

# 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 doctoral 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, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language 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-Whorf 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-Whorf 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.

There are 87 Clause Units in English, and 108 in Vietnamese. The Clause Units in either language are cast in a two-dimensional field: the Clause Class Dimension, and the Clause Type Dimension (see the two Charts, pp. 116 and 117). The Clause Type Dimension is subdivided, under four levels of consideration, into ten Clause Types in English, and is subdivided, also under four levels of consideration, into nine Clause Types in Vietnamese. The Clause Class Dimension is subdivided, under four levels of consideration, into ten Clause Classes in English, and is subdivided, under five levels of consideration, into thirteen Clause Classes in Vietnamese.

### 1.1. CLAUSE TYPES IN CONTRAST

If the Clause Types in English and in Vietnamese are set side by side, their similarities and differences can be noticed easily:

ENGLISH	VIETNAMESE
E.a1. Intransitive: [+S +Pr] <i>He went.</i>	V.a1. Intransitive: [±S +Pr] <i>Nó đi.</i>
E.a2. Transitive: [+S +Pr +O] <i>He bought books.</i>	V.a2. Transitive: [±S +Pr ±O] <i>Nó mua sách.</i>
E.a3. Double Transitive: [+S +Pr +IO +O] <i>He gave them books.</i>	V.a3. Double Transitive: [±S +Pr +IO ±O] <i>Nó cho họ sách.</i>
E.a4. Attributive Transitive: [+S +Pr +O +AtCompl] <i>They elected him chairman.</i>	V.a4. Attributive Transitive: [±S +Pr ±O +AtCompl] <i>Họ bầu nó làm chủ tịch.</i>
E.a5. Passive Transitive: [+S +PasPr ±A] <i>It was bought by him.</i>	Non-existent.
E.a6. Passive Double Transitive: [+S +PasPr +(I)O ±A] <i>It was given (to) her by him.</i> <i>She was given it by him.</i>	Non-existent.
E.a7. Passive Attributive Transitive: Non-existent. [+S +PasPr +AtCompl ±A] <i>He was elected chairman by them.</i>	





Clause Types in Contrast (continued from page 115)

ENGLISH	VIETNAMESE
Non-existent.	V.a5. Actional Submissive:
	[±S +SubmPr +SubmCompl]
<i>he undergo-bad-experience-of go</i>	Nó bị đi.
<i>He had to go.</i>	
Non-existent.	V.a6. Passive Submissive:
	[±S +SubmPr +SubmPasCompl]
<i>he undergo...(they) reprimand</i>	Nó bị (họ) rầy.
<i>He was reprimanded (by them).</i>	
E.a8. Equational:	V.a7. Equational:
[+S +EqPr +EqCompl]	[±S +EqPr +EqCompl]
<i>They are carpenters.</i>	Họ là thợ-mộc.
Same as E.a8. above.	V.a8. Adjective:
	[±S +AdjPr]
<i>he fast</i>	Nó lẹ.
<i>He is fast.</i>	
E.a9. 'there' Stative:	V.a9. 'co' Stative:
[+there +StPr +StS]	[+cóPr +StCompl]
<i>There were two people.</i>	Có hai người.
E.a10. 'it' Stative:	Non-existent.
[+it +StPr +StCompl]	
<i>It was the boys.</i>	

The tagmemic contrastive analysis advocated points out the following dissimilarities:

- (1) The nuclear Subject tagmeme is obligatory in English, and is optional in Vietnamese. This is confirmed in practical situations where Vietnamese speaking English actually omit the Subject.
- (2) The nuclear Object is obligatory in English, and is optional in Vietnamese. This is also confirmed in the same way as for (1).
- (3) The Passive Transitive Clause Types E.a5-7 in English are non-existent in Vietnamese. The following pre-Aspects surface-to-surface transformational rule is advocated to derive these Passive Clause Types from the Active Transitive Clause Types E.a3-4:



KERNEL STRUCTURES: E.a2. [+S +Pr +O]  
*He bought it.*

E.a3. [+S +Pr +IO +O]  
*He gave her the flowers.*

E.a4. [+S +Pr +O +AtCompl]  
*They elected him chairman.*

# TRANSFORM RULE

## Passive

---

E.a5. [+S +PasPr ±A]  
*It was bought (by him).*

E.a6. [+S +PasPr +(I)O ±A]  
*She was given the flowers (by him).*  
*The flowers were given (to) her (by him).*

E.a7. [+S +PasPr +AtComp] ±A]  
*He was elected chairman (by them).*

## 1.2. CLAUSE CLASSES IN CONTRAST

The Independent Declarative Clause Class, whose Clause Types are listed in 1.1., is the kernel Clause Class from which all the other Clause Classes can be derived in both English and Vietnamese when appropriate transformational rules are applied. Thus a contrastive analysis of the Clause Classes in the two languages consists necessarily and sufficiently of a comparison of the Clause Class Formulas, and that of their Transformational Rules:

### ENGLISH

### VIETNAMESE

E.b. Imperative:

[+ImpPr...]

