

THE CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS DEBATE:  
PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS\*

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Because of its theoretical and practical implications contrastive analysis (henceforth CA) has provided one of the most interesting issues in the recent history of the teaching of English as a foreign language. It has probably also been the most controversial issue. Anyone who is familiar with the history of applied linguistics knows that CA has been the subject of intense scholarly debate and that linguists, applied linguists and language teachers have expressed widely divergent views on its feasibility and usefulness. What I propose to do in this paper is to look at some of the assumptions underlying the contrastive analysis hypothesis and to discuss some of the controversies to which they have given rise. I would also like to report briefly on a contrastive grammar of English and Dutch that is currently being written in the Department of English of the University of Nijmegen.

The term 'contrastive linguistics' was first used by Benjamin Whorf in 1941 in an article called 'Language and logic'. Four years later Charles Fries published his influential book *Teaching and learning English as a foreign language*. Together with Weinreich's *Languages in contact* (1953) and especially Lado's *Linguistics across cultures* (1957), this book is responsible for adding a new dimension to foreign language teaching pedagogy. Of course traditional language teaching also regularly made use of comparisons between native language and target language, but they were usually impressionistic and ad hoc. Ever since the 1950's CA has played a major role in applied linguistics and in the teaching of English as a foreign language. It is useful to distinguish two periods in the development of contrastive studies, the first

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lasting from the early 1950's until 1968 (the year of the 19th Annual Round Table Conference in Washington), the second from 1968 until the present day.

Questions like 'Is it possible to carry out a CA of two languages?' and 'What is the value of such an analysis?' do not seem to have posed serious problems at first. The confidence with which linguists approached such questions is clearly illustrated by the following quotations from Fries and Lado. Fries claims that

The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner (1945:9).

Lado writes that

The plan of the book rests on the assumption that we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student. In our view, the preparation of up-to-date pedagogical and experimental materials must be based on this kind of comparison (1957: Preface).

Two years after the publication of *Linguistics across cultures* the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington started work on a number of contrastive studies involving English and five of the major European languages. Three studies (English-German, English-Spanish and English-Italian) were published between 1962 and 1965. Although the influence of transformational grammar is already visible, the Contrastive Structure Series is clearly part of the Fries-Lado tradition. As Charles Ferguson, the editor, puts it in the general introduction:

The Center for Applied Linguistics, in undertaking this series of studies, has acted on the conviction held by many linguists and specialists in language teaching that one of the major problems in the learning of a second language is the interference caused by the structural differences between the native language of the learner and the second language. A natural consequence of this conviction is the belief that a careful contrastive analysis of the two languages offers an excellent basis for the preparation of instructional materials, the planning of courses, and the development of actual classroom techniques (Kufner 1962:v).

What these quotations show is that neither the feasibility nor the usefulness of CA are called in question. Provided certain conditions are met, the contribution that CA can make to facilitating the learning problems of students is taken for granted.

The following assumptions may be said to underlie the contrastive analysis hypothesis:

1. Learning a language is a question of habit formation.
2. Students of a foreign language transfer the items, categories and structures of their native language to the target language. This means that their old habits may interfere with their learning task.

3. Interference (or negative transfer) takes place at all levels of linguistic structure (phonological, syntactic and semantic) and affects both productive and receptive skills.
4. Comparison will reveal both the differences and the similarities between native language and target language.
5. Systematic comparison depends on the availability of scientific descriptions of the two languages concerned. These descriptions must be based on the same theoretical framework.
6. Comparison of whole languages is impossible; we can only compare equivalent sub-systems.
7. Similarities between native language and target language will cause no problems, but differences will. The student's learning task is in fact the sum of the differences between the two languages.
8. On the basis of the differences between two linguistic systems CA can predict the difficulties that students will have.
9. Difficulties can be arranged in hierarchies based on the extent to which the two systems diverge.
10. It is the task of the linguist to discover the differences and the task of the textbook writer to develop the appropriate teaching materials.

These points summarize the major claims of the contrastive analysis hypothesis until roughly the middle of the 1960s. As Twaddell (1968:197) puts it, they make the production of contrastive studies look 'beautifully simple in theory'. Two crucial questions were not satisfactorily answered, however. The first was 'What do we understand by the scientific description of a language?' The second was 'How do we carry out a systematic comparison of two languages?' From now on these questions were to figure very prominently in the contrastive analysis debate.

