THE POTENTIAL OF CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS IN THE STUDY OF DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *The article focuses on contemporary trends in contrastive studies. As a point of departure the nature, history and evolution of contrastive linguistics are examined. Contrastive linguistics is viewed in relation to other disciplines such as comparative linguistics, comparative historical linguistics, linguistic typology, theory of translation, and foreign language teaching. Any aspect of language may be covered in cross-linguistic studies which involve a systematic comparison of two or more languages both at micro-linguistic and macro-linguistic level. The current trends are identified in terms of macro-linguistic widening of contrastive analysis which is applied in studies of specialized discourses such as media, political and academic communication. The findings are based on a small-scale research of contrastive studies published in Contrastive Linguistics, the oldest international journal for contrastive linguistics. By conducting quantitative and qualitative analysis and employing a diachronic approach conclusions are drawn about the need for the contrastive approach at macro-level, the type of linguistic phenomena studied and the preferred methods of contrastive analysis within a period of forty-six years. The findings show that there is only a slight increase in macro-linguistic analyses in recent years, but contrastive analysis remains a vibrant area of research with a potential for development at discourse level in particular and implications for intercultural understanding and tolerance.*

Keywords: *contrastive linguistics, macro-linguistic contrastive analysis, discourse*

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Introduction

Modern linguistics studies the multiple aspects of language and its use, including its functioning and evolution. Various research methods open insight into the very essence of language but as a rule, each branch of linguistics applies its own set of methods. One of the common methods used in different branches of linguistics is the comparative study of languages.

There are several approaches to linguistic comparison – comparative historical linguistics, typological linguistics, and contrastive linguistics. Unlike the other two comparative approaches, contrastive linguistics aims at finding and describing similarities and differences in languages rather than grouping them genetically or typologically. It focuses on pairs of languages and explores their similar or different nature.

In this paper, we will present an overview of contrastive studies at the level of discourse, which will allow to draw conclusions about the relevance of contrastive linguistics as a method together with its main issues and trends. These conclusions will be based on a small-scale research of publications in *Contrastive Linguistics* journal employing contrastive analysis.

Theoretical background

The nature of contrastive linguistics

Contrastive linguistics refers to cross-linguistic studies which involve a systematic comparison of two or more languages, which are not always related or have had contact with one another, with the aim to describe their similarities or differences for the purposes of language typology, foreign language teaching and theory of translation. From the perspective of the general framework of comparisons within and between languages it represents a synchronic interlingual comparison. Other synonymous terms for contrastive linguistics are contrastive analysis and contrastive studies. (Danchev, 2001, p. 10; Hasselgård, 2002, p. 98; Ke, 2019, pp. 4-8; Krzeszowski, 2011, p. 9).

Contrastive linguistics differs from comparative linguistics, therefore, the two terms are not interchangeable. The two concepts are in hierarchical relation as shown in Figure 1. The term *comparative linguistics* is a hypernym which covers two main and relatively autonomous branches of general linguistics, i.e. comparative historical linguistics and contrastive linguistics. According to the main focus of the studies contrastive linguistics is divided into three branches, covering issues related to foreign language teaching, theory of translation, and language typology. Typology-oriented contrastive studies also consist of three branches depending on the number and the type of the languages researched. Such studies can be universal, group, and bilateral. The latter type of studies

are the most numerous as they can reveal most clearly the specific features of a language contrasted to a particular native language (Danchev, 2001, pp. 51-52).