*Go! (Mr)*

V.b. Imperative:

[+S +ImpPr...]

*Ông hãy đi!*

Similar to E.c. below.

*Mr go or Mr stay*

*(Are you going or are you staying?)*

V.c. Alternative Interrogative:

[+DeclCl +AlternPhrase +DeclCl]

*Ông đi hay ông ở?*

E.c. Yes-No Interrogative:

[++ +S +InterPr...]

*Are you going? (no?)*

V.d. Yes-No Interrogative:

[+DeclCl +YesNoInterPhrase]

*Ông đi không?*

Realised as an Echo Interrogative. V.e. Right-Wrong Interrogative:  
 [+DeclCl +RWInterPhrase]

*Mr went right no*

Ông đi phải không?

(*You went, didn't you?*)

Realised as a Yes-No Interrogative. V.f. Realisation-Nonrealisation  
 Interrogative:

[+DeclCl +RnonRInterPhrase]

*Mr go no-yet*

Ông đi chưa?

(*Did you go?*)

E.d. Subject Interrogative:

[+InterS +Pr...]

*Who went?*

V.g. Subject Interrogative:

[+InterS +Pr...]

*Ai đi?*

E.e. Non-Subject Interrogative:

[+InterNonS [YesNoInterCl -NonS]]

*What did you buy?*

V.h. Non-Subject Interrogative:

[±S +Pr +InterNonS]

Ông mua gì?

E.f. Extra Interrogative:

[+XInterIntroducer +YesNoInterCl]

*Where did you go?*

V.i. Extra Interrogative:

[+DeclCl +XInterIntroducer]

Ông đi đâu?

E.g. Subject Dependent:

[±DepS +Pr...]

*that went...*

V.j. Subject Dependent:

[±DepS +Pr...]

(*mà*) đi...

E.h. Non-Subject Dependent:

[±DepNonS [+DeclCl -NonS]]

(*that*) *you bought...*

V.k. Non-Subject Dependent:

[±DepNonS [+DeclCl -NonS]]

(*mà*) ông mua...

E.i. Relative Dependent:

[±RelDepIntroducer +DeclCl]

(*that*) *he went.*

V.l. Relative Dependent:

[±RelDepIntroducer +DeclCl]

(*rằng*) nó đi.

E.j. Extra Dependent:

[+XDepIntroducer +DeclCl]

*When he went...*

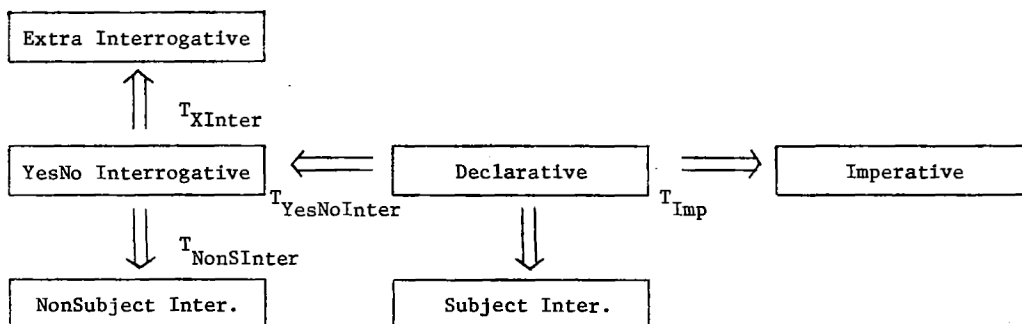
V.m. Extra Dependent:

[+XDepIntroducer +DeclCl]

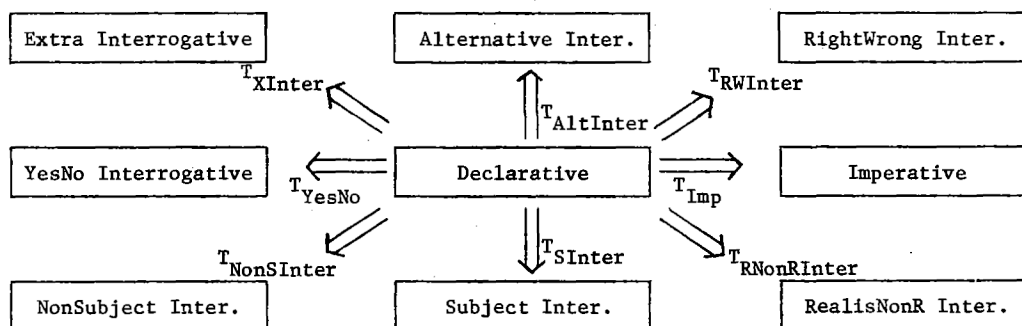
*Khi nó đi...*

Because all these Clause Classes in both languages can be derived, on the surface structure consideration, from the Independent Declarative Clause Class when appropriate surface Clause Class Transformational Rules are applied, a contrastive analysis should point out the transformational differences as follows:

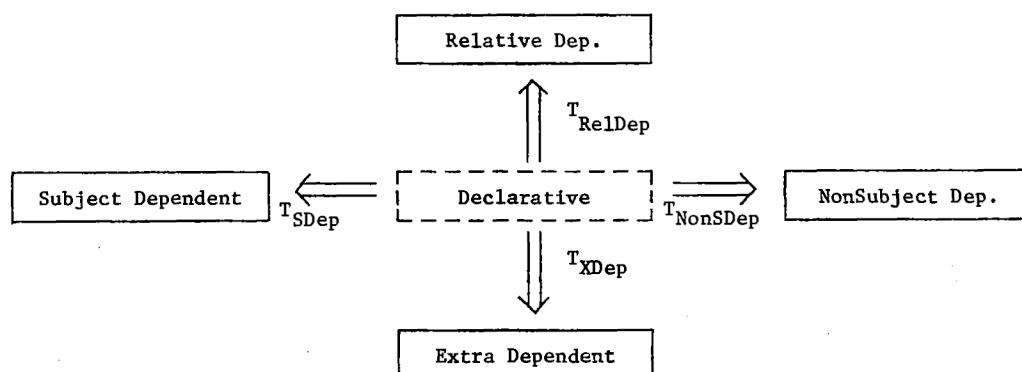
## ENGLISH INDEPENDENT CLAUSE CLASSES AND TRANSFORM RULES



## VIETNAMESE INDEPENDENT CLAUSE CLASSES AND TRANSFORM RULES



## ENGLISH OR VIETNAMESE DEPENDENT CLAUSE CLASSES AND TRANSFORM RULES



From these diagrams, the similarities and differences in the two languages can be easily seen. The dissimilarities stem only from the In-

dependent Clause Classes, while the Dependent Clause Classes are quite similar. The dissimilarities are as follows:

- (1) The Yes-No Interrogative Transform Rules are different: in English, there is an inversion of the order of the Subject and Predicate tagmemes, and in Vietnamese, there is no such an inversion.
- (2) The Non-Subject Interrogative and the Extra Interrogative Clause Classes in English derive from the Yes-No Interrogative Clause Class in English. In Vietnamese, all Interrogative Clause Classes derive directly from the Independent Declarative Clause Class.
- (3) The Right-Wrong, Alternative, and Realisation-Nonrealisation Interrogative Clause Classes in Vietnamese do not have equivalents in English.

The surface transformational rules to derive one clause class from another are also advocated to underlie transformational drills in language exercises.

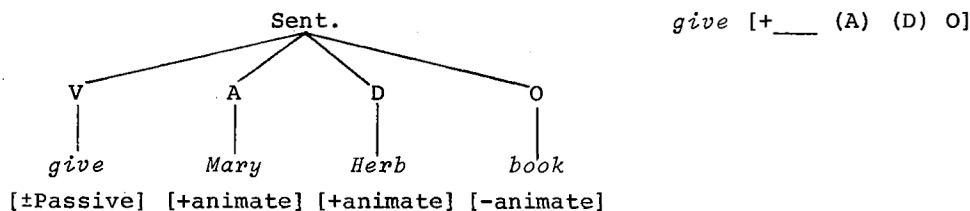
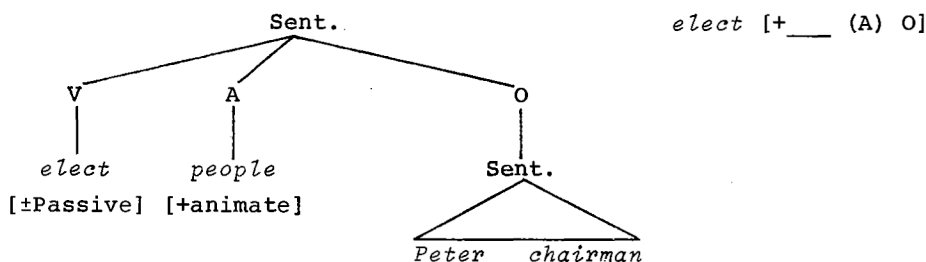
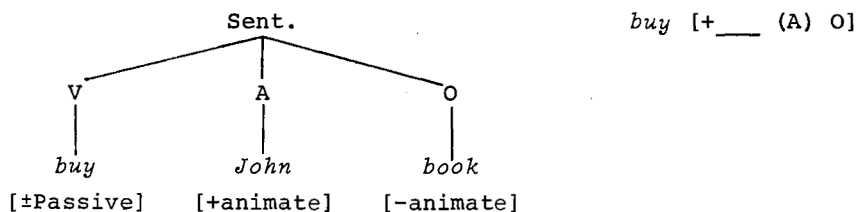
## 2. CASE GRAMMAR

