

[Review Article]

Objectives of Contrastive Linguistics: In Parallel with Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract *König and Gast (2009) contrast English and German in terms of phonology, morphology, and syntax to clarify grammatical subsystems, describe the properties of each cognitive system, and examine external factors and effects of second language acquisition. This review considers the advantages and disadvantages of the contrastive linguistic approach, comparing König and Gast (2009) with similar studies; Tarvainen (1985), Whitley (2002), and Nose (2010a). By choosing English as the candidate for contrast, we can apply educational and more typological knowledge, while noting the risks of English-based analysis.*

Key Words: contrastive linguistics, typology, English, German, temporal expressions

Interdisciplinary Fields: Language, Linguistics

1. Introduction

Presently, many students and businesspeople worldwide learn a second language along with their native language, often choosing English as a second language. In linguistics, a contrastive study is one that contrasts one language with another to clarify the grammatical structures of each and explain the formal and functional differences between them. This contrastive form of linguistic methodology has been used in many contrastive studies for theoretical, experimental, and educational purposes. Very often, English is contrasted with the language of the country in which the study is conducted, for example, with Japanese in Japan, Chinese in China, French in France, and so on. The book under review (König and Gast 2009), contrasting English with German, was published in Germany. This review considers the characteristics and possibility of the contrastive study conducted by König and Gast, and comments upon the limitations of their contrast.

2. König and Gast's claims (2009) and the advantages of contrastive studies

Previously, Hawkins (1986) conducted an extremely analytical con-

trastive study between English and German. His study was remarkable in that his approach was based on typological and functional viewpoints, and his descriptions of word orders and raising constructions¹ are thorough. Finally, he summarized characteristics of each language, as shown in (1).

(1) Hawkins (1986: 121) contrastive typology

German	English
More grammatical morphology	Less grammatical morphology
More specific selectional restrictions	Less specific selectional restrictions
More word order freedom	Less word order freedom
Less semantic diversity of GRs (GR: Grammatical Relations)	More semantic diversity of GRs
Less raising	More raising
Less extraction	More extraction
More Pied Piping	Less Pied Piping
Less deletion (of NPs)	More deletion (of NPs)

Hawkins (1986: 121-122) explains that “(w)here the grammars of English and German contrast, the surface forms (morphological and syntactic) of German are in a closer correspondence with their associated meanings...” Hawkins (1986) also claims that there are different functional motivations between German and English, and he demonstrates that we can identify the grammatical differences and form-meaning relationships by contrasting the languages.

Several of Hawkins’ (1986) German-English contrasts are valuable in both functional linguistics and linguistic theories. These relate to syntax, morphology, several useful constructions, and thorough typology data. In fact, König and Gast (2009) can be regarded as a sequel to Hawkins (1986), but it differs from Hawkins. König and Gast (2009: 1) emphasize their objectives of contrast specifically in terms of first and second language acquisition, as described in (2a-d).

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1. Raising constructions are frequently observed in English, but they are absent in German. In English, the element occupying the object position can move to the subject position without changing any meaning, as shown in (i).

(i) John is said [(t) to be a swindler]. (König & Gast 2009: 203-206)

In this case, the subject “John” is raised from t position (Reportive S-S raising). In German, this type of raising is impossible; instead, it can be paraphrased by using the modal verb “sollen,” as in “Johann soll ein Schwindler sein.”

- (2) Contrastive points of König and Gast (2009: 1):
- a. First language acquisition and foreign language learning differ fundamentally, especially in those cases where the foreign language is learned later than a mother tongue and on the basis of the full mastery of that mother tongue.
 - b. Every language has its own specific structure. Similarities between the two languages will cause no difficulties (“positive transfer”), but differences will, due to “negative transfer” (or “interference”). The student’s learning task can therefore roughly be defined as the sum of the differences between the two languages.
 - c. A systematic comparison between the mother tongue and foreign language to be learned will reveal both similarities and contrasts.
 - d. On the basis of such a comparison it will be possible to predict or even rank learning difficulties and to develop strategies (teaching materials, teaching techniques, etc.) for making foreign language teaching more efficient.