Contrastive linguistics usually has an applied perspective in areas such as translation studies and language pedagogy. At the same time, it may also be more theoretically oriented by investigating how a universal category X is realized in languages A and B (Hasselgård, 2002, p. 99). It is claimed that contrastive studies are not dependent on any particular theoretical framework. However, Krzeszowski (2011, p. 10) argues that contrastive linguistics is dependent both on descriptive and on theoretical linguistics. Descriptive linguistics is important in the sense that no comparison of languages is possible without their prior description. On the other hand, no reliable exploration can be conducted without a theoretical background. Danchev (2001, p. 24) found out that contrastive studies have been conducted from the perspective of various linguistic theories and approaches and usually ascribe to the dominant theories of the languages in focus. The main issue is the selection of the same conceptual and terminological instruments when describing and contrasting two and more languages.
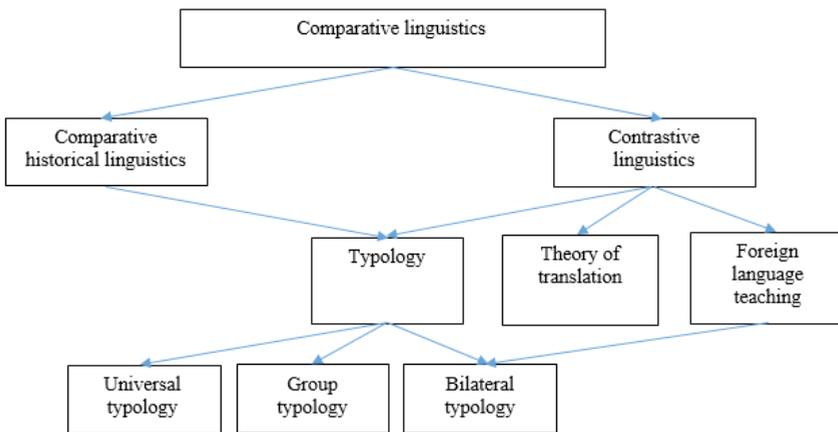

Fig. 1. *Contrastive linguistics in relation to other disciplines. Adapted from Danchev, 2001, p. 51.*

The successful comparison presupposes that the items compared have something in common. This makes the identification of a "third term" of paramount importance. Such metalanguage that can provide a frame of reference for comparison independently from the two contrasted objects represents the main methodological issue. Various third terms, also referred to as *tertia comparationis*, have been used. They can focus on three aspects:

- formal aspect, studying the similarity of form or grammatical categorization;
- semantic aspect, exploring the similarity of meaning;

- functional aspect, examining the similarity of communicative purpose, genre, etc.

Translation equivalence has also been used as a *tertium comparationis* in studies based on parallel corpora (Krzeszowski, 2011, pp. 15-22). Three more approaches to contrasting languages can be applied. The common frame of reference can also include the surface structures, the deep structures and the translation equivalence (Danchev, 2001, p. 17).

Types and levels of contrastive analysis

Danchev (ibid., pp. 45-50) identifies six types of contrastive studies:

(1) *Synchronic, diachronic and combined*;

(2) *In terms of language levels*

According to this criterion, differentiation is made between micro- and macro-contrastive analysis (Ke, 2019, pp. 4-8). Micro-contrastive analysis is concerned with language structure and is performed at four structural levels of language, i.e. phonetics, phonology, lexis, and grammar. This is the traditional mode of contrastive linguistics. Macro-contrastive analysis has a broader perspective of linguistic analysis. Its major concern is language use and is performed at the level of text and pragmatics.

Contrastive studies are unevenly distributed according to this criterion. Most of the contrastive studies are conducted at the level of grammar, phonetics and phonology, while there are fewer contrastive studies at the level of lexicology and much fewer at textual level and word formation.

(3) *Theoretical and/or applied contrastive studies*

Theoretical contrastive studies are usually conducted within the framework of language typology. Applied contrastive studies are motivated by the needs of foreign language teaching and theory of translation. However, a distinct line between theoretical and applied contrastive studies cannot be drawn.

(4) *In terms of the number of contrasted languages*

According to this criterion bilateral and multilateral contrastive studies can be distinguished.

(5) *In terms of the manner of contrasting languages*

There are one-way and two-way contrastive studies;

(6) *In terms of the degree of kinship between the contrasted languages*

Three types of contrastive studies can be differentiated: contrastive studies of closely related languages, of distantly related languages and of unrelated languages.

