

CONTRASTIVE TEACHING, COMPARATIVE TEACHING AND LANGUAGE AWARENESS ENHANCEMENT. ANALYSIS OF A CONTRASTIVE AND COMPARATIVE TEACHING LINGUISTIC EXPERIMENT

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Abstract. The article focuses on the tight connection between Contrastive Teaching and Comparative Teaching methodologies which complement each other and on the implications stemming from this relationship for language awareness enhancement. Its importance for FLT is studied on the basis of previous research conducted by this author and supported by eminent researchers in a cognitive perspective. A linguistic experiment in English passive diathesis types, which involved both contrastive and comparative methods, was designed and carried out among high school learners of French (FL1) and English (FL2). Experimental results have been analyzed within a cognitive linguistics framework.

Keywords: contrastive teaching, comparative teaching, language awareness, attention, understanding

1. Introduction

Abundant research in cognitive linguistics and language awareness has already been published. Still there are numerous issues to discuss and explore which have multiple FLT implications, e.g. the relation between *language awareness* and *multilingualism* (Schmidt, 2010)¹, James' "*mutual relevance of Contrastive Analysis and Language Awareness*"², etc. The current study³ aims to delineate the *relationships* and *dependencies* between *Contrastive Teaching (CT)*, *Comparative Teaching (CpT)* and learners' *Language Awareness (LA)* on the basis of previous research, the author's insights and a specially designed *language experiment* analysis.

We will adhere to the following structure: a brief description of the *methods* applied, *language awareness* examination, presentation of the *experiment* and comment on *experimental results*.

2. Contrastive and Comparative Teaching

As the present article deals with *LA implications* of *CT* and *CpT*, these will be clarified only briefly.

2.1. Contrastive Teaching

James (1980: 154) introduced **CT** as a method which “involves presenting to the learner at the same time all the terms in a linguistic system of L2 which, as a system, contrasts with the corresponding L1 system”. The underlying idea of this approach is to prevent and overcome native language (NL) interference. However, theoretical and practical research evidence, *widening* and *specifying* quoted definition, has appeared over the years.³ According to multiple authors, amongst them Corder, Odlin, Selinker, Danchev, Shopov, Pencheva & Shopov, etc.⁴, *FL1 features* are largely susceptible to influence *FL2 acquisition*, alongside the *NL impact*. What is more, it has become evident that *positive transfer* should also be explored and both, the *similarities* and the *differences* in terms of *form, meaning and functioning* need to be investigated and identified. We believe that both, *divergences* and *convergences*, which mutually cast a light on the *functioning of a linguistic system* (or systems), and also affect NL, FL1 and FL2 users’ mental representations and way of thinking, can be particularly profitable in *LA building* through *CT*. This conviction of ours, cognitively founded and also experimentally corroborated, will be further discussed in the paper. Undoubtedly, teaching “all contrasting terms” in the words of James appears to be an extremely ambitious, if not impossible task. In reality, *CT*, which is aimed at fighting interference and promoting positive transfer, encompasses a restricted number of categories depending on learners’ needs and the teaching circumstances.

2.2. Comparative Teaching

Comparative Teaching (CpT)⁵ occurs when one compares *similar in form and/or meaning* categories within a language system. This comparison or juxtaposition fights *intra-lingual* (within one language) interference⁶ emerging from completely or partially convergent forms, which correspond to completely or partially divergent meanings and vice-versa, convergent meanings, which are conveyed by divergent forms. Therefore, *CpT*, which similarly to *CT* plays the role of some kind of *highlighting mechanism*⁷, contributes to *learners’ consciousness enhancement* regarding *form ↔ meaning* interaction. This interplay turns out to be crucial for error reduction in *LA* perspective.⁸

3. The essence of Language Awareness and its components. The importance of LA

3.1. Definition and scope

LA is a complex phenomenon, which encompasses various depth levels of linguistic knowledge, understanding and abilities and, therefore, bears crucial relevance to language learning. Due to language learning capacities and their peculiarities, specific for various ages, *LA* is predominantly important to be taught at high and higher school level.⁹

