MODERN LINGUISTIC THEORIES AND CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS
OF ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

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0.   INTRODUCTION

In 1933, Leonard Bloomfield (1933:496-510) discussed the ways in
which the findings of linguistics could be applied to the teaching of
foreign languages. Since then, throughout governmental and university
language programmes cited by Carroll (1959), Moulton (1962), and Hodge
(1963) for example, a concept of applying modern linguistics to the
teaching of foreign languages has been developed in various countries
throughout the world. This concept of applied linguistics has been
systematised mainly by Charles C. Fries (1945), and Robert Lado (1957).
Representative of the recognition of the development of a methodology
for the application of findings of linguistics to the teaching of foreign
languages are the numerous contrastive analysis publications and doc-
toral dissertations in the fifties and the sixties.

The central idea of the concept of applied linguistics is the
"importance of the native language in foreign language learning", Reed,
Lado, and Shen (1953:121-7). The foreign language learner, being so
much used to the phonological and grammatical systems of his native

language, tends to transfer them to the language to be learned. This transfer creates a phenomenon of interference (Weinreich 1953:3). The power of contrastive analysis is then, according to the theory, to point out the similarities and differences in the two linguistic systems. Wherever there are differences, there are teaching and learning difficulties. Thus, contrastive analysis should naturally serve as the basis for materials preparation, since, as Fries says:

> "The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a
> scientific description of the language to be learned, care-
> fully compared with a parallel description of the native lan-
> guage of the learner."

Another important concept of applied linguistics is that language is not a self-contained system, but that linguistic aspects are closely related to total human behaviour (Pike 1954, 1955, and 1960). Since language is only one part of a larger totality of structured human behaviour, and behaviour is a set of habits, language learning should be overlearning by such ways as drill, as E. Picazo de Murray says:

> "Language is skill, and skill is the result of habit."
> (UNESCO 1953:53).

The immediate corollary of such an axiom is that, as J.H. Cooper *et al* put it:

> "The key to language learning is (well planned and lively)
> drill, drill, drill." (1963:9).

The notion of habit forming through drill can be found in the Lado-Fries series of English for foreigners (1954, 1956, 1957, and 1958), or the author's series of materials of English for Vietnamese (1962, 1963a, and 1963b).

At the same time, because the phenomenon of interference is observed not only in situations of languages in contact but also in those of culture in contact, the techniques of contrastive linguistic analysis was extended to contrastive cultural studies to find out cross-cultural differences, as Albert H. Markwardt says:

> "Just so, it may be reasonably maintained that contrastive
> cultural analyses are equally important in terms of language
> study." (1963:1-4).

However nowadays, all this golden era of contrastive analysis seems to be a matter of the past forever gone. The claim that the best language-teaching materials are those based upon a contrast of the two interfering linguistic systems has been in the last few years seriously challenged by the generative-transformationalists. Whereas the Sapir-Wholf hypothesis claimed that the structure of a language subtly influences the cognitive processes of the speakers of that language, the generative-transformationalist proposes that infants are innately endowed with the ability of acquiring a natural language, and that all

they need to process the learning of a natural language is an exposure to the data of that language. By postulating such a natural language learning hypothesis, the generative-transformational school can account for language universals, as well as the ability to learn a first foreign language with ease, and by the same token, the difficulty to learn a second language after childhood. (For an evaluation of contrastive analysis, see Ronald Wardhaugh, "The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis", *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 4, No. 2, June 1970, pp. 123-30). Also, by postulating such a cognitive hypothesis, the generative-transformationalist can claim that contrastive analysis does not serve any purpose in foreign language teaching and learning, for it is set upon a wrong concept of language learning processes. This completely negative reaction to contrastive analysis can be found in the views of Ritchie (1967), or Wolfe (1967).

The argumentation for the dismissal of contrastive analysis is this: All natural languages have a great deal in common in their deep structure. If there are language-specific differences, these are only due to diverse realisations of language universals (which by definition are common to all natural languages) in various languages. The deductions from such a hypothesis are two-fold: on the one hand, since all languages are similar in their deep structure, a particular language speaker knows already a great deal about any other language he has to learn. On the other hand, since languages differ only in their surface structure through differing transformational processes from a similar deep structure, the power of contrastive analysis should not be in its presentation of surface structure differences between languages, but should rather be in its capability of showing the differing processes involving language universals in the deep structure to language-specific realisations in their particular surface structure. Contrastive analysis works in the fifties and sixties would not likely pass such a test to measure their power, for most of them dealt only with surface structure differences. Such recent suggestions for using generative-transformational theory into contrastive analysis have been advocated by Ritchie (1968) who tried to utilise distinctive feature hierarchies in the explanation of phonological interference phenomena.

In the midst of such a theoretical controversy, the language teacher cannot help but feel obliged to re-examine contrastive analysis as well as the theories advocating or rejecting it. On the theoretical ground, he finds that, although the Sapir-Wholf behavioural hypothesis and the generative-transformational language acquisition device hypothesis are contradictory to each other, they are both as difficult to prove correct or incorrect at the present state of the art. On the practical

ground, however, he also notices in the classroom situation that some pitfalls in foreign language learning are more difficult to overcome than others, and that the surface structure is as important, to be on the conservative side, as the deep structure in language teaching and learning. In these circumstances, the language teacher cannot help but feel like going back to planting his own garden, as Voltaire says, and try to make the most use of competing linguistic theories to improve his daily teaching and text preparation.

With the spirit of pragmatism above all, I am proposing an eclectic contrastive analysis of English and Vietnamese clause units, and trying to see how to apply tagmemics, case grammar, pre-*Aspects* transformational grammar, and generative-transformational grammar to present surface structure differences and deep structure similarities between the two languages. Finally, I shall try to point out that, besides grammaticalness and acceptability (Chomsky 1965:11) of a grammatical construction, the frequency of occurrence (Cook 1965, 13-44) of a grammatical construction is also an important factor to be considered in applied linguistics.

1. TAGMEMICS AND PRE-*ASPECTS* TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCEDURE

The tagmemic model of contrastive analysis advocated here is based upon the theory of language developed by Pike (1954, 1955, and 1960), later refined by Longacre (1964), Cook (1969), and Young, Becker, and Pike (1970). It was tested in contrastive analysis by the author (Liem 1966, 1967, 1969, and 1970a). Tagmemics offers an excellent methodology for contrastive analysis because it postulates *patterning* as being central to human behaviour in general and linguistic behaviour in particular. It presents linguistic patterns in straightforward and summary fashion. Such patterns when systematically described for one language can be contrasted with similar patterns described for another language. Thanks to the notion of hierarchy in tagmemics, such patterns can be contrasted on clearly cut levels of consideration, such as on the sentence level, the clause level, or the phrase level. Furthermore, the notion of a tagmeme as a slot plus a filler-class permits us to see whether patterns in two languages differ in their tagmemes (i.e. patterns in one language have some tagmemes that patterns in the other do not), or just in the filler-classes of their tagmemic slots (i.e. patterns in two languages contain the same functional slots, but the slots are filled by a different number of distributional-subclasses).

In order to see how contrastive analysis works in a tagmemic model, I am presenting the clause units in English and Vietnamese in contrast.