

ON THE SO-CALLED "THEORETICAL CONTRASTIVE STUDIES"¹

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Fisiak (1973) has introduced the term "specific-theoretical contrastive studies" (hence TCS). These studies were defined as giving "an exhausting account of the differences and similarities between a given pair of languages". "Specific-theoretical studies" were distinguished from "general-theoretical studies", which deal with general methodological principles of contrastive work and "applied studies", "general" and "specific". Applied contrastive studies are supposed to be a part of applied linguistics and should direct the comparison of two languages toward some specific purpose, as, for example, the explanation of interference errors.

In this paper I would like to examine certain methodological aspects of the of TCA (theoretical contrastive analysis — the terms "studies" and "analysis" are used interchangeably here). In particular, I will be interested in its potential explanatory power and the contribution TCA can make to descriptive linguistics.

It appears that from the methodological point of view TCA is a very peculiar field. This peculiarity may be an underlying cause of much of the criticism that has been directed lately against CA. The most important and distinctive methodological feature of TCA is that it does not provide us with any original explanatory theory which TCA and no other branch of linguistics can provide. In this sense it is not an explanatory science. What TCA provides is a set of observations concerning what may be called contrastive facts. These are mostly of the following types:

1. a) L_1 has feature α where L_2 has feature β
1. b) L_1 has feature α and L_2 does not.

¹The present paper is a revised and expanded version of the paper read at the 5th Polish-English contrastive conference at Ustronie, December 12, 1973.

In an explanatory science such a set of observational statements is usually supplemented by a theory that explains the observed facts by answering the question: why do those facts occur? Can there be an explanation for contrastive facts? Of course such an explanation can exist but the theoretical statements which will occur in its premises will not be different from those required independently by some other linguistic branch. Thus the explanations that contrastivists are possibly seeking can be easily, almost mechanically, constructed assuming that the researcher has at his disposal full and adequate grammars of compared languages and the general theory of language.

To demonstrate this point let us provide an explanation for 1 when 1 concerns syntax. Four possibilities come to mind. They can be presented in a very informal way as:

A. It is so that 1.a) because in L_1 there is a rule A that generates structure X having the property α where in L_2 there is a rule B that generates structure Y that differs from X in that it has the property β where the former had α

It is so that 1.b) because in L_1 there is a rule A that generates structure X that has a property α and there is no such a rule in L_2 .

where α, β = properties of syntactic structures

B. It is so that 1.b) because the rule A that generates structure X with the property α is restricted by a set of exceptions (conditions) different from the set of exceptions (conditions) to the rule A in L_2

or It is so that 1.b) because the rule A in L_1 is dependent on certain other rules that apply before it and either restrict or widen the domain of its application (bleed or feed it) and that have no counterparts in L_2 , or their counterparts are restricted in a different way

where α, β = properties of syntactic structures.

A good example of B is the one given in König (1970). Relative clause reduction and the subsequent shift of the unreduced material to the front of the relativized noun phrase is much less restricted in German than in English because of the word order rule that shifts the verb to the end of the relative clause. If the verb is a participle, it would allow the operation of the two rules mentioned above. In a similar situation in English the application of the relative clause rule and the adjectival shift is blocked whenever there is some element within the relative clause that follows the participial form of the word. In both languages the process leading to the construction

1) *Der Junge der durch den Hund gebissen worden war.*

2) *Durch den Hund gebissener Junge.*

3) *The boy who was bitten by a dog.*

4)* *The bitten by a dog boy.*

of adjectival constructions is constrained in the same way (it applies whenever the relative clause ends with an adjective or participle) but in German it is "fed" additionally by the rule of subordinate clause word order which does not exist in English.

C. It is so that 1. is possible because α and β are not universals, where α, β = rules (s) or category(ies).²

D. It is so that 1.a) because (a) — it is always so that whenever γ occurs in a language, α occurs too; whenever δ appears, β is present.

