

Cross-linguistic Awareness: A New Role for Contrastive Analysis

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In his clairvoyant 1983 paper Gerry Abbott suggested that applied linguists should take a look at "*El otro Lado*" and issued an urgent invitation to that father of modern Contrastive Analysis (CA): *Come back Robert , nearly all is forgiven!* Well, it has happened - almost. As I shall demonstrate, CA has come back, but those who have rediscovered this particular wheel seem not to have heard of Robert Lado, nor of Charles Fries. Compare the following observations about CA. Fries (1945: 9) wrote the originally famous lines:

"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.

This view was endorsed by Lado in the preface to his seminal work Linguistics across Cultures (1957: vii):

"The plan of the book rests on the assumption that we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student."

There followed a forty year uneasy truce, where those who dared (Nickel, 1971, 1972; James, 1980; Fisiak, 1984) continued to do CA, while those who had found alternative paradigms either sniped at contrastivists, changed their own job titles to "cross-and interlanguage or transfer analysts", or maintained an acquiescent silence.

With what relief the outcast contrastivist therefore welcomes encouraging statements such as the following:

"In brief, each native language has trained its speakers to pay different kinds of attention to events and experiences when talking about them. This training is carried out in childhood and is exceptionally resistant to restructuring in second language acquisition." (Slobin, 1996: 89) followed by:

"Much of value could be learned from a systematic study of those systems in particular second languages that speakers of particular first languages find especially difficult to master." (ibid. : 90)

Two things - besides his failure to acknowledge Fries, Lado and the whole CA tradition - are noteworthy about these statements from Slobin. First, note the use of the word training in the first excerpt, an unmistakably Behaviourist label. Admittedly, the original psychological background to CA (James, 1980, Chapter 2) was thoroughly Behaviourist, and an assumption was made by those who rejected CA that it had become unviable the day that Behaviourism was discredited. Slobin seems to be suggesting that Behaviourism has not been totally banished from language learning contexts after all. Note further, in the second excerpt, Slobin's advocacy of the diagnostic, or what Wardhaugh (1970)

called the weak version of the CA Hypothesis. This is the version which set its goal no higher than to explain attested learning difficulties, whereas the alternative strong version prefers to predict and anticipate them by comparing MT and FL patterns, that is, by doing CA proper. One wonders whether Slobin has ever considered the strong alternative.

There are other welcome signs that CA is coming back onto the agenda. Especially encouraging is the fact that it is in language teaching contexts that a role for CA is being defined. Nobody with an inclination to do CA need feel intimidated or out of date. Let me add some details about these signposts to improved access.

i) Culture learning.

We ought not to forget the title of Lado's 1957 founding work: Linguistics across Cultures. He was way ahead of his time in seeing culture learning as a priority, possibly the main justification for timetabling foreign language study in school. Widdowson (1992) has proposed that cultural understanding should become a major goal of FL teaching, being at least as important as the teaching of communicative competence, accuracy or fluency. This cultural understanding, he suggests, "can be seen as a function of the study of language" (ibid.: 107). The question is, what forms should such study take? Contemporary specialists in the field of culture learning and teaching, for example Byram and Morgan (1994), refer to classroom research that clearly shows that language teachers frequently make use of comparison and contrast, "especially in talk about the foreign culture." (p. 42). They cite the following example from a French FL class:

T1: Qu'est-ce que c'est, saucisson?

P: Sausages.

T2: Sausage, yes, what sort? What sort of sausage? Wall's?

P: (Silence)

T3: Sort of salami type of sausage, that sort of sausage.

Note how the teacher T, in her second move (T2), uses contrast: she insists, rhetorically, that a French *saucisson* is not to be equated with the English banger type of sausage, of which the Wall's brand is typical. Then, at T3, extension is the associative strategy used to introduce the new concept: a *saucisson* is similar to something the learner is likely to be acquainted with - salami. These authors justify the use of contrast and comparison in teaching on educational and learning-theoretical grounds: FL learning is supposed to develop in pupils an understanding not only of the FL culture but also of their own MT culture, and such confrontation of the familiar and the new triggers an attitudinal change in children (and adults). Clearly, the contrastive dimension is prominent, if not crucial, in culture teaching.

ii) Removal of the Audiolingual Vetoes.

