

## ON SOME LINGUISTIC LIMITATIONS OF CLASSICAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSES

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In this paper I intend to show that classical contrastive analyses of all sorts are incapable of grasping certain important generalizations concerning differences between the compared languages. By classical contrastive analyses I understand such analyses in which the contrasting procedures have no generative format, even if they are based upon generative grammars of the compared languages, i.e., such grammars which are both explicit and predictive (cf. Lyons 1968:155). Classical contrastive analyses are taxonomic in nature since they are limited to yielding inventories of differences and possible similarities between parallel systems of the compared grammatical structures, between equivalent sentences and constructions and between equivalent rules operating at various levels of derivations. All classical contrastive analyses are based on sentence grammars (S-grammars), i.e., on grammars which define sentence rather than longer stretches of the text. (For a discussion of differences between sentence grammars and text grammars see Van Dijk 1972:12 ff.). In another paper (Krzyszowski 1972; 1974) I suggested that for reasons independent of those discussed below classical contrastive analyses should be replaced with such analyses which would lead to the constructions of Contrastive Generative Grammar (CGG) or a device which enumerates equivalent sentences in the compared languages, and in doing so provides them with structural descriptions and indicates those places of the derivations which are identical and those which are different. CGG assigns the status of equivalence to those sentences only which have identical semantic inputs in the two languages. In this manner CGG explains, at least in part, the bilingual informant's intuitions motivating the recognition of particular pairs of sentences as equivalent across languages (for more detailed suggestions see Krzyszowski 1974). This paper, however, will be limited to a discussion of some linguistic limitations

of classical contrastive analyses, which ultimately also points to the necessity of reconsidering their status vis a vis CGG.

In classical contrastive analyses it is possible to distinguish three types of comparisons:

1. Comparisons of particular equivalent systems across languages, for instance, the system of personal pronouns, of articles, of verbs, etc.

2. Comparisons of equivalent constructions, for instance, interrogative constructions, relative clauses, negative constructions, nominal phrases, etc.

3. In contrastive analyses based upon transformational generative grammars, comparisons of equivalent rules, for instance, subject raising from the embedded sentences, adjective placement, interrogative inversion, etc. The comparison usually covers such properties of the rules as their obligatory or optional status, their ordering and their presence or absence in the compared languages. In the subsequent discussion we shall be referring to these three types of comparisons as type 1, type 2 and 3, respectively.

From the theoretical point of view, for each item undergoing comparison, each type of comparison may reveal three possible situations: (a) an item X in a language  $L_1$  may be identical with an item Y in a language  $L_2$  in one or more than one respects; (b) an item X may be different from an equivalent item Y; (c) an item X may have no equivalent in  $L_2$ . For example, in type 1 the systems of number of nouns in French and English are in one respect identical in that both systems are based upon the fundamental dichotomy "oneness" vs. "more-than-oneness". The system of number is in that respect different in, say, Sanskrit, where it is based on the trichotomy "oneness" vs. "twoness" vs. "more-than-twoness". The system has no equivalent in Chinese where nouns are not inflected for number. In type 2, the passive constructions in English and Polish are in some respects identical in that in both cases they involve a form of the auxiliary *be* or *get* in English and of *być* or *zostać* in Polish, in each language followed by the main verb in the form of the past participle. In new Testament Greek and in Japanese the passive constructions are different in that they do not involve any auxiliaries followed by the past participle forms of the verb, but they are formed synthetically (e.g. Gr. *luetai*, "is loosened", Jap. *korosaremasita*, "were killed"). In certain languages, such as Sumerian and Basque, in which there is no formal distinction between transitive and intransitive sentences, there is no distinction between active and passive constructions, either. These languages may be said to have no passive constructions at all (cf. Milewski 1965: 240).

In type 3 one can find that the rule optionally deleting the relative pronoun replacing the object operates in English and Brahui in the identical fashion (Andronov 1971: 134). The equivalent rule in Hausa operates in a

different way in that it is restricted to those instances only which involve verbless sentences as main clauses with the nominal element introduced by the particles *ga*, "here (is)" and *akwai*, "there (is)" (Ščeglov 1970: 177). In languages such as Polish, French, German and many others the rule does not operate at all.

It takes little reflection to realize that no rules generating sentences can be formulated without a thorough examination of the structure of particular sentences and sentence types (constructions). The latter is in turn impossible without a clear statement of the systems and their elements which are constituents of particular constructions. For example, the subject-raising in such English sentences as

(1) John wants Steve to kill Mary.

cannot be stated without providing the structural descriptions of the input and of the output to the rule, in terms of some sort of hierarchical constituent structure whose elements are also elements of the English system of nouns, verbs, etc. Thus of the three types of comparisons only the first one can be performed more or less independently, while of the remaining two each one heavily relies upon the results of comparisons (even if they are stated very informally) of the preceding type.

