
language learning vs. language teaching

1940’s: contrastive analysis -- application of structural linguistics to foreign language pedagogy

influence of first language on second language

"imitation"
"positive transfer" -- alike properties
"negative transfer" -- dissimilar properties

emphasis on identifying properties of target language that needed reinforcement through carefully constructed drills

what led to downfall of contrastive analysis:

1) empirical inadequacy
   a) errors predicted by negative transfer did not always appear, positive transfer did not always occur
   b) interference errors in the minority; overgeneralization and simplification errors in the majority

2) contrastive analysis internally inconsistent with tenets of American structuralism, which claimed that a language must be analyzed on its own terms, without recourse to a universal frame of reference (anti-universalism)

3) the rise of generative linguistics, which was internally compatible with contrastive analysis (universalism), did not lend itself to pedagogical applications (and, it kept changing!)

if Chomsky (1965) was correct that language acquisition was driven by a language acquisition device (LAD), and language learners were little hypothesis-testing scientists, then the errors they made were of central theoretical importance

applied to 2LA, this contributed to the demise of contrastive analysis, but led to the rise of "error analysis", in which the errors of second language learners were compiled, organized, and tabulated

but this taxonomic approach was in turn internally inconsistent with the tenets of generative grammar!

this was due to:

1) the rise of generative semantics in the late sixties and early seventies, which "generally withdrew from the program of formal
explanation to one in which simply noting interesting facts about a variety of languages became the general practice.” (p. 38)

[with, to be fair, supporting quotes from Lakoff and Fillmore]

2) the rise of Lenneberg’s critical period hypothesis: shut off of LAD at puberty, ergo adult 2LA can tell us nothing about the LAD (or, as it came to be called by the mid-1970s, UG)

This latter claim was challenged by Krashen and his colleagues in the 1970s with 2LA data showing similarities to 1LA:

a) errors of L2 learners mimic those of L1 learners
b) order of morpheme acquisition studies (but see later in course)

This suggested that UG may still be available after puberty

This in turn led to UG-based approaches to 2LA, based on the idea that 2LA could tell us something about the nature of UG

As in L1 acquisition, this has led to a preponderance of studies of syntax (5 to 1 by end of the 1980s)

a) reflects situation in theoretical linguistics as a whole at the time
b) contrastive analysis *was* useful to a certain extent in the realm of phonology
c) popular notion that a foreign accent is biologically determined for adults

This also led to a renewed interest in contrastive analysis (“at a higher theoretical plane”)

Thence follows an agonizing breast-beating about the how difficult it is to sever the ties to pedagogy....

Note that this historical overview does not take note at all of the trend in the late seventies and early eighties, and apparently continuing into the present, to focus on speech act theory (Searle 1969), perhaps because this is considered pedagogical?