SIU STUDIES

ISSN 1991-3052

Contrastive analysis on the surface structure of basic syntax of Bangla (L1) and English (GL)

* Prodhan Mahbub Ibna Seraj

Abstract

This paper aims at picking up to show how and where are the dissimilarities and similarities on the surface structure of basic syntax of Bangla and English language. The study focuses on the importance of contrastive analysis in teaching English in the context of Bangla (L1). From my investigation, it is noticed that contrastive analysis is useful to identify the problems in learning the surface structure of sentences in English as Global language (GL). Thus, the teachers and students would be able to aware of the problem areas arising due to the differences between Bangla (L1) and English (GL) interfered in learning L2 syntax. So contrastive analysis on the surface structure may certainly help students and teachers to identify where the problems are and how they can be solved.

Keywords: Surface structure, L1, GL, CLT, GTM.

Introduction

English is taught all over the world as a global language (GL). In most of the countries of the world, it is treated as the second or foreign language. Due to the current status of English as a global language of science, technology and international relations, many countries around the world consider the teaching of English as a major educational property. Bangladesh is not an exception to this. Considering its importance, Bangladesh is now putting emphasis on the learning of English to keep pace with the advanced countries.

English is taught as the compulsory subject from the primary level to degree leveling Bangladesh. Many methods and techniques have been used to teach this language. The grammar translation method (GTM) has long been used in Bangladesh to teach English. But now communicative language teaching (CLT) has been introduced to make learners communicatively competent. But no method is sufficient in itself and as a result of that, CLT somewhat fails to fulfill the desired goal. This method does not inspire the teachers to discuss the problem areas arising due to the differences between Bangla (native, L1) and English (global language, GL). So, the students are frequently facing some difficulties in learning English. I think, these problems may be overcome to a large extent by using contrastive analysis (CA).

* Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sylhet International University

In my dissertation, I focus on the surface structure of Bangla and English in teaching English as a foreign language in Bangladesh. I feel the need the practice of CA in teaching English at the secondary level in Bangladesh. Unless it is practiced in Bangladesh, the students will be deprived of the maximum benefits of CA in learning English. It is a fact that no two languages are exactly similar or dissimilar. As result, English as a foreign language differs to a large extent of syntax from Bangla. So, it is true that in learning English some problems arise due to the differences between the syntax of these languages. The students very often commit mistakes because of these problem areas. So, the teachers should be aware of the similarities and dissimilarities of these two languages and make the students aware of the problems arising out of these contrasts. Contrastive analysis, which is a well-known theory and a widely appreciated technique of applied linguistics, can help the English teachers of Bangladesh in this respect. By making a comparison of English with Bangla, the teachers will come to know the real learning problems and teach the students accordingly. So, for the teachers the knowledge of contrastive data is highly desirable. It enables them to understand certain problems as they arise in the class. In this regard, it is expected that the English teachers of Bangladesh at the secondary level will apply contrastive analysis in teaching English. The research shows that If this technique of teaching is introduced in Bangladesh, the students will be greatly benefited. In this regard, it is highly desirable that the English teachers of Bangladesh would come forward to take initiatives. If they teach English in comparison with Bangla, the students will be aware of the real differences between two languages and be able to learn English accurately and effectively. To speak the truth, the English teachers of Bangladesh at the secondary level are badly in need of the knowledge of CA in order to locate and explain the similarities and contrasts between Bangla and English and predict, explain, correct and eliminate errors occurring due to the interference of Bangla in teaching English.

Objectives and scope of the study

The objective of my study is to establish the importance of Contrastive Analysis in teaching English at the secondary level in Bangladesh and it also aims at investigating how far it is practiced in Bangladesh. The study deals with a fair attempt to make the teachers and students aware of the difficulties created by the difference between Bangla (L1) and English (GL) and the interferences of Bangla and English and the interference of Bangla in acquiring English. My study aims at locating and explaining the similarities and dissimilarities between Bangla and English with a view to making the teachers aware of the blind spots in teaching English. This study also aims at growing awareness among the students about the mistakes they very often commit by oversimplification of rules at the secondary level in Bangladesh.

Contrastive analysis, as a technique of Applied Linguistics, is definitely an important technique in teaching a foreign/second language. Regarding this, numerous researchers have been conducted in this field. But study in this field is rare in Bangladeshi context. In fact, very few people think about contrastive analysis for the secondary level students in Bangladesh. So, I think, by my study, I can contribute a lot for the secondary level students in Bangladesh. This study certainly adds a new dimension to the present teaching system.