(b) γ occurs in L_1 and δ in L_2

It is so 1.b) because (c) — (a) holds (d) γ occurs in L_1 , but not in L_2 .

From the above we can see that

(a) the statement following "because" in C has to be present as a part of the general linguistic theory, one of the most important aims of which is to show to what extent languages can differ and to what extent they cannot.

(b) (a) in D is also to be found within general linguistic theory in the section which deals with implicational universals.

(c) what follows "because" in A and B is nothing other than simple conjunctions of theoretical statements to be found within the theories of grammars of the languages to be compared. The general pattern of argumentation here is as follows. The reason why there is a syntactic structure which has the property α in L_1 is because the grammar of L_1 has the property(ies) X, and the reason why there is a syntactic structure with the property β in L_2 is because the grammar of L_2 has the property(ies) Y.

As has been demonstrated, TCA is a peculiar field where no new, original explanatory theories are constructed to account for the painstakingly collected body of data. The reason for this is that the theory needed to account for it is, theoretically at least, easily available, constituting a part of the general and specific theories of language.

It should be clear that the results of TCS, contrastive facts, do not explain anything by themselves, much less interference errors. In an empirical science to explain means to infer logically from the conjunction of statements of

² In the form given here C looks like a pseudo-explanation. Actually, it can be interpreted as an *ad-hoc* constructed trivial conclusion following from the statement describing the fact which needs explanation. Ideally, the statement denying universality to some language feature should be justified independently from the observation it is needed to account for (and which otherwise provides a sufficient justification for it). Practically, this means that we are pointing out to the fact that there is another pair of languages which differ by the same feature. Of course, what the question C answers is not "why 1?" but "why is 1 possible?".

which at least one is a general, theoretical statement (referring to some general regularity, law), a statement describing a particular fact to be explained. In case of a language error explanation the necessary general statement will be taken from the psycholinguistic theory of language learning and use. The role that TCA plays in relation to error analysis is to supply some, but not all, premises for the explanations of errors.

An important but equally ancillary function of data collecting has TCA in relation to linguistics "proper". This has been pointed out by several contrastivists (see, for example, Selinker 1971). Let us examine this possibility in a more detailed way.

TCA, in my opinion, can and should contribute to a) linguistic typology, b) general linguistic theory, c) grammatical descriptions of particular languages. Its contribution is again of a peculiar type in that it is accidental or non-TCA-specific. In an ideal situation the linguistic theory utilized in TCA, both general and that of particular languages, should not need any modifications. It appears, however, that many of the theoretical linguistic issues may be solved only when data taken from more than one language is considered. In TCA we are supposed to operate with adequate descriptions of two languages, based on the same general theory. In reality, either one of the grammars or the general theory may be inadequate, due to its formulation without the necessary recourse to the data of other language, when such a consideration might have led to some modification. In this way a contrastivist reformulation has a chance to reformulate defective existent descriptions. This reformulation, however, will not be done by the linguist as a contrastivist, but as either a theoretician of language or as a grammarian of one of the languages compared.

Another type of contribution occurs when a comparison of two languages suggests to the linguist a relevant linguistic generalization, the formulation of which does not necessitate the consideration of the data from more than one language. Again, when a contrastivist attempts to formulate such a generalization, he is acting no longer as a contrastivist, but as a theoretical linguist.

Let us illustrate the two types of contributions with examples. The second type of contribution may be made by TCA to the theory of implicational universals. When comparing a synthetic language like Polish with an analytic one like English, we notice that the former has the "scrambling" rule (the rule that accounts for the so called "free" word order) while the latter does not. Such comparison may suggest that there is perhaps some connection between a language's being analytic and its not having the rule in question (actually, the connection is quite obvious and, consequently, the example trivial). The complementary distribution of two language features (lack of inflectional endings and free word order) in more than one, and possibly all, languages suggests that the appearance of one in L_1 and the other

in L_2 is not a mere coincidence. Of course, this fact might be explained by studying L_1 alone and showing that if it were to contain both features, it would lose its communicational feasibility. The chances are, however, that except in an obvious case, like the one above, the systematic and necessary nature of the co-occurrence relation between two features will be overlooked unless confirmed by the examination of more than one language.