History and development of contrastive linguistics

Contrastive methods have a long history in linguistics. Boyadjiev (2004) and Krzeszowski (1995) mention the first attempts at classifying languages on the basis of their genealogical ties that go back to the Renaissance. These methods are part of the approaches to linguistic comparison together with comparative historical linguistics and typological linguistics (Danchev, 2001, pp. 55-60; Krzeszowski, 2011, p. 9; Pirozhkova, 2016, p. 159). Comparative historical linguistics was the first linguistic discipline that put comparison on a scientific basis. It originated in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century and is associated with the names of F. Bopp and J. Grimm, the Danish linguist R. Rask and the Russian A. Vostokov (Boyadjiev, 2004, pp. 234-235). The aim of the comparative historical method is to compare related languages in order to identify common generic patterns of their development while the essence of the contrastive method is to establish and analyze the common and different features of two or more languages where the genetic relationship of languages is not necessary. The foundations of contrastive linguistics as part of the comparative method were laid down by Baudouin de Courtenay at the beginning of the 20th century with the publication of his study of Polish, Russian and old Church Slavonic, i.e. old Bulgarian, which by its nature represented contrastive grammar. The term "contrastive linguistics" was used for the first time by Benjamin Lee Whorf in 1941 in his paper "Language and Logic" but started to be used intensively at the end of 1960s. Thus the origins of contrastive linguistics can be found both in Europe and in the USA. It must be noted that contrastive linguistics which developed as a branch of applied linguistics in the USA in the 1940s and 1950s was neither the first, nor the only source of contemporary contrastive studies. Chronologically, it is the fourth source of contrastive studies, the first three being the Prague school, the Russian and Soviet school, and the Geneva school (Danchev, 2001).

The development of the contrastive linguistics in the USA was brought about by the combination of three factors: the need for quick and effective second language teaching, the popularity of behaviorist theory in learning, and the flourish of structural description of language (Ke, 2019, p. 17). The application of Structural Linguistics to foreign language teaching was based on the following assumptions: (1) the main difficulties in learning a new language are caused by interference from the first language; (2) these difficulties can be predicted by contrastive analysis; (3) teaching materials can make use of contrastive analysis to reduce the effects of interference (Hasselgård, 2002, pp. 98-99).

The pedagogic interest in contrastive analysis declined in the late 1960s due to two main reasons (Ke, 2019, p. 18). The first one was the newly emerged approaches to psychology and linguistics, namely cognitive psychology and Transformational Grammar. The second one was the replacement of interference

by other explanations of learning difficulties. It was discovered that contrastive descriptions were only able to predict part of the learning problems encountered by learners. In terms of the two types of errors that could be distinguished – interlingual and intralingual – contrastive analysis was able to predict only the former.

Interestingly, the relative decline of contrastive linguistics in the USA coincided with a growing interest into this research area in Europe. Contrastive linguistics was not solely associated with L2 teaching. As pointed out by Danchev (2001, pp. 63-71) there was a more balanced relation between its theoretical and applied aspects without a marked adherence to a certain linguistic approach. What is more, a number of large-scale contrastive programmes were launched in Europe in the 1960s. They focused on English which was contrasted to the native languages of the countries like Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

Current trends in contrastive studies

In recent years contrastive analysis has been applied to areas such as the theory and practice of translation, L2 writing, understanding and description of particular languages, language typology, the study of language universals. Interdisciplinary studies, such as those that make links between contrastive linguistics and translation, lexicography, corpus linguistics, language teaching and learning, genre studies and cultural studies have been published where the main emphasis is on the comparison of languages.

Any aspect of language may be covered in contrastive studies, including vocabulary, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, text and discourse, stylistics, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. These studies make use of both micro-linguistic and macro-linguistic approach (Danchev, 2001, pp. 89-91; Ke, 2019, pp. 8-9). Micro-linguistic analysis compares the structure of linguistic systems, whereas macro-linguistic analysis focuses on their realizations in speech and the factors which underlie certain linguistic forms and their variants. As pointed out by Danchev (ibid.), it is this macro-linguistic widening of the analysis which represents the new trend within comparative linguistics. It is realized by the incorporation of speech production which is of two types – translated, usually translation corpora, and non-translated, i.e. produced by native speakers and foreign language learners.

