PROBLEMS AND IMPLICATIONS OF CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF VOCABULARY AND CULTURE

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The chief aim of pedagogically oriented CA projects, which are what w- have in mind here, is to improve L_t teaching and facilitate L_t learning by make ing use of contrasts and differences discovered between L_s and L_t in teaching and in the preparation of teaching material.

Although CA of L_s and L_t is no longer a novelty (as a matter of fact, it is well past its heyday) in the impressive amount of research already done in this field of applied linguistics two areas have not received sufficient attention: lexis and culture.

Most contrastive studies deal mainly with phonology, morphology and syntax. Even in large-scale contrastive projects, culture, as a rule, is ommitted, and lexis, either only touched upon or limited to comparisons at morphological level; sometimes lexis remains at the level of 'promises'; in other words, it is on the list of future tasks, although little or nothing has been done so far.[1]

It is a well-known fact, however that there are serious problems in the teaching and learning of L_2 at the lexical and cultural levels. Gross misunderstandings and even complete breakdown of communication may result from incorrect usage of words or unfamiliarity with the cultural patterns of L_2. If this is so, why then have lexis and culture been neglected to such an extent, ignored even, in contrastive studies and analyses? There are several possible reasons for this imbalance of research on phonology, morphology and syntax on the one hand and lexis and culture on the other:

a) Grammar and phonology, being closed systems, lend themselves better to CA than those areas which are more elusive, fluid or subject to change, such

[1] It is almost twenty years since Lado wrote his pioneering book *Linguistics across cultures*, in which two chapters were devoted to the droplems of comparing L_s and L_t vocabulary systems and two cultures. It is therefore surprising that so few papers deal with vocabulary and culture comparisons in the multitude of contrastive analysis projects and papers.

as lexis and culture.[2] Because of the very nature of lexis some authors think that CA of lexis is not only 'lengthy' but 'unusable'.

b) Some, if not most, CA have as their primary aim the preparation of pedagogical grammar, which, naturally, does not include lexis and culture.

c) One of the central aims of foreign-language teaching at the elementary level today is the mastery of the structure of the language and its phonology, not lexis; accordingly lexis is treated as if it were something that can easily be fit into grammatical patterns which have been mastered. This attitude to lexis is often extended to intermediate and even advanced level of instruction, ignoring thus the importance and complexity of the learning of vocabulary at the latter two stages.

d) However paradoxical it may sound, the notion of the communicative component of L_2 learning is of recent origin. Speech, the use of language for the purpose of communication with speakers of that language, has been the center of L_2 learning for more than thirty years, and yet the importance of communicative competence has been recognized only recently, grammatical correctness having been the main concern of language teachers.[3]

e) Most of the authors involved in contrastive analysis projects and research were either not interested in teaching or, rather, were not actually involved in it and thus failed to recognize the difficulties and importance of lexis and culture in L_2 teaching/learning.

Nevertheless, regardless of the changing attitude towards CA for pedagogical purposes, and the directions it may take in the future, a strong point can be made for contrastive analysis of L_s and L_t lexis as well as L_sC and L_tC. This also implies that these analyses can be affected in such a way as to be usable in and applicable to language teaching.

In view of the foregoing, the aim of this paper could be formulated as follows:

i. Firstly, we would like to draw the attention both to the importance and problems of contrastive analysis of lexis and culture of L_s and L_t and to the lack of such studies.

ii. Insofar as time allows we would like to discuss, or rather outline, why and how this could be done so as to be useful in teaching and learning foreign languages.

[2] As a matter of fact lexis is less fluid and amorphous, less resistant to systematization and categorization than is often thought. One can talk about lexical systems and categories only different types than those found in grammar. This is of particular importance for contrastive lexical studies.

[3] Contrastive analysis of lexis and culture raises a question which seems nowadays to be more pertinent than before, that of different degrees of correctness and adequacy — grammatical correctness and communicative adequacy. In other words, should one aim at native-like linguistic competence or native-like communicative competence, the latter implying certainly a degree of linguistic competence.

iii. We would also like to describe, however briefly, the form which the final product of a contrastive analysis of lexis and culture might take.