During the second half of the 1960s a critical (and occasionally sceptical) attitude began to manifest itself, which seriously challenged some of the earlier assumptions. Among the most outspoken critics of CA were Ritchie (1967) and Newmark and Reibel (1968). Ritchie believes that it is 'virtually impossible to compare the linguistic descriptions of particular languages in any meaningful way' and that 'the only way for a learner to gain a fruitful, simple, revealing intuition of the structure of a given foreign language is to rely on his innate knowledge of general linguistic structure' (1967:129). Newmark and Reibel claim that 'The problem of "interference" ... reduces to the problem of ignorance, and the solution to the problem is simply more and better training in the target language, rather than systematic drill at the points of contrast between the two languages in order to combat interference' (1968:160); on the so-called ignorance hypothesis see James (1971, 1977) and Kellerman (1977, 1978). Though not all critics adopted this negative view, there was no longer any consensus of opinion on the pedagogical value of

CA nor on questions relating to its theoretical orientation or its methodology.

The contribution that CA can make to language teaching was seriously challenged by several leading linguists. Mackey, for example, claims that the principle that 'all the mistakes of the language learner are due to the make-up of his native language ... is demonstrably false' (1966:201). He also believes that the linguist's prediction of mistakes based on a contrastive study is less reliable than the teacher's prediction based on his experience. Equally critical of the predictive power of CA is Baird (1967). These criticisms concern some of the basic principles of CA. Other critics went further, in fact, in questioning the achievements of CA and its direct relevance to the teacher and to the language learning process. For example, in his review of the Spanish Volumes in the Contrastive Structure Series Saporta writes:

We need not quarrel over whether good grammatical descriptions are better than bad ones, and much of what is presented here is good. But mere honesty compels us to admit that we do not know how to convert the information in a good description into pedagogically optimal format... We linguists do a disservice both to ourselves and to our colleagues in language departments by deceiving them into believing that we have access to some secret information about how to teach foreign languages (1967:200).

Pit Corder writes of contrastive studies that

Teachers have not always been very impressed by this contribution from the linguist for the reason that their practical experience has usually already shown them where these difficulties lie and they have not felt that the contribution of the linguist has provided them with any significantly new information. They noted for example that many of the errors with which they were familiar were not predicted by the linguist anyway. The teacher has been on the whole, therefore, more concerned with *how* to deal with these areas of difficulty than with the simple identification of them, and here has reasonably felt that the linguist has little to say to him (1967:162).

As far as its theoretical orientation is concerned, CA was criticized for having mainly concentrated on the comparison of surface structures, using a behaviouristic theoretical framework that viewed language as a set of habits and regarded the difficulties of foreign learners as the result of the incompatibility of their own linguistic habits with those of the target language. After the publication of *Aspects* in 1965 it was felt that transformational grammar could no longer be ignored and, indeed, many linguists were convinced that TG was the only viable model for CA to adopt (see, for example, Nickel and Wagner 1968, Di Pietro 1968, James 1969). It was now claimed that CA should concern itself with the comparison of deep structures, a level at which languages were supposed to be identical or, at least, to contain common elements. Surface structural differences were regarded as the result of the application of language-specific transformational rules. To quote Di Pietro

What is deep, or universal, or underlying, if you wish, is that which is common to both target and source languages. CA can be then defined as the process of showing how each language interprets universally shared features as unique surface forms. (1968:68).

Unfortunately there was no consensus of opinion on this issue either, if only because transformational grammarians themselves did not agree on the fundamental theoretical question whether deep structures should be syntactic or semantic. Criticisms of the methodological procedures of CA focussed on, among other things, the fact that CA had been mainly concerned with differences between L1 and L2 and with interlingual interference, without paying much attention to other factors that affect learner's performance.

The state of the art at the end of this period was well summarized by the papers presented at the 19th Annual Round Table Conference in Washington in 1968, which was entirely devoted to contrastive analysis and its pedagogical implications (Alatis 1968; see also Kühlwein 1972). On the one hand these papers show that linguists and applied linguists still believed in CA and were moderately optimistic about its future. On the other hand they reveal a growing sense of insecurity about what exactly CA can contribute to pedagogical problems (Lee 1968, Hamp 1968, Catford 1968) and particularly about the question what form an ideal contrastive analysis should have (Moulton 1968, Lado 1968, Hamp 1968). The year 1968 was also the year of the meeting of the Federation Internationale de Professeurs de Langues Vivantes in Yugoslavia. One of the recommendations of that meeting was that 'in spite of the unsettled state of research in linguistic theory, CA should be continued because of its value for teaching (Di Pietro 1978:12). This insecurity did not lead to an impasse, however. On the contrary, it was around this time that large-scale contrastive projects were started in several European countries. These have not only produced a large number of publications dealing with specific areas of difference between English and the languages concerned, they have also paid a great deal of attention to questions of theoretical and methodological interest (see, e.g. Nickel 1968, Filipovič 1970, Fisiak 1973).