Let us turn now to cases where crosslinguistic considerations are necessary for verifying theoretical linguistic hypotheses.

Such a situation, too obvious to require a discussion, exists in linguistic typology. As to the general theory of language, TCA may provide a testing ground for claims assigning a universal value to a particular syntactic rule (set of rules) or category(ies). To test a hypothesis of this sort would be to search for possible counterexamples. If there are none, the hypothesis is not refuted and, hence, has to be accepted. Naturally, such a verification can be done and is done outside TCA proper. Ideally, a general claim of this type should be tested on a number, possibly all, languages, within general theoretical linguistic studies. A multilingual comparison would go beyond the scope of CA, which is limited to the comparison of just two languages at a time.

I would now like to present briefly what, in my opinion, is a non-trivial example illustrating the type of argumentation described above. It shows how an apparent counterexample ceases to be one under deeper analysis.

I will claim that modal adverbs in English have a deep structure position which is essentially identical in terms of node configuration with that of auxiliary elements. The tentative universal hypothesis to be made in this connection is:

A) The structural position in Diag. (1) is connected, in the case of modal adverbs (and probably in case of some modal verbs), with a special status in the focus-presupposition arrangement of the sentence. Modal adverbs, when in a main clause and not under contrastive stress, are neither presupposed (do not belong to the presupposition of the sentence) nor a part of the focus phrase of the sentence.

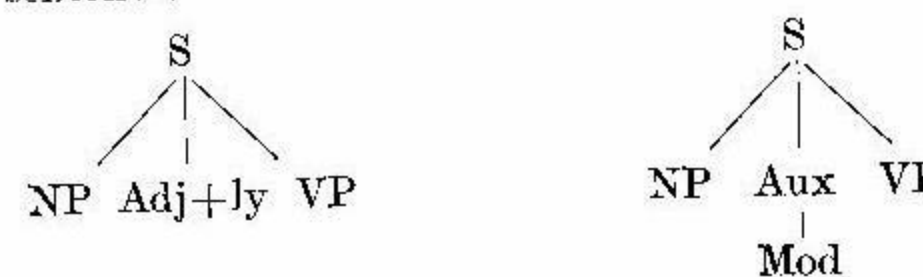


Diagram (1)

The validity of the second part of the condition stated above can be shown by making a simple declarative sentence 5) containing a modal adverb, the "natural answer" of a question.

5) *I will probably go to France.*

It appears that in such a situation the modal adverb, a) is never identical with the element questioned about, i.e., focus, b) may be absent from the presupposition of the question³. Since a question shares its presupposition with the declarative sentence that is an answer to it, the modal adverb in 7) is not presupposed.

5) is not a "natural answer" to 6), but rather to 7).

6) *Is it really probable that you will go to France?*

7) *Where will you go?*

There is an apparent counterexample to a) in Polish. We can find here examples of modal adverbs which, in the conditions specified in a) (main clause, normal intonation pattern), seem to function as the main foci of sentences, upon which the intonation center has been placed. There is no presupposition-focus difference between 8) and 9).

8) *Jest rzeczą oczywistą, że on tam poszedł.*

9) *Oczywiście, że on tam poszedł.*

In my opinion such a difference exists between 8) and 10).

10) *On tam oczywiście poszedł.*

The elements which are being asked about in a "natural question" for 8) and 9) are "rzecz oczywista" and "oczywiście" respectively. The rest is presupposed.

11) *Czy to jest naprawdę oczywiste, że on tam poszedł?*

11) is not a "natural question" to 10).

³ It is not so (contrary to the observation in Katz and Postal (1964)) that modal adverbs are never found in questions.

Consider the following sentences

Where will you possibly go?

Will you surely go there?

The first question can be roughly paraphrased as

I want you to tell me where you suppose you will go.

