

Unit 1.

Contrastive Studies in perspective. A Short history

1.1. Introduction: contrastive studies

A brief history of Contrastive Linguistics

- Linguistics B.S. (before Saussure): comparative linguistics (investigate historical relatedness of lgs).
- Modern linguistics: Saussure. “The scientific study of language”: only synchronic approaches

- After this, many subdisciplines arose, trying to cover different aspects/goals of language study:
 - learning and teaching of a Second Language (L2)
 - language problems such as aphasias, acquisition problems, etc.
 - as a tool for translation
 - as a tool for lexicography (the making of dictionaries)
 - Natural Language Processing (using language with computers, as in Machine Translation, etc.)
 - in general terms, as a descriptive tool.
 - as a tool to know how the human mind works, how our thought is structured.

1.2. Some subdisciplines of linguistics

- ▣ ***Psycholinguistics***
- ▣ ***Sociolinguistics***
- ▣ ***Computational Linguistics***
- ▣ ***Neurolinguistics***
- ▣ ***Applied Linguistics***

Contrastive Analysis

1.3. Contrastive Analysis

- Forms part of Applied Linguistics (Robert Lado, 1957) and is concerned with the influence of L1 in L2 learning, which is called **Transfer**
- When this influence has a negative outcome, it is called ***Interference***

- In a first stage, it was thought that the main source of L2 Learning problems came from L1 transfer:
 - If the two languages were close, transfer would be positive, and learning would be facilitated;
 - if they were far apart, transfer would be negative and we would have *interference*.
 - So, the closer the language, the easier to learn (better for Spaniards to learn Italian than Chinese)
- Result: CA had to compare languages and find the differences and similarities, which would predict where learning problems would be found
 - Teaching should be centered on the differences among languages; similarities could be ignored
- However, practical studies showed that L1 influence was not so great

TWO MAIN PROBLEMS FOR CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS:

1. Not all linguistic differences cause problems (linguistic difference \neq learning problems)
2. There are many other reasons for learning problems: motivation, age, aptitudes, intelligence, personality, teaching methods.

Two types of contrastive studies:

- 1) theoretical, comparing one paradigm in several languages (say, plural, or subject-verb agreement);
- 2) applied, as part of AL, with a specific practical purpose (e.g., improving L2 Learning/teaching, helping translation, etc.).