Literature Review

Contrastive analysis, a systematic technique of applied linguistics, plays an important role in teaching a foreign/second language. It is the systematic comparison of two or more languages. It inspires the teachers to teach the global language (GL) in comparison with the native language (L1). It is mainly introduced by American linguist Robert Lado's Linguistics Across Cultures (1957) in the mid 20th century. Many linguists concentrate on the view that the teaching of the foreign/second language will be effective and accurate if it is taught in comparison with first language. Among all the linguists, the name of Robert Lado (1957) is worth mentioning. Lado in his book, Linguistics Across Cultures puts emphasis on the comparison of two languages in teaching the second/foreign language. By the two languages, definitely he means the first language and the second/foreign language. As the two languages are different from each other, there should be some similarities and dissimilarities between these two languages. Lado holds the view that the learners of the first language will learn the elements of the second/foreign language easily which are similar to their first language but they will feel difficulty in learning the elements which are dissimilar from their native language. Many linguists share this idea of Lado. They think that because of the differences between the native language and the target language the learners of the mother tongue face some difficulties in learning the target language. They are of the opinion that Contrastive Analysis may solve these problems to a large extent. The knowledge gained by a systematic comparison between learner's native language and the target language may be applied for various purposes. According to Gass and Selinker (2001) CA is the way of comparing languages in order to determine potential errors for the ultimate purpose of isolating what needs to be learned and what does not need to be learned in a second language (L2) learning situation.

Richards, Platt and Weber (1985, p.63) argue that CA is based on the following assumptions:

    i. The main difficulties in learning a target language are caused by interference from the first language

ii. These difficulties can be predicted by Contrastive Analysis
iii. Teaching materials can make use of CA to reduce the effects of interference

Contrastive analysis has two forms as strong and weak (Wardhaugh 1970). The strong form claims that all L2 errors can be predicted by identifying the differences between the target language and the learner's native language. Again, the weak form claims that it is used to identify which errors are the results of interference. Lee (1968:180) notes that CA stipulates that the prime cause or even the sole cause of difficulty and errors in foreign language learning is interference coming from the learners' native language. Bloomfield (1933) says that the differences among languages are great enough to prevent our setting up any system of classification that would fit all languages.

Contrastive Analysis can also tell us how we can explore the resources of the mother tongue to teach a foreign/second language. In other words, it helps to teach us how far and in what ways we can make use of the mother tongue in teaching foreign language. So, it may be said that interference of the native language into the second/foreign language teaching is not always bad. It is sometimes effective as some linguists think that interference is not sole cause of the learner's errors. It is quite natural that there may be cross-linguistic influence between the target language and the native language.

Research Methodology
The data of this research paper is based on the secondary data through reading a lot, compiled to develop the concept of similarities and dissimilarities of the basic structure of sentences between Bangla (L1) and English (GL). To develop my research paper, I have consulted a good number of books, papers, journals and articles.

Features of the surface structures between Bangla and English
It is notable that according to expressing meaning and structures, both Bangla and English have the same classification of sentences but they have different distributions of words in syntax. Through contrastive analysis the following is the results of comparison on surface structures of Bangla and English language.

1. Assertive Sentence
Both Bangla and English have the assertive sentences in which events or occurrences are expressed affirmatively and negatively to audience. But they have distinctions in their structures as followings
    a) Affirmative sentence:
    i) Affirmative sentence in simple sentence.
    Syntax-1(Bangla): Subject+ object/others+ verb.

Example: আমি বই পড়ি (ami boi pori).

টম ফুটবল খেলে (tom football khele).

Syntax-1(English): Subject+ verb+ object/others.

Example : He eats apple

The child likes red colour

The dissimilariyt lies here on the different positions of verbs and objects. In bangle verb comes at the end of the sentences whereas verb comes often soon after the subject in a sentence. L1 knowledge may hamper of learning L2 (English) for the beginners for oversimplification.

ii) Affirmative sentence in complex structure.

Syntax-2 (Bangla): subordinate clause+ Independent Clause

Example: যে লোকটি এখানে এসেছিল, সে একজন ডাক্তার (je lokti ekhane esechilo se ekjon doctor). তুমি আসবে বলে আমি অপেক্ষা করেছি (tumi ashbe bole ami opekkha korechi).

Syntax-2 (English): subordinate clause+ Independent Clause
Example: The man who came here is a doctor.

I am waiting as you will come.

In this case, there is no dissimilarity to make a complex sentence. In some cases, independent clause may come initially or finally of the sentence. Antecedent is strictly maintained when a clause is made with a relative pronoun.

iii) Affirmative sentence in compound structure.

Syntax-3 (Bangla): Independent Clause+ obay(conjunction)+ Independent Clause
Example: সে গরীব কিন্তু তার ছেলেরা মেধাবী (se gorib kintu tar cholera medhabi).

সে সৎ অথচ গরীব (se shot othocho gorib)

Syntax-3 (English): Independent Clause+ conjunction+ Independent Clause
Example: He is poor but honest.

I helped him and he was grateful to me.

It is a great advantage for Bangla native learners to learn English as there is no variation in the structure of compound sentence between bangle and English.

b) Negative Sentence:

i) Negative in simple structure.

Syntax-1 (Bangla): subject+ object +verb+ negative marker (obay).

Example: আমি বই পড়ি না (ami boi pori na).

টম ফুটবল খেলে না (Tom football khele na).

Syntax-1 (English): subject+ auxiliary verb+negative marker +main verb+ object

Example: He does not eat apple.

Tom does not play football.

Here, the problem is laid that in English we need an auxiliary verb with a negative marker to make negative sentences. Whereas, in bangla there is no auxiliary verb, only adding a negative marker soon after the verb, negative sentence is built.

