

Contrastive Discourse Analysis - Functional and Corpus Perspectives.

Maite Taboada, Susana Doval Suárez and Elsa González Álvarez, Eds.
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In the introduction to the volume *Contrastive Discourse Analysis – Functional and Corpus Perspectives*, the editors Maite Taboada, Doval Suárez and González Álvarez announce the birth of a new subfield, *Contrastive Discourse Analysis* within the “new wave of contrastive linguistics” (p. 2). The 15 chapters in the volume clearly show the potential of this new subfield by way of highlighting similarities and subtle differences in discourse organization between two languages, or between L1 and L2 versions of English, alongside discussions of which linguistic principles and constraints account for the patterns found. In this review, I first take a short step back to give a brief historical view of contrastive linguistics in which contrastive discourse analysis represents the most recent development, and then provide an overview of the studies in the four themes in the volume: *studies of discourse markers; information structure; registers and genres; and phraseology*. I end with some general remarks.

Two directions in the new wave of contrastive linguistics

Emerging as a field in the 1960s and 1970s, contrastive linguistics was formulated as a program with solid application in foreign language teaching. In fact, as pointed out by König (2012:4), it was considered tantamount to a theory of second language acquisition. With time, however, it became obvious that language contrast comprises but one factor of many in foreign language acquisition, and contrastive linguistics was pushed towards the fringes of linguistic study (König 2012). It then reappeared on the more central research agenda in the late 1980s, as a result of a general broadening of linguistic interest beyond syntax to pragmatics and discourse studies and, perhaps most importantly, as a result of the introduction of corpus linguistics.

Two main research directions quickly emerged in this new wave of interest (referred to as the *first* and *second direction* in this review). The first direction typically involves contrastive studies based on parallel corpora. Studies from this direction often investigate two, or sometimes three, languages as a form of ‘pilot typology’ (Auwera 2012). Observations from small-scale studies of a limited set of languages (often only two) form the basis for hypotheses about universal linguistic principles, or they nuance such principles (see Johansson 2007 for an overview of studies). The second direction is more directly related to the pedagogical agenda of the early form of contrastive studies, but represents a reorientation in focus from error-analysis to studies of interlanguage. Studies in this direction very often consider the frequency profile of words or phrases in texts written by advanced learners of a language and native speakers, and are typically based on learner corpora comprising texts written by L2

writers of English (the advanced learners) contrasted with a ‘control corpus’ of native-speaker writing (see e.g. Granger, 2003). Differences in frequency profile between L1 and L2 writers are discussed as learners’ *over-* and *underuse* in comparison with the native-speaker ‘norm’, and differences are put in relation to possible L1-interference, on the one hand, or universal features of interlanguage, on the other (see e.g., Gilquin et al, 2007).

Even if both directions in the new wave of contrastive linguistics tend to seek explanation for language use in functional and cognitive paradigms, most new-wave publications do take a ‘bottom-up’ perspective whereas ‘top-down’ studies remain scarce, i.e. there is a focus on studying issues from the perspective of form to function rather than from function to form (see e.g. Ädel 2010, Conrad 2011: 54-55). One reason for this limitation in focus, of course, is the strong influence of corpus linguistics methodology on contrastive linguistics –with its possibilities for syntactic tagging and phraseological queries, corpus methodology simply lends itself to contrastive studies below clause level. To extend the perspective to the discourse level, manual analysis is still required. Thus, one of the strengths of the volume under review is the true ambition to move beyond ‘bottom-up’ type of studies, as reflected in the four themes: discourse markers; information structure; registers and genres, and phraseology.

Chapter overview and comments

The first section on discourse markers includes four chapters. The three chapters by Taboada and Gómez-González, Stenström and Adam Dalmas contrast discourse particles in two languages, and can be sorted under the first direction of contrastive linguistics described above, whereas the last chapter in the section, by Romero-Trillo, contrasts differences in the intonation of discourse markers between native and non-native speakers and thus belongs to the second direction. Common to all chapters in this section is that they underline the importance of ‘culture’ as a contextual variable. Taboada and Gómez-Gonzales, for instance, show how genre conventions can travel across national boundaries, a finding which resonates with Fløttum et al’s (2006: 267) observation that disciplinary identity tends to trump language differences and national cultural identity in genre instantiation. Adam and Dalmas, next, show that both linguistic differences and more general cultural discourse-functional conventions associated with ‘national’ cultural conventions can explain the possible functions of discourse markers in French and German respectively. Romero-Trillo’s study, lastly, indicates that L1 interference in intonation patterns in L2 language might have consequences for discourse-meaning, implying a crucial role for L1 intonation conventions in L2. Interestingly, though, all of Romero-Trillo’s L2 informants are female, which activates gender as a possible ‘cultural’ variable, particularly since differences in intonation between men and women have been associated with a ‘dual-culture’ situation that can lead to misunderstandings (Tannen, 1994).

