

Paper 1: Contrastive Analysis, Tertium Comparationis and Corpora

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In this presentation we address one of the main challenges within the field of contrastive linguistics, namely that of equivalence. It is generally agreed that in order to establish equivalence across languages a sound tertium comparationis is needed, i.e. a background of sameness that ensures that we compare like with like. Several tertium comparationis have been launched over the years, including surface form, deep structure and translation (James 1980), but no consensus has been reached, although Chesterman's (1998) concept of perceived similarity seems to be a good starting point / compromise for most contrastivists.

We start with a brief outline of modern Contrastive Analysis as a systematic research paradigm, including different views on what constitutes a good tertium comparationis, before moving on to some thoughts on how corpora may have had an impact on how equivalence in CA is tackled. Relevant in this context is what Johansson (2012: 46) calls "contrastive linguistics in a new key", i.e. contrastive analysis in which

- the focus on immediate applications is toned down;
- the contrastive study is text-based rather than a comparison of systems in the abstract;
- the study draws on electronic corpora and the use of computational tools.

Within corpus-based CA, the types of available tertium comparationis are very much tied to the different types of corpora that are typically used in cross-linguistic research, i.e. comparable corpora and parallel corpora of different kinds, (e.g. uni-, bi- or multi-directional). Following an outline of the pros and cons of such "contrastive" corpora, the "same" case study will be carried out on the basis of a comparable vs. a bidirectional parallel corpus, demonstrating two different tertium comparationis: similar forms and translation.

Finally, in the light of the results presented, we encourage a discussion of what the best available tertium comparationis may be – independent of the cross-linguistic questions asked – to establish cross-linguistic equivalence, and how this can be reflected in the types of studies we carry out and the types of corpora we compile in the future.