In this case, the modal adverb belongs to the presupposition of both the the question and a declarative sentence like 5), which may be regarded as an answer to the question. As we can see, 5) is ambiguous in respect to its focus-presupposition arrangement. The second interpretation, relevant to the argument, occurs when in the contextually preceding ("natural") question there is no mention as to the modal attitude of the interrogated person towards the assertion he is expected to make, i.e., no modal adverb is present, as in 7). In such a case, the fact that the speaker of 5) is not sure about the place where he wants to go is not a part of knowledge common to him and the speaker of 7) before 5) is being uttered.

Yes. I will surely go there.

For a more detailed discussions of related problems see Zabrocki (1973).

The counterexample is not a real one, however, under closer scrutiny. The adverb in 9) has a different surface structure position from that in 10). This difference can be demonstrated when we analyze the derivational history of 9).

There are syntactic facts that seem to indicate that type 9) sentences are related to underlying structure (2) by the transformational process which I would call pseudoadverbialization. The embedded clause in (2) has been extraposed from the subject position.

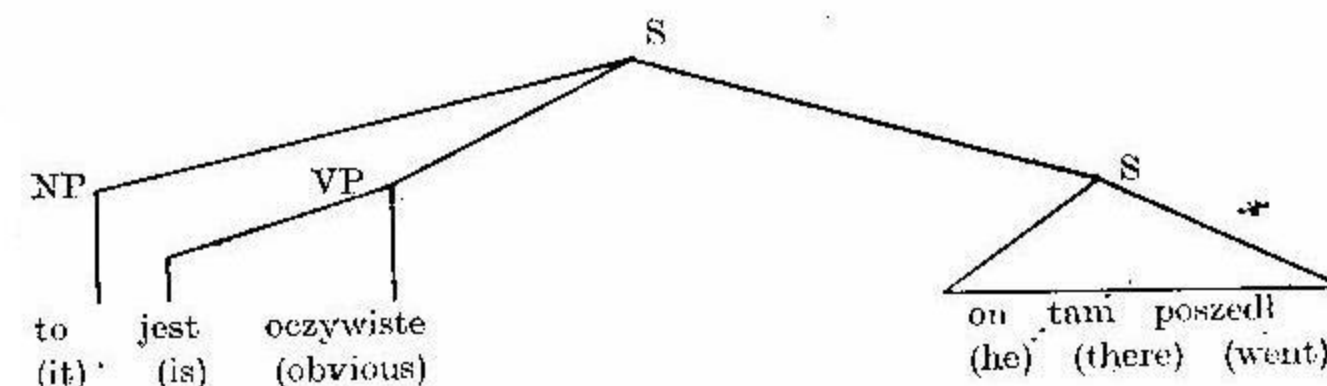


Diagram (2)

The rules that apply to (2) are, in this order, "to jest" (it is) deletion and pseudo-adverb suffix addition (pseudo-adverb formation); the latter is obligatory whenever the former has been applied.

Only under such a hypothesis can we explain in a principled way the fact that those, and only those lexical items that are exceptions to pseudo-adverbialization appear in structures resulting from the application of "to jest" deletion only.

I a) *Jasne, że sobie tego nie życzę.*

II a) **Jasnie, że sobie tego nie życzę*

b) **Oczywiste, że*

b) *Oczywiście, że*

a) *Możliwe, że*

a) **Możliwie, że*

b) *?*Pewne, że*

b) *Pewnie, że*

In our analysis I a) constructions are the result of exceptions to pseudo-adverb suffix addition. Thus, there are no corresponding adverbial forms II a).

I b) constructions are impossible because the adjectives here are not exceptions to pseudo-adverb formation rule: the adverbial suffix has to be added, once "to jest" has been deleted.

In the examples above, the analysis of the Polish data did not influence the way in which the grammar of English was formulated. Such a possibility could exist.