First of all, there are authors who do not make the important distinction between contrastive learning-teaching and contrastive analysis. Contrastive analysis belongs to the province of methodics, i.e., it should take place outside the classroom and affect teaching indirectly. In other words, CA is not a teaching technique, even less a method of teaching, but rather a technique which aids textbook and test writer in the preparation of teaching material.

There are much more effective clasroom procedures than juxtaposition, explanations and drills of contrastive pairs in lexis or other language elements (cf. Hadlich 1965). The results of CA regardless of the language level, are not for direct application in the classroom through an 'analytical teaching approach'. This appears to be a common knowledge, yet needs to be stressed because one still hears opinions to the contrary.

Hadlich (1965:429) has shown how "... contrastive analytic techniques on the lexical level should wane". CA should wane only if and when it has been downgraded to the level of a teaching technique.

Other authors (Kufner 1963) omit lexis from their contrastive studies not because their primary aim is the analysis of grammatical structures but because they think that lexical contrastive analysis should be based on a "... full description of the universe as seen by a speaker of English, then of the universe as seen by a speaker of German... "(Kufner 1963 : 75). This is of course, for an English-German CA. The point we would like to make here is that for teaching purposes one need not undertake a global contrastive analysis of the two lexis, or the totality of the conceptions of the speakers of the two languages.[4] Such analyses would certainly be of great interest for both linguists and language teachers, anthropologists, etc., but it is not essential for the fairly limited purposes of what is called elementary, intermediate and advanced-level foreign language learning, which is what we are concerned with.

Contrastive projects of lexis can be approached from two standpoints. We can contrast and analyse lexical items from two languages from the semantic point of view and from the standpoint of occurence which includes frequency, availability, disponibilité and some other criteria which we shall come to later.

The semantic basis of lexical analysis constitutes the cornerstone of the analysis. The proper cornerstone, however, does not seem to have been found, since CA of lexis lags behind other contrastive projects. For more comprehensive

[4] Cf. Országh (1969:222) and Lado (1957:89). According to Országh the new typo of dictionary should "... say more about less". He does not discuss the problem of a contrastive dictionary but postulates a dictionary which would include, among other things, emotive applicability of words, stylistic range etc.

lexical contrastive projects "...some fundamental and as yet not completely verified problems" have to be solved. These problems have to do with the "... underlying universal matrix of semantic features and a set of universal selection rules which establish the basic patterns of human cognition" (Di Pietro 1971:111). For obvious reasons (lack of space and the complexity of the problem of semantics) we cannot go deeper into this question. But, clearly, for such practical problems as the teaching of foreign languages, solutions of some kind ought to be worked out. Teaching cannot wait until all linguistic and theoretical problems have been solved.

For the present we can propose only which might be termed an eclectic and practical approach to the problem of making a contrastive analysis of the lexis of two languages. The notion of 'range' described by Stockwell, Bowen and Martin (1965:265) supplemented by Lado's and Mackey's lexical criteria as well as those of Politzer seems to offer a good starting point for a lexical CA.[5]

The semantic level of the contrastive lexical analysis is certainly important but other levels of analysis should also figure in general lexical studies, particularly when they have a pedagogical aim.

We should know not only how lexical items in two languages differ or are similar in meaning or form (cf. Ivir 1969) but also other features which will become apparent only if other criteria are taken into consideration, for instance, frequency, different types of lexical availability, currency, familiarity, range, co-occurrence, (cf. Gougenheim et al. (1956); Dimitrijević[6] (1969); Mackey, Savard, Ardouin (1971); Mackey (1965); Savard (1970)).

By computing data about frequency, availability and other lexical criteria, a list similar to the one Savard compiled (la valence lexicale) would be obtained; this list would be useful not only in selection and grading for teaching purposes but would also serve as a guide for the selection of words for contrastive analysis.

What would be the final result or product of lexical contrastive analysis? In short, we would suggest the compilation of a contrastive dictionary where a well-chosen number of lexical items of L_t would be listed together with their most important meanings, usage, giving examples and contrasts with the 'equivalents' from L_s. Traditional, noncontrastive, dictionaries often mislead students even in such simple examples as saying *Good day*. In English the phrase can be used both when meeting someone and when taking leave while its 'equivalent' in Serbo-Croatian *Dobar dan* is used only when meeting someone. Thus Good day means *dobar dan* but Serbo-Croatian speakers must learn that it also has the meaning of *Good bye*. The German word *Freund* has a different meaning from its English 'equivalent' *friend*, and though in giving this example to illustrate the difficulty of lexical contrastive analysis Kufner at the same time distinguishes this pair very cleverly by saying "it is much easier to find a friend than a Freund". Similar explanations would be given for the different meanings and usages of the 'same' words in Russian and English *Graždanin*, *tovarishch* and *gospodin*, namely *citizen*, *comrade* and *Mr.* (*gentleman*, *Sir*). They are evidently different in their connotative meanings and associations, and use, their availability and frequency in English and Russian. The contrastive dictionary would state in what way they differ.

