Lecture 2
PBI207

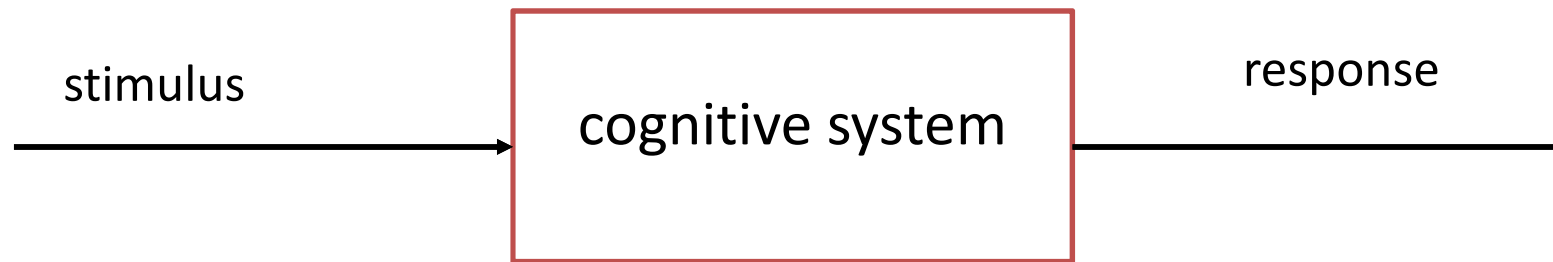# Contrastive Analysis

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Contrastive Analysis (CA)

Contrastive analysis is based on the theoretical assumptions of behaviorism.

If L2 acquisition is disturbed by the habits of your native language, it is reasonable to focus on the differences between native and target language.

In the US, contrastive analysis had a practical goal: If you recognize the differences between your native language and the target language, you are able to overcome the linguistic habits of your native language that interfere with the habits of the target language.

Contrastive analysis (CA)

stimulus → | cognitive system | → response

Learning is a process of *habit formation*.

Learning involves:
1. imitation
2. practice
3. reinforcement

Behaviorism: Language acquisition as habit formation

Definition of CA

Contrastive analysis is the study and comparison of two languages, learners' target language and learners' native language.

This is done by looking at the structural similarities and differences of the studied languages.

The idea of contrastive analysis grew out of observing students learning a second language. Each student or group of students tended to repeat the same linguistic mistakes as previous groups. This turned into an assumption that the mistakes were caused by the student's first language interfering with the second. This interference happened because the student applied the first language's rules to the second language, much in the same way children apply the rules of regular words to irregular ones.

Contrastive analysis (CA)

Serious studies into contrastive analysis began with Robert Lado's 1957 book, "Linguistics Across Culture." Its central tenets and other observations on second language acquisition became increasingly influential in the 1960s and 70s. It built upon ideas set out in linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which believed that language structures affect cognitive thinking. This led to the automatic transferring of one language's rules to another.

Robert Lado, *Linguistics Across Cultures,* **1957:**

"Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture — both productively and when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by natives." (1957, in Gass and Selinker 1983, p. 1)

Robert Lado (1957:2)

"…those elements that are similar to this native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult"

The mainstream of CA

The most simplistic version was the belief that linguistic differences based simply on similarities and differences alone could be used to predict <u>learning difficulties.</u>

A simplistic prediction:

"Where two languages were similar, positive transfer would occur; where they were different, negative transfer, or interference, would result."

Contrastive analysis (CA)

Two types of transfer:

1. Positive transfer
2. Negative transfer

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (= CAH)

CAH - This extension of the notion of CA attributed the ability to predict errors to a CA of two languages, a predictability that practitioners associated with the degree of similarity between the two systems

Problems for the CAH version

1. Association with behaviorism:

    -1959 Noam Chomsky's classic review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior,* in which Chomsky seriously challenged the behaviorist view of language. CAH, intimately associated with behaviorism, got caught in this discrediting of this view of language.

Problems for the CAH version

2. Mispredictions:

Specifically, the supposed ability of CAH to predict errors was not supported by the facts.

- ❖ it underpredicted, that is, it failed to predict some errors;
- ❖ it overpredicted, that is, it predicted some errors that failed to occur;
- ❖ of course, it also got some right

Why?

As Long and Sato (1984) pointed out, one cannot depend upon the analysis of a linguistic product to yield meaningful insight into a psycholinguistic process.