When we look at what happened after 1968, we see that this uncertain state of affairs persisted. The contrastive analysis debate continued and, in fact, the confusion increased. The critics had not been silenced, a number of crucial theoretical and procedural problems had not been solved and it had by now become obvious that CA was not a panacea for all language teaching problems. The literature of this period shows that there are still at least two camps, with a number of people taking up positions in between.

Among the most critical exponents of the negative view of CA in the 1970's is Gradman. In his dissertation he writes:

The state of the contrastive analysis hypothesis at this point in time is such that there are so many interpretations that one might well advance the argument that

there is no theory at all, but rather a set of theories, none of which are totally harmonious with each other. Such conditions are not conducive to basing educational programs on them, regardless of the intellectual excitement one might feel about the ferment.

I think it is at this point painfully obvious that there is insufficient merit in contrastive analyses to warrant either their construction or their application (1973: 133).

Gradman believes that CA works from the wrong direction. What he advocates is an alternative approach which examines and explains actually observed linguistic behaviour by second language learners, in other words error analysis. The view that error analysis may be more useful than CA is also defended by Ronald Wardhaugh (1970), who distinguishes two versions of the contrastive analysis hypothesis. The strong version claims that two languages can be contrasted in order to predict the difficulties that learners will be confronted with. It is untenable in Wardhaugh's view because '(it) demands of linguists that they have available a set of linguistic universals formulated within a comprehensive linguistic theory which deals adequately with syntax, semantics and phonology', and, in addition, 'a theory of contrastive linguistics into which they can plug complete linguistic descriptions of the two languages being contrasted so as to produce the correct set of contrasts between the two languages' (1970: 125). The weak version, on the other hand, does not require of the linguist that he should be able to predict difficulties. All he is supposed to do is explain actually observed interference phenomena. According to Wardhaugh most of the available contrastive analyses conformed to the demands of the weak version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis and not at all to the strong version. Although he rejects the latter, he is prepared to admit that the weak version 'has proved to be helpful' (1970: 129). What Wardhaugh calls the weak version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis is, in fact, the a posteriori CA approach which forms part of the field of error analysis.

The adequacy of CA as a predictive device is also questioned by Whitman and Jackson (1972). On the basis of a comparison of the results of two tests administered to Japanese students with predictions of the relative difficulty of the test items derived from four contrastive analyses, they arrive at the conclusion that contrastive analyses do not adequately predict subject performance. They suggest that there are two explanations for their results:

1. Contrastive analysis, as represented by the four analyses tested in this project, is inadequate, theoretically and practically, to predict the interference problems of a language learner;
2. Interference, or native-to-target language transfer, plays such a small role in language learning performance that no contrastive analysis, no matter how well conceived, could correlate highly with performance data, at least on the level of syntax (1972:40).

Whitman and Jackson believe 'that it is quite likely that both explanations may turn out to be true'.

Another cherished tenet of orthodox CA doctrine that came under attack was the claim that what is different is difficult and what is similar is easy. Pit Corder (1973: Chapter 10) makes two important observations about it. The first point he makes is that there is not necessarily a connection between difference and difficulty. The fact that difficulty is a psycholinguistic rather than a linguistic matter makes it hard to predict which features in L2 are difficult to learn and which are not. The second point is related to the first. Corder claims that learners must not only learn the differences between L1 and L2, they must also discover the similarities.

Dulay and Burt (1974) compare the contrastive analysis hypothesis with the L2 acquisition = L1 acquisition hypothesis. According to the latter the errors made by children learning a particular L2 are similar to those made by children learning that language as L1. Whereas the contrastive analysis hypothesis explains errors in terms of transfer theory, the L2 acquisition = L1 acquisition hypothesis accounts for them in terms of 'an active mental organization theory'. The assumption is that children, in learning a second language, make generalizations about its structure in a way that is comparable with what happens in L1 acquisition. Dulay and Burt do not deny that there is some evidence to partly confirm the contrastive analysis hypothesis at the product level (i.e. the level of the actual error). They claim, however, that the hypothesis runs into difficulty at the process level (i.e. the level of its theoretical assumptions), since psychologists are questioning its theoretical base (interference theory). Consequently Dulay and Burt hypothesize that 'the child's organization of L2 does not include transfer from (either positive or negative) or comparison with his native language, but relies on his dealing with L2 syntax as a system' (1974: 115; cf. also Ervin-Tripp 1974 and, for critical comment, Zobl 1980).