From the point of view of effecting a successful contrastive analysis, the third possibility in the first type of comparison, i.e., a situation in which a system X in  $L_1$  has no equivalent in  $L_2$ , is the most difficult to handle. I am going to claim that classical contrastive analyses fail to secure important generalizations about differences and similarities between the compared languages if the results which they yield are limited to the mere observation that a system X in  $L_1$  has no equivalent in  $L_2$ . I am also going to show that classical contrastive analyses are inherently incapable of making such generalizations.

Before undertaking the task proper, let us observe that a failure to identify equivalent constructions in two languages may be either a result of a failure to find an equivalent system involved in the compared constructions or a result of applying inadequate criteria of identification. A failure to find equivalent rules may result from a failure to find equivalent systems in the two languages and/or a failure to find equivalent constructions. A failure to find equivalent rules may also result from applying an inadequate model of grammar.

As was said before, classical contrastive analyses fail whenever a system in  $L_1$  cannot be matched with an equivalent system in  $L_2$ . It does not do to say that a contrastive analysis of  $L_1$  and  $L_2$  reveals the absence of a system in  $L_2$  which would be equivalent to a system in  $L_1$ . A revelation of this sort merely creates the question: how are the same meanings expressed in  $L_2$ , if at all? The answer to this question necessitates a search for some common



platform of reference and the formulation of such rules which would account for the fact that the same semantic content is realized as different surface structures in the two languages. Thus comparisons of type 2 and 3 are immediately involved and affected by any realization of the lack of parallelism revealed by the comparison of type 1.

Classical contrastive analysis can successfully perform the comparison of type 1 (and consequently of the other two types) only in the case of those systems in  $L_1$  for which equivalent systems in  $L_2$  can be found. Suppose that there is a set of systems  $S_1 \dots S_n$  in some language  $L_1$  and a set of systems  $Z_1 \dots Z_m$  in some other language  $L_2$  and that the task of the investigator is to compare the parallel systems in the two languages, which, as was said earlier, constitutes type 1 of comparisons. It is impossible to predict that for each  $S$  there is going to be an equivalent  $Z$ . For example, English deictic systems, embracing auxiliaries and determiners, are extremely difficult to match with any well-defined systems in Polish. It is quite obvious that the mere observations of the fact that Polish has no perfect and continuous tenses or that it has no articles is not particularly illuminating, and its cognitive value is next to none. Immediately, there arises a question: how are English sentences containing perfect and continuous tenses and articles rendered in Polish? In other words, there arises the necessity of finding Polish *equivalents* of sentences containing continuous and perfect tenses and articles. Investigations inspired by such questions, if they are to be of any value, have to aspire to formulating certain *general principles* governing the matching of English and Polish sentences as equivalent.

At this point let us observe that in a situation in which there is a lack of parallelism between particular systems in  $L_1$  and  $L_2$ , the comparisons are reduced to a search for equivalent means of expressing the same contents in  $L_1$  and  $L_2$ , i.e., to type 2. Comparisons of type 2, however, cannot be successfully performed without establishing what specifically one is attempting to compare. Since one cannot rely on the matching of systems whose elements appear in the compared sentences and constructions, one has to base the comparison upon some common semantic or pragmatic platform. The formulation of such a platform, however, requires a clear view of the semantic and pragmatic content of the systems whose elements constitute the compared constructions. If, for example, one sets about comparing such an English sentence as

(2) John has killed that dog with an axe.

with its Polish potential equivalent

(3) Jan zabił tego psa toporem.

but not

(3a) Jan zabijał tego psa toporem.

one must make sure that the Polish equivalent expresses the same semantic

content as does the English sentence. It will not do to say that Present Perfect in English is expressed by the Simple Past of completed verbs in Polish since one also encounters such equivalent pairs as

(4) John has read that book.

and

(5) Jan czytał tę książkę.

or

(5a) Jan przeczytał tę książkę.

The difficulty— consists in grasping the semantic content of the Present Perfect Tense in such a way as to account for all the instances of the appropriate use of the tense in actual sentences and hence for the appropriate matching of those sentences with Polish sentences as their equivalents.