Several definitions of *LA* have been given, some of which will be quoted and analyzed here. As Malmberg (2001: 141)¹⁰ writes: “Language awareness is a person’s sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life.”¹¹ According to ALA (Association for Language Awareness) *LA* “can be defined as explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use.”¹² Alegre 2000 (in Araújo e Sá & Melo, 2007: 9) defines examined *LA* as “the ability to reflect on languages and to verbalise that reflection”. These definitions contain some key concepts, common to all of them, i.e., *conscious awareness, explicit knowledge about language, nature of language, reflection on languages*. It should be mentioned that *consciousness* and *explicitness* must be present in all types of linguistic activities, *teaching, learning and use*. It is also compelling to draw attention to the symptomatic general use of *language/languages*, definitely referring to *linguistic thinking development*, interest in the nature of *language* and its (including its systems and subsystems) *role and functioning*, *linguistic induction* and *generalization*. All these *LA* features prove to be really useful in learning, which will be substantiated in 3.2.

We believe different *LA* stages exist, in accordance with consciousness *depth* and *degree* of linguistic understanding stemming from the implementation of later described *cognitive processes*. Lecturers *as well as learners*¹³ are bound to realize the relationships between *form* and *meaning* of categories, their language *utility* and way of *functioning*. ***LA formation*** leads to asking, reflecting upon and answering questions, such as: *What* is this category all about?; *Why* does it exist?; *Why* should we teach/learn it?; *How* is it related to the form and meaning of *other categories* (focusing on similar ones) within *one and the same or more languages*?; *What* are the *equivalents* in terms of *form and semantics* (as well as the *isomorphism* degree) in NL, FL1, FL2, etc.?; *How* essential is it to *communication*?; *What* implications does it have for *everyday use*?; *What* do I fully or partially understand and *why*?; *What* kind of problems as to the use of this category do I experience?; *Why* and *how* can I solve them?, etc. Answering, *or even asking*, similar queries promotes *LA* enhancement, which preconditions, as shown below, better language performance.

3.2. *LA* implementation necessity

The interdependence between *LA* and *linguistic activities* is undeniable from the point of view of *cognitive linguistics* and *experiment*. Svalberg (2007) provides evidence of the greater efficiency of *explicit* learning in comparison with *implicit* acquisition effectiveness. Robinson’s (1995)¹⁴ study testifies to better results when using an *inductive* approach in the formulation of grammar rules rather than relying on teacher’s tuition only. Schmidt (1995)¹⁵ attests “a low level of learning associated with a low level of attention”¹⁶, maintaining that in methodological terms “it seems difficult if not impossible to demonstrate complete absence of attention when learning takes place”.¹⁷ Truscott (1998 in Schmidt, 1995) corroborates these

views writing that: “Since learning necessarily requires detection¹⁸, and since detection is the essence of attention, learning without attention is also theoretically impossible”. Jourdenais et al. (1995)¹⁹ emphasize the “facilitative role of noticing” achieved by means of underlining structures in various styles and fonts.²⁰ Leow’s (1997) experiment shows that “the *high aware* group significantly outperformed the *unaware* and *low aware* groups”; in the same train of ideas Rosa & O’Neill (1999) testify to the “strong correlation between awareness and intake”²¹ in syntactic structure acquisition. Schmidt (2010) interprets Wes’ “very limited” grammar development in L2 as a result of “... over-reliance on an implicit learning strategy, learning through interaction alone, with little attention to language form and little conscious reflection about language structure”²². Quite the contrary, Julie displayed “native-like grammatical competence” in L2 as a result of grammar observations, conscious L2 grammar structure manipulation, “attention to morphological variation” and feedback use (ibid.). Similarly, Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam (2008), quoted in Schmidt (2010), assign their learners’ group highest performance to “interest and devotion to language structure and language learning.” To support *LA* implementation necessity we refer to Schmidt (2010) again who convincingly writes “... to the best of my knowledge, no study has ever shown that people learn better in dual task conditions than in single task conditions, or that ignoring grammatical forms in input results in better learning outcomes than noticing forms and forming hypotheses about them. Indeed, explicit knowledge (whether gained through instruction or through conscious induction) should have mostly positive influences on learning...” Horaničová’s²³ view on learning, while commenting on modern cognitive approaches, is also in conformity with the above presented awareness statements as “learning is an *active, constructive, cumulative, and self-directed process* that is dependent on the *mental activities* of the learner”. To put it differently, *LA* and its components (see 3.3.) greatly influence FL acquisition, as the enumerated learning features are bound up with conscious and explicit knowledge to be manipulated and processed.