The system of tagmemic analysis as demonstrated above is a well defined system in presenting the grammatical elements of surface structure in terms of the function and form of each unit being contrasted. Its primary concern is with the description and comparison of surface structure. The matrix displays and transformational rules presented above attempt to show the relationships between sentences with diverse surface structures, for example the passive clause types are conceived as related to the active ones.

It is also the belief of the author that the use of case grammar will enrich contrastive analysis a great deal, especially in the presentation of the deep structure and the relationships between different surface structure patterns that have a common deep structure. Case grammar as developed by Charles Fillmore (1968, 1970a, and 1970b), is a system which views the deep structure of sentences as a set of relations between a verb and a series of case-marked noun phrases. The series of noun phrases constitutes a set of roles which are useful in classifying verbs in terms of the case frames in which they occur. The system is particularly powerful in relating sentences with identical deep structures but diverse surface structures. The usefulness of case grammar techniques to contrastive analysis can be stated as follows:

- (1) By considering the deep structure cases, the theory can be related to different surface structures that have a common deep structure

among themselves, thus, it can provide a more powerful means of presenting transformational drills in language teaching. For example, the verbs *buy*, *elect*, and *give* which appeared in the examples above can be conceived with their case-marked noun phrases as follows:



With the deep structures realised as verbs and a series of case roles, these deep structures must then be mapped on to the surface structures by a series of transformational rules, which are called realisation rules. (In 1970, Fillmore proposed the following realisation rules: 1. Subject raising (optional); 2. Co-reference deletion; 3. Dative (or Experiencer) shunting; 4. Psych movement; 5. Accusative marking; 6. Passive rule (optional); 7. Nominative marking; 8. Subject formation; 9. Extraposition; and 10. Object formation for English.

By applying case grammar to contrastive analysis, we can see that the three verbs above are marked ±Passive in English, and they are not marked that way in Vietnamese. We can then apply the optional Passive rule to form passive constructions in English, and present

the constructions in a set of transformational drills.

- (2) The second application of case grammar to contrastive analysis can be seen as this: In case grammar, verbs are classified according to the case frames hospitable to them. Thus, a verb such as *give* has the case frames A, D and O, whereas a verb such as *elect* has the case frames A and O only. This is why *give* can have two passive realisations and *elect* can have only one. Such a classification of verbs according to their case frames would be useful in the preparation of transformational drills in eliminating ungrammatical constructions.
- (3) By using case grammar, contrastive analysis will be able to make distinctions, and consequently present in class, between sentences because of their different deep structures. For example, the two sentences *John is eager to please* and *John is easy to please* will have *John* in the first sentence marked with the Agentive role, while it will be marked with the Objective case in the second sentence. Such differences should be made in drills as well.

### 3. GENERATIVE TRANSFORMATIONAL INSIGHTS

The transformational rules presented in 1. showed the surface relationships between various surface structures. Today, we possess some other notions about language. We are now concerned with two kinds of structures, surface structure and deep structure. In contrastive analysis, we also want to relate the surface differences between languages to the language universals in the deep structure. Whether we want to do it in a case grammar framework or in a generative transformational framework (the kind posited by Chomsky), contrastive analysis will be enriched a great deal.

### 4. STATISTICAL STUDIES

Contrastive analysis points out the similarities and differences in two or more languages under consideration. Its application to foreign language teaching should be then based upon statistical studies of actual errors made by the learner in order to have a hierarchy of difficulty. Furthermore, language is communication. In foreign language teaching, the frequency of occurrence of grammatical constructions should also be considered. The statistical study of grammar as presented in the two charts would serve to establish which grammatical constructions should receive priority in a language teaching textbook. (In order to

see the statistical techniques utilised, see Liem 1970b, and 1970c.)

## 5. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is the belief of the author that contrastive analysis should not be rejected because one belongs to a linguistic camp. On the contrary, if one makes use of existing theories and techniques, one will be able to improve contrastive analysis and make use of it in foreign language teaching until another cognitive hypothesis is proved solid and capable of destroying the present overlearning character of language learning.

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