The idea of a contrastive dictionary of English (or any other language) for foreign students raises an important practical question: which words will be contrasted, i.e. included in the dictionary. There are two possible answers to this question:

i. Selection on the basis of purely subjective criteria, i.e. on the basis of our teaching experience.

ii. Selection on the basis of criteria mentioned earlier in the paper. This would have to be corrected by a subjective analysis because it appears that some lexical items escape objective criteria. In this way we would obtain something we could call *The teacher's 2500/5000 word book based on a contrastive analysis of the two languages* (English-French, German-Russian, etc.).

A contrastive dictionary would be equally useful to students, teachers and textbook writers, helping them to develop an awareness of the different connotative meanings and differences which 'the same words' may have in two languages.

By reference to this new type of dictionary students would avoid incorrect substitutions of lexical items in L_t under the negative transfer from L_s. For instance, in Serbo-Croatian there are two words for *hand* and *arm* (*šaka* — RUKA): however, in most cases only the word *ruka* is used, whether the speakers have in mind *arm* or *hand*. It is the same with another lexical pair, *leg* and *foot* (*noga* — *stopalo*). When native speakers of Serbo-Croatian start learning/speaking English they transfer this kind of substitution from their L_1 into English and instead of *arm* or *foot* they say *hand* and *leg*.[7]

[5] In his analysis of vocabulary comparison Lado (1957:76) is concerned with three aspects of words: form, meaning and distribution. These aspects and their different relations and combinations would make a useful contribution to lexical contrastive analysis, particularly when combined with other criteria and other lexical aspects.

[6] Studies of lexical availability and disponibilité have produced some interesting and very useful results, regardless of whether they were done for one language only (mainly French) or in contrastive studies: Serbo-Croatian and English, Serbo-Croatian-Hungarian. We discussed some of these results at the II International Congress of Applied Linguistics in Cambridge, 1969. Through contrastive studies of lexical availability it is possible to see how different cultures, social, sex, age and other factors effect the degree of availability of words for immediate use.

[7] Abberton (1968) gives very good examples of lexical mistakes in English made by Serbo-Croatian speakers including "those whose English is otherwise excellent", most of these mistakes, certainly some of them, would have been avoided if a contrastive English-Serbo-Croatian dictionary had been available.

A contrastive dictionary would also help the student avoid pitfalls and mistakes which stem from what is known as convergent and divergent relations and zero representation in the lexis of the two languages (cf. Carroll:1963), or in mastering false cognates and all cases where the "... semantic field seems to be divided differently in L_1 and L_2" (Politzer 1972 : 116).

A possible practical objection to contrastive dictionaries could be their size because 'simple words' would require lengthy explanations. This may be true. A dictionary of 5000 words could easily fill several hundred pages, if not more. We do not see any drawbacks (except financial) to having good though sizable reference books.

A lexical CA could be extended to idiomatic expressions, simili and what is sometimes called 'set phrases' and collocations, once the basic lexical analysis has been completed.

The results of lexical contrastive studies (and cultural as well) can be used not only in the teaching of foreign languages but in testing as well. There is no time to go into the problem of CA and testing but a very useful application of the results of CA in testing is in the selection of distractors for multiple-choice items.[8]

Since our main concern here is the teaching of foreign languages, the emphasis in this paper is on the implications of lexical CA in that area. But contrastive lexical studies may also have a broader linguistic significance.

Contrasting a lexical item in one language with the corresponding item or items in another, may bring to light semantic features which, without CA, would have escaped our attention.

It is possible that idiomatic expressions, collocations, simili and 'set phrases' in different languages spring from or are governed by certain 'underlying rules' of perception, universal human ways in the linguistic interpretation of reality and specific features of natural languages. We are well aware that some studies of this exist or are in the process of development but it is our feeling that more should be done. Linguists today are showing more interest in semantic research than they did ten or fifteen years ago and therefore we may hope to receive more help from them in lexical CA for pedagogical purposes.