As was said earlier, classical contrastive analyses, in those cases when they are unable to match equivalent systems, must attempt to match equivalent constructions in the compared languages. This task, however, cannot be adequately performed in a large number of structurally ambiguous or semantically vague constructions (such as (4)) without resorting to stretches of text longer than sentence. Classical contrastive analyses, being based upon sentence grammars, are inherently incapable of handling this task. Thus the failure of classical contrastive analyses to find equivalent systems in comparisons of type 1 is projected into their inability to match equivalent constructions in comparisons of type 2. Classical contrastive analyses fail to perform comparisons of type 2 adequately in the case of syntactically ambiguous and/or semantically vague constructions, since the theoretical framework which they have at their disposal does not make it possible to analyse longer stretches of the text. Facing an ambiguous sentence in  $L_1$ , an investigator following the principles of classical contrastive analyses will be unable to match it with an equivalent sentence or a class of equivalent sentences in without an exhaustive analysis of the ways in which the original sentence is ambiguous. The analysis may reveal that a sentence  $S_k$  in  $L_1$  is  $n$ -ways ambiguous and that a sentence  $S_l$  in  $L_2$  is  $m$ -ways ambiguous. The analysis may also reveal that some of the  $n$ -readings of  $S_k^{L_1}$  are equivalent to some of the  $m$ -readings of  $S_l^{L_2}$ , while the remaining readings are not equivalent. Given a situation of this sort, one faces the problem of whether  $S_k^{L_1}$  is equivalent to  $S_l^{L_2}$ . The problem cannot be solved without considering which specific readings of  $S_k^{L_1}$  and of  $S_l^{L_2}$  are involved. The determination of the specific readings of the sentences in question cannot be effected without examining longer, disambiguating contexts, i.e., stretches of texts longer than sentences. Suppose, for example, that the investigator confronts the following English sentence

(6) Drinking water can be dangerous.



which is ambiguous in at least two ways. One reading of (6) roughly corresponds to

(7) The drinking of water can be dangerous,  
while the other reading roughly corresponds to

(8) Water for drinking can be dangerous.

In Polish (6) can have two equivalents:

(9) Picie wody może być niebezpieczne.

(10) Woda do picia może być niebezpieczna.

Without examining some disambiguating contexts in which (6) appears, the classical investigator in contrastive analyses will be unable to choose (9) or (10) as the equivalent of (6). He will be reduced to concluding that both (9) and (10) can be equivalents of (6) and will thus miss a generalization which could be grasped if a longer stretch of the text were examined.

On the other hand, confronting a pair of sentences such as

(11) The invitation of the doctor surprised John.

(12) Zaproszenie doktora wywołało zdumienie u Jana.

will be correctly recognized as equivalent but at the same time no account will be given of the fact that

(13) To, że doktor został zaproszony, wywołało zdumienie u Jasia.  
may also be an equivalent of (11) upon one of its readings. The alternative reading of (11) will yield

(14) To, że doktor zaprosił (kogoś), wywołało zdumienie u Jasia.

The proper matching of equivalents on the basis of larger contexts is always possible to achieve by competent bilingual informants but cannot be accounted for by classical contrastive analysis, since it accommodates no theoretical framework which would provide means to analyse longer stretches of the text. Suppose that (11) appears in the following context:

(15) Mary decided to invite the doctor. The invitation of the doctor surprised John.

No competent bilingual informant will hesitate associating (11) in the context of (15) with (13) rather than with (14). Any contrastive analysis which does not provide explicit means for undertaking analogous decisions fails to grasp important generalizations concerning the matching of equivalent sentences across languages and thus proves to be inadequate. (For more examples of this sort see Krzeszowski 1973).

Being unable to account for the correct matching of equivalent sentences, classical contrastive analyses are reduced to comparisons of type 3, i.e., to comparisons of rules. Considering such pairs of equivalents as (11) and (12), the investigator will claim that in both cases there are some such rules which map two different underlying structures onto one surface structure and that these rules operate in the two languages in a parallel fashion. The statement of the fact that the rules which are involved in the derivation

of (11) and (12) are parallel is a useful generalization as far as it goes. Contrastive classical analyses fail to predict, however, which of the possible alternative realizations are obligatory in particular contexts. All they can predict is that either (13) or (14) can also be matched as equivalents of (11). In this way they fail to grasp a generalization about the operation of non-equivalent rules accounting for equivalent constructions across languages, such as (11) and (13) or (11) and (14). Such a generalization could be easily made and appropriate principled ways of matching equivalents such as (11) and (13) as well as (11) and (14) stated if longer stretches of the text such as (15) were possible to examine. Classical contrastive analyses by failing to match equivalent sentences across languages also fail to grasp important generalizations concerning the operation of rules in the compared languages in those cases when a set of rules in  $L_1$  cannot be matched with an equivalent set of rules in  $L_2$ .

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