

## **The Effect of Contrastive Analysis on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners of L2 Adjective Knowledge**

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### **Abstract**

Contrastive analysis of hypothesis is the comparison of the linguistic system of two or more languages and it is based on the main difficulties in learning a new language that caused by interference from the first language. The present study intended to investigate the effect of contrastive analysis on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of L2 adjectives. The question of this study lied in the fact that whether contrastive analysis has any effects on intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of L2 adjectives, In order to find the answer of this question, this article investigated some issues about contrastive analysis between two languages and their effect on L2 adjective knowledge. For this reason 60 intermediate EFL learners were selected by OPT test and were divided in two groups, one of them was control group and the other was the experimental group. After that the pretest of L2 adjectives knowledge was administered in both groups in order to understand about L2 adjectives knowledge. Then treatments were administered in both groups. Treatment in control group was the traditional way of teaching adjectives and in experimental group was teaching adjectives by using contrastive analysis between two languages. These treatments were administered for two weeks. After that administering posttest in both groups and at the end the data was analyzed by two way independent sample t-test and one-way ANCOVA. And the result of study showed that the null hypothesis of the study was rejected so the contrastive analysis had positive effect on L2 adjective knowledge.

**Keywords:** Contrastive Analysis; L2 adjectives knowledge; EFL Learners.

### **Introduction and Review of the Literature**

After second world war, Contrastive Analysis as a great interest in foreign language teaching underwent a period of rapid development and expansion in the 1960s, especially in the United States and was originated from the behaviorist and structuralist approaches and it was based on the inferences of first language system with the target language and these interferences were the main barrier to target language learning. CAH was made by Lado (1957) and was published in his book "Linguistic Cross Cultures" which was based on describing and predicting the patterns caused difficulty and those didn't cause difficulty. Lado (1957) believed that the degree of difference between the two languages also correlated with the degree of difficulty. Later on, this attention was drawn to similarities between languages. Lado (1957) established

procedures for the comparison of grammar, vocabulary and phonology and discussed the ways in which such analysis might be relevant to syllabus and materials design, and methodology.

Contrastive analysis considered and the difficulties between the two languages and offered some strong claims in the area of language teaching. CA shouldn't be overlooked in syllabus design and it is a valuable source of information for the purposes of translation and interpretation. Contrastive analysis hypothesis is an area of comparative linguistics which is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages to determine the differences or similarities between them, either for theoretical purposes or purposes external to the analysis itself. It implies a belief in language universals, if there are no features in common, there will be no basis for comparison. CA has been used as a tool in comparative historical linguistics for creating language taxonomies. Contrastive analysis hypothesis claims that those features of the target language which are similar to learners' native language would be easy to learn and those features of target language which differ from learners' native language would be difficult to learn. So language teachers and linguists should be able to predict the difficulties that learners would encounter in order to facilitate learning.

Contrastive Analysis was as an important part of the foreign language teaching methodology and was founded on some assumption that languages could be compared. As a theoretical foundation of Contrastive Analysis was behaviorism in linguistic field until the end of the 1960s. As a school physiology, behaviorism emerged from empiricism, the philosophical doctrine that all knowledge came from experience. Therefore according to the behaviorist learning theory, errors occurred as a result of interference of the mother tongue. Interference was the subcategory of a more general process that was called transfer. Transfer was a general term describing the carryover of previous performance or knowledge to subsequent learning. Positive transfer occurred when the prior knowledge benefited the learning task, when a previous item was correctly applied to present subject matter. Negative transfer occurred when previous performance disrupted the performance of a second task. The latter could be referred to as interference, in that previously learned material interfered with subsequent material. Contrastive Analysis of the grammatical structures of two languages has been for a long time a technique to predict problems.