The second theme of the volume is information structure. The two first chapters in this section by Hannay and Gómez González and Herriman merge the two contrastive directions introduced above. More specifically, both chapters suggest that the V2

constraint in Dutch and Swedish restricts the flexibility of elements in thematic position in these languages in comparison to English, (typical first-direction focus), and point to the applied benefit such observation can have in explaining the non-native flavor of language learner texts (typical second-direction focus). The chapter by Suárez and González Álvarez, next, clearly belongs to the second direction of contrastive studies. This chapter shows how learners with different L1s behave differently with respect to the use of *it*-clefts: Spanish learners underuse *it*-clefts while former studies on German and Swedish learners have shown an overuse of *it*-clefts. The chapter contributes to the question of how L1 interference and more universal features of learner language interact, and thus contributes to the research goals of contrastive interlanguage analysis (see Gilquin, 2000/2001). The last two chapters on information structure by Arús, Lavid and Moratón and Hidalgo and Downing provide important steps in creating annotation schemes for automatic annotation of Theme-Rheme structure (Arús, Lavid and Moratón) and the pragmatic notion of topic (Downing). Annotation schemes working towards consistency of functional categories across languages is of crucial importance both to facilitate quantitative analysis ‘data-mining’ for significant contrastive differences (Jarvis, 2011) and to inform theory building with regards to universal discourse-semantic categories.

The chapters in the third theme, registers and genres, all use a ‘top-down’ approach, and represent a particularly new direction in contrastive linguistics where the concept of genre is pushed to the very front of linguistic study using tools from SFL (see e.g. Martin and Rose, 2012) and/or Swalesian genre pedagogy (Swales 1990; Swales and Feak 2012). In my view, the main strength of these papers is their discussion of the methodological development of top-down discourse approaches. Kunz and Steiner’s chapter considers the discourse-semantic system of cohesion in English and German, and although this system belongs to the layer of discourse semantics, Kunz and Steiner take an ambitious leap upwards in their proposition of a framework, methodology and corpus annotation scheme for careful comparison of the instantiation of cohesion across languages and genres. Pound’s chapter considers the discourse-semantic system of appraisal in the genre of real-estate advertisement, and shows how evaluative meaning in real-estate advertisements in English and Italian is instantiated both in genre- and culture-specific ways. The chapter by Taboada and Carretero, which comprises the end of the section, discusses how analyses with discourse-semantic systems as their bases for comparison must rest on carefully developed annotation schemes evaluated by means of inter-rater reliability tests.

The final theme of the book on phraseology only includes two chapters. The first chapter by Rica Perominga concerns differences in the use of lexical bundles in texts by non-native writers of English and professional native writers, and thus sorts under the second contrastive direction discussed above. Using a bottom-up approach where a list of recognized lexical bundles are contrasted in L2 and L1 writing, Rica Perominga finds that lexical bundles are overused in the learner texts – particularly the bundles with correspondences in the learners’ native languages. This implies that L1 interference – or transfer – plays a significant role in learner texts. The second paper by Mansilla maps the type of cognitive models that are used in the metaphorical

expression of the semantic fields of lying, falsehood and deceit. Manilla's chapter provides important first steps in addressing the fundamental question of defining the universal and specific concepts used in meaning-making across languages.

General comments and final remarks

In sum, the book clearly fulfills the objective of “showcas[ing] a variety of approaches to the study of languages in contrast” (p. 9). It is indeed a valuable contribution pushing contrastive linguistics towards ‘top-down’ perspectives, while simultaneously including chapters true to the two main directions of the new wave of contrastive linguistics (from the 1970s and onwards) emanating from a general increase of interest in linguistics towards discourse studies from a functional and cognitive theoretical perspective. In my view, there is one minor gap in an otherwise shiny display window: all the contributions in the volume contrast two languages, and I miss a chapter showcasing a contrastive study including more than two languages. I would like to make the point with van Auwera (2012:84) that “there is nothing sacrosanct about restricting oneself to two languages [in contrastive studies].” Especially in studies where observations from small-scale studies are used to tentatively indicate universal linguistic principles, or nuance such principles, stretching the basis for contrast to at least three languages can potentially add explanatory power and theoretical value to contrastive linguistics as a field – also for studies with a discourse focus. It is my hope that such studies will be showcased in the continuation of the new and fascinating research field Contrastive Discourse Analysis, to which the volume under review marks the intriguing and timely beginning.

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