Thus, König and Gast (2009) contrast German with English in terms of language acquisition (cf. Similarly, Whitley’s (2002) consideration of second language acquisition contrasts Spanish with English). They describe each grammar rule for German students and other researchers, and their descriptions are also useful for contrastive linguists. König and Gast comprehensively contrast German with English, and their descriptions concern each language’s phonology (Chapters 2 and 3), morphology (Chapter 4), tense and aspect (Chapter 5), grammatical relations (Chapter 6), internal and external possessions (Chapter 7), diathesis (Chapter 8), reflexivity and intensification (Chapter 9), word order (Chapter 10), *wh*-movement and relativization (Chapter 11), non-finite subordination (Chapter 12), and lexicon (Chapter 13). Reference lists at the end of each chapter enable readers to check the data and the theories quoted in chapters.

Finally, König and Gast (2009) summarize their research in Chapter 14, and their simple contrast is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 English and German: Major parameters of comparison
(König & Gast 2009: 256)

	<i>German</i>	<i>English</i>
morphology	(more) inflecting	(more) isolating
case	case marking	loss of case distinctions
basic constituent order	SOV	SVO
freedom of word order	freer word order (multi-factorial)	(more) fixed word order (mono-factorial)
encoding of grammatical relations	transparent	functional

Several comments in Table 1 represent advantages and disadvantage of this contrastive study. First, König and Gast's (2009) results are not new compared with those of Hawkins (1986). In (1), Hawkins (1986) describes German as having more grammatical morphology and English having less of it, and this discovery is effectively equivalent to transparent versus functional in Table 1. Second, these contrastive results in (1) and Table 1 are too simple or overstate the differences. It is interesting and may be noteworthy to propose simple explanation(s) in a contrastive study, but in most cases, such differences are partly explicable, but typologically and theoretically more difficult. König and Gast (2009) summarize their observations, and suggest three points for contrasting the languages, as shown in (3).

(3) Conditions to consider the contrast:

1. dependencies between grammatical subsystems
2. properties of the human perceptual and articulatory system
3. external language history, in particular language contact

Although contrasting two or more languages enables us to examine these conditions, performing a comprehensive description of each language is far more difficult² as is comprehensively defining each language's grammatical characteristics. Thus, such contrastive linguistic studies are becoming less popular (as opposed to contrasting corpus or parallel text corpus) because, although contrasting two languages is an important approach, it results in few linguistically valuable observations.

3. Other contrastive studies and approaches to contrast

There are many contrastive studies and too many pairs of contrast to count. In this section, we review several studies contrasting languages other than those that König and Gast (2009) selected. This review summarizes and compares three studies with König and Gast (2009) to illustrate what contrastive studies clarify and to demonstrate their usefulness.

3.1. Tarvainen (1985): German and Finnish

Tarvainen (1985) contrasts German with Finnish. German is Indo-European and Finnish is Finno-Ugric, making them genetically and typologically different. Tarvainen's (1985) contrast completely ignores phonolo-

2. It is extremely difficult to describe one unknown language, and even more difficult to describe the grammars of two languages, even if we know both. As a matter of fact, typological studies of more than 10 languages usually result in only partial explanations or superficial observations, except for several legendary works.

gy and phonetics, but his selections of contrastive German-Finnish sentences are useful for linguists and learners of both languages. In fact, Tarvainen (1985: 44) notes that German and Finnish are similar in several grammatical elements (word order, tense forms), but differ in many characteristics.

(4) Tarvainen (1985: 44)

- a. German: Ich fahre morgen nach Köln.
- b. Finnish: Matkustan huomenna Kölniin.
- c. English: I travel to Köln tomorrow.

Above, we observe several differences between German and Finnish. In German, first person subject “Ich” (first person pronoun) is necessary, and locative direction “to Köln” is expressed by the preposition “nach.” In contrast, Finnish does not need the first person subject “minä (i.e., pro-drop), and the verb inflection “matkust-an” indicates the first person singular. Finnish has many locative cases and some postpositions, and locative direction is expressed by the illative case “Köln-iin.” (In addition, the essive case “-na” is included in “huomen-na” (tomorrow)). Overall, Tarvainen’s study is unique in that he contrasted Finnish and German, and he succeeded in showing the morpho-syntactic differences between them³.

3.2. Whitley (2002): Spanish and English

Whitley (2002) contrasts Spanish and English grammatical functions and second language acquisition. This contrastive study includes not only phonetic and phonological sections but also pragmatic and discourse factors. Its glossary of linguistic terminology, useful for learners and specialists, summarizes in both Spanish and English (e.g., *auxiliar/(verbo) auxiliar, case/caso (nominativo, dativo, acusativo, preposicional)*, etc.). Spanish and English have common grammatical characteristics in SVO word order and prepositions. However, their specific behaviors are different despite their belonging to the Indo-European family.