3.3. LA components

Schmidt 1990 defines *consciousness* as *intention, attention and awareness*. According to Schmidt 1994a *consciousness* can be subdivided into four categories, *intention* by which he means intentional learning; *attention*, which encompasses noticing and focusing, *awareness* and *control*. As Al-Hejin (2004:1) estimates, concepts of *attention* and *awareness* are “inherently connected”. The same author states (ibid., 2004: 2) that “*Attention* and related terms such as *consciousness, noticing, awareness* and *understanding* are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature...”; Carr & Curran (1994: 219)²⁴ maintain that “if you are conscious of something, then you are attending to it ... and if you are attending to something, then you are conscious of it.” Quite logically, the concepts of *awareness, consciousness,*

attention, noticing and *control*²⁵ intermingle, all of them being inherently connected and mutually defining. Here below we shall cite views on the above mentioned terms to further elucidate their essence and FL learning implications.

– Noticing

Schmidt (1994b: 179) defines *noticing* as the “registration of the occurrence of a stimulus event in conscious awareness and subsequent storage in long term memory.” As pointed out by Al-Hejin (2004: 4) “since it is impossible to be aware of something without detecting it, we might ... simplify the equation [*noticing* = *detection* + *awareness*] to *noticing* = *awareness*.”

– Attention

As Schmidt (2010) points out “... attention does not refer to a single mechanism but to a variety of mechanisms or subsystems, including alertness, orientation, detection with selective attention, facilitation, and inhibition (Schmidt 2001; Tomlin & Villa 1994). What these have in common is the function of controlling information processing (...). Learning, establishing new or modified knowledge, memory, skills, and routines is therefore largely, and perhaps exclusively, a side effect of attended processing.” Posner & Peterson (1990)²⁶ consider attention as consisting of *alertness* (related to selection speed), *orientation* (referring to stimulus orientation) and *detection* (“cognitive registration of a stimulus” (Al-Hejin (2004: 3)).

– Understanding

Schmidt (1990, 2001 and 2010) compares *noticing* to *understanding*, stating that “noticing” refers to the “conscious registration or attended specific instances of language, and “understanding”, to “a higher level of awareness that includes generalizations across instances. Knowledge of rules and metalinguistic awareness of all kinds belongs to this higher level of awareness.” (ibid, 2010). Soons (2008: 13) defines *understanding* as “recognition [of rules, regularities] at a deeper level of abstraction”.

As a result of examining the above mentioned quotations we may conclude that:

– Due to the selective nature of *attention* there is a tight relationship between *awareness* and *attention* as *selective procedures* turn out impossible without *appropriate conscious prior knowledge*. Thus, *LA* deepening facilitates and preconditions controlled *selection* and vice-versa.

– The above mentioned *selection process* can be compared to a *circle or chain*, its repetition allowing deeper *awareness* and further *selection*. Thus, more profound *understanding* is achieved. Schematically, we may represent the examined dependency in fig.1 below.

Fig. 1 *Attention (Detection, Selection) ↔ Awareness ↔ Understanding → same process repetition at higher level*

4. Implications of Contrastive Teaching and Comparative Teaching for Language Awareness

The implications of *CT* as well as of *CpT* for *LA*, which represent one of the objectives of this study, stem from the essence of already considered *LA* and its *components*. Linguistic information to be *detected, noticed, selected, consciously attended to, processed, understood* and *memorized* needs to be previously *highlighted* (see 3.2.), *underlined, drawn attention to*. Already defined *CT* and *CpT* approaches, often jointly applied, perform a successful attention attractor part. Their advantageous *LA enhancement role* will be revealed and experimentally supported on p. 5.

