

Contrastive analysis



Contrastive analysis(CA) is a method to distinguish between what are needed and not needed to learn by the target language(TL) learner by evaluating languages (M. Gass & Selinker, 2008). In addition, CA is a technique to identify whether two languages have something in common, which assess both similarities and differences in languages, conforming to the belief in language universals. (Johnson, 1999). Both statements indicate that CA holds a principle which is important in order to identify what are required by the TL learner to learn in TL and what are not. If there is no familiar characteristic in the languages, it indicates that the learner might have difficulty in learning the TL. While much could be said about comparing languages, a more important aspect is about the influence from TL in first language (L1).

“ Contrastive analysis stresses the influence of the mother tongue in learning a second language in phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic levels. It holds that second language would be affected by first language” (Jie, 2008, p. 36).

On the same score, Wardhaugh asserts that first language of TA learners can clarify all “ errors” that are constantly made them. These arguments prove that the errors make by the TL learner are explainable in the L1. Indeed, this idea is conformed to the rule of CA, which believes in language universal.

However, this analysis has disadvantages. In Susan M. Gass and Larry Selinker words, they believe that this analysis is questioned because of the concept of difficulty as the basic theory of the CA is concerning the difficultness. If an error is made by a person, this shows that the person has

a problem in some area, not because of the native language. Thus, we cannot presume that fluency of a target language learner is depending on the nature of L1. There are more aspects that related to this matter.

“ There are other factors that may influence the process of acquisition such as innate principle of language, attitude, motivation, aptitude, age, other languages known...” (M. Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Next, CA cannot detect some difficulties experienced by the TL learners. For example,

“ Je vois les/elle/la/le” . “ I see them/her/her/him” (this phrase is impossible in French) (Choi, 2009).

Error analysis (EA) is “ a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make” (M. Gass & Selinker, 2008). This analysis is almost the same with the weak version of CA which is comparing the errors which made by TL learners. However, EA is not evaluating the errors with TL native language (NL), but it compares with the TL. “ Error analysis provides a broader range of possible explanations than contrastive analysis for researchers/teachers to use account for errors, as the latter only attributed errors to the native language” (M. Gass & Selinker, 2008). I do agree with Gass and Selinker because as Corder (1967) says that by producing errors, it shows that the learners are progressing and participating. This statement is supported by the interlanguage theory, as according to Christina Gitsaki;

“...interlanguage is seen as a kind of interim grammar gradually progressing towards the target language grammar”

There are two categories of sources of errors which are interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors are kind of errors produced because of influence of the NL. Intralingual error happens when learners try to make a new rule for the target language. Example of interlingual error is, the word “rumah-rumah” in Malay Language can be said in English as “houses”. However, the learners would say as “house-house”. The TL learners mixed the lexical from the NL with the TL. Example of intralingual error is the word “telah” in Malay Language represents “was/were/had” in English. That is no doubt that a Malay learner would construct a sentence like this,

1. “She were playing badminton” (wrong)
2. “Dia telah bermain badminton”
3. “She was playing badminton” (correct)

The first sentence happens because there is no past tense marker in Malay language. So it becomes a problem for Malay learners since the TL and NL share different tenses.

EA gives an important role because it makes the errors not as unwanted but as guidance to assess how the learners progress in TL. It also detects lots of errors, more than CA does. EA also recognizes the learners' acknowledgement of language system. Besides, it also can categorized errors made by learners according to a system. However, EA is totally depends on errors made by learners. It is also cannot explain about what are classified as errors and non errors. In addition, EA as a mode of inquiry was limited in its scope and concentrated on what learners did wrong rather than on what made them successful (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). This shows that EA

cannot cover lots of aspects since it is bounded by its range and errors are temptation for error analyzer.

Statements

a) There may be covert errors, A classic example from Corder (1981) is the German speaker who says “ You must not take off your hat” when the intent is “ You don’t have to take off your hat”. In what sense is this error? In what sense it is not?

According to Joachim Wagner (2007), James (1998) uses the term covert error to describe a genuine language error which results in a sentence which is syntactically well-formed under some interpretation different from the intended one. This means that there is no wrong about a dubious sentence but the understanding by both speaker and receiver are important.