During the period when the Audiolingual approach to FL teaching was in vogue, the sort of foreign language study (in the literal sense of that word) that Widdowson had in mind, like Harold Palmer many years earlier in his discussion of FL learners' "studial capacity" (Palmer, 1921) was outlawed from classrooms. All talk about and reflection on the FL was banned, and fluency and automatic response were the overriding objectives. As H.V. George (1972: 180ff)

perceptively observed, the Audiolingual approach "fitted, and fits, an anti-intellectual style of thinking about education generally." As for talking in class about the structural affinities that hold between the MT and the FL being learnt, that was anathema: Hadlich (1968) warned against the teaching technique of juxtaposition in class of lexical problem-pairs such as English *do/make* or German *kennen/wissen*, claiming that this technique would precipitate the very confusion that one wishes to avoid. This amounts to the claim, to return to our sausage example, that it is evoking in the learner's mind the image of a banger that makes the new concept *saucisson* more inaccessible. But surely it is the learner who juxtaposes these two, when he mediates the FL through his MT. Moreover such translationally paired associates have very little formal similarity, so there is little chance of them leading to confusion, as this notion is defined by Room (1979), somehow being exacerbated by being brought into contact in the learner's mind.

These Audiolingualist vetoes have now been lifted. First, there has been a shift toward reflectivity at all levels of education, of the sort that George (op.cit.) proposed. Py defines such reflectivity as "attention shifting from the content to the form of the interaction, which then takes on an autonomous status for one or two speaking turns. (Py, 1996: 182). Secondly, there has been a reconceptualisation of the role of the school, in language teaching specifically. The school is there to fine-tune the makeshift FL repertoires which learners have developed through language contact, exposure to comprehensible input, and frequent resort to coping strategies. Odlin (1991) argues that without this fine-

tuning, which is best undertaken in schools, there will be massive interference from MT systems on the learner's attempts at producing the FL. This explains, he claims, why there are still such obvious traces of Irish in contemporary Hiberno-English: because at a crucial period in Anglo-Irish history (during the 18th. and much of the 19th. centuries) English was acquired in a makeshift fashion without the opportunities for fine-tuning, monitoring and reflectivity that are provided in school-based FL teaching. He argues that "It is highly likely that the unavailability of education encouraged cross-linguistic influence" since "Formal second language instruction frequently provides some explicit comparison of the native and target language." (Odlin, 1991: 187-88)

iii) **Neo-Whorfianism.**

It is all too easy to forget the associations that exist between Contrastive Analysis and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Like CA, the latter also comes in two versions, strong and weak. The strong version posits linguistic determinism, or the idea that the language a person speaks determines the way s/he perceives and subsequently processes those perceptions of the physical and social worlds. Its CA analogue would be that one's MT determines the way s/he perceives and processes her perceptions of the FL she is learning, a language being a representation of those physical, social and cognitive worlds. The weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or the theory of linguistic relativism, claims that as languages differ, so do the thoughts of their speakers. Pinker (1994: 57) rejects the Sapir-Whorf (or more precisely the Humboldt-Whorf) hypothesis in its entirety, dismissing it as a conventional absurdity, that is "a statement that goes

against all common sense", and insists that we think not in English, Polish or Malay but in a linguistically neutral or nonspecific propositional logic he calls "*mentalese*". Slobin (op.cit.) rescues the theory but prefers to talk of the Boas-Sapir hypothesis, and suggests that while one's language may not determine how one thinks, it does determine how we do our "thinking for speaking" that is, how we formulate our ideas and transmit them to listeners. He has compared how speakers of Spanish, German, and English encode their accounts of what is objectively the same series of events, and is able to make interesting generalisations, such as the following:

"English speakers assert actions, implying results, whereas Spanish speakers assert results, implying actions." (Slobin, *ibid.*: 84)

This generalisation is amply supported by his data. In its symmetry this formulation must rank as an archetypal contrastive statement: Lado really has come back home! The corresponding perfect state of affairs in the foreign language classroom would be one where the Spanish teacher and learner of English would somehow become cognisant of this generalisation - and take appropriate avoiding (or self-corrective) action in their linguistic behaviour.

iv) **Contrastive rhetoric**.