It would be wrong to conclude from these criticisms that contrastive linguistics was now in the doldrums. On the contrary, the contrastive industry continued to thrive, although it is fair to say that the proponents were beginning to reduce some of their earlier claims and to formulate them with greater care and modesty. Politzer (1972), for example, makes only one general assumption regarding performance in a foreign language, namely that 'performance in the foreign language (L2) may at times reflect competence in the native language (L1)'. As to the pedagogical value of CA, the only assumption he makes is that 'The interference in performance in L2 which can be associated with competence in L1 can be counteracted by exercises which are specially designed to reduce the influence of competence of L1 on performance in L2'.

Other linguists put up a stronger case for the defence (see, e.g., James

1971, Marton 1972, Selinker 1972, Di Pietro 1974, Schachter 1974, Sanders 1976, Berman 1978). Carl James (1971) summarizes the various criticisms of CA in nine points, providing counter-arguments in each case. Some of the criticisms he mentions, however, concern issues that are no longer as controversial as they used to be. James does not deal at length with such fundamental questions as 'What is a contrastive grammar?', 'What exactly is comparable across linguistic systems?' and 'What is the exact relationship of contrastive linguistics to linguistic theory?', all of them questions that Selinker (1972) regards as 'perplexing problems (that) remain'. One of the most interesting issues discussed by James concerns the relation between CA and error analysis: are they alternatives or do they complement each other? James believes that 'CA is a necessary component complementing error analysis, if errors other than false analogies are to be taken into account' (1971: 55). This view is shared by Schachter (1974), who, on the basis of evidence from a study of the acquisition of relative clauses by speakers of Persian, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese, claims that error analysis cannot account for avoidance phenomena. In her view only a combination of CA a priori predictions, error analysis and comprehension testing can provide information on the nature of the second language learning process.

The 1970's were obviously a period in which contrastive linguistics was in a state of flux and confusion. On the one hand there was a great deal of optimism due to a number of promising new developments. On the other hand there were also signs of disillusionment and pessimism. In 1972 at the 3rd AILA congress in Copenhagen Corder (1974: 17) claimed that 'contrastive analysis, error analysis and elicitation procedures, used as a trio of complementary techniques, are going to represent one of the most powerful research tools in our repertoire'. Six years later, however, Gerhard Nickel (1978a), in his introduction to the special volume of contrastive linguistics papers submitted to the 4th AILA congress in Stuttgart, went so far as to suggest that the heyday of contrastive analysis was over. It would seem that there is little evidence to support this gloomy view. The fact that the tradition of the 1970's of having a special section devoted to CA at the AILA congresses was continued at the 6th congress in Lund in 1981 is a sure sign of its continuing topicality.

When reviewing the present state of the art, we must conclude that the contrastive analysis debate has led to a certain amount of agreement on some issues, but that others are still subject to controversy. In what follows I shall confine myself to issues that have played a major role in this debate. Apart from the goals of CA and its relation to theoretical linguistics, I shall comment briefly on the notions of interference, predictability, difficulty and comparability.

The goals of CA may be said to have been primarily pedagogical at first.

The results of contrastive studies were supposed to be directly relevant to the designing of instructional materials and to classroom practice, but a theoretical dimension was lacking. Rivers (1968) applied Chomsky's distinction between a linguistic grammar and a pedagogic grammar to types of contrastive studies. Since the early 1970's it has been customary to draw a distinction between applied and theoretical CA (Marton 1974, Fisiak 1971, Fisiak et al. 1978, Fisiak 1980). Although the distinction is not always clear-cut, many linguists agree that it is a useful one to make. Theoretical CA forms part of typological linguistics and contributes to general linguistic theory and to the study of language universals. Theoretical studies are supposed to provide exhaustive descriptions of the similarities and differences between languages and to have explanatory power and heuristic value. Applied CA, on the other hand, is pedagogically oriented. It makes use of the findings of theoretical CA, applying them to specific languages for specific purposes. Whereas theoretical CA is concerned with the comparison of deep structures and rule systems, applied CA focuses on surface structures. This raises a number of interesting questions. The most difficult one to answer concerns the relation between linguistic grammars and 'applied' grammars. In other words, how exactly can a description formulated in terms of a particular linguistic theory, be converted into a pedagogically useful format? Another question concerns the underlying linguistic theory itself. It has often been taken as axiomatic that comparative statements cannot be made unless they are based on a linguistic theory that incorporates the distinction between deep structures and surface structures. I shall not go into this question here. It is clear, however, that, given the controversial status of the concept of deep structure in current linguistic theory, attempts to explain differences and similarities between languages in terms of transformations and language universals (cf. Di Pietro 1978) cannot but be speculative and vague. Besides such theories have been criticized for failing to account for communicative competence, which has received a great deal of attention in language teaching recently. In this connexion Widdowson (1979) has made an interesting proposal to the effect that a pedagogically appropriate model of description is one derived from the language user rather than from the linguistic analyst, a model that is 'participant rather than observer orientated' (1979: 243). Unfortunately he does not say what such a model looks like.

As far as interference and predictability are concerned, it is now generally recognized that, although the learner's mother tongue accounts for a large number of errors he produces in the target language (estimates vary from 33 to 53 per cent; see, for example, Richards 1971, Brudhiprabha 1972, George 1972, Tran-Thi-Chau 1975), errors are not only due to interlinguistic factors (Mackey 1965, Dušková 1969, Nickel 1971, James 1971, Burgschmidt and Götz 1974, Jain 1974, Taylor 1975) and hence not all errors are predictable

on the basis of a contrastive analysis. Lee (1972) claims that first language interference is greatest when the learner has no knowledge of L2 and that this is a stage where L1/L2 comparison is most relevant. As the learner progresses, however, various intralinguistic factors come into play. Intralingual (or developmental) errors have nothing to do with the learner's mother tongue. They are made by all categories of learners irrespective of their linguistic background and may be regarded as clues to their command of the new language and also as indications of the learning strategies they employ. According to Richards (1974: 174) 'Developmental errors illustrate the learner attempting to build up hypotheses about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or textbook'. Richards discusses four major types: over-generalization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules and false concepts hypothesized. Some errors are due to the influence of another L2 and many errors have extralinguistic sources. The fact that errors are produced by such a variety of causes makes it impossible for CA to identify all the factors that generate them, let alone to predict all the errors that learners are likely to make. This has led to the rejection of a static view of interference and to a shift of interest from the prediction of potential errors to the explanation of errors that are actually observed. It is now obvious that CA can no longer do the job on its own. Error-analysis (Svartvik 1973, Richards 1974a, Corder 1975, Nickel 1978b) and the study of interlanguage (Nemser 1971, Selinker 1972, Richards and Sampson 1974, Corder 1975, 1976) are now considered to be necessary complements.

As to the notion of difficulty, we can approach it from two angles. If we confine ourselves to the two linguistic systems involved, we can say that applied linguists now agree that the view that what is similar is easy and what is different is difficult requires qualification for several reasons. In the first place there is evidence to show that some interlinguistic differences are not experienced as problematic at all. Secondly, it appears that there are interlinguistic similarities that constitute trouble spots and that some errors are made in spite of the fact that the corresponding L1 structures are similar. Learners often tend to assume that things cannot possibly be so simple in the target language as they are in their mother tongue and also that they cannot be so idiosyncratic (Kellerman 1977, 1979). If we approach the notion of difficulty from the learner's point of view, we are of course dealing with even more complex phenomena. Richards and Sampson (1974) suggest that apart from interlanguage difficulties we must take account of a possible universal hierarchy of difficulty, containing certain phonological, syntactic or semantic items and structures that are inherently difficult for man. They also believe that what the learner finds difficult depends on what he already knows of the target language: 'His knowledge of the target language will form part of the data by which he infers the meaning of new elements' (1974:13). The learner's

perception of difficulty has been investigated in an experimental study by Tran-Thi-Chau (1975). What she attempts to do is to relate the learner's perception of difficulty to the outputs of error analysis and CA in order to find a better approach to the problem of difficulty in second-language learning. Although her study confirms that mother tongue interference is the greatest single cause of errors, her results show that the predictive value of CA is negligible (since it cannot predict more than half the total number of errors) and that little value can be attached to hierarchies of difficulty (Stockwell et al. 1965). CA cannot do without error analysis, since it cannot account for intralingual errors. The high correlation between the frequency of errors and the students' ratings of difficulty shows that students do have insight into what is problematic (cf., however, Kellerman 1976). The author's conclusion is, therefore, that the causes of difficulty can only be explained by a combination of error analysis, CA and students' perceptions. Very interesting is Eckman's (1977) attempt to explain difficulty in terms of the 'markedness differential hypothesis', which claims that what is different is not necessarily difficult, but that 'Those areas of the target language which differ from the native language and are more marked than the native language will be difficult' (1977:321). The major difficulty with this hypothesis, apart from those pointed out by Kellerman (1979), concerns the definition of markedness, particularly in syntactic matters.

The establishment of comparability is one of the preconditions for contrasting, the other condition being that the two languages should be described in terms of the same theoretical framework. From a fairly early stage onwards linguists have agreed that it is impossible to compare whole languages. What can be compared are certain features and patterns and what have been called equivalent sub-systems. Comparative statements involve a number of steps (Halliday et al. 1964, Whitman 1970), one of which is the establishment of comparability. According to some linguists (Halliday et al. 1964, Catford 1965, Marton 1968, Krzeszowski 1971) comparability crucially depends on contextual equivalence, which can be demonstrated by reference to translation. As Halliday et al. put it (1964:115): 'If the items are not at least sometimes equivalent in translation, they are not worth comparing'. Others claim that comparability is not only a question of translational (=semantic) equivalence but that contrastive statements should be based on formal features as well (Krzeszowski 1971, König 1972). If both semantic and formal considerations are taken into account, sentences can be: (a) equivalent and formally different, (b) equivalent and formally similar (=congruent), (c) non-equivalent and formally similar, (d) non-equivalent and formally different (Krzeszowski 1971). Ideal equivalence involves also lexical correspondences and is found in sentences 'which constitute the closest acceptable approximations to word-for-word translations' (Krzeszowski 1974). Finally, it has been pointed

out (Bouton 1976) that, apart from semantic and formal equivalence, we must take account of situational or pragmatic factors, but that this is a type of equivalence that transformational grammar cannot account for. The establishment of comparability, then, is a much more difficult problem than it appears to be at first sight. The recent emphasis on communicative language teaching has made it even more so.

Let me try to summarize. It is evident that CA is here to stay. Contrastive studies have added a dimension to foreign language teaching whose value is beyond all doubt. This does not mean that the field is no longer controversial. The contrastive analysis debate is still in full swing and several crucial issues have not yet been solved. Among the most interesting questions is that of the relation between CA and linguistic theory. Broadly speaking, there are two views on this. There are those who insist that a contrastive description of two languages is impossible without a particular theoretical framework. Others believe that in language teaching it is not necessary to have a linguistic model as the underlying frame of reference (see, for example, Widdowson 1979:234). This is a situation that can easily lead to deadlock. What we need is a pragmatic approach which enables experienced grammarians and language teachers to carry on their work without having to worry too much about controversial issues and without having to wait for agreement on what the best theoretical framework is. Given the present situation, the task of CA is best summed up by Corder (1973:244), who writes that, in the absence of adequate 'semantic-based' grammars, 'we shall have to manage as best we can in applied linguistics with a notional comparison of languages, and with ad hoc descriptions of those parts of the languages which look as if they could yield to the inadequate knowledge we have'.

In the second part of this paper I would like to report briefly on the kind of work we are doing at the University of Nijmegen. Let me begin by saying that Dutch Anglists have not been particularly active so far in contrastive studies of English and Dutch. This is a little surprising in view of the reputation they used to have in the field of pedagogic grammars of English, all of which had a strong contrastive bias. Whatever the reason may be, there has been fairly little research in Dutch-English contrastive analysis and the number of publications is accordingly small. At the moment research is going on at several universities in the Netherlands, including Utrecht and Nijmegen. In Nijmegen we are writing a contrastive grammar of English and Dutch, which will only be concerned with syntax and with the expression of notions and functions, not with phonology or the lexicon. The grammar will be pedagogically oriented and is primarily intended for first-year university students of English. Underlying it are the following assumptions:

1. Information about the differences and similarities between English and

Dutch should be supplied at an early stage since this facilitates the students' learning task.

2. Given the students' knowledge of English grammar such information should be presented in a pedagogically suitable format. We believe that contrastive descriptions based on a particular linguistic theory do not benefit beginners, but should be studied by students at advanced level.
3. It is useful to separate syntactic categories from the expression of notions and functions.
4. Before students can tackle contrastive problems, they should have a basic knowledge of English grammar.

Our grammar consists of three parts. Part I contains a non-contrastive outline of English syntax, which is theoretically neutral, but terminologically geared to *A grammar of contemporary English*. It is based on the units of grammatical description (morpheme, word, phrase, etc.), on grammatical categories such as number, tense, voice, and aspect, and on sentence functions and their realizations. This part functions as an introduction to parts II and III, since it contains information that is indispensable if students are to understand what the rest of the book is about. Parts II and III are contrastive. In Part II (*The structures of English and Dutch compared*) we deal with syntactic matters such as the comparison of the structure of phrases in the two languages (e.g. the noun phrase and the verb phrase) and with related concepts such as number and gender, tense and mood. We have tried to separate syntax and semantics as much as possible, although a certain amount of overlap in Parts II and III is unavoidable. One of the advantages of devoting a separate part of the grammar to notions and functions is that it enables one to discuss alternative syntactic realizations of the same concept under one heading. The method we use is comparable with, though not entirely the same as, Levenston's (1965) 'translation-paradigm' technique, which lists a grammatical category from language A opposite all the categories in language B by which it may be translated, providing notes on grammatical and contextual criteria. Part II, then, is concerned with questions like the following:

1. given a particular syntactic category (for example, the noun phrase or the verb phrase), what are the structural possibilities and constraints in the two languages? The noun phrase in English and Dutch can be described in terms of premodification, head and postmodification. Premodificational structures in Dutch, however, can be much more complex than in English. Cf.:

Een verleden jaar door Longman  
gepubliceerde grammatika.

}	A grammar published by Longman last year.
}	*A last year by Longman published grammar.

The verb phrase in Dutch allows combinations of two or more auxiliaries, which are ungrammatical in English. Cf.:

Jan zal moeten komen.	{ John will have to come. *John will must come.
Susan moet kunnen slagen.	{ Susan should be able to pass. *Susan should can pass.

2. Given a particular syntactic category, does it have the same uses in English as in Dutch?

For example, the uses of the present and past tenses overlap to a large extent, except for cases like the following:

Ik ben sinds 1970 getrouwd.	{ I have been married since 1970. *I am married since 1970.
Ik deed het als ik jou was.	{ I would do it if I were you. *I did it if I were you.
Mary is gisteren vertrokken.	{ Mary left yesterday. *Mary has left yesterday.

3. Given a particular syntactic category, what is its distribution in the two languages?

The genitive, for instance, is used attributively both in English and in Dutch, but in English it also occurs in so-called 'local genitive' constructions and in post-modification to a noun phrase head:

Ik logeer bij mijn tante.	{ I am staying at my aunt's. *I am staying at my aunt.
Een vriend van Jan.	{ a friend of John's *a friend of John

Similarly, prepositions can be used in sentence-final position in both languages, but not in all cases. Cf.:

Waar kijk je naar? — What are you looking at?

Het meisje waar hij naar keek... } — The girl that he was looking at...  
\*Het meisje waar hij keek naar... }

Waar is mijn boek? — Where is my book?

Je zit erop. } You are sitting on it.  
\*You are sitting thereon. }

4. Given a particular syntactic category, in what cases does it have to be expressed in the other language and in what cases can (or should) it have zero-expression? Relative pronouns, for example, can, under certain conditions, be deleted in restrictive relative clauses in English, but never in Dutch. Cf.:

De vrouw die hij trouwde was Française.	} — The woman he married was French.
*De vrouw hij trouwde was Française.	

Both Dutch and English have pro-forms for nouns. But, whereas English uses the pro-forms *one/ones* after adjectives, after the definite article and after words like *this* and *that*, Dutch does not. Cf.:

Jim kocht een nieuwe auto, maar een goedkope.	} Jim bought a new car, but a cheap one. *Jim bought a new car, but a cheap.
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5. Given a particular syntactic category in one language which is lacking in the other, how do we specify the conditions for its proper use?

Examples would be the use in English of the progressive form, of tag-questions and of periphrastic *do*, all of which are unknown in Dutch.

6. Given a particular syntactic rule (such as concord of number), does it apply to the same cases in the two languages?

For example, although Dutch and English have subject-verb concord, Dutch often has no concord between subject and subject complement or between subject and direct object. Cf.:

Mijn zussen zijn verpleegster.	— { My sisters are nurses. *My sisters are nurse.
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De jongens hadden hun fiets vergeten.	— { The boys had forgotten their bikes *The boys had forgotten their bike
--	--

These questions are different from those we deal with in Part III, which is semantically orientated and pays a great deal of attention to communicative factors (Wilkins 1976 and 1979, van Ek 1977, Brumfit and Johnson 1979). We agree with Candlin (1979:78f.) that the principal concern of a semantically based pedagogic grammar 'is to provide LT materials writers and foreign language learners with the opportunity to view language as communication and more particularly to provide in its explanations systematization under language-function parameters to enable the learner to organize and relate his often scattered and isolated knowledge of the language under study'. In Part III we take situational needs as our starting-point and the questions we ask are of the form 'Given a particular function of notion X, what are the linguistic devices by means of which it can be expressed?'. What we are concerned with here are the ways in which speakers make statements, ask questions and give orders; with how they apologize, express gratitude or refer to future time. We also deal with the expression of notions such as possibility, necessity, obligation, permission and ability. Each notion is first defined as accurately as possible. We then list the various devices by means of which



it may be expressed in English and finally we discuss the important points of contrast between English and Dutch. The notion of ABILITY may serve as an example:

## ABILITY

### 1. Definition

The notion of ability typically expresses that an animate agent has the physical or mental potential to do or experience something.

Since English often uses the same grammatical means to express the notions of ability, permission and possibility, it is often hard to tell what the exact meaning of a sentence is. Most of the examples below are unambiguous, but some can only be fully interpreted in context.

### 2. Ability can be expressed in the following ways:

#### a. by means of the auxiliary *can* (*could*)

Examples:

I'm sure you can carry this.

My sister could play the violin when she was six.

*Could* is also used in polite questions:

Could you lift this trunk?

Could you tell me the way to the station?

Note that the passive counterpart of some sentences expressing ability is interpreted as expressing possibility. Cf.:

Children can learn this very easily.

This can be learnt (by children) very easily.

#### b. by means of the phrase *be able to*, which is also used to supply the missing forms of the defective auxiliary *can*.

Examples:

I have never been able to understand this.

Will you be able to come to my party?

He used to be able to speak Swedish.

#### c. by means of the phrase *be capable of*

Do you think she is capable of keeping a secret?

#### d. by means of the phrase *know how to*

She knows exactly how to handle him.

#### e. by means of the phrase *be in a position to*

At last we were in a position to help her.

### 3. English and Dutch compared

The following points deserve comment:

- Since the auxiliary *can* lacks non-finite forms, whereas the Dutch verb *kunnen* is a fully conjugated verb, we find that in the perfect and future tenses English uses the suppletive form *be able to*;

Ik heb mijn brief niet kunnen afmaken.

I have not been able to finish my letter.

Zul je kunnen komen als ik je uitnodig?

Will you be able to come if I invite you?

English also uses the suppletive form when the corresponding Dutch sentence contains the infinitive *te kunnen*:

Ze bleek te kunnen typen

She appeared to be able to type

#### b. *Be able to* is also used to express hypothetical ability:

Zou jij die tekst kunnen vertalen?

Would you be able to translate this text?

#### c. Dutch *had kunnen* corresponds to English:

- had been able to* when the reference is to something that was actually achieved in the past.

He had been able to save his life by jumping out of his car.

- could have* or *should/would have been able to* when the reference is to hypothetical ability in the past.

He could have saved/would have been able to save his life if he had jumped out of his car.

#### d. The Dutch past tense *kon(den)* corresponds to English:

- Could*, when the reference is to permanent ability in the past or when there is another verb in the context which clearly has past time reference:

My brother could play Beethoven when he was eight.

He said that he could lift that box.

- Could*, in exclamatory sentences expressing a wish:

If only I could meet her again.

- Was/were able to, manage to* or *succeed in* when the reference is to an isolated achievement in the past:

We were able to pull all the passengers out of the burning car.

He just managed to jump off the bus.

Did you succeed in contacting him at home?

- Whereas Dutch can use the verb *kunnen* without a following infinitive, the auxiliary *can/could* must always be followed by an infinitive (except in cases of ellipsis):

Jan kan dat -- John can do it

- Note that where English has *can* followed by a verb of physical perception (*see, hear, feel, taste, smell*), Dutch normally dispenses with the auxiliary:

Ik zie een vliegtuig -- I can see a plane

- Note that in English *can't/couldn't* can be followed by *seem* in sentences

like the following, where *I can't/couldn't seem* may be paraphrased as *It seems that I am/was unable to...*:

I can't seem to remember his name.

I couldn't seem to get that bottle open.

It is not so difficult to criticize this approach, of course. One objection could be that the information on notions such as ABILITY is presented in one teaching unit. We believe that this is justified at university level, although at lower levels a cyclically organized course which gradually expands the learner's repertoire is probably more useful (Wilkins 1976:61). A more valid criticism concerns the fact that it is hardly possible to suggest useful ways of ordering the range of syntactic forms that is available for the expression of notions in English. Wilkins (1976:60f.) lists no fewer than 16 ways of seeking permission (to use the telephone), ranging from *O.K.?* to *I should be most grateful if you would permit me to use your telephone*, and Pride (1973) has shown what an enormous range of variables speakers of English have at their disposal to express commands and requests. As he points out (1973:66), 'What one does *not* choose to say (yet might have chosen to say — or write) gives meaning to (one might well say defines) what one does say'. It is obvious that a mere listing of the various choices that are available is not really adequate, since it relies too much on the student's intuition of what is possible and what is not in a given situation. What we need is taxonomies that correspond to sociolinguistic reality. One of the tasks of CA will then be to develop procedures for relating the range of options in the languages that are being contrasted in such a way that students can learn where the correspondences are and where there is 'lack of fit'. Another area for research is the study of speech acts and the importance of speech act theory to second language acquisition (Schmidt and Richards 1980). It is obvious that we still have a long way to go.

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