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# Contrastive Linguistics

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## Introduction

This course on Contrastive Linguistics aims to provide students with a wide perspective on this field of linguistic analysis, and also with the tools they need in order to be able to establish comparisons and to contrast English with Spanish or Catalan.

Contrastive Linguistics (CL) is a discipline of Applied Linguistics that first emerged in the United States in the mid-50s, under the influence of structuralism, and as a result of a renovated interest in the teaching of foreign languages. Initially, it sought to contrast pairs of languages in order to determine similarities and differences between them. The hypothesis postulated within this framework was that the systematic analysis of two languages should help predict the difficulties that learners of a foreign language (FL) will encounter when acquiring it.

The base of CL is grounded on the idea, suggested by Robert Lado (1957), that it is possible to identify areas of difficulty for the learners of a foreign language by contrasting their mother tongue (L1) with the language they are learning (L2). The analysis proposed by this author in his influential work (*Linguistics across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers*) always involved the analysis of at least two languages, that is, a target language (TL) and a source language (SL), even though more languages could be contrasted if required. Difficulties are expected to appear in those areas in which the two languages differ. For that reason, special attention must be paid to difficulties; similarities, on the other hand, are expected to facilitate the learning process.

Lado's work is important because in it he suggested the techniques for contrasting languages. For example, he proposed to search for features of the L1 that do not exist in the L2 at the phonological or morphological levels, in order to create teaching materials that would make students aware of them. At the lexical level, he proposed to study the problems between pairs of words in both languages, taking into account the similarities and the differences in both form and meaning.

The concept known as *Tertium Comparitionis* is core to Contrastive Linguistics. Making a comparison between two linguistic properties or features, regardless of the language level you are contrasting, presupposes the existence of a common feature that becomes the basis for the comparison. This common feature is called *Tertium Comparitionis*.

CL faced a decline for several reasons (for a more profound account see Antenberg & Granger 2002). Nevertheless, in the last decades there has been a resurgence of CL as an area of interest in linguistic research. According to

Artenberg and Granger (2002: 3), there are several interrelated factors that can explain this revival. On the one hand, the integration of European countries in a 'multilingual and cross-cultural' space has created a real need for comparing and contrasting languages and cultures. Intercultural communication has become the focus of intensive research.

On the other hand, from a methodological point of view, there has been a shift in the way languages are currently studied. The most important one is the emergence, in the 1980s, of the empiricist approach to linguistic analysis (i.e. Corpus Linguistics), which implied a revolution in the way data is approached and collected.

The course you are about to start presents a contrastive account of English, on the one hand, and Spanish and Catalan on the other. Each unit deals with the contrast of these languages at a different level of linguistic analysis, phonetics, morphology, lexicology, syntax and, finally, discourse and pragmatics. As you can very well imagine, even though each unit discusses a lot of different aspects, we cannot cover every single area that could be contrasted between two or more languages, but we do cover some of the most important ones.

The course is structured as follows. In Unit 1, you will be introduced to the basic notions in phonetics and phonology that are necessary in order to describe and compare phonological systems. These notions will help you to learn how to describe the consonant and vowel systems of English, and how to contrast them to the Catalan and Spanish systems. You will also find a description of the main characteristics of English word stress, sentence stress, rhythm and intonation, also contrasted with Catalan and Spanish. Thus, you will learn to identify the differences and similarities between the English and Catalan/Spanish sound systems and will become aware of potential areas of difficulty for Catalan/Spanish learners of English.

In Unit 2, you will be presented with some basic notions that are fundamental for the study of morphology, both inflectional and derivational morphology. In addition, we will explain the most relevant differences between English and Catalan or Spanish, with respect to noun and verb morphology. Similarities between the morphological systems will also be explained. Finally, we will explain the various word formation processes in English and Catalan and Spanish.

Unit 3 is divided in two different parts. In the first part, we present the general structure of the noun phrase and explain the differences and similarities in all three languages. In the second part, we compare and contrast sentences following the theoretical framework known as Construction Grammar. Thus, some of the most basic constructions in English, Spanish and Catalan, such as the transitive or the passive construction, are reviewed and compared.

Unit 4 is devoted to the study and contrast of languages at the lexical level. We will review Lado's classification and briefly present some concepts such as that of false friend or cognate. In addition, we will present lexical divergences such as lexical gaps, and review some productive mismatches between English and Spanish or Catalan. Finally, we will move on to the concept of extended units of meaning, beyond the word level. You will learn how to identify and translate them.

In Unit 5 we deal with discourse and pragmatics. Within discourse, we focus on the various cohesion mechanisms that make a text coherent in the three languages (reference, syntax, connectors and lexical cohesion), and on the differences in how information structure is conveyed at the sentence level. As for pragmatics, we explain the concepts of speech act, politeness, and face. Then, by studying three specific speech acts (apologies, requests and complaints), we discover how the differences in politeness are revealed in how people perform them.

Finally, all the units present an abundance of practical examples and activities and exercises for students to practice.

## Objectives

The objectives that you must have achieved after working with the Contrastive linguistics materials are the following:

- 1.** Understand the basic notions of the different levels at which the comparison between English and Catalan/Spanish is carried out (phonology, morphology, the lexicon, syntax, discourse and pragmatics).
- 2.** Describe and contrast the consonant and vowel systems of English, and identify and explain the main differences in word stress, sentence stress, rhythm and intonation in the three languages, and become aware of some of the most common phonotactic characteristics and connected speech processes in English (*cf.* the unit «Phonetics and Phonology»).
- 3.** Distinguish between inflectional and derivational morphology, be aware of the differences in noun and verb morphology, and explain the various word formation processes in English and Catalan/Spanish (*cf.* the unit «Morphology»).
- 4.** Contrast equivalent senses of lexical items in English and Spanish/Catalan using Lado's classification, and understand the concepts of lexical divergence, mismatch, extended unit of meaning, neologism and borrowing (*cf.* the unit «Contrastive Lexical Analysis»).
- 5.** Identify and explain the general structure of the noun phrase in English, Spanish and Catalan, and formulate the differences and similarities in this area. Analyze, understand and compare the most important constructions in English, Spanish and Catalan (*cf.* the unit «Syntax»).
- 6.** Understand, explain and contrast the mechanisms involved in cohesion and information structure in the three languages (discourse), and in carrying out the speech acts of apologising, requesting and complaining (pragmatics) (*cf.* the unit «Discourse and Pragmatics»).

## Contents

### Module 1

#### **Phonetics and Phonology**

Juli Cebrian Puyuelo

1. Segmental structure
2. Suprasegmental structure
3. Connected speech processes

### Module 2

#### **Morphology**

Hortènsia Curell Gotor

1. Inflectional morphology
2. Derivational morphology
3. Compounding
4. Other word formation processes

### Module 3

#### **Syntax**

Hortènsia Curell Gotor and Ana Fernández Montraveta

1. The noun phrase
2. Major constructions

### Module 4

#### **Contrastive Lexical Analysis**

Ana Fernández Montraveta

1. Lado's classification
2. Lexical divergences
3. Current trends in Contrastive Lexicology
4. Anglicisms: neologisms and borrowings

### Module 5

#### **Discourse and Pragmatics**

Hortènsia Curell Gotor

1. Discourse
2. Pragmatics

## Bibliography

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Comprehensive review of old and new trends in the area of contrastive lexical studies.

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Overview of the English sound system highlighting the main sources of difficulty for Spanish and Catalan learners of English.

**Goldberg, A.** (1995). *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Exhaustive account of some of the most important constructions at argument-structure level in English.

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Contrastive study of the basic differences between English and Spanish.