applicable to a large number of facts can be formulated, the chances of errors are smaller. For instance, when we teach the interrogative form of different tenses, we draw the students attention to the specific English world order: Auxiliary – Subject – National Verb. In view of these observations, it is our job to help the students arrive at as many generalizations as possible.

Other solutions refer to further explanations with more adequate examples or teaching aids, comparison with the mother tongue, translations etc. But the most effective way to extinguish error is to have plenty of corrective exercises which should provide something for the students to say or write, sentences or short paragraphs to be imitated, completed or added to a series of exercises directed at each typical error.

## CONCLUSIONS

We may conclude that the aim of contrastive studies is not only a better understanding of the linguistic structure, but also applied deductions, meant to raise the entire teaching activity above the empirical and occasional practice, to outline fundamental teaching programs based on the scientific knowledge of the language.

Contrastive analysis has laid the emphasis on error analysis as a way to study the difficulties encountered by foreign – language learners. The findings of such studies can be very helpful in setting up teaching devices.

Contrastive analysis and error analysis are complementary to one another, in the sense that the results obtained and the predictions made by the contrastive studies are to be checked up and corrected by the results obtained in the error analysis.

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