According to Lado (1957) and Fries (1945), Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis stated that the structure of L1 affected the acquisition of L2. This theory showed that there were some

differences between components of sentences in different languages, so according to this theory, the differences of adjectives between Persian and English and teaching these differences to the students were investigated by this research in order to remove the problems of L2 adjectives. According to Widdowson (1978, p. 159), in a process of learning a foreign language, there was inevitable association in the mind between the language we have already known and the new language. James (1980, p. 63) proposed four basic steps for contrastive analysis:

1. Assembling the data
2. Formulating the description
3. Supplementing the data as required
4. Formulating the contrasts

There were two types of Contrastive Analysis. The first type was theoretical contrastive grammars and the second type was pedagogical contrastive studies. Theoretical contrastive grammars referred to the special theoretical frame to provide explanations to develop insights into the contrastive problems, and pedagogical contrastive studies referred to finding of theoretical contrastive studies to provide a frame for comparing a pair of languages and providing data about evaluated the suitability of Contrastive Analysis in determining some major difficulties and establishes the hierarchy of difficulties to facilitate learning and teaching. (Yarmohammadi & Rashidi, 2009).

The attempt to predict difficulties by CAH was what Wardhaugh (1970) called strong version and weak version. Ziahosseiny (1999) introduced a moderate model of CAH, in which they proved that wherever the patterns of two languages were minimally distinct, then acquiring some items in two languages were hard to be learned.

There are some previous studies regarding to Contrastive Analysis. Esser (1980, p. 181) suggested that Contrastive Analysis has belonged to applied linguistics in that the analysis might yield practical instructional materials. Stockwell et al (1965) used the following criteria to establish the pedagogical sequences: 1. Hierarchy of difficulty, 2. Functional load, 3. Mishearing, 4. Pattern congruity. When the structures of two languages were similar, positive transfer would occur and while they were different negative transfer would take place. Whitman (1970, p. 191) divided the contrastive analysis into four component procedures, the first procedure was related to take account of two languages, mother tongue and target language and writing formal description of them. The Second component procedure was picking any linguistic unit of any

size from the descriptions for contrast. The third was, making the contrast of two forms which chosen and the forth one was making the prediction of difficulty through contrast. There were a series of contrastive theses, papers, monographs and dissertations which their aim were discovering and predicting learning difficulties by comparing first and target languages.

Articles were published by Tudor (1987), Thomas (1984), Edge (1986), Titford (1983), Baynham (1993) in ELT journal, and the research in language transfer was done by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), Ellis (1994) and Gass and silinker (1992) and the collection of papers which were edited by Fisiak (1984, 1990), all refered to methodological value of a selective and directed use of Contrastive Analysis in which L1 and L2 were involved. Until the 1980s, both descriptive contrastive studies and pedagogical were concerned with Language system which was proposed to use language and syntax of sentences. There was a shift of emphasis from language as a self-contained system to language as means of communication and after that a new approach to contrastive studies was emerged.

Chesterman (1998), made a useful distinction between ‘similarity-as-trigger’, it meant “the notion of a particular relation existing between entities in the world, a relation that impinges upon human perception, from matter to mind” and ‘similarity-as-attribution’, which refered to the opposite direction, from mind to matter. It was vital a probabilistic, subjective, cognitive process that perceived two entities as being similar comparability criterion. Brown (1987, p. 159) made an explanation of application of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis for phonetic comparison and pointed out the shortcomings of it: “The process is oversimplified. Subtle phonetic distinctions between phonemes have been ignored. Phonological environments and allophonic variants of phonemes have been overlooked”.

The next research was about Contrastive Analysis of adjectives. In this research, the similarities and differences of adjectives in English and Yoruba language were used in order to show the difficulties parts of learning. This research was done by Adelabu (2014) in Nigeria. This research sought to find out which aspects of English adjective made problem to the learners of English as a second language. The study involved two hundred students who were Yoruba speakers and learners of English as a second language. The results revealed a high error margin and therefore confirmed that Yoruba learners of English had problems with the using of English adjectives and there were some differences between the learners’ first language and second language.