According to Pirozhkova (2016, pp. 159-160), the current growth of interest in comparative studies is motivated by the following reasons:

- the need to identify the universal features of the language material;
- the desire to describe the national picture of the world of speakers of different languages;

- the need to improve bilingual dictionaries, where national-specific features of the semantics of translation correspondences are indicated;
- the interest in the study of the national specifics of semantics and the study of the national specifics of linguistic thinking;
- the enlargement of the scope of foreign language teaching.

Particularly interesting are contrastive studies of political communication as pointed out by Chudinov (2006, pp. 27-28). There are at least two reasons for that. On the one hand, each country is characterized by nation-specific ways of perception and linguistic representation of the political reality which can be explained by the national mentality and the historical conditions under which a certain political culture is formed. On the other hand, comparison of political communication within different countries and epochs allows researchers to differentiate between the self and the other, the occasional and the natural, the unique and the peculiar. This broader perspective contributes to a better understanding between peoples and intercultural tolerance.

Contrastive analysis of political texts is a potent area of research as pointed out by Pirozhkova (2016) in her overview of the methodology and methods for contrastive analysis of political texts. Thirty-six Russian extensive academic publications (monographs and PhD theses) were examined. The main findings show that the contrastive analysis was conducted in terms of metaphoric modelling, intertextuality, specific personal rhetorical style, communicative strategies and tactics, representation of ideological systems, multimodal representation of political events.

The trend of applying contrastive analysis in studies of specialized discourses can be traced in Bulgarian publications as well. Todorova's monograph (2014), for instance, examines various linguistic and cultural aspects of print advertisements as part of media discourse. Advertisements are considered as a text type which reflects the specific features of a certain language and culture. The employment of the contrastive method allows to examine the relation between language (Bulgarian and English) and culture (Bulgarian, British and American) in order to draw the conclusion that this relation is complicated and contradictory. The reason is its dependency on the value systems which can be given various meanings and interpretations during different periods.

Shamonina and Kostova's (2013) handbook of academic communication takes an applied, not a typological perspective. It focuses on academic discourse in three languages, i.e. Bulgarian, English and Russian, by combining contrastive and genre analysis. The expectation is that scholars from one language background may transfer features of academic language and genres in their L1 into the foreign language they use. Knowledge of these likely areas of transfer is emphasized as the handbook is not merely a dictionary providing translations. By collecting texts from the same genres in these three languages the rhetorical features

are made visible and can easily be compared and contrasted. This platform of comparison between texts helps to identify equivalencies and differences at the text level, at the conceptual level, and at the linguistic level. Many academics today are well aware that reliance on the practices in one's native language can lead to mismatch with the expectations in the foreign language. Thus, knowledge of norms and variations of genre across cultures can be expected to assist avoiding potential pitfalls in the construction of specific text types.

Similar purposes of pedagogic intervention underlie the recently published monograph by Blagoeva (2019). By employing both the contrastive and corpus methods, it studies the cohesive devices in the Bulgarian-English interlanguage used in academic writing by advanced Bulgarian learners of English.

Methodology and research questions

Despite the publications and achievements discussed above, contrastive studies at the textual, discourse, pragmatic and sociolinguistic level do not seem to be proliferating. A small-scale research of the articles published in the Bulgarian journal *Contrastive Linguistics* was conducted in order to make an overview of the current trends in contrastive studies. The choice of this particular journal has a twofold motivation. First, it is the first specialized journal devoted to contrastive linguistic analysis at international level. Compared to *Languages in Contrast*, the renowned international journal for contrastive linguistics, it has a twice longer publication history of more than four decades. The contrastive studies investigate more than fifty languages and are published in six languages – Bulgarian, Russian, English, German, French and Spanish. Second, except for vocabulary, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, the research articles cover other aspects of language as well, including text and discourse, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Thus, the variety and time span of the publications allow to gain insight into the development of contrastive linguistics and to make conclusions about the need of the contrastive approach, the type of linguistic phenomena studied and the preferred methods of contrastive analysis.