If we extend "thinking for speaking" to the written modality and consider "thinking for writing" also, we open up the Pandora's box of contrastive rhetoric, defined by Ulla Connor (1996: 5) in her book of the same title as follows (note that she also opts for the weak CA hypothesis):

"Contrastive rhetoric is an area of research in second language acquisition that

identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain [my emphasis: CJ] them."

It is salutary to relate contrastive rhetoric to the notion of "thinking for writing", since doing so will allow us to avoid the jingoism of claiming that foreigners don't think like us, and therefore think less well, less logically and less clearly than us. This kind of Anglocentrism-cum-nativespeakerism was perceived by many as at least implicit in Kaplan's (1966) doodles paper on contrastive rhetoric, where he appeared to be saying that English speakers go straight to the point while Orientals go logically (or illogically?) round in circles, to judge from their writing conventions. This bias alienated many people. We need only say that Oriental or Semitic writers express themselves differently from Western writers, without attributing any cognitive deficit to the former: it is merely a case of how they express their thoughts, not how they conceive, value, and process them.

v.) **Translation.**

As Connor makes clear in chapter 7 of her book Contrastive Rhetoric, this field of study has much in common with the study of translation. We might go even further, to say that one of the effects of the native language on FL learning has much in common with translation (James, 1988). The layperson's view of performance in a FL assumes translation from the MT to be the prime resource. The layperson who experiences MT interference in FL learning and use normally describes it in terms of "translating from the Mother Tongue", and sees success as dependant on somehow cutting oneself free from this tendency to translate.

And yet these laymen are not so very far from the truth! After all, MT transfer in FL production is a particular form of translation: over-literal translation, such as Krashen (1985) assumed to be in operation when learners "beat the clock" and outperform their own FL competence by resorting to the MT-plus-monitor mode of FL production (James, 1991)

In fact there is a growing body of research which addresses the specific issue of mental translation in FL performance. Kern (1994) reports the effects of translating mentally into MT when reading FL texts, while Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) and Brooks (1993) have investigated the effectiveness of FL writing that is done by translating from the MT. The thrust of this research is to suggest that the standard admonition on the part of teachers not to translate to or from the MT when processing the FL is not uniformly justified, since quite tangible benefits can accrue from making use of the MT through mental translation. A very useful survey of this research is to be found in Cohen (1998), where it is suggested that use of the MT can help FL learners in a number of ways, for example to chunk material into semantic blocks, to keep their train of thought, to create semantic associations, and to clarify the grammatical roles in the particular FL text being read (and also presumably heard).

iv.) **Noticing.**

The "noticing hypothesis", attributed to Schmidt (1990), suggests that features of FL input that are noticed by the learner have an enhanced probability of being acquired. The didactic implication of this is clear: promote noticing. Presumably features that are in some respect salient stand a better chance of being noticed -

and therefore acquired - than features that are low-profile such as the French clitic pronouns as in *Mon pere [l'y] a envoye*. Some features may be intrinsically highly noticeable, while others less salient can be put into contexts that either enhance their low salience or invest some salience in them, by association, so to speak. A third source of salience is contrastive salience: the salience of a FL feature is highlighted or enhanced by its contrastive association with the corresponding MT item, very much in the same way as two colours clash. Our fascination by the exotic would explain this effect to some extent. What proof exists for this claim? Odlin (1996) demonstrates how proficient bilinguals are able to identify certain errors in the attempted FL performance of learners as resulting from MT interference in cases where there is a high degree of MT:FL contrastivity. Successful learners, having struggled to overcome these same interference triggers, retain a vivid memory of their source: the word "vivid" here suggests they got well noticed, on account of their contrastivity. For example, successful MT Spanish learners of FL English (Odlin calls them "bilinguals") found it easy to identify the following typical [head noun + modifier] order errors occurring in the attempted English of MT Spanish students:

*The *[girl pretty]*

The car is the[transport most popular].*

Comparisons were possible of the respective bilinguals' ability to attribute different MT transfer error types. Thus, 14 out of 16 Koreans correctly saw the following as resulting from Korean influence, while only one out of 9 Spanish speakers was willing to attribute it to MT Spanish influence:

**a different country man(a man from a different country)*

Symmetrically, while 8 out of 9 Spanish judges correctly saw *many discoveries have been *possibles* as coming from Spanish, a mere two out of 16 Korean judges were so convinced. What is important is that these perceptions correspond to the facts.

Kupferberg and Olshtain (1997) go a step further than Odlin, in suggesting, and indeed demonstrating experimentally, that in FL learning there is an optimal noticing point (when the FL form enters short-term memory) where MT:FL comparisons (contrasts) can be executed. Facilitating these interlingual contrasts and ensuring that the contrasts learners make are valid and productive is the job of teachers and the teaching materials. Such engineered input is referred to as contrastive linguistic input (CLI). Whereas the old classical role of CA was to predict or diagnose errors, in the CLI framework, "CA is used for the definition of salient input which may assist L2 learners" (op.cit: 151). Kupferberg and Olshtain gave an experimental group of 67 Israeli learners of English contrastive linguistic input (CLI) on the structures of compound nouns and relative clauses in English, while a matched control group received only comprehensible input. In other words, the experimental group received direct contrastive evidence of the sort "Look how your MT and English contrast here", while the control group received only indirect positive evidence, on the basis of which incidental learning should take place. Compound nouns (CNs) in these students' MT Hebrew contrast with English CNs in two features: Hebrew has [head + modifier] order, English [modifier + head] order; and Hebrew has number differentiation in the modifier while in English the modifier noun is constantly

singular, even when implicitly plural as in *pencil (M) case (H)*, which is of course a case for several pencils, not just one. As for reduced restrictive relative clauses (RRRCs) such as that bracketed inside *The student (reading the book) is clever*, these are nonexistent in Hebrew, and a further contrast is the occurrence of resumptive pronouns in Hebrew relative clauses versus their absence in English. These contrasts, the focus for the CLI, can be summarised as follows:

Compound. Nouns

Hebrew	English
hm	mh
sing (collar [for a] cat)	
m	m sing (tooth brush, pencil case)
plural (brush [for all] teeth)	
(lit: teeth brush)	

Reduced Restrictive Relative Clauses

Hebrew	English
Res Pron	(nonoccurring)
The student who HE is reading	
(nonoccurring)	Reduced RRCs

The student reading a book is clever

The experimental group's recognition and production scores on these two contrasting patterns were significantly higher than those of the control group, suggesting that FL learners in formal settings do benefit from receiving explicit CLI. In other words, there are at least some occasions where somewhat artificial contrastive input obtains better learning results than mere exposure to comprehensible input.

vii). **The Interface of MT and FL.**

I hope to have established that the MT: FL interface is again very much under discussion in FL teaching and learning circles: no longer is reference to or even use of the MT seen as a taboo in these contexts. This should not be surprising, since it is obvious that one never knows a second language in isolation from the knowledge of one's first. This is only true however where that knowledge is held unconsciously, tacitly, or intuitively, for in this form knowledge is not amenable to control. One cannot simply voluntarily shut out one's MT when engaging with the FL, as we have shown above. It is possible however to know two languages each in isolation from the other when the knowledge (of either both or of one of those languages) is conscious or explicit. Every day I encounter FL learners who know a great deal about (have explicit knowledge of) the FL they are learning but nothing explicitly about their MT. Holding one's two languages in isolation one from the other is an undesirable state of affairs for the FL learner. It is just as disabling for the student of the MT to have no other language knowledge to draw