(5) Whitley (2002:123-124): “about to happen” (anticipatory present):

- a. Spanish: Se van mañana a las ocho.
- b. English: They leave tomorrow at eight/They’re leaving tomorrow at eight.

3. Finnish is spoken in Finland, which is a neighbor to Sweden. Thus, there are more contrastive studies between Finnish and Swedish (Swedish is a Germanic, Indo-European language).

For example, Whitley (2002: 123-124) illustrates the anticipatory present (about to happen) in English represents in both the present tense and the progressive aspect. In contrast, Spanish expresses the anticipatory present with only the present tense, and the progressive aspect means only “occurring now.”

Whitley’s (2002) study is valuable for linguists and learners of Spanish and English, and provides an excellent description of Spanish for English speakers. Nevertheless, Whitley’s study ignores typological view as he contrasts both Indo-European languages, and he presents a few unusual characteristics of the languages.

3.3. Nose (2010a): English, Japanese, and Tok Pisin

Nose (2010a) contrasts three languages (English, Japanese, and Tok Pisin) on comparative constructions. This study is neither comprehensive nor descriptive; yet, it examines the three languages’ comparative constructions from the functional perspective. Granted, the three languages are not genetically related, but this study uses parallel texts of the New Testament. By examining the comparative constructions found in the New Testament in English, this study found the corresponding constructions in Japanese and Tok Pisin. One example (Nose 2010a: 462) is illustrated by Matthew 6.

(6) Nose (2010a:462; Matthew 6):

- a. English: But after me will come [one who] is more powerful than [I].
- b. Japanese: Watashi-no atokara kuru [kata-wa], [watashi]-yorurete orareru.
- c. Tok Pisin: Tasol man i kam bihain long mi, [strong bilong em] i winim [strong bilong mi].

In English, the comparative construction is classified as the particle type. The particle “than” is necessary to mark the standard of comparison⁴. Japanese uses locative case “yori” to mark the standard of comparison, and is classified as the locational comparative type. The locational type is the most frequent comparative construction in the world, observed primarily in Eurasian languages. Tok Pisin has several types of comparative construc-

4. In comparative constructions, the following five parameters characterize the semantic roles of comparison, as shown in (ii).

(ii) This house is more beautiful than that one. (Nose 2010a: 460)

- This house: comparee
- more: parameter marker
- beautiful: parameter
- than: standard marker
- that one: standard

tions, and Nose (2010a) found that Tok Pisin uses particle and conjoined, exceed types according to the context. The exceed type is the most common in the Tok Pisin New Testament, and the verb “winim” (surpass) connects the comparee and the standard of comparison, as shown in (6c). In (6c), it literally means, “man who comes after me, his strength surpasses my strength.”

Overall, Nose (2010a) attempts to describe characteristics of comparative constructions in each language, and claims that the grammatical status is decided according to the standard of comparison. In English and Japanese, the standard appears with the particle “than” or the locative case “yori,” so that their grammatical status is oblique in English, or locative in Japanese. In contrast, Tok Pisin is an exceed type, and the standard maintains its grammatical status as accusative.

4. Discussion: contrastive study of temporal expressions

Here, we discuss the following two points: the advantages and disadvantages of contrasting English with another language, and the purposes of contrasting two or three languages.

The advantages and disadvantages in contrasting English with another language leads us to evaluate the validity of English-based contrastive studies. Because English is a global language and is taught as a second language in many nations, it is the dominant candidate for contrast, and many contrastive studies of English with another language are used for educational purposes.

There are many advantages to English-based contrast. By comparing English with another language X, the X learner easily understands the grammar of X in comparison to the English grammar. For example, König and Gast (2009) is helpful to English-speaking students in learning German. Contrasting English with X highlights major differences in the two grammars, which serves both language education and purely linguistic purposes. However, disadvantages also exist. English-focused contrast may inhibit potentially revelatory contrasts of other pairs of languages such as Japanese and German, French and Chinese, Hungarian and an Australian Aboriginal language, and the like. Naturally, it might be pointless to contrast geographically distant languages (genetically, geographically, and pedagogically), as very few people would apply the differences in such contrast pairs. Recently, in Japan, many studies have contrasted geographically close languages such as Japanese and Korean, Japanese and Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian, etc. The application valuable of contrasting such neighboring pairs of languages, excluding English, is apparent for both linguists and

those countries' populations in general. However, it is important to identify the purpose(s) for which these contrastive pairs are chosen. Tarvainen (1985) contrasts German and Finnish, clarifying specific uses of grammatical and locative cases between the two languages. English is less useful for this purpose because it has few and decayed case uses.