We subscribe to James' view²⁷ who insists on "contrastive salience"²⁸ promoting noticing. This idea was not only theoretically founded on this author's insights into contrastive linguistics, but it was also experimentally supported – a contrastive evidence group did better than a group which was given "only comprehensible input". To improve *LA* Schmidt 2010 recommends "conscious comparisons between their own [learners'] output and target language input", which evidently refers to interlanguage analysis, error analysis and involves, in our view *CT*, combined with *CpT*. Such ideas are also corroborated by Ellis (2006, 2008), referred to by Schmidt (2010), who states that L2 learners need deliberate attention when failing to notice not really prominent cues or cues that "need to be processed differently from the way they are in the L1²⁹". Penz (2001: 104) subscribes to the view, in the same train of thought, that "developing awareness of the relationship between mother tongue and foreign language education is a particularly important factor of language awareness".

Here below we will present a recent linguistic experiment focusing on *CT* and *CpT* of English passive periphrasis. The experiment, which will be analyzed in terms of the enhancement of *LA* and its *components*, involves high school learners of French (FL1) and English (FL2).

5. CT and CpT linguistic experiment description

5.1. General description

A group of twenty-four 11th grade high school learners with French (FL1, B2) and English (FL2, B1) were introduced, *contrastively* and *comparatively*, to the form and semantics of *English Passive periphrasis*. The contrast was established between *French* and *English* and some reference was made to their NL (*Bulgarian*). Approaches, hereby implemented and extended, belong to Ruzhekova-Rogozherova 2012b, a study devoted to English passive *CT* and to the *comparison* (in terms of form and meaning) of this category with other forms revealing some degree

of isomorphism. The material was taught by means of PowerPoint multimedia presentation; learners' active participation was envisaged and stimulated.

5.2. Stages

A. Contrastive and comparative presentation

– Learners were given the experiment purpose, to enhance awareness of the passive voice, through analyses of the form and semantics of related categories, and also by English passive contrastive examination.

– A few illustrative paragraphs involving *most typical passive voice utterances*, as recommended (ibid.), were proposed, where passive voice phrases were *underlined characteristically*, as well as the *tense/aspect markers*. Our learners' attention was drawn to passive voice instances, which were read aloud and *differentiated from active ones*.

– The original paragraphs were presented *jointly* with their *French translations*. The *passive structures*, as well as the *tense/aspect markers*, were identically underlined, e.g.:

(En.) These houses **were built** 20 years ago. Before that there was a cinema here but the building **was damaged** in a fire and **had to be knocked down**. (after Murphy (2004: 259))

(Fr.) Ces maisons **ont été construites** il y a 20 ans. Auparavant il y avait une salle de cinéma; cependant, l'édifice **a été** abîmé à cause d'un incendie et **il a fallu le démolir**. (translation is ours)

– Attention was drawn to the passive instances in *original and translation* texts, e.g. formation, *agent ↔ patient* relationships, tense/aspect parameters, presence/lack of isomorphism between both paragraphs as to diathesis use. The used terminology was understandable to learners, whose participation was required as they were asked *elicitation questions*.

– Explanatory *passive/active voice diagrams*, based on the *original/translation utterances* were presented to the learners and analyzed with their participation in terms of *form and semantics*.

– The highest possible resultativity (conveyed by the *passive perfect*) was grasped by the participants, connections between the *perfect* and the *passive* were mentioned, their common denominator being *resultativity*.

– The Passive formula [*grammatically active patient* (subject)] + [*to be*] + [*past participle*] + [*by*] + [*grammatically passive agent* (object)] (ibid.)³⁰ was suggested and jointly analyzed with students.

– Other (apart from traditional) types of passives (such as *get*, *have* and *want* + *-en form passives*; *stative, adjectival*, “*with*” or “*by*” *preposition passives*, *change-*

of-state passives (in English), impersonal passive, factitive passive, based on se faire; se laisser; se voir + infinitive passive, adjectival, metaphorical passive (in French)) were exemplified and connections between them were identified.³¹

– Passive voice result attribution was commented on, learners having been shown utterances revealing the similarities between the *passive, perfect and deverbial adjectives*.