Whether it is legitimate to extrapolate the internal evidence of one language to the grammar of another one appears to be a controversial matter. Even though such procedures are quite commonly used in the current grammatical research, serious objections have been raised. Commenting upon Ross's analysis of auxiliaries Chomsky (1972:122) writes: "Arguments concerning the German auxiliary bear on English only if one is willing to make some general assumptions about translatability of rules that seem to me unwarranted".

It seems that there are at least two cases when such extrapolation is methodologically correct. In the first case the following preconditions have to be met.

a) The particular syntactic hypothesis concerns an underlying structure of some sentence in L_1 that has a translation equivalent sentence in L_2 .

b) Accepting the generative semantics hypothesis, we assume that there is a certain abstract level of syntactic analysis where the two linguistic expressions which are simple (the term needs some further specification) paraphrases of each other are structurally identical. The cases in which the equivalence must be accounted for by some logical equivalence rule (such as for example De Morgan's Law) and not by the identity of the underlying structure will have to be excluded.

c) The proposed hypothesis concerns this level of analysis.

A tentative example of such an argument may be given in relation to the deep structure analysis of English sentences like 12) containing what may be called after Greenbaum (1969) stylistic sentence adverbials.

12) *Frankly speaking, he is a crook.*

One may propose that in the underlying structure of 12) there is a conditional construction 13).

13) *If I may speak frankly I would say that he is a crook.*

There is evidence in Polish which supports this analysis, but which cannot be found in English. The word "to"⁴, which usually appears at the beginning of the main clause in the conditional constructions, can optionally appear after the adverbial phrase, which is a semantic and structural equivalent of "speaking frankly".

14) *Szczerze mówiąc, (to) on jest oszustem.*

If the presence of "to" in 14) is to be explained, 14) will have to be connected to the structure underlying a conditional sentence 15)

⁴ Obviously, the "to" we are dealing with here is a different thing from the homophonous pronoun (mentioned earlier).

15) *Jeżeli mam mówić szczerze, to powiem że on jest oszustem.*

If this argument is regarded to be valid for English as well, we get a strong evidence supporting an analysis that connects 12) and 13). Of course, such an extrapolation is only possible if there is no evidence in L_1 which would in some way contradict the conclusions reached within L_2 .

In other words, the two languages would first of all have to be thoroughly analyzed in their own terms.

The above conclusion applies also in the case of the second type of extrapolated argumentation. It is different from the first one, because the problem that is being addressed does not necessarily concern a very deep level of the underlying sentence structure.

The structure of the argument is as follows:

a) A general statement is formulated which says that the nature of a particular grammatical process is the same in all languages where it appears (in the example below, it is the process of infinitivization, which is a relatively low level syntactic phenomenon).

b) statement a) is treated as a universal hypothesis; all attempts to falsify it on the basis of the analysis of the infinitivization process in both languages fail,

c) there is, however, a theoretical possibility of falsification, since the analysis of one of the compared languages (English) leads to two alternative solutions, neither of which can be invalidated on empirical grounds.

If one of them is chosen, our hypothesis in a), as to the unitary nature of the phenomenon, is still valid; and if the other one is chosen, it has to be rejected.

d) in such a case, we can change our general hypothesis a) into an assumption (we may do it since it is impossible to falsify it; in other words, it cannot be shown to be wrong),

e) on the basis of this assumption we are able to choose that particular solution (of the two available) that agrees with it.

The following is a developed version of such an argument, that, I think, is methodologically valid.

It has been proposed by Thorne (1973) that the distribution of infinitive complementizers in complement sentences in English should be connected to the semantic fact that clauses which allow their main verb to be infinitivized are in a non-indicative mood. Then, he proposed that in the underlying structure of embedded clauses in the indicative (i.e., "that" clauses) there is always a superordinate clause with the predicate "the case". The same structure is said to underlie 16) and 17).

16) *I said that John is wise.*

17) *I said that it is the case that John is wise.*

In such a theory, there are two possible ways in which the relation between the rules that lead to the removal of the subject NP from the embedded clause (Equi-NP deletion and subject raising) and the transformational process of infinitivization can be explained.