upon besides that of the MT itself. This one-sidedness makes it impossible for them to carry out valid data-based interlingual comparisons of the sort that Odlin's bilinguals or Kupferberg and Olshtain's teachers executed. The danger is that they will nevertheless persist in trying to carry out MT:FL comparisons, but purely on the basis of their intuitions, which, as Kellerman (1995) observed, may be counterfactual: This awareness of typological relations (quite regardless of its accuracy) has been termed the learner's psychotypology. (ibid.: 1995: 143 fn..6). The problem is that the less proficient the learner, the less his or her intuitions about the FL are likely to be veridical, so some constructive guidance on the explicit/declarative level is called for.

There are two sorts of constructive guidance. The first attends to the veridicity of the learner's knowledge concerning the structural relationships that hold between the MT and the FL being learnt. This is contrastive or cross-linguistic knowledge, which is knowledge of the sort that Fries, Lado and others studied. In the early days of CA and Audiolingualism. This knowledge was the prerogative of the linguist and teacher, but was cautiously withheld from the learner. The difference is that for Fries and Lado the two bodies of knowledge were deposited in two individuals, each a monolingual native speaker of one of the languages but lacking knowledge of the other. Classical CAs we executed on two NS grammars: the NS of the MT and the NS of the FL. Now the learner can become her own contrastivist since the two languages coincide in one individual at this cognitive or knowledge-based level. Such knowledge is objective rather than subjective, by which I mean that it has to be veridical to qualify as

knowledge: if you believe that the MT and the FL have the same [head+modifier] order but they do not, then you lack the necessary knowledge of course. It has in this respect a different status from Kellerman's psychotypology, which can be counterfactual. It is a necessary counterweight to Kellerman's psychotypology because it contains a checker.

Beyond this contrastive linguistic knowledge there is a more abstract metalinguistic knowledge: knowing how much one knows intuitively about the relationships (and the absence of any relationship) between one's MT knowledge and one's knowledge of the FL. This sort of knowledge I shall refer to as cross-linguistic awareness, since it involves making underlying tacit knowledge explicit. The difference therefore between cross-linguistic knowledge and crosslinguistic awareness is that the former deals with knowledge that was at all times explicit: it is the sort of knowledge students of linguistics gather. You can know much about Hungarian and about Tamil and about how they compare - while speaking neither. Crosslinguistic awareness is based on what one knows tacitly of the MT and the FL and about how they relate. It is metacognitive by virtue of being explicit knowledge of the state of one's implicit knowledge.

viii) **Awareness and Consciousness**

I suggest that there are two types of linguistic metacognition: awareness and consciousness. These are not synonymous, although sometimes they are used synonymously, which is to overlook a crucial distinction between them. Language Awareness (or LA) is metacognition of some element of language

about which one already has knower intuitions: this allows one to scrutinise, and if necessary to revise, one's intuitions or the behaviours that are based on them. For example, an English speaker might inspect her use of relative clauses to see if she makes optimal use of them in her descriptive writing. LA is what the British School of LA, founded by Hawkins (Hawkins, 1984) concerns itself with. Linguistic Consciousness-Raising (CR) is by contrast for learners rather than knowers. As Snow (1976: 154) first suggested, we learn by becoming conscious of what we do not yet know. CR is thus predicated on an inadequacy in linguistic competence and skilled performance that has to be bridged by a heightened declarative knowledge (James, 1997)

"There is a deliberate attempt to draw the learner's attention specifically to the formal features [those one needs to learn: CJ] of the target language". (Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1985: 274). If we accept Reads (1978: 73) definition of LA raising as "focussing attention on something that one knows", we can define CR as focussing the learner's attention on something she does NOT know: when we do this, we bring about noticing, as we saw above.

In this short paper I have attempted to see the mutual relevance of Contrastive Analysis and Language Awareness. I have also suggested a crucial distinction between Language Awareness and Consciousness Raising.

At the same time I have attempted to show that sweeping that old-fashioned entity called CA under the carpet just does not work. Try as you will, issues to do with language transfer and its effects on language learning just won't go away.

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