– To consolidate understanding, *French – English translation utterances*³² were examined, in which learners were asked to refer to passive periphrasis instances in both languages.

– The students were offered *English active voice examples*, which they were required to *transform into the passive*, then, to *translate original (English) active utterances into French* and, finally, to *transform them into French passive ones*, e.g.:

– Who wrote the poem? → Who was the poem written by? → Qui a écrit **ce poème**? → **Ce poème** a-t-il été écrit par qui?

– Where have they taken your car? → Where has your car been taken? → Où a-t-on volé **ton auto**? → Où **ton auto** a-t-elle été volée ?

– Why did they cancel the train? → Why was the train cancelled? → Pourquoi a-t-on annulé **le train** ? → Pourquoi **le train** a-t-il été annulé ? (English examples only, quoted from Falla & Davis 2008)

While working contrastively and comparatively, some active/passive voice examples were translated into Bulgarian as well, to further promote learners' understanding of passive voice structure and meaning.

– Finally, students were given the *above mentioned translation passive voice corpus* and their homework assignment was to examine equivalences.

B. Survey analysis

On the following day, after commenting on homework task, learners were asked to fill in a *questionnaire* aimed at establishing progress in their *passive voice awareness* stemming from *practically implemented CT and CpT approaches*. The survey, which was anonymously conducted, consisted of nine issues to be assessed, each one of which will be presented and analyzed in terms of their *LA* utility degree, according to survey participants' evaluation, in the table below. The issues were written in Bulgarian and contained only basic grammar terminology to provide maximum understanding and, consequently, high assessment reliability. The points to choose from while grading each issue were: **0** (lack of utility), **1** (profitable to some extent), **2** (considerably profitable) and **3** (highly profitable).

Issue No	Issue description and comments	Utility degree in %
1.	Commenting on voice essence in general and, in particular, on active and passive by means of text examples or minimum context utterances; implementation of comparative form – semantics analysis approach (CpT)	60,87%
2.	Passive periphrasis contrastive examination on the basis of the comparison with French translation equivalents; contrastive approach implementation (CT)	63,89%
3.	Various passive structure types in English as well as in French presented by means of illustrative utterances; comparative and contrastive approach implementation (CpT, CT)	62,5%
4.	Illustrating types of relationships, in both languages, between a sentence meaningful and grammatical arguments (or components), subject, object, agent and patient, through schemes and diagrams; implementation of comparative and contrastive approach (CpT, CT)	69,44%
5.	Passive periphrasis structure interpretation, by means of an illustrative utterance, in comparison with its active voice equivalent in terms of constituents' roles (subject, object, to be, past participle); implementation of comparative form – semantics analysis approach (CpT)	73,61%
6.	Revealing passive voice connection with adjective and perfect categories in order to substantiate the attributive essence of the passive, commenting on the result, attached to grammatical subject, most frequently by means of to be.; implementation of comparative form – semantics analysis approach (CpT)	52,78%
7.	Comparisons, though rather general, with Bulgarian passive; contrastive approach implementation (CT)	55,56%
8.	Active → passive transformations of English examples accompanied by French translation of original English utterances and analogous active → passive transformations of translated utterances; implementation of comparative form – semantics analysis approach and of contrastive approach (CpT, CT)	76,39%
9.	Commenting on the equivalences from a French → English translation corpus encompassing typical passive utterances; contrastive approach implementation (CT)	50%