Note CAH failed, not CA

The failure discussed thus far is the failure of CAH, not the failure of CA.

Strong vs. weak versions of CA

Wardhaugh (1970) proposed a distinction between the strong and the weak version of the CA.
The strong version [CAH] predicts *apriori*

.

The weak version deals with learner errors and uses CA, when applicable, to explain them, *a posteriori*
, that is, after the fact.

In fact, this was the beginning of error analysis, that is, the detecting of the source of errors

Critique of contrastive analysis:

- The process of L2 acquisition is not sufficiently described by the characterization of errors

- Errors in L2 acquisition do not only arise from interference.

- The structural differences between two languages are not sufficient to predict the occurrence of errors in L2 acquisition.

Error Analysis (EA)

Of course, CA survived. No one can deny that the L 1 influences L2 performance.

Thus, the next approach was to limit the analysis to the examination of errors that students actually made.

Error Analysis (EA)

Pit Corder (1967) The significance of learner's errors.

- L2 acquisition should not be looked at from a purely pedagogical perspective.

- Errors in L2 are interesting because they reflect underlying linguistic rules.

- The study of L2 can be seen as a subfield of general linguistics or cognitive science.

Contrastive Analysis Vs Error Analysis

Contrastive analysis	Error analysis
Pedagogical orientation	Scientific orientation
Focus on input, practice, inductive learning	Focus on linguistic and cognitive processes
Errors of transfer	Multiple types of errors

Language acquisition as rule formation

Under the influence of Chomsky's theory of language acquisition, researchers began studying the speech of children learning English as their L1. They attempted to use these to write a grammar of what the children were producing.

What is Chomsky's theory on children's language acquisitions about?

Child language acquisition theory – Chomsky

Noam Chomsky believes that children are born with an inherited ability to learn any human language. He claims that certain linguistic structures which children use so accurately must be already imprinted on the child's mind. Chomsky believes that every child has a 'language acquisition device' or LAD which encodes the major principles of a language and its grammatical structures into the child's brain. Every language is extremely complex, often with subtle distinctions which even native speakers are unaware of. However, all children, regardless of their intellectual ability, become fluent in their native language within five or six years.

Language acquisition as rule formation

So-called "rule formation":
*She doesn't wants to go.
*I eated it.
*geeses
*wented

Notice that such forms cannot be the product of imitation.

'Developmental' errors:

SLA researchers found that in SLs the learners committed similar 'developmental' errors, errors that were not apparently due to L1 interference.

Interlingual versus intralingual errors (Richards, 1971)

❖ Errors found to be traceable to L1 interference were termed interlingual. CA was used to explain them.

❖ A large number of similar errors, however, were found to be committed by SL learners regardless of their L1 and these were termed intralingual errors. EA was used to explain these.

Mistakes vs. errors

Corder distinguished between mistakes and errors.

- Mistakes were 'misfires', slips, that is, the type of random mistakes we all make.
- Errors were systematic errors in the student performance reflecting incomplete mastery of some aspect of the language

Interlingual Errors

Interference

Example:

- I student.
- My name Proboseno.

This constructions may possibly be influenced by Learners L1 – Indonesian.

Intralingual errors:

These were analyzed to see what sort of strategies were being used.

overgeneralization

simplification

communication based

induced errors

Overgeneralization

*Last week Jim didn't know where is Bill living.
*Shirley doesn't know what is the dog doing.

The speaker has perhaps overgeneralized the pattern for subject-auxiliary inversion and applied it to the so-called embedded question. Note that this is a statement, not a question.

Simplification

*I studied English for two year.

The omission of the plural marker following the noun *Year* could be termed simplication; note that no information is lost. The cardinal number already signals plurality.

Communication-based

The learner uses 'airball' for 'balloon' (word coinage from Tarone, 1980)

The learner incorrectly labels the object (perhaps knowingly), but successfully communicates a desired concept.

Induced errors

*She cried as if a baby cries. (Stenson 1974)

The teacher had given 'like' for the meaning of 'as if' without explaining how the grammar has to be different for 'as if'. E.g.,

She cried *as if she were* a baby and
She cried *like* a baby cries.

Criticism of EA

According to Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1977)

1. Focused only on errors
2. Did not deal with avoidance

relative clauses: Chinese and Japanese vs. Spanish and Farsi
English passive avoidance by Arabic speakers
phrasal verbs by Hebrew speakers

In short, EA did not deal with what the students were doing that caused them to succeed, that is, it did not deal with what led to learning.