The statement “ You must not take off your hat” is not wrong in the sense of German speaker but in English, the choice of the word or modal verb is wrong. The modal verb “ must not” is not appropriate in this context. That modal verb means to prohibit or disallow the action of taking off the hat. The German speaker, literally, wants to say that the person does not have to take off his hat. However, instead of trying to convey a positive transfer sentence, the German speaker makes a negative transfer sentence.

According to Jie (2008):

“ In the course of language learning, L1 learning habits will be transferred into L2 learning habits. Therefore, in the case of L1 transfer into L2, if structures in the MT have their corresponding structures in the TL and L1 habits can be successfully used in the L2, learners would transfer similar properties successfully and that would result in positive transfer.

Contrastingly, in the case of negative transfer or interference, certain

elements of the MT have no corresponding counterparts in the TL, L1 habits would cause errors in the L2, and learners would transfer inappropriate properties of L1”

In other words, the German speaker forms a sentence in English, which has the same properties with the German language but unfortunately, the sentence is wrong in the sense of CA. Error in this statement can be referred to the L1 speaker. In Robert Lado’s words (1957: p. 2):

“ The ‘ fundamental assumption’ is transfer; ‘ individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture”.

I agree with Robert Lado since the German speaker tends to use direct translation if both languages properties are same to make a complete sentence. In this context, both German Language and English have the same grammatical order. For example, in German Language and English, the word order is subject + verb + other elements sentences.

1. er schlägt mir.

(Subject) (Verb) (Other element)

2. He beats me.

(Subject) (Verb) (Other element)

Because of the structure similarity between German language and English, there is no syntax problem. Though, in the context of lexicon, the German speaker seems to confuse because in German language, there is no auxiliary verb “ do”. German language only has “ must” and the German speaker uses “ must” as the word is quite similar to “ do”, in his or her judgment. This

error also happens to a Malay learner. In Malay language, “ tidak” is represented by “ is not” and “ do not”. For example, in Malay, the sentence,

1.“ Dia tidak sempurna”

(Subject) (Negation) (Predicate)

Is written in English as

2.“ He is not perfect”

(Subject) (Negation) (Predicate)

However, because of there are two negations that represent the word “ tidak”, there is no doubt the sentence below, will be produced by Malay learners.

3. “ He does not perfect”

(Subject) (Negation) (Predicate)

The first statement is logical but the second statement shows that errors and transferred inappropriate properties those made by TL learners because of the differences between the L1 and the TL.

Clearly, the German speaker is struggling in choosing the right vocabulary although the error does not give an obvious picture of the difficulty. This is because, in his or her point of view, the usage of “ must not” is correct even though the sentence has covert error. However, this justification cannot measure the degree of difficulty that the German speaker has. We cannot say that the German speaker is weak in English and not progressing. This error shows that the German speaker is in the process of improving his or her target language.

From EA point of view, the German speaker made an intralingual error. The German speaker made an error in his or her sentence because of native language influence. He or she over generalizes the function of modal verb to make this sentence.

Overgeneralization means

“ The introduction of a nonstandard or previously non-existent spelling or verb form when a speaker or writer makes an analogy to a regular spelling or a regular verb” (Wheeler, 2009)

“ You do not have to take off your hat”(correct sentence)

“ You must not take off your hat”(Over generalize the modal verb function)

The German speaker believes that the statement is grammatically correct. The German speaker tries to simplify his or her task by employing this rule. He or she makes his or her own analogy by taking words that do not carry contrast for him or her. However, due to cross linguistic action, the modal verb being used is wrong, in terms of its function.

In addition, this speaker seems that he or she does not master the function of the modal verb although the sentence is correct, literally. Besides, the German speaker does not know the correct modal verb in English to carry his or her intentional meaning. As a result, an ambiguous sentence has come out although the German speaker intention is to give suggestion.

This also happens to Spanish learners. They would say

1. “ He went to the market and buy a chicken”

instead of

2. “ He went to the market and bought a chicken”.