Another research was an overview about Contrastive Analysis was done by Joze Tajareh (2015). Applied CA and mother CA and some aspects of Contrastive Analysis were spoken by this research. Also in area of Contrastive Analysis a research was done by Shahbaiki and Yousefi (2013), conducted a comparative study of adjective-noun collocations from English into Persian. The result of this study was based on the comparison of two studies in order to solve the translation difficulties. Another research based on Contrastive Analysis was “A contrastive study of L1 and L2 acquisition” that was done by Moinzadeh et al (2012), the study tried to review the issues in mother tongue and second language contrastive studies and also proposed the effect of similarities and differences in the process of learning. Ghabanchi & Vosooghi (2006) was done the research on the role of explicit contrastive instruction in learning difficult L2 grammatical forms. This research was an attempt to induce contrastive data in the classroom. The result of this comparison revealed that the application of contrastive linguistic input to Iranian EFL high school students could improve their status as to internalizing the difficult structures.

### **L2 Adjective Knowledge**

Adjectives are words used to modify nouns or pronouns by describing, limiting or making its meaning more nearly exact. They don't change the basic meaning of the word it modifies. To modify is to specify the exact meaning of another word, for example 'a black cat' is still a cat. One of the important parts of speech in most languages especially English is Adjectives. They are vital aspect of productive and receptive skills in English so learning them can help to use the language correctly. This is why, it is important to work on the contrastive parts between adjectives in order to find difficulties that learners encounter in learning adjectives. So it is important to learn and use L2 adjectives in other languages. According to Quirk et al (1980), four features were introduced as a characteristic of adjectives,

1. “Adjectives can occur in attributive position and pre-modify a noun as ‘the lazy man’, ‘the little girl’.
2. Adjective can occur in predicative position with the function as object or subject complement, e.g. ‘reasonable’ in ‘the man seemed reasonable’.
3. Adjective was pre-modified by the intensifier ‘very’. e.g. the girls are very happy
4. Adjective can take comparative and superlative forms with inflection or by the addition of the pre- modifiers ‘more’ or ‘most’ e.g ‘They are happier now’. ‘They are

the happiest couple I know.’ He is more beautiful than sara’. ‘They are the most colorful rainbow I have ever seen’.”

The classification of adjectives in English and Persian languages are somehow different, so the researcher put the emphasis on different classification of adjectives based on the contrastive analysis of two languages and error analysis in order to find difficulties in learning adjectives and show how L1 has effected in L2 learning. So teaching these difficulties can facilitate the intake of the target linguistic structures.

Iranian students think that they know all aspects in Persian language and don't have any problems while they are using different parts of speech, such as using nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives. Because the Persian is their mother tongue, they know all colloquial forms used in everyday life but they are unable to specify the differences between the mother tongue and target language. So, the students always encounter the problems and teachers also ignore the fact. Thus in one way applied contrastive analysis and in the other way English grammar, are two important ways in English that must be considered, especially those who works on translation. Adjectives are as a part of grammatical features in English. In this way contrasting target and mother tongue can help learners to improve their knowledge in target language.

Shoebottom (1996) believed that there were a number of difficulties that English adjectives may cause. For example: adjectives can be both predicative and attributive. This means “the house is big” or “the big house” both of them are correct; or “the book is interesting” or “the interesting book” are correct. But many adjectives beginning with the letter “a” cannot be used attributively. Therefore, for instance, “the girl is asleep” is correct but not “the asleep girl”; or “the animal is alive” but not “the alive animal”. The adjective “poor” is interesting too. In its meaning of not rich, it can be used in both ways: “the poor people” or “the people are poor”. But when it has the meaning of unfortunate or unhappy, it can only be used attributively. In other words, “the poor child” is correct but not “the child is poor”.

