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Patrizia Pierini

Comparing Italian and English

An Introduction

second edition
fully revised and enlarged



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Preface

The present volume is the second, fully revised and enlarged edition of *Comparing Italian and English: an Introduction*, published in 2004. The new edition has been revised to reflect recent developments in Contrastive Linguistics, and new features include: a reorganisation of the content in Part I, the rewriting of sections within existing chapters, updated references, further reading and new materials — the use of comparable corpora (chapter 3), the compound adjective (chapter 5), the verb (chapter 6), compliments (chapter 8), and definitions across genres (chapter 9).

The aim of this book is manifold: to make available the basics of contrastive research and practical case studies in a single book; to stimulate reflection and awareness of the asymmetries between Italian and English; to help and encourage readers old and new to the field to pursue their interest in this dynamic area of study. The user-friendly presentation of notions and data allows the reader to approach the subject with ease.

I conceived this project at the beginning of the 2000s. It arose out of my desire to contribute to Contrastive Linguistics with a work based on my year-long research activity in the field, and my experience as a teacher holding courses on contrastive topics. I am grateful to the colleagues and students at the University of “Roma Tre” who have unwittingly or otherwise contributed to this book during the period of gestation of the two editions. In particular, I would like to thank Paolo D’Achille and Stefania Nuccorini for their stimulating comments and alternative views.

Patrizia Pierini
December 2011

Introduction

Of even greater importance for the future technology of language and thought is what might be called 'contrastive linguistics'. This plots the outstanding differences among tongues — in grammar, logic and general analysis of experience.

Benjamin L. Whorf, *Languages and Logic* (1941)

Anyone who has attempted to learn a foreign language or to translate from one language into another has acquired a vast amount of direct proof that languages differ in many ways. Such differences often represent learning problems and translation problems, and may lead to errors. So researchers have defined and developed a field of enquiry — now about sixty-years old — aimed at comparing two languages in selected areas at all levels of analysis in order to identify convergences and divergences. Various names are used to refer to it: 'Contrastive Linguistics', the international label (hereafter abbreviated CL) used within this volume; 'Contrastive Studies', used in an Anglo-Saxon context, where the word 'studies' is present in the naming of many academic disciplines, such as Translation Studies; 'Contrastive Analysis', the more traditional label.

CL was founded by the American scholar Robert Lado in 1957 when in *Linguistics Across Cultures*, he advocated a contrastive analysis for applied purposes. There are two scholars that have been called forerunners of CL, and both advocated an interlinguistic comparison for theoretical and descriptive goals. They are Benjamin L. Whorf, who used the term 'contrastive linguistics' for the first time in 1941, and Vilém Mathesius, the founder of the Linguistic Circle of Prague. He spoke in the 1930s about the comparison of languages as a way of determining the characteristics of each language and gaining a deeper insight into their specific features (Pierini 1994).

CL emerged as a scholarly discipline in the 1960s and 1970s, and

was associated primarily with foreign language teaching (Ringbom 1994). It flourished in the U.S. (Agard — Di Pietro 1965 and 1966) and in Europe, where large-scale contrastive projects were established, comparing English and some European languages, such as German, Polish and Serbo-Croatian (James 1980:205). Then, the popularity of CL declined in the U.S., but not in Europe. The Polish project, in particular, produced an impressive number of theoretical contrastive studies (Fisiak 1980, 1981, 1984, 1990). Scholars such as James (1980) and Krzeszowski (1990) argued that CL still had much to offer, not only to foreign language teaching, but also to translation studies, the description of languages, linguistic typology and the study of language universals. In the 1990s, contrastive research began to be more popular within mainstream linguistics. It widened its perspectives by including not only pragmatics, but also discourse analysis, text linguistics and rhetoric. As a result, its scope has been broadened: in the past, the main emphasis was on grammar and phonology; attention is now paid to phenomena above the sentence level, as shown by studies such as *Contrastive Textology* (Hartmann, 1980), *Contrastive Pragmatics* (Oleksy, 1989; Aijmer, 2011) and *Contrastive Rhetoric* (Connor, 1996), which focuses on writing conventions that are culturally determined.

International journals have devoted special issues to CL: *Language Sciences* (1996) vol. 18, and *Linguistics* (1996) vol. 34/3. Research groups in Nordic Europe have carried out large-scale corpus-based contrastive projects, such as English — Norwegian and English — Swedish (Aijmer — Altenberg — Johansson 1996; Altenberg — Granger 2002). In 1998, John Benjamins Publisher has launched the journal *Languages in Contrast*.

CL has been able to evolve in many regards— theoretical assumptions, aims, methods, and approaches (structuralism, generativism, functionalism, corpus linguistics). It is now a discipline with major theoretical implications, which may contribute to the understanding of cross-linguistic variation, by analysing a wide range of phenomena from different theoretical perspectives and with different aims.

CL is now a very active field of research in Europe, as shown by international conferences: the 6th International Contrastive Linguistics Conference (Berlin, 2010), the 41st Annual Meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea* (Forlì, 17–20 September 2008) on “Languages in Contrast: Grammar, Translation, Corpora”, and the conferences

organised in Italy or by Italian associations (Calleri — Marellò 1982; Skytte — Sabatini 1999; Azzaro — Ulrych 1999; Porcelli — Maggioni — Tornaghi 2002; Korzen 2004). In Italy, some extensive contrastive studies with descriptive and/or applied goals have been published: on Italian — French, Arcaini (2000); on Italian — German, Blasco Ferrer (1999) and Nied (2009); on Italian — Spanish, Di Stefano — Gnocchi — Zamora Muñoz (1994); on Italian — English, Pierini (2004).

As highlighted by Altenberg — Granger (2002), there are three main reasons for the revival of interest in CL. Internationalisation and the gradual integration of Europe have created an increasing demand for multilingual and cross-cultural competence, for translation and foreign language teaching. A growing interest in real-life communication has shifted the focus away from the earlier interest in language system to language usage and authentic data. The third reason is the ‘computer revolution’ and the possibility of analysing language usage on the basis of electronic text corpora.

At present, CL permeates a number of fields and its impact is strong in fields such as bilingual lexicography (Altenberg — Granger 2002:33–36), translation studies, and the description of languages. Here, we would like to deal briefly with the relationship of CL with three fields of study. As to descriptive linguistics, Weigand (1998:vii) says that “essential features of individual languages can be discovered only by looking beyond the limits of our mother languages and including a contrastive perspective”. Comparison is, in general, a tool for acquiring knowledge