Twenty articles published in the Bulgarian journal *Contrastive Linguistics* have been identified to study language above sentence level. They belong to two periods as shown in Table 1. The first period covers a time span of 34 years between 1976, the year when the journal was issued for the first time, and 2009 when the annotated bibliography of the articles in *Contrastive Linguistics* was published (Assenova, 2009). The second period encompasses 13 years between 2010 and 2022. The division between the two periods refers to the way the articles have been counted and selected. For the selection of the articles from the first period the annotated bibliography was used while for the selection of the articles from the second period the author counted and annotated the articles herself.

The **research questions** which the present study aims to answer are:

1. Is there a significant trend of macro-linguistic widening of the contrastive analyses published in *Contrastive Linguistics* journal? If yes, which aspects of language above sentence level are studied?

2. What motivates the current growth of interest in contrastive studies of specialized discourses? Which languages are compared?

3. Does the new trend of contrastive studies aim at having broader implications like intercultural understanding and demystification of power relations or does its findings refer strictly to the language system?

Analysis and discussion

As seen from Table 1 the number of research articles from the first period investigated is 649. Only 17 of them conducted contrastive analysis at text, discourse, pragmatic or sociolinguistic level. This means that 2.6 percent of the articles did investigations of language above the level of the sentence. In the second period, which encompasses the years from 2010 until 2022, 94 contrastive studies were published. Only three of them, or 3.2 percent, conducted analysis at discourse level. Statistically, the share of articles with an interest into issues relating to discourse, pragmatics and sociolinguistics has slightly increased by 0.6 percent.

Table 1. *Number and share of research articles conducting contrastive analysis above sentence level and published in Contrastive Linguistics*

Year of publication	**Total number** of research articles	**Number** of research articles conducting contrastive analysis above sentence level	**Share** of research articles conducting contrastive analysis above sentence level
1976-2009	649	17	2.6%
2010-2022	94	3	3.2%

The analysis of the content of the articles from the corpus has found that the comparisons discussed take a functional perspective. The articles include examination of:

1. *Communicative purpose, i.e. expressing negation, greetings, wishes, congratulations* (Baharev, 1985; Vasseva, 2007)

2. *Metaphorical framing and representation of events* (Assenova & Aleksova, 2008);

3. *Intertextuality, i.e. direct, indirect and semi-direct speech, and onomastics, i.e. use of proper names* (Dimitrova, 1988; Leonidova, 1982; Nitsolova, 2009; Popova-Veleva, 2004; Popova-Veleva & Drenska, 1998);

4. *Pragmatic features of professional jargon and speaker positioning* (Blagoeva, 2006; Hung, 1995);

5. *Sociolinguistic features, i.e. speaker values, attitudes and verbal stereoty*pes (Dimova, Grebeshkova & Walker, 2015; Tkaczewski, 2015);

6. *Professional genres* (Tincheva, 2003; Todorova, 2014; Vassileva & Sotirov, 1994; Yankova, 2005a; Yankova, 2005b);

7. *Verbal strategies and intentionality* (Milanova, 2001);

8. *Cohesive devices, i.e. linking words and functional sentence perspective* (Vassileva, 1992; Yankova, 2005a; Yankova, 2005b).

All the studies in the corpus are synchronic and theoretical. Only one study refers to itself as both theoretical and applied (Vassileva 1992). Most of the research is bilateral, while the research which examines groups of languages like Balkan and Romance languages can be defined as multilateral. The following articles deserve attention because they implement contrastive analysis to the study of various specialized discourses – academic, professional, legal, political and media:

1. Tincheva (2003) studies the production and reception of individual text genres, more specifically political speeches, as governed by particular mental models. Differences in English- and Bulgarian-language political speeches are used to demonstrate an integrated approach to studying whole texts and genres. This approach refers to the triangle of discourse, cognition and society. The main theoretical underpinning of the research is van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach within CDA.

2. Yankova (2005a) investigates particular types of legal qualifications, their textual patterns and structuring in legislative documents across two different legal systems – in Bulgaria and in England. The differences between the codified Roman law based system and the common law and precedent based systems are traced to find out their representation in the language used in order to conceptualize statutory provisions.