### **Methodology**

The quasi-experimental research was followed by this study. Participants were selected via an Oxford placement test. The test was composed of 40 questions, which fall into different categories. The selected students randomly divided in to two groups, an experimental and a control group and each group was consisted 30 students in intermediate levels. Pretest of

adjective knowledge was administered as one of the primary source of data for this investigation. It included 100 items about the different part of adjective knowledge. Time allotted for the test was 60 minutes. In the next step, the treatments were administered in both groups. The treatment in control group was ordinary way of teaching adjectives and the treatments in the experimental group was teaching adjectives by using contrastive analysis of two languages in the case of adjectives here. At the end of the course the posttest was administered in both groups. The posttest was the same with the pretest in the way of test-retest and was consisted 100 questions. At the end, the collected data was analyzed through SPSS program.

### Data Analysis

There were two ways of analysis of data in this research. The first one was an independent sample T-test which was conducted between scores of posttest and the second one was analysis of covariance (one-way ANCOVA) which was used for comparing the mounts of progress from pretest into posttest in each group, at the end collected data was analyzed through SPSS program.

### Result and Discussion

The results were demonstrated through different tables, such as the table of independent sample t-test between the scores of posttest, and analysis of covariance between the scores of pretest and posttest in both groups.

Independent Samples Test					
t-test for Equality of Means					
df	Sig. (2-tailed)			t	
knowledgeofL2adjectiv	Equal variances	5.350	58	0.000	
es	assumed				
	Equal variances not	5.350	55.404	0.000	
	assumed				

The result of table showed that the observed t was 5.350 while the critical value of t was 2.000, so observed t was > bigger than the critical t. and the amount of significant here was 0.0 that was

acceptable too. It was included that the null hypothesis of the study was rejected (t-critical was already computed and it's found in research in education book by Best and Kahn 2006, p.483).

**ANCOVA results for the experimental group of the study**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1916.745 <sup>a</sup>	1	1916.745	12.688	.001
Intercept	3493.370	1	3493.370	23.124	.000
<b>PreEX/PosEX</b>	<b>1916.745</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1916.745</b>	<b>12.688</b>	<b>.001</b>
Error	4230.055	28	151.073		
Total	106372.000	30			

The results of Table revealed that the effect of the independent variable (the contrastive analysis of two languages) on the dependent variable (Knowledge of L2 Adjectives) was significant. \*p < .05, so the result was acceptable and “relationship between the dependent variable and each of covariates is linear” (Pal lent, p.293).

**ANCOVA results for the control group of the study**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	766.344 <sup>a</sup>	1	766.344	6.720	.015
Intercept	753.895	1	753.895	6.611	.016
<b>PreCON/PosCON</b>	<b>766.344</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>766.344</b>	<b>6.720</b>	<b>.015</b>
Error	3193.023	28	114.037		
Total	50925.000	30			

The result was shown in this Table indicated that the value of F= 6.720 was under the 0.05, \*p < .05, thus there was the effect of the independent variable (ordinary ways of teaching adjectives as a treatment) on the dependent variable (Knowledge of L2 Adjectives) too. But the amount of this effect was lower than the effect in experimental group, and there was the significant difference between them. F-value in experimental group was upper than the F-value in control group. By the result of research study the null hypothesis was rejected and the result showed that the contrastive analysis of two languages had more positive effect than traditional teaching adjective on Iranian intermediate EFL learner's knowledge of L2 adjectives.



## Conclusion

Comparing and analyzing data revealed that there were many differences between English and Persian. In the present study, a significant difference was existed between the two groups on knowledge of L2 adjectives. The difference between the learners' performance of the experimental group, who received treatment based on the contrastive analysis of L1/L2 and the learners' performance in the control group, who received ordinal ways of teaching adjective, was significant. And although there was an amount of effect in both groups, but the effect in experimental group based on the contrastive analysis of two languages was stronger than the effect in control group with the ordinary way of teaching knowledge of adjectives.

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