

Error Analysis

English Language

- English has undoubtedly become today's global lingua franca. Apart from the 350-450 million of native speakers of English there are also about 800 million of people who speak it as a foreign language (James, 1998: 25). This suggests that most of the interaction in English takes place among its non-native speakers (Seidlhofer 2005).
- English as a lingua franca (ELF) therefore serves as “a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication” (Firth 1996: 240 cited in Seidlhofer 2005: 339).
- Other terms used for this phenomenon are ‘English as an international language’, English as a global language’ and ‘English as a world language’, but as Seidlhofer argues, the preferred term when referring to people from different mother-tongue and cultural backgrounds is ‘English as a lingua franca’ (Seidlhofer 2005: 339).

1: CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS AND CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS

History

- Contrastive Analysis has been the first major theory dealing with the relationship between the languages a learner acquires or masters.
- Linguists have always been interested in comparing and contrasting different language systems and first pioneering works appeared at the end of the nineteenth century (James 1981). The term 'Contrastive Study' was coined by Whorf in 1941; before that this discipline had been called 'Comparative Linguistics' or 'Comparative Studies' (Fisiak 1981).

Definitions and Terminology

- Fisiak defines contrastive linguistics as “a sub-discipline of linguistics concerned with the comparison of two or more languages or subsystems of languages in order to determine both the differences and similarities between them” (Fisiak et al. 1978 cited in Fisiak 1981: 1).

Division of Contrastive Studies

- Fisiak (1981: 2-3) divides contrastive studies into theoretical and applied:
- “Theoretical contrastive studies give an exhaustive account of the differences and similarities between two or more languages, provide an adequate model for the comparison, and determine how and which elements are comparable ...” They are language independent, which means that they do not investigate how a particular category or item present in language A is presented in language B, but “they look for the realization of an universal category X in both A and B” (Fisiak 1981: 2).

- Applied contrastive studies belong to applied linguistics. Fisiak (1981: 2-3) explains that “drawing on the findings of theoretical contrastive studies they provide a framework for the comparison of languages, selecting whatever information is necessary for a specific purpose ...” The main focus of applied contrastive studies is “the problem of how a universal category X, realized in language A as Y, is rendered in language B, and what may be the possible consequence on this for a field of application” (Fisiak 1981: 2-3).
- They are also concerned with “the identification of probable areas of difficulty in another language where, for example, a given category is not represented in the surface and interference is likely to occur” (Fisiak, 1981: 3). So they are rather interested in the surface representation of language.

Formulating Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

- The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) was widely accepted in the 1950s and 1960s
- USA and its original purpose was purely pedagogical. The teaching method which used the CAH as its theory of learning was the audio-lingual method.
- Based on behaviorist and structuralist theories, the basic assumption for this hypothesis was that
- “the principal barrier to second language acquisition is the interference of the first language system with the second language system ...” and “... that second language learning basically involved the overcoming of the differences between the two linguistic systems – the native and target languages” (Brown 1980: 148). The term ‘interference’ here refers to “any influence from the L1 which would have an effect on the acquisition of L2” (Powell, 1998: 2)

- The assumptions about L1 interference were supported by the evidence from speakers' performance in their second language. As Brown states, "it is quite common, for example, to detect certain foreign accents and to be able to infer, from the speech of the learner alone, where the learner comes from" (1980: 149).
- Later in the same book he claims that the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult. The teacher who has made a comparison of a foreign language with the native language of the student will know better what the real learning problems are and can better provide for teaching them. (Lado 1957: 2 cited in Fisiak 1981: 4)
- This formulation of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis was later called by Ronald Wardhaugh 'the strong version' of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Brown 1980: 157).

2: INTERLANGUAGE THEORY

- This Interlanguage theory or hypothesis has arisen as a reaction to the CAH.

The Birth of Interlanguage

- The CAH focused on the influence of L1 on the emerging L2 system and stressed the similarities and differences between the L1 and L2.
- The Interlanguage theory, which is a reaction to the CAH, basically understands second language learning as “a creative process of constructing a system in which the learner is consciously testing hypotheses about the target language from a number of possible sources of knowledge ...” (Brown 1980: 162); these sources include, among other factors, both L1 and L2.
- The term ‘interlanguage’ was first used by Selinker.
- However, it was Nemser who in the 1960s first mentioned ‘deviant’ learner language: “Learner speech at a given time is the patterned product of a linguistic system distinct from [NL] and [TL] and internally structured” (Nemser 1971: 116 cited in Powell 1998: 3). And, finally, it was Corder who made the whole issue important.

- In McLaughlin (1987: 60) we read that the term ‘interlanguage’ can mean two things:
- “(1) the learner’s system at a single point in time and
- (2) the range of interlocking systems that characterizes the development of learners over time”.
- Therefore we think that one’s interlanguage is different from one’s mother tongue and target language as well.
- It is, as James (1998: 3) suggests, a system which holds a half-way position between knowing and not knowing the TL.

Selinker's View of Interlanguage

- In Selinker's view, interlanguage is "a separate linguistic system resulting from learner's attempted production of the target language norm" (McLaughlin 1987: 60-61).
- McLaughlin (1987: 61) also gives Selinker's belief that interlanguage was "the product of five central cognitive processes involved in second-language learning":
 - (1) language transfer, i.e. transfer from the L1;
 - (2) transfer of training, i.e. some features transferred from the training process;
 - (3) strategies of second-language learning, i.e. an approach to the material taught;
 - (4) strategies of second-language communication, i.e. those ways learners use to communicate with L2 speakers; and
 - (5) overgeneralization of the target language linguistic material.

- Selinker also believed that the development of interlanguage was different from the first-language development because of “the likelihood of fossilization in the second language” (McLaughlin 1987: 61).
- Fossilization can be basically defined as the state when a learner’s interlanguage does not develop anymore, no matter how long the learner is exposed to the target language.
- Based on the analysis of children’s speech, Selinker found a “definite systematicity in the interlanguage”, which was evidenced by certain cognitive strategies: language transfer, overgeneralization of target language rules and simplification.
- So his view of interlanguage is “an interim grammar that is a single system composed of rules that have been developed via different cognitive strategies ... and the interlanguage grammar is some combination of these types of rules” (McLaughlin 1987: 62-63).