It is not because lexis and culture have been given insufficient attention in CA projects and research that we are discussing these two questions in a paper of only 12 pages, which may appear overambitious or even pretentious. The reason why we have put lexis and culture together is not a formal one but of a fundamental nature. Learning a foreign language necessarily means

[8] Lado (1961) is the only author to go into the problem of testing L_tC in any depth. Harris (1969) and Heaton (1975) omit culture completely and other authors of textbooks on testing only touch upon the subject (cf. Valette (1967); Clark (1972)).

learning about the culture of the language in which it operates, and the link between culture and language seems to be most overt in the area of lexis. "Contrastive lexical analysis also drives home that point that contrastive language analysis must ultimately be linked to a contrastive cultural analysis" (Politzer 1972:115).

Turning now to the problem of contrastive analysis of L_s culture (L_sC) and L_t culture (L_tC) it will be necessary to begin again with what is common knowledge.

For a successful application to CA and language teaching culture must first of all be defined, but the definition must be appropriate to pedagogical purposes. There are different definitions of culture, depending on one's basic orientation (linguistic, anthropological, etc). If we accept the definition of culture as a sum of different norms of behaviours, beliefs, ways of communication, systems of value, "all those historically created designs for living explicit and implicit... which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men" (Kluckhohn and Kelly in Hoijer (1953:554)) this means that cultures differ, that they overlap, that a culture is patterned (can be categorized or observed as a set of structural units) and that it must be a part of every foreign language course. If this is so, it is obvious that there will be problems in the teaching of L_tC, some of them stemming from various kinds of negative transfer from L_sC because we tend to transfer cultural patterns from L_sC to L_tC. Not only are cultural patterns transferred very easily, but we are also less aware of this kind of negative transfer than if it occurs at the phonological or some other linguistic level. We expect foreigners to say the things we are accustomed to and we are surprised when we are not understood the way we would like to be.

Of course, there are cultural overlaps, not only differences, but they must be discovered and systematized. Textbook writers are aware of these similarities (and differences), in their writing and teaching and they rely on their own experience and knowledge about L_tC which may be subjective, biased and even prejudiced.

Although the general consensus of opinion is that culture should be taught[9] the basic principle, the rationale of teaching culture have not been sufficiently elaborated. Teachers do not know how and when to teach it, and in textbooks one finds gross oversimplifications and methodological errors in the way culture is presented. For example, if included at all in a foreign-language course, culture is often presented in only one form, only 'English culture' (or French,

[9] In a survey conducted in Belgrade in 1973/74 students of English, German, French and Russian agreed about the need for teaching culture as a part of foreign language courses (cf. Dimitrijević, Djordjević (1975)).

German, etc), without any reference to subclasses or cultural differences within that culture as opposed to L_sC; students should be made aware of cultural dialects, social and age differences too. This would make the teaching of culture more complete, and prevent students from adopting an oversimplified, inaccurate view of the culture whose language they are studying.

If L_sC should be taught, if cultures differ, grave errors sometimes result from insufficient knowledge of a culture whose language is being studied, if there is negative transfer from L_sC to L_tC (we could continue the list of if's) it seems obvious to us not only that the goals of teaching culture should be made more specific (which very often is not the case) but that we should know both the differences and similarities (cultural overlaps) between the two cultures. One way of obtaining such knowledge is through a systematic contrastive analysis which at the present moment is lacking. Before a contrastive analysis of two cultures can be made both of them must be accurately described and analysed, using the same methodological approach.

The methodology of making a CA of two cultures for pedagogical or general purposes is even less developed than for lexis. There are several reasons for the lack of an adequate and explicit methodological procedure for cultural contrastive analysis. One of them is the problem of working out a definition of culture applicable to language teaching and contrastive analysis. In CA of two cultures different approaches can be adopted. Thus Nickel supports the behavioural kind of CA rather than linguistic "... since many linguistic expressions have become stereotyped and no longer reflect spontaneously creative psycholinguistic processes" (Nickel 1974:118).