The fact that whenever an infinitive appears the subject is removed is simply explained by showing that it is only in subjunctive clauses that the conditions for subject removal are satisfied ("the case" is analyzed as a non-subject raising predicate). The relationship between subject removal and infinitivization is thus presented as an indirect one, mediated by the way non-indicative mood is represented in the deep structure.

An alternative theory, which has been proposed in Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1970), links the two phenomena directly and explains infinitivization as a consequence of subject removal, the latter being a necessary and sufficient precondition for the former⁵.

It seems impossible to decide which of the two theories (which might be interpreted as attempts at the general explanation of the phenomenon of infinitivization) is better founded empirically on the basis of the English data alone. When the correctness of the "case" analysis is assumed, one might imagine a language in which evidence can be found favoring one of those solutions on empirical grounds.

It would be more advantageous to link infinitivization with subject removal rather than directly with the mood of the clause, if there was more than one way of expressing the subjunctive in a language and if the particular fact of a clause's being in the infinitive and not in some other subjunctive form always coincided with the fact that the subject had been removed from the clause.

Such a situation exists in Polish. The subjunctive can be expressed either by adding the particle "by" to the "ze" complementizer and making the verb take a past tense form, as in B, (or by infinitivization as in 18). The last possibility is realized only when conditions are satisfied for Equi-NP deletion (no subject raising in Polish).

18) *Janek chce wyjechać do Ameryki.* (Equi-NP deletion)

19) *Ja chcę, żeby Janek wyjechał do Ameryki.*

20) **Ja chcę Janek wyjechać do Ameryki.* (no Equi-NP deletion)

⁵ What was really claimed in Kiparskys (1971) was that the occurrence of the infinitive is connected with the fact that the subject-verb agreement rule cannot apply. The rule is blocked not only when the subject is removed, but also when it is made into a prepositional phrase by the addition of the preposition "for". The existence of "for ... to" constructions can be explained in this way. It seems that no serious consequences as to the discussion in the present paper follow from this simplification.

Under the assumption that the same process leads to the formation of infinitives in English and Polish, the solution adopted for one language is relevant for the second one, too. The assumption is not unwarranted since it can be tested against the evidence in both languages. Because it is impossible to show, on empirical grounds, that in English infinitivization should be made directly dependent on the mood of a clause (the only way to show that the assumption is wrong) the crosslinguistic generalization concerning infinitives can be accepted.

The solution of the general problem of infinitivization has an effect on the way the grammar of English has to be formulated. The rule that inserts an infinitive complementizer will have to have its structural index formulated differently (the scope of the rule will be limited to a single clause. The fact whether there is a superordinate "the case" clause in the same sentence will be irrelevant now).

The argument can be presented graphically.