They choose wrong tense and alter the word meaning.

b. It might be more appropriate to talk about TL-behaviour. The fact that a learner has produced a correct form/sentence in a language does not necessarily mean that it is right.

Target language like behavior from the grammatical point of view is happen when target language learners construct a sentence or a phrase because they have learnt the target language grammatical rules. However, the construction of sentence might or might not correct. As example, Malay learners would create a sentence like this

“ I eated the fruit”

instead of

“ I ate the fruit”.

From CA point of view, this error occurs because past tense is a new category for Malay learners. Although, the learners seem alert with the past tense rule which is -ed and subject verb agreement but they forget about past irregular form. They think that they have mastered the rules but they forgot about irregular verb rule. However, CA does not explain about the difficulty from the target language point of view. CA cannot give the correct degree of difficulty. Moreover, from the speakers' perspective, they might think that the sentence is no wrong even with the covert error. So, we cannot say that the speakers are having difficulty to understand the rule since they can produce a correct form of sentence but with covert error.

On the other hand, from error analysis point of view, a sentence like “ You must not take off your hat” evens the intention of the speaker is “ You do not have to take off your hat” is correct. The structure of the sentence is correct and there is no mistake produces. However, the meaning of the sentence is distorted. This is because, error analysis is totally depends on errors but not the usage of the sentence. Though, to the speaker perspective, this is a correct sentence since there is no grammatical mistake. On the other hand, the solidness of the first sentence makes the EA is useless to explain this sentence. So, even the sentence is wrong according to CAH, but it is consider as correct to EA.

C. It is not always possible to provide a single explanation for interlanguage data.

Interlanguage is the way the learner develops the target language knowledge. This term was produced by Selinker (1972)

“ Interlanguage refers to the structured system which learner constructs at any given stage in the development”.

There are strategies apply by the learners to progress in target language such as transfer. Transfer is

“ Influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired (Ellis, 1997).

Interlanguage is systematic and dynamic. Interlanguage is systematic because the rules are efficiently selected by the learners and the way the TL learners acquired TL is the same with native speaker acquires NL. Interlanguage is dynamic because the learners' interlanguage is continuously shifting. The learners tend to make new rules in one context and so on. In addition, this process form the approach to study the way the target language acquires by the learner. Though, this strategy does not apply to the target language learner alone, they also depict the way the children learn their native language. For example, an English child might come out with non-English like sentence.

	Non-English
English Like	Like

She came	She comed
yesterday.	yesterday

This happens because the children generalize the rules. It is possible to say that the children already acquired the rule of tenses but they failed to apply them in certain circumstances. This also happens to the target language learners. For example, problem in pluralizing word.

	Non-English
English Like	Like

	Singular-
Singular-	mouse
mouse	

	Plural-
Plural-mice	mouses

The word “ mice” is always forgotten as plural form of a mouse. Instead of saying “ mice”, the target language learners who apply interlanguage generalization strategy would say “ mouses”. This might occur because of L1 interference. For instance, in Malay Language, the word “ mouse” is “ tikus”. However, there is no such word as “ mice” in Malay language. So, Malay learners would go for “ mouses” instead of “ mice”. From CA perspective, these examples show that the learners have difficulties in pluralizing because of differences between the L1 and the TL. However, the first example proves that the NL speaker can make the same mistake as the TL learners. CA can be used to analyze the second example but it is not valid for the first example.

In addition, from EA point of view, the learners would find that they make errors. On the other hand, EA still does not give the correct view of learners’ linguistic behavior. The first example explains that errors made by NL speaker. This is because the child overused the rule of past tense. EA can help the child to progress in leaning the NL by classifying the errors. However, there is no clear path to understand about the child linguistic behavior because the child already knew the rule of regular verb tense but not irregular verb tense. The second example happens because of cross linguistic error. The learners have knowledge in plural rule but due to difference between languages and NL interference, the rule is generalized and error occurs.

Conclusion

As conclusion, both CAH and EA have their own strength and weaknesses. The analysis of the sentence is important in order to detect error or to notify the progress of the second language learners. However, CAH and EA cannot work alone. For the sake of the language learners, these analyses should be worked hand in hand in order to improve the quality of the target language learners.