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A PHONOLOGICAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF KURDISH AND ENGLISH

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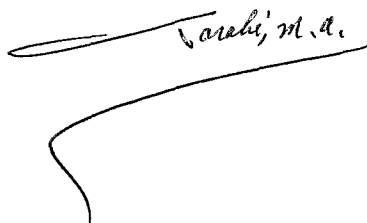
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ABSTRACT

Despite the different criticisms on contrastive analysis it has been proved that the results of it (when processed) can be useful in a TEFL environment, specially at the level of phonology. This study is an attempt to compare and contrast the sound systems of Kurdish and English for pedagogical aims. The consonants, vowels, stress and intonation of the two languages are described by the same model - taxonomic phonology - and then compared and contrasted for finding the potential areas of difficulty and problem while teaching English to Kurdish speaking students. Fourty four phonemes of BBC English has been described and compared with the thirty eight phonemes of Sorani Kurdish. Phonetic details have been elaborated on only when they have a pedagogical importance. The results have been summarized in tables. The stress of the two languages also have been studied at the levels of words, compounds and sentences. The nature and function of stress and its differences in the two languages have been surveyed. Intonation in English and Kurdish also have been studied within the same model. All the results have been analysed and categorized for the purpose of teaching English as a foreign language to Kurdish speakers.

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Chapter I

Introduction

I-1. OVERVIEW

Contrastive Analysis as Fisiak (1981:1) puts it "may roughly be defined as a subdiscipline of linguistics concerned with the comparison of two or more languages or subsystems of languages in order to determine both the differences and similarities between them". There are two types of contrastive studies: theoretical and applied (Fisiak, 1981). Applied contrastive study, which is the concern of this thesis, is a part of applied linguistics. Drawing on the findings of theoretical contrastive studies it provides a framework for the comparison of languages. Applied contrastive studies deal more, although not exclusively, with the surface representation of languages.

Fallahi (1991) asserts that any contrastive study has two main theoretical values: general and pedagogical. Generally it describes more precisely the divergent / convergent phenomena of any two languages and so contributes to the general theories of linguistic universals. Pedagogically it reveals the conflicting points of linguistic systems of any two languages, gives some insights into the nature of these conflicts, predicts the existence of potential learning hurdle, and at the last but not least, helps the practitioners and course designers to provide a valid foundation for the development of language - learning materials to be used in language programs.

Contrastive Analysis is a form of linguistics and hence it owes to linguistics the framework within which the two linguistic descriptions are organized. "Framework"

implies three things. First, CA adopts the linguistic tactic of dividing up the concept "a language" into areas of phonology, grammar and lexis. Secondly, use is made of the descriptive categories of linguistics. Thirdly, a CA utilises descriptions arrived at under the same "model" of language.

1-2. PHONOLOGICAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

Based on the definition of CA provided above one can deduce that contrastive phonology is "the process of comparing and contrasting the phonological systems of languages to formulate their similarities and differences" (Yarmohammadi; 1995: 19). It is in the area of phonology that as Ringbom (1994: 738) claims "the predictions of CA work best". At the very outset of learning, most learners have a very low phonetic competence in the target language: in rhythm, in stress and intonation, and in individual speech sounds, L1 patterns will normally be easily discernible (Asher and Simpson, 1994). Eliasson (1984: 7) asserts that a contrastive phonology "compares phonological properties of two languages in order to determine areas in the phonological system of one language which may create learning difficulties for speakers of the other language". Kohler puts more emphasis on the differences of the two systems rather than similarities. He states "the aim of contrastive phonology seems to be straightforward and logical: it is to analyse the difference in sound structure between language". (Kohler, 1984:7).

As James (1980: 30) states any CA "involves two steps: first, there is the stage of description when each of the languages is described on the appropriate level; the second stage is the stage of juxtaposition for comparison". For the executing a CA of the sound systems of two languages James (1980: 74) particularly assumes four

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steps: "draw up a phonemic inventory of L1 and L2; equate phonemes interlingually; list the phonemic variants (allophones) for L1 and L2; state the distributional restrictions on the phonemes and allophones of each language".

In the literature on phonological CA and CA in general we encounter differences in determining these steps (cf. Stockwell and Bowen, 1965. Fisiak 1981. Krzeszowski, 1990. Whitman, 1970).

1-3. MODELS FOR PHONOLOGICAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS:

The methodological principle of CA is to compare and contrast the structures of the two languages by means of the same models (James, 1980; Whitman, 1970; Krzeszowski, 1990). The choice of model is fairly straightforward in phonology, where there are basically only two choices: 'taxonomic phonology' and 'generative phonology'. The taxonomic model is used in this study because it is more suitable as Yarmohammadi (1996) asserts "for phonological CA, particularly in applied areas. Kohler (1971) admits that taxonomic approach for phonology works quite well. He claims that "To put contrastive studies and their practical applications in language teaching on a better foundation than taxonomic phonology we cannot substitute generative phonology" (Kohler, 1971: 87).