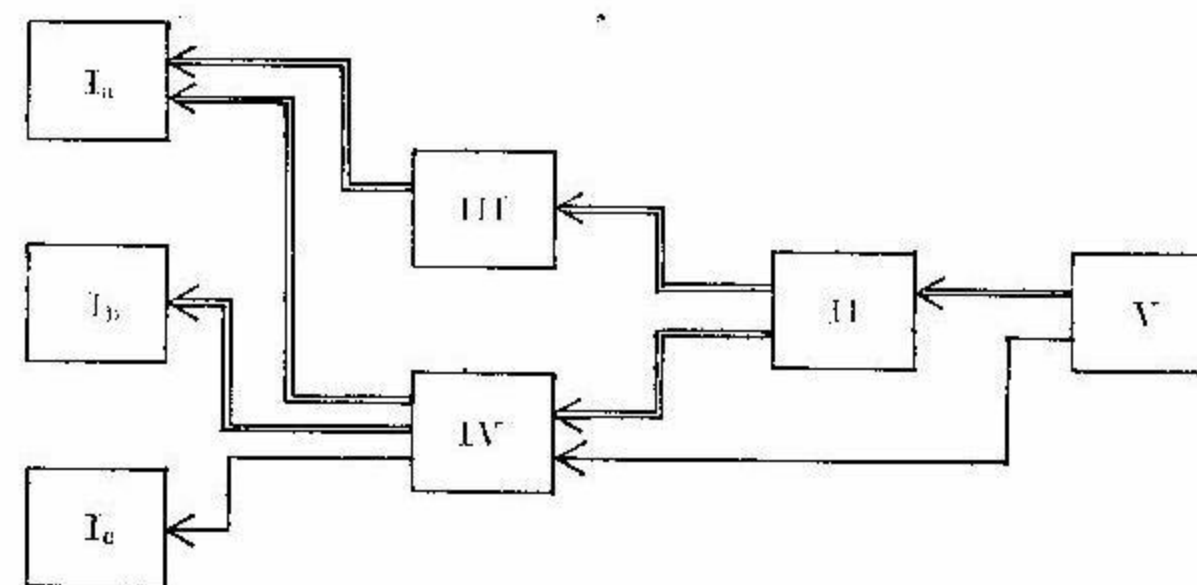


Diagram (3)

where I_a, I_b, I_c — observations
 II, III, IV, V — theories

I_a (English-hypothetical)		I_b (Polish)	
indicative	—	indicative	—
non-indicative	+	non-indicative	+
			or other subjunctive form
I_c (English, other languages)			
indicative	+ or —		
non-indicative	+		

- II — “case” is the main predicate in the superordinate clause in which all and only indicative sentences are embedded.
- III — the rule forming infinitives applies on the condition that the verb to be infinitivized does not appear in a clause embedded within the “case” sentence.
- IV — the rule forming infinitives applies on condition that there is no subject in a sentence (removed transformationally)
- V — infinitivization is the same phenomenon (determined by the same set of factors) in all languages where it occurs.

Notice that while the truth of II and consequently III ultimately depends upon whether the language facts are those in I or I_a, the truth of IV does not. If in reality I_c holds (and it is actually highly probable that it does⁶) then II and III will have to be rejected. III is inadequate for obvious reasons. The absence of “the case” clause cannot be used to trigger the infinitivization process, since infinitives may also occur when the clause is present⁷. II cannot be salvaged either. Since III has been rejected, II would have to appear in conjunction with IV, and sentences in the indicative with an infinitivized verb could not be generated because of the presence of “the case” clause blocking subject removal rules (if we stipulate that it does not block them, then II becomes totally irrelevant for the discussion of infinitives).

On the other hand, IV and V can be maintained, if we can show that the subject is missing in the indicative infinitive clauses.

Let us sum up the main conclusions of the present paper.

1. TCA differs from other branches of descriptive linguistics in that it does not aim at creating any original explanatory theory. It merely collects data supplying premises for the explanations offered by error analysis.
2. The consideration of contrastive data might suggest solutions to various linguistic problems, especially those which cannot be solved without the analysis of evidence taken from more than one language.

⁶ There seem to be sentences which are indicative and where the subject NP has been removed and a verb in the infinitive is present. Consider the subordinate clause in the following sentence:

To be unable to do it did not embarrass him.

The clause is presupposed, which means that there is no uncertainty as to its truth value — the feature usually associated with the subjunctive. No difference, in this respect exists between the sentence above and the one below:

That he was unable to do it did not embarrass him.

The evidence from Latin points out to the same conclusion. “Verba dicendi” obligatorily demand ACI constructions, no matter whether the infinitivized verbs are rendered in Polish translations as indicative or subjunctive forms.

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⁷ The criticism of III could be avoided by replacing II by a weaker claim which would allow certain semantically indicative clauses not to be embedded in the “case” sentence. In such a case, however, the “case” hypothesis risks a danger of degenerating into a pseudo-explanation of a very *ad-hoc* type where the only justification for the postulation of a superordinate “case” predicate for a given clause is the fact that the clause has the main verb in infinitive.