2. Interrogative sentence:

Interrogative sentence serves the similar purpose as ask to know information about the events or happenings in both Bangla and English. But word order is different from bangla to English as follows:

Syntax-1(Bangla): i) subject+ interrogation marker+ (object) + verb+?

ii)Interrogation marker+ verb+?

Example: সে কি করে (Se ki kore)

তুমি কখন আসবে? (tumi kokhon ashbe)

কে যাবে? (ke jabe)

Syntax-1(English): i) Auxiliary verb+ subject+ verb+(Object)?

ii)What + Auxiliary verb+ subject+ verb+(Object)?

Example: Do you like it?

Is he a student?

What do you want?

According to above comparison, it is found that there are some fixed interrogation markers (ki, kokhon, Kobe, kothay etc.) used to make Bangla interrogative sentences. whereas auxiliary verbs and wh-words are used to make english interrogative sentences.

3. Imperative sentence:

Imperative sentences are used to state the mood of order, advice, request, forbidden, suggestion etc. in both Bangla and English. Structurally, they have less or more similarities in their basic structures as follows:

Syntax-1(Bangla): i) verb+ (negative marker)?

Example: চুপ কর (chup kor)

খেও না (Kheo na)

যেও না (Jeo na)

Syntax-1(English): i) (auxiliary verb + not) + verb+(others)?

    Example: Go.

             Go there.

             Don't go there.

4. Optative Sentence:

Optative sentences express the state of the mood of wishes and prayers in both Bangla and English. Nonetheless, they are different in their structures as follows:

Syntax-1(Bangla): Noun + (Possessive pronoun)+ verb

      Example: ঈশ্বর তোমার মঙ্গল করুন (ishshar tomar mongal korun)
    ঈদীর্ঘজীবী হউন (Dirgho jibi haun)

Syntax-1(English): i) Modal verb+ subject+ verb+ (others)
ii) verb+ other

      Example: May Allah help you.

          Thank you.

As in the syntax they have differences, L1 may interfere learning L2 (English). Students and teachers may pay attention in this regards.

5. Exclamatory sentence:

In both English and bangla language exlamatory sentences express the similar state of mood. according to meaning they are similar but they have different surface structures as follows:

Syntax-1(Bangla): i) Pronoun (কী) + adjective+ Noun+(verb)+!

        ii) adjective+ Noun+!

        iii) Subject + obay+ verb+!

        iv) obay (interjection)+! + Pronoun (কী) + adjective+ Noun.

    Example: কী সুন্দর ফুল! (ki shundor ful)
  আমি তো ভয়ে মরি! (ami to voye mori!)
  অদ্ভুত ব্যাপার! (odvut baper!)
      বাহ! কী চমৎকার মেয়েটি (Bah! kicomotkar)

Syntax-1(English): i) Interjection (bravo, fie, alas etc) +! + Subject + verb + others.

  ii) wh-word+a/an+ Noun+ pronoun+be verb!

  iii) How+ adjective+ Subject+!

    Example: Alas! I am undone.

      What a match it is!

      How beautiful the flower is!

Conclusion:

Sometimes students of target language may face some expressions which seem to be incompressible to them. In this regard, the teacher can easily solve the problems by Contrastive analysis. The teacher can clarify the difficult or incompressible expressions to the students with the help of some similar expressions from the native language. Teachers can take favorite story from L1 and translate it into GL for the students or even teach the target language on situations that are found in the country. Certainly one goal of foreign language instruction is to expose students to new languages and new cultures in order to prepare them to become global citizens in the future. The purpose of Contrastive Analysis is to locate and explain the similarities and contrasts between the mother tongue (L1) and the target language (L2) systems with a view to making the teachers conscious of the trouble spots in teaching the target language so that they can be aware of them beforehand and can concentrate on them by consciously devising the techniques to address them. It is the teacher who is of primary importance in teaching second/ foreign language and contrastive analysis just provides him/her with a very effective tool for that purpose in the form of contrastive data. Contrastive Analysis will also have a part to play in the evaluation of the errors. Both the teachers and the students require the knowledge of CA in order to be able to predict, explain, correct and eliminate errors occurring due to the interference of the native language in acquiring the global language. But it is true that contrastive linguistics cannot predict or explain all the errors of the learners of a foreign language but predict only those mistakes which the students are likely to commit because of the differences between L1 and L2. So, it is evident that the features of CA that have been discussed are much more important and positive role to play in learning/teaching the structure of sentences of target language.

References

1. Leonard, B. (1933) language, New York; Holt.

2. Lee, W. (1968) Thoughts on Contrastive Linguistics in the Context of Languag Teaching in J.Alatis(ed.), Washington, D,C., Georgetown University.

3. Lado,R (1964) Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach, New York, McGraw- Hill.

4. Gas, M. S and Selinker, L. (2001). Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

5. Richards, Platt & Weber (1985) Longman dictionary of applied linguistics, Harlow, Essex, England: Longman.

6. Wardhaugh, R.(1970) The contrastive analysis hypothesis.TESOL Quarterly 4:123- 30