This disadvantage of contrasting other languages with English brings us to the consideration of the purposes of contrasting two or three languages. Let us consider the numbers of the sample languages and what we can observe by contrasting two or three languages. Typological studies usually use 30 or 40 languages to explore certain grammatical phenomena. However, only two to four sample languages are usually chosen in normal contrastive studies. Certainly, we can observe and discover more by contrasting two languages than by focusing on a single language. However, examining too many languages (possibly more than three) result in overly complicated work or a superficial contrast. Thus, two or three sample languages are ideal for a comprehensive and more profound contrast, particularly for the purposes of second language acquisition and education. Now, let us consider the validity of contrasting two or three languages. Specifically, we need to evaluate the usefulness of contrasting two or three languages. To address this issue, I refer to my ongoing research of temporal expressions (Nose 2010b). Nose's (2010b) objective is to clarify universal and specific time expressions and functions by contrasting several languages (cf. Chung & Timberlake 1985, Yamada 1981). Nose (2010b) is a contrastive study of temporal expressions in English, Japanese, Hungarian, Amele, Tok Pisin, and Chinese. This study focuses on typology of the forms carrying temporal meanings, and the observed forms are prepositions (English, Tok Pisin), postpositions (Amele), locative cases (Hungarian), or other lexical means including no grammatical marking (Chinese). In the temporal expressions example below (Nose 2010b, *The Alchemist* 36⁵), the underlined elements are time expressions equivalent to 'at noon' in English.

(7) Temporal expressions: (Nose 2010b)

- a. English: The next day, the boy met the old man *at noon*.
- b. Japanese: Tsugi-no hi, shounen-wa shougo-ni roujin-to atta.
- c. Hungarian: Másnap dél-ben a pásztorfiú találkozott az öreg emberrel.
- d. Tok Pisin: em i bin mitin oldpela man belo kaikai.

5. Nose (2010b) uses the parallel texts of "The Alchemist" written by Paulo Coelho in Portuguese, with translated versions in English, Japanese, and Hungarian. There is no translation in Tok Pisin and Amele, and I examined the corresponding expressions in my fieldwork in Papua New Guinea.

As shown immediately above, in English, the preposition “at” is marked to “noon.” This preposition “at” is originally based on the locative (*at school, at home*), and the locative usage of “at” is considered to be extended to temporal usage. In Japanese and Hungarian, locative cases are marked with “ni” in Japanese and “-ben” (inessive case) in Hungarian. Both locative cases originally indicate locations, and their locative meanings are extended to temporal, as with the English preposition “at.” This linguistic extension from location to time is nearly universal, but Tok Pisin lacks any grammatical form (preposition) in (7d), and the adverbial-lexical expression “belo kaikai” (noon, or time to have lunch) is used. This usage is not related to location or space.

Nose (2010b) finds that the same temporal meaning can be expressed by different constructions and grammatical/lexical means in different languages. The resulting differences in (7) include different grammatical/lexical forms such as cases, prepositions, and others. Thus, these grammatical differences of temporal expressions reflect each language’s consideration of relationships between space and time. Finally, contrastive approaches enable us to classify languages and identify the mechanisms of their grammar (cf. McWhorter 2001) from several viewpoints, leading to discoveries that will be helpful for foreign language learning and teaching.

5. Conclusion

This review demonstrates that we can understand more deeply the grammar of one language by contrasting it with that of another language(s), and, even more fortuitously, we may become aware of grammatical complexity in each of the contrasted languages. Readers of such contrastive studies whose native tongue is one of contrasted languages will observe their native tongue more objectively. Even if the languages contrasted are not a reader’s native tongue, one can compare those languages with the grammar of one’s first language.

Contrastive studies also incur certain risks. One such risk is the pervasive use of English (as in König & Gast 2009), in contrastive studies. The dominance of English-based analysis risks missing rare phenomena in other languages that can be discovered only in contrast with languages other than English. König and Gast (2009) contrast English with German, both of the Indo-European family, a condition that obscures characteristics or significant phenomena of English and German that only comparison with unrelated languages would reveal. Therefore, it is better to add at least one very different language to a contrastive study.

Further research should investigate educational purposes for the

advantages of contrastive results in second language acquisition.

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