As a starting point in a CA of culture one might coordinate the teaching aims, syllabus and parameters suggested by several authors: Nostrand, Upshur, Brooks, Lado, etc. Nostrand lists about thirty headings under four rubrics: culture, society, the individual and ecology (giving them a common label Emergent Model (cf. in Seelye 1968)). Upshur (1966) gives a useful description and classification of 'observed foreign cultural patterns' and 'patterns to be appropriately performed' (some kind of receptive and productive skills). Lado (1957) discusses the same matter from the point of view of structural units and Brooks (1964) classifies cultural patterns according to different topics.

An appropriate and functional matrix which would include certain parameters by the authors mentioned above, and others too, could serve as a basis for describing and selecting the cultural patterns to be included in a contrastive study and later in teaching.

A cultural contrastive analysis would offer enough material for a special kind of 'cultural dictionary', a reference book for teachers, textbook writers and students (*Guide to patterns and usage of English culture for foreign students*). The entries in this 'cultural thesaurus' would be the patterns which we encounter frequently and teach within the frame of foreign language courses. With an accurate description of L_s cultural patterns, L_t cultural patterns and a systematic contrastive analysis we would be able to produce language material with less cultural bias, prejudice and subjectivity.[10]

It may be hoped that with the development of sociolinguistics and its impact on the teaching of foreign languages more attention and time will be devoted to the communicative aspect of foreign language teaching, which also implies a more systematic teaching of culture and different attitude towards the teaching of Lexis.

However, if we are less optimistic and look at the problem under discussion from a more realistic point of view, we must remind ourselves of the concluding lines in Lado's book *Linguistics across cultures*, published twenty years ago, "Even though a total analysis and comparison of any two highly complex cultures may not be readily available for some time to come..." Twenty years have passed and we still have not obtained such an analysis in spite of the enormous amount of work done in the field of applied linguistics and other linguistic disciplines.

With an approach of this kind students will learn not only to produce correct sentences but also say the right thing at the right place to the right person. We should not forget that "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless"[11] (Hymes 1972:278).

What should be the major tasks in a lexical and cultural contrastive analysis?

i. Recognition of the importance of such studies and their inclusion in CA projects.

ii. Development of a methodology for CA of lexis and culture, adequate to pedagogical purposes.

iii. Carrying out of the contrastive analyses.

iv. Compilation of a contrastive dictionary and contrastive reference material for culture.

Let us summarize the main points:

— Lexical and cultural contrastive studies are generally neglected or even completely ignored in contrastive analysis projects.

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[10] For pedagogical purposes CA of two cultures should include "... not only linguistic data, but also behavioural phenomena of a semiotic nature not reflected in language" (Nickel 1974:119).

[11] At Puškin Institute of the Russian language in Moscow a special kind of Russian dictionary is being compiled. This dictionary is based on a "linguacultural method" (lingvostranovedčeskii slovar-metod). Thus, it will not be contrastive but in the explanation of lexical items the cultural component will be taken into account, special uses and associations of words and phrases deriving from local cultural and other factors will be described. See Vereshchagin, Kostomarov (1973).

— Foreign language students make mistakes at lexical and cultural levels which lead to serious misunderstandings and even to a breakdown in communication.

— Lexical and cultural mistakes seem to be most persistent and are characteristic not only for beginners but also for speakers who have attained an advanced level of grammar and phonology.

— Examiners do not easily agree about the lexical and cultural mistakes their students make as opposed to syntactical mistakes; therefore the former need more study and attention.

— Lexical and cultural contrastive analyses are feasable in spite of some theoretical and methodological problems.

— The analyses of lexis and culture need not be total; for pedagogical purposes partial analyses will suffice.

— The final product of lexical and cultural CA would be:

a) a kind of thesaurus (a contrastive dictionary) which would include not only equivalents of L_s or a description in L_t of the meanings of lexical items (as in bilingual and monolingual dictionaries) but an exhaustive description of usage contrasted with meanings and usages in L_s and

b) a contrastive reference book of L_tC in which an approach similar to that for contrastive dictionary would be applied.

The main aim of this paper was to call your attention to the possibility of and need for compiling a new type of dictionary and a reference book of L_t cultural patterns.

Our intention in this paper was not to define problems and solve them but (being more realistic) only raise some questions and initiate a discussion which could contribute to the formulation of a broader and more useful approach to contrastive analysis.

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