3. In her second article Yankova (2005b) studies the similarities and differences in the textualization of statutory provisions in Bulgarian and English legislative texts. The regularities in the construction of genre and generic structure are described through the analysis of the textual component and cohesion in particular. In terms of the theoretical framework the two articles are part of a larger comparative study which applies Bhatia's discourse analysis and Halliday's functional model.

4. Todorova (2014) focuses on values expressed in Bulgarian and English advertisements. The investigation of their various representations shows that the way they are exploited and categorized differs in Bulgarian, British and American cultures. Within advertisements, these values are explicated through key words which may be identical but only on the surface level. It is concluded that the semantic features of human universals vary with different languages and cultures due to the difference in text producer's and text receiver's global knowledge pattern. It is the contrastive method which allows to examine the relation between language and culture and to draw the conclusion that this relation is complicated and contradictory. The main linguistic theories that can be recognized as underpinning the study are Beaugrande and Dressler's Text linguistics, Fauconnier and Sweetser's Mental Space Theory, and Fillmore's Frame semantics.

Considering the selected articles in comparison with the other articles from the corpus, several observations can be made. First, all the four articles study the linguistic phenomena in focus from the point of view of English. Their main theoretical underpinnings are text linguistics, discourse and genre analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. It becomes clear that different contrastive studies use different theoretical perspectives which are typical for a certain linguistic tradition, in this case British-American research and theoretical approaches. Second, although all the four articles study specialized discourses, only one focuses on political discourse (Tincheva, 2003) and one (Todorova, 2016) is involved in discourse analysis proper. Third, compared to the corpus of publications compiled and discussed by Pirozhkova (2016), the number of the Bulgarian publications applying contrastive analysis at discourse level is critically low. This means that contrastive studies are unevenly distributed in terms of language levels but this is related to various factors, not only to the traditions within Slavonic and British-American linguistics.

Conclusion and implications

The findings based on the analysis point to several facts:

1. The trend of widening of the scope of contrastive analyses published in *Contrastive Linguistics* journal cannot be said to be a significant one as they represent approximately 3 percent of all the publications. However, a slight increase of less than 1 percent can be noticed in macro-linguistic analyses.

2. This growth of interest in contrastive studies of specialized discourses is motivated by the new developments and disciplines in the field of linguistics such as text linguistics, discourse analysis, genre analysis, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. A wide variety of languages are covered such as Slavonic and Balkan languages (Bulgarian, Russian, Polish, Czech),

Roman languages (Italian, French and Portuguese), German languages (English and German) and Vietnamese. It can be concluded that macro-level contrastive analyses are not limited only to English language and linguistics although most of the studies of specialized discourses refer to English.

3. It must be noted that most of the contrastive studies from the corpus are not overly ambitious in their implications. In fact only two studies, i.e. Todorova's (2014) contrastive analysis of advertising discourse and Yankova's (2005a) contrastive analysis of legal discourse, attempt at achieving intercultural understanding.

Still contrastive analysis is a vibrant approach to linguistic research at discourse level. It is valuable for the linguistic research conducted from macro-perspective and its benefits include:

- Contrastive studies create conditions for investigation from a new perspective. For example, CDA is not a typical research method within Slavonic linguistics. It is through contrastive research that this method can be applied to non-English texts. Such experimentation may lead, arguably, to improvement of research methods and/or their application.

- Contrastive analysis creates unique research. Many researchers are apprehensive that most linguistic phenomena are already studied. However, research can become more insightful and novel if approached from the point of view of similarities and differences with another language/ languages.

- A better understanding of the studied linguistic and related extralinguistic phenomena can be reached both at applied and at theoretical level especially when multiple research methods are combined.

The potential of contrastive analysis has two aspects. First, applied contrastive studies of academic discourse has proven to be supportive in areas such as foreign language teaching and learning, writing for publication and translation. These are areas where contrastive data can suggest solutions through various practical linguistic data. Second, although there is a growing trend of contrastive studies conducted from macro perspective, there is a niche for contrastive theoretical studies at discourse level and even a larger niche for contrastive studies of political discourse. In the future, the broader perspective of such contrastive studies can test and possibly modify modern linguistic theories that are based on the study of western languages and can have a real contribution to intercultural tolerance.

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