All indices arithmetical mean amounts to **62,78%**.³⁴

Summarizing experimental results

The analysis of the above presented results definitely and explicitly supports the implementation of CT and CpT approaches in *passive voice LA enhancement*, this conclusion deriving from favourable students' evaluation of performed activities. It should be pointed out that a vast majority of learners appreciated the *structural-semantic* method of passive diathesis explanation as *really useful*; they approved of the use of *diagrams*

and schemes in the purpose of form-semantics relationship illustration. Many learners not only positively assessed the *comparative* (active-passive) approach within FL2 itself, but they also considered the *contrastive-comparative* analyses through exploring FL1/FL2 *structure equivalences valuable*. Quite probably, due to the *contrastive-comparative* interest aroused in passive diathesis, *more than 76%* of the participants surveyed deemed efficient the *English → French active example translation* as well as *active → passive transformations in both languages*. As it can be seen from the stages of passive voice presentation, as well as from the questionnaire, *CT* is most frequently *combined* with *CpT*, both methods mutually complementing each other. Due to already elucidated connections between the approaches examined and *LA* underlying components, i.e. *noticing, detection, attention, understanding*, we consider *CT* and *CpT* use really *cognitively* motivated. Not only does it contribute to understanding improvement, but it also logically leads to better performance and adequate material consolidation.

6. Conclusion

The current article sets the objectives, on the one hand, to *support in cognitive perspective Language Awareness (LA)* importance in *all* linguistic spheres, and especially, in *FL teaching and learning*, and, on the other, to elucidate in terms of *LA components* the benefits of *CT* and *CpT approaches* as to the enhancement of taught material understanding. The analysis of a convincing linguistic experiment involving *CT* and *CpT*, while presenting English *passive periphrasis parameters*, e.g. types, formation, meaning, relationships between isomorphic categories, reveals a *favourable connection between LA constituents and implemented methods*. The learners surveyed not only *positively responded* to applied teaching procedures, but they also *suggested ideas* as to further activities, which they considered useful in *promoting participation and passive voice acquisition*. Students showed *motivation and interest*, another proof of the relevance of implemented procedures. To conclude, we shall state we firmly believe *CT* and *CpT* use is bound to be successful in the teaching and learning of numerous other categories.

NOTES

1. James, C.: Cross-linguistic awareness: A New Role for Contrastive Analysis (http://www.ucp.pt/site/resources/documents/FCH/Linguanet/Carl%20Jamesartigo%20_2_.pdf)
2. As it will be revealed later, *highlighting* plays an underlying part in *noticing* (relevant cognitive linguistics concept); *CpT* and *CT*, pointing out *contrasts (and similarities)*, also represent a type of highlighting and emphasizing procedure.
3. Highlighting in our view, which will be substantiated later in the article, can be performed in numerous ways, including by means of contrasts, comparisons, etc.
4. Leow (1997) and Rosa & O'Neill (1999) are quoted by Al-Hejin (2004: 17).

According to Schmidt's 1990 *noticing hypothesis* input becomes intake as a result of *conscious* learning.

5. We reckon Wes' lack of noticing of grammar functioning and form ↔ meaning relationships, as well as reported by Schmidt "mis-identification" (*their* with *they are*, for example) may be due to the lack of *contrastive* structure and meaning *highlighting*, combined with the absence of *comparative* teaching approach.
6. Horaničová, Z. The influence of cognitive psychology in a second language instruction. http://www.phil.muni.cz/angl/thepe/thepe_01_17.pdf; italics are ours.
7. LA definitions (see 3.1.) also attest this interrelation.
8. James, C.: Cross-linguistic awareness: A New Role for Contrastive Analysis (http://www.ucp.pt/site/resources/documents/FCH/Linguanet/Carl%20Jamesartigo%20_2_.pdf)
9. We treat FL1 – FL2 - *FLn relationship* similarly to NL – FL1 connection in accordance with numerous researchers' views (endnote v).
10. These examples were drawn from a translation corpus we produced on the basis of comparing Saint-Exupéry's "Le petit prince" with its English translation.
11. Students were extended gratitude for cooperating and were asked to make mention of the type of *additional explanation / activities* they may need to further enhance their passive periphrasis *understanding*. Two participants highly appreciated the experiment and concluded: "It was wonderful!"; "I also thank you. The experiment was really useful." Two students recommended using games, which could facilitate understanding and acquisition. One of them insisted on more comparisons including tense use (while teaching the passive), believing this component will enhance learners' participation. One of the participants surveyed shared she understood passive periphrasis and frequently used it; she recommended working on more books, poems, speeches to stimulate passive voice learning.

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