1-4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a paradox in the development of CA. From around 1970 many criticisms leveled at CA. What also happened was that the total body of contrastive studies, including microlinguistic studies, increased enormously during

the 1970s and 1980s. Ringbom (1994: 742) affirms the two basic tenets of CA have survived. These are (a) L1 is a major factor in L2 learning, and (b) important insights can be gained from comparison and contrast of two languages. Fallahi (1991) also advocates that "since the phenomenon of mother - tongue interference is extremely noticeable in an EFL environment, the application of CA for English programs has to be a matter of great importance in Iran" (Fallahi, 1991: 1). Aid (1974) reports that many classroom teachers at the 1972 TESOL Convention stated that CA has been useful to them for instructional purposes. Johnson and Cook (1999: 86) also claims that "recent years have seen some revival of interest in CA though sometimes under new names".

Phonological CA is even more justifiable to be conducted. Richards et al (1992: 83) confirm that Contrastive Analysis is more successful in **phonology** than in other areas of language. Dulay and Burt (1974: 105) state that "most of the valid CA evidence is phonological". Richards (1971: 204) suggests that "studies of SLA have tended to imply that CA may be most predictive at the level of **phonology**, and least predictive at the syntactic level". Felix (1980) speculates that at the **phonological level L2** learners start with their L1 system and establish a correspondence between L1 and L2 sounds (quoted in Ioup, 1984). Cook (1999:86) states that Lado's methods "are most successful in the area of **pronunciation** (where interference is evident, extensive and easily described), rather less successful in the description of grammar and lexis".

This study intends to compare and contrast the phonological systems of English and Kurdish. The vowels, consonants, stress and intonation in Kurdish will be investigated and then compared and contrasted to those

of English. At the theoretical level this study gives a picture of the sound system of Kurdish which has not been done so academically in our country and it also demarcates the **differences and similarities of the Kurdish sound system and English sound system.** Pedagogically the results can be processed for using in the classroom to teach English pronunciation to Kurdish speakers since as Ioup (1984:2) confirms "It is often implied by those who deny the importance of native language (NL) transfer that the only significant evidence of interference is found at the **phonological** level". In discussion of L2 phonological acquisition authors usually concur that the most observed phenomena is **the influence of the structure of the L1 phonology** (cf. Tarone 1980; Vago and Altenberg 1977; Wode 1980; Beebe 1980; Flege 1980; Eckman 1981; Anderson 1982).

1-5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1- What are the segmental phonemes (vowels and consonants) of Kurdish?
- 2- What is the role of stress in Kurdish and how it is used?
- 3- How intonation is realized in Kurdish?
- 4- What are the differences between vowels, consonants, stress and intonation of Kurdish and English?
- 5- What are the pedagogical implications of this comparison?

1-6. METHODOLOGY:

This study begins by setting the concept of Kurdish. Then Kurdish sound system is described using the model of **taxonomic phonology.** As for the sound system

of English there is no problem since there is a plethora of works in this area. Then a comparison will be made between these two sound systems. It should also be noted that in the course of this study native speakers of Kurdish have decided for the true position of a sound, stress, and so on when there is doubt about them.

1-7. OUTLINE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY:

The study is organized in this thesis with the following chapters:

Chapter one: Introduction

Chapter two: Literature review in which a short history of literature on CA specially *phonological CA* is investigated.

Chapter three: Methodology and design in which Kurdish and English phonemes will be investigated, and also stress and intonation in Kurdish and English is discussed.

Chapter four: Data analysis and results in which the data are compared and contrasted for pedagogical reasons.

Chapter five: Discussion and conclusion in which the general conclusion and pedagogical implications of the results and suggestions for further research are put forward.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:

In a broad sense Contrastive Analysis has always been present in linguistics and language teaching materials. CA has been used in historical linguistics to establish language genealogies, in comparative linguistics to create language taxonomies and in translation theory to investigate problems of equivalence (cf. Robins 1997; Stern 1983; Johnson and Johnson 1999). Teachers have always accepted the idea that ***native language influences affect second language acquisition*** (Odlin, 1989). However, it was the structuralist linguists of the 1940s and 1950s who promoted the term Contrastive Analysis and as Guy Cook (1999: 86) states "drew explicit attention of the relevance for language teaching of linguistic description in general and of contrastive descriptions in particular". In language teaching it has been influential through the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) which claims that ***difficulties in language learning derive from the differences between the new language and the learner's first language***, that errors in these areas of differences derive from first language interference and that these errors can be predicted and remedied by the use of CA. The first systematic and extensive formulation of the CAH was by Lado (1957) in ***Linguistics across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Teachers***, a book which is widely regarded as having launched the CA 'movement' in language teaching. Before this, some scholars either used or discussed CA in teaching. The first reference appeared in a study by John Lott (1943). Fries (1945) claimed that the results of a careful description of