

Fundamental Issues in Contrastive Analysis

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Introduction

During World War II, the United States military needed a way to communicate better with both allies and enemies. This created a big demand for teaching and learning foreign languages, especially English. To meet this need, different experts worked together:

- 1. Linguists (people who study language structure)**
- 2. Teaching specialists**
- 3. Psychologists**

Their goal was to find the best and most efficient ways to teach languages.

One idea that became popular was called the **Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis**. The people who supported this idea believed that:

The best way to teach a new language is to compare it with the learner's native language

By finding the differences between the two languages, you could **predict** what errors students might make.

Because of this belief, Contrastive Analysis became a very important part of language teaching for many years. In fact, some people thought it could solve all problems in language teaching!

As a result, researchers in both America and Europe did many studies comparing different languages. These studies had a practical goal: they wanted to **predict and solve the problems and errors that language learners might have.**

However, not everyone agreed that Contrastive Analysis was the perfect solution. There were debates about how useful it really was. That's why it's important to look at different views on this topic.

Historical Perspective

Comparative Linguistics, originally called **Comparative Philology**, started in the 18th century. Scholars began to compare different languages to see if they shared a common origin. This shared origin was called a "**proto-language**," or a common ancestor for related languages.

For example, linguists studied Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, and Old Persian to reconstruct a language called **Proto-Indo-European, which existed before any written records.**

Some linguists also compared different stages of the same language. For instance, they looked at how Persian has changed over time, comparing Old Persian with Middle Persian and Modern Farsi.

Linguists also study modern languages to classify them based on similarities. This type of study is called "**Comparative Typological Linguistics.**" Another type of study, called "Contrastive Linguistics" or "Contrastive Analysis," is what we will focus on here.

What is Contrastive Analysis?

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is the systematic study of two languages to find their differences and similarities. This is usually done for translation and teaching purposes. The goal is to help second-language learners by identifying which parts of the target language might be difficult for them to learn.

CA is also used in translation studies to find equivalent words or phrases between two languages.

Unlike other types of comparative studies, CA focuses only on modern languages. It can also be applied to studying different dialects (varieties of the same language), registers (language used by specific groups, like doctors or lawyers), and styles (formal vs. informal language).

Types of Contrastive Analysis

There are two main types of contrastive studies: theoretical and applied.

- 1. Theoretical Contrastive Studies: These focus on comparing two or more languages without focusing on one language's specific features. Instead, they look at universal categories in both languages. For example, rather than just comparing English and Arabic, theoretical studies look at how both languages express universal ideas like time or space.**

- 2. Applied Contrastive Studies: These focus on solving practical problems, like:**
- **Helping learners avoid making errors when learning a foreign language.**
 - **Assisting translators in transferring meaning between languages.**
 - **Finding equivalent words when creating bilingual dictionaries.**

The main job of applied contrastive analysis is to explain why some parts of a new language are harder to learn than others. This type of study, called "pedagogical contrastive analysis," will be our main focus for the rest of this chapter.

Pedagogical Contrastive Analysis and Its Psychological Basis

In the 1950s and 60s, Pedagogical Contrastive Analysis (CA) was used to explain why some parts of a new language are harder to learn than others. CA compares two languages (your native language and the new one) to find differences, and then it predicts where you might make mistakes.

For example:

- . In Arabic, the sentence structure is usually verb-subject-object like "ذهب أحمد إلى المدرسة" (literally: "went Ahmed to school"). But in English, the word order is subject-verb-object like "Ahmed went to school." So, Arabic speakers might accidentally say "Went Ahmed to school" in English, following the Arabic structure.**

Why was this useful?

- 1. It helped teachers understand why students made certain mistakes.**
- 2. It helped teachers know which parts of English would be difficult for Arabic speakers to learn.**

Behaviorist Psychology and Language Learning

CA is based on Behaviorist Psychology, which says that learning happens by forming habits. Think about how you memorize something — you repeat it until it becomes automatic, like reciting a poem.

Behaviorists, like Skinner, believed learning your first language (L1) is similar to how animals can be trained to

perform tasks. They thought that when you learn a second language (L2), habits from your first language might make things harder.

For example:

- . Arabic doesn't have the English sound "p" (like in "pen"). So, Arabic speakers might pronounce "pen" as "ben" because Arabic has the sound "ب" but not "p."**

Positive and Negative Transfer

Transfer means using what you know from your first language (L1) when learning a second language (L2).

There are two types:

- . **Positive Transfer: When something from Arabic helps you in English.**
 - **Example: Arabic and English both use adjectives before nouns in certain phrases, like "beautiful house" or "بيت جميل." This makes it easier to learn adjectives in English because the structure is similar.**
- . **Negative Transfer: When something from Arabic makes learning English harder.**
 - **Example: In Arabic, you don't use the verb "to be" in the present tense. You say "أنا سعيد" (I happy) without the verb "am." But in English, you must say "I am happy." So, an Arabic speaker might forget**

to include "am" and say "I happy," which is an example of negative transfer.

How Contrastive Analysis Helps Teachers

Teachers used Contrastive Analysis to create lessons that helped students avoid mistakes. For example, if they knew that Arabic doesn't use "to be" in the present tense, they would make sure to focus on teaching how to use "am," "is," and "are" in English sentences.

In the 1960s, teachers believed making mistakes was bad, and they wanted to prevent errors. For example, if a student said "He good" instead of "He is good," teachers would make the student repeat the correct sentence "He is

good" many times to form the righERSIONS OF caht habit.

Versions of CA

The Strong Version

The strong version of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis claims that the main challenge in learning a new language is the interference from your native language (L1). This version is based on the idea that comparing two languages (L1 and L2) can predict all the difficulties you will face. It suggests that:

- 1. The difficulties come from how different L1 is from the target language (L2).**

- 2. The bigger the differences, the harder it is to learn.**
- 3. By comparing the two languages, we can know in advance which mistakes you will make.**

Example: In Arabic, there's no sound for "p," so an Arabic speaker might say "ben" instead of "pen" in English. According to the strong version, this mistake could be predicted by knowing that "p" doesn't exist in Arabic.

1.4.2 The Weak Version

The weak version is more realistic. It doesn't claim to predict all mistakes in advance. Instead, it suggests that

we should first observe the mistakes learners make and then use contrastive analysis to explain why they happened.

For example, if a student says, "He go to school" instead of "He goes to school," we could use contrastive analysis to explain that in Arabic, verbs don't change depending on the subject (no third-person singular "-s"). The weak version looks at errors after they occur, rather than predicting them beforehand.

1.4.3 The Moderate Version

The moderate version of CAH focuses on the subtle differences between languages. It argues that learners may actually have more difficulty with small, similar features between L1 and L2 than with major differences.

For example, Arabic speakers may struggle with English words that sound similar but have different meanings, like "ship" and "sheep," because the small difference between the vowel sounds can be hard to distinguish. The moderate version says these small differences are sometimes harder to learn than completely new sounds or words.

Additionally, this version suggests that learners may also make intralingual errors (errors within the new language)

and not just interlingual errors (errors due to transfer from their native language).

Conclusion

- . The strong version tries to predict all difficulties in advance, but it's too ambitious.**
- . The weak version focuses on explaining mistakes after they happen.**
- . The moderate version looks at small differences between languages and suggests that these can sometimes be harder to learn than big differences.**

This approach helps understand why Arabic speakers might face unique challenges when learning English and why some errors are more common than others.

Linguistic Levels of Analysis

Linguists study language by breaking it down into different levels. These levels are:

- 1. Phonology: The sounds of the language.**
- 2. Morphology: The structure of words.**
- 3. Syntax: How words are arranged into sentences.**
- 4. Semantics: The meanings of words and sentences.**
- 5. Pragmatics: How language is used in different situations.**

Each of these levels can be compared between two languages, such as Arabic and English, to help identify similarities and differences.

Example:

- . In phonology, Arabic doesn't have the "v" sound like English, so learners might struggle with words like "very," pronouncing it like "ferry."**
- . In syntax, Arabic often follows a verb-subject-object order (like "Ate Ahmed the apple"), while English uses a subject-verb-object order ("Ahmed ate the apple").**

Procedures for Comparing Languages

1. Selection Not every feature of a language needs to be compared. The teacher or linguist selects the most important aspects that might cause problems for students. This selection can be based on personal experience or by looking at common student errors.

Example: If many Arabic-speaking students confuse “p” and “b” sounds in English, the teacher might focus on this difference.

2. Description After selecting certain features, the linguist describes the features of both languages. The description

needs to be systematic, using the same framework for both languages.

Example: In Arabic, verbs don't change depending on the subject (no "he goes"), while in English, verbs change ("he goes" vs. "they go").

3. Comparison After describing the features, the linguist compares the two languages to find similarities and differences. The comparison happens on three levels:

- . Form: How the words look or sound.**
- . Meaning: What the words mean.**
- . Distribution: When and where the words are used.**

Example: In both Arabic and English, plurals change the form of the word. In Arabic, adding "-een" or "-aat" makes a word plural, while in English, adding "-s" or "-es" makes a word plural.

4. Prediction Once the comparison is made, the linguist can predict where students will have difficulties learning the second language.

Example: Since there's no "p" sound in Arabic, students might have trouble with words like "pen" or "paper." The teacher can predict these problems and design lessons to help.

5. Verification Finally, the teacher or linguist checks if their predictions are correct by observing the mistakes learners make. If learners are making the expected mistakes, it confirms that the analysis was accurate.

Example: If Arabic-speaking students consistently confuse "p" and "b," this verifies the teacher's prediction based on comparing the two languages.

Summary

Arabic:

/م/

/ب/,

(No difficulty: direct transfer)

2. Level

1

-

Coalescence

Two or more items in Arabic are expressed by a single item in English, requiring the learner to collapse

distinctions they are used to.

Example: Arabic distinguishes between two types of past tense verbs, "كان" (kan - used for habitual actions in

the past) and "كان يفعل" (kana yaf'al - used for continuous actions in the past), while English uses just one past

tense: was or used to.

Diagram:

English:

was/used

to

Arabic:

يفعل

كان

/

كان

(Difficulty: merging two forms into one)

3. Level

2

-

Underdifferentiation

An item exists in Arabic but is absent in English, so learners must avoid transferring it.

Example: Arabic has the "glottal stop" sound (ء, represented by /ʔ/), which is common in spoken Arabic but does not exist in English. Arabic learners must learn not to pronounce this sound in English.

Diagram:

English:

--

Arabic: /ʔ/ (ء)

4. Level 3 - Reinterpretation

An item that exists in Arabic is given a different shape or distribution in English.

Example: In Arabic, the sound /l/ is always clear, but in English, it has two forms: "clear" /l/ (before vowels, like in "light") and "dark" /ɫ/ (at the end of words, like in "full"). Arabic speakers need to learn when to use the "dark l" sound in English.

Diagram:

English: Clear /l/ and Dark /ɫ/

Arabic: Clear /ل/

5. Level 4 - Overdifferentiation

English has a completely new item that does not exist in Arabic, so learners must learn it from scratch.

Example: Arabic does not have the sounds /p/ or /v/. Arabic speakers often struggle to distinguish between /p/ and /b/ (e.g., "park" vs. "bark") and /v/ and /f/ (e.g., "van" vs. "fan").

Diagram:

English: /p/, /v/

Arabic: --

(Difficulty: learning new phonemes)

6. Level 5 - Split

One item in Arabic becomes two or more distinct items in English, requiring the learner to make new distinctions.

Example: In Arabic, the pronoun "هو" (huwa) is used for both "he" and "it" when referring to a masculine object. In English, learners must distinguish between *he* (for people) and *it* (for objects or animals).

Diagram:

English:

he

/

it

Arabic: هو

1 What is the primary goal of Contrastive Analysis in language learning?

- **To create a new language that combines elements of both languages.**
- **To focus solely on vocabulary acquisition.**
- **To teach a new language without considering the learner's native language.**
- **To identify differences and similarities between two languages to aid learning.**

2 What does the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis suggest about language learning difficulties?

- **Difficulties arise from the differences between the learner's native language and the target language.**
- **Difficulties are solely based on the complexity of the target language.**
- **Language learning is only difficult for adults, not children.**
- **All language learning difficulties are due to lack of motivation.**

3 Which of the following is NOT a type of Contrastive Analysis?

- **Pedagogical Contrastive Analysis**
- **Comparative Typological Linguistics**
- **Applied Contrastive Studies**
- **Theoretical Contrastive Studies**

4 What is an example of negative transfer in language learning?

- **An Arabic speaker correctly using the verb 'to be' in English.**
- **An Arabic speaker omitting 'am' in 'I am happy' and saying 'I happy.'**
- **An Arabic speaker pronouncing 'pen' as 'ben' due to sound differences.**
- **An Arabic speaker using adjectives before nouns correctly in English.**

5 What does the strong version of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis claim?

- **Language learning difficulties cannot be predicted at all.**

- **The main challenge in learning a new language is interference from the native language.**
- **Learning a new language is easier than learning the first language.**
- **All language learners will face the same difficulties regardless of their native language.**

6What is the focus of applied contrastive studies?

- **Solving practical problems in language learning and translation.**
- **Studying historical language evolution.**
- **Creating new languages based on existing ones.**
- **Theoretical comparisons of universal language features.**

7Which linguistic level deals with the sounds of a language?

- **Morphology**
- **Syntax**

- **Pragmatics**

- **Phonology**

8 What is a key feature of Pedagogical Contrastive Analysis?

- **It helps teachers understand why students make specific mistakes.**

- **It focuses only on vocabulary without considering grammar.**

- **It is only applicable to written language.**

- **It ignores the learner's native language completely.**

9 What is the main difference between the weak and strong versions of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis?

- **The weak version focuses on vocabulary, while the strong version focuses on grammar.**

- **The weak version claims all mistakes are due to the native language, while the strong version does not.**

- **The weak version explains mistakes after they occur, while the strong version predicts them in advance.**

- The weak version is based on behaviorist psychology, while the strong version is not.

10 What is an example of positive transfer in language learning?

- Pronouncing 'pen' as 'ben' due to sound differences.
- Saying 'I happy' instead of 'I am happy' in English.
- Using adjectives before nouns in both Arabic and English, like 'beautiful house.'
- Using the wrong word order in English sentences.

Detailed Contrastive Analysis: Simple Present Tense in Arabic and English

Similarities

1. ****Expressing Habitual Actions****

- Arabic: يَشْرَبُ أَحْمَدُ الْقَهْوَةَ كُلَّ صَبَاحٍ (yashrabu Ahmad al-qahwata kulla sabaahin)

- English: Ahmad drinks coffee every morning

2. ****Stating General Truths****

- Arabic: تَدُورُ الْأَرْضُ حَوْلَ الشَّمْسِ (tadooru al-ardu hawla ash-shamsi)

- English: The Earth revolves around the Sun

3. ****Describing Current States****

- Arabic: أَسْكُنُ فِي الْقَاهِرَةِ (askunu fil-qaahirati)

- English: I live in Cairo

4. ****Expressing Likes and Dislikes****

- Arabic: أُحِبُّ الشَّايَ (uhibbu ash-shaaya)

- English: I like tea

5. ****Describing Abilities****

- Arabic: **يَتَكَلَّمُ مُحَمَّدٌ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ وَالْإِنْجِلِيزِيَّةَ** (yatakallamu Muhammad al-'arabiyyata wal-injliiziyyata)

- English: Muhammad speaks Arabic and English

6. ****Use in Time Clauses for Future Events****

- Arabic: **عِنْدَمَا يَصِلُ الْقِطَارُ، سَنَذْهَبُ إِلَى الْمَنْزِلِ** (indamaa yasilu al-qitaaru, sanadh-habu ilaa al-manzili)

- English: When the train arrives, we will go home

Differences

1. ****Verb Conjugation****

- Arabic: Verbs change form for person, number, and gender

* اَكْتُبُ (aktubu) - I write

* تَكْتُبُ (taktubu) - You (m) write

* تَكْتُبِينَ (taktubiina) - You (f) write

* يَكْتُبُ (yaktubu) - He writes

* تَكْتُبُ (taktubu) - She writes

* نَكْتُبُ (naktubu) - We write

* يَكْتُبُونَ (yaktubuuna) - They (m) write

* يَكْتُبْنَ (yaktubna) - They (f) write

- English: Only changes for third-person singular

* I/You/We/They write

* He/She/It writes

2. ****Negation****

- **Arabic:** Uses the negative particle لا (laa) before the verb

* لا أَكْتُبُ (laa aktubu) - I do not write

* لا يَكْتُبُ (laa yaktubu) - He does not write

- **English:** Uses auxiliary 'do/does' + 'not'

* I/You/We/They do not write

* He/She/It does not write

3. ****Question Formation****

- **Arabic:** Adds question particles (e.g., هَلْ - hal) at the beginning, verb form unchanged

* هَلْ تَكْتُبُ؟ (hal taktubu?) - Do you write?

* هَلْ يَكْتُبُ مُحَمَّدٌ؟ (hal yaktubu Muhammad?) - Does Muhammad write?

- **English:** Uses auxiliary 'do/does' with subject-verb inversion

*** Do you write?**

*** Does Muhammad write?**

4. **Expressing Continuous Actions**

- Arabic: Simple present can express both habitual and continuous actions

*** أَكْتُبُ الْآنَ (aktubu al-aan) - I write now/I am writing now**

- English: Uses present continuous for actions in progress

*** I am writing now**

5. **Future Time Reference**

- Arabic: Simple present often used for future actions

*** أُسَافِرُ غَدًا إِلَى لَنْدَنَ (usaafiru ghadan ilaa Landan) - I travel to London tomorrow**

- English: Generally uses other constructions for future

*** I am traveling to London tomorrow / I will travel to London tomorrow**

6. **Stative Verbs**

- Arabic: No distinction between stative and dynamic verbs

*** أَعْرِفُ الإِجَابَةَ (a'rifu al-ijaabata) - I know the answer**

- English: Stative verbs not typically used in continuous forms

*** I know the answer (not "I am knowing")**

7. **Use of Auxiliary Verbs**

- Arabic: Does not use auxiliary verbs in simple present

*** أَتَكَلَّمُ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ (atakallamu al-'arabiyyata) - I speak Arabic**

- English: Uses 'do/does' in questions and negatives

*** Do you speak Arabic?**

8. **Emphatic Statements**

- Arabic: Uses particles or word order for emphasis

*** إِنِّي أَفْهَمُ (innanii afhamu) - I do understand**

- English: Uses auxiliary 'do/does' for emphasis

*** I do understand**

9. **Expressing Possession**

- Arabic: Uses a construction meaning "to me/to you" etc.

*** عِنْدِي كِتَابٌ (indii kitaab) - [To me a book] I have a book**

- English: Uses the verb "have"

*** I have a book**

10. **Time Expressions**

- Arabic: Time expressions often come at the end of the sentence

*** أَذْهَبُ إِلَى الْعَمَلِ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ (adh-habu ilaa al-'amali kulla yawmin) - I go to work every day**

- English: Time expressions can be more flexible in position

*** Every day, I go to work / I go to work every day**

Simplified Insights from Arabic-English Present Tense Comparison

Key Similarities

1. Both use simple present for:

- **Habits: "I drink coffee every morning"**
- **Facts: "The Earth revolves around the Sun"**
- **Current states: "I live in Cairo"**

Important Differences

1. Verb Changes

- **Arabic: Verbs change a lot (for he, she, they, etc.)**
- **English: Only changes for he/she/it (adds -s)**

2. Making Negatives

- **Arabic: Add 'la' before the verb**
- **English: Use 'do not' or 'does not'**

3. Asking Questions

- Arabic: Add question word at the start**
- English: Use 'do' or 'does' and change word order**

4. Ongoing Actions

- Arabic: Can use simple present**
- English: Uses present continuous (I am writing)**

5. Talking About Future

- Arabic: Often uses simple present**
- English: Usually uses other forms (will, going to)**

Main Challenges for Arabic Speakers

- 1. Remembering to add '-s' for he/she/it in English**
- 2. Using 'do' and 'does' for questions and negatives**
- 3. Choosing between simple present and present continuous**
- 4. Not using simple present for all future actions in English**

Teaching Tips

- 1. Practice 'do/does' questions and negatives a lot**
- 2. Focus on when to use simple present vs. present continuous**
- 3. Teach specific time expressions for each tense**
- 4. Use lots of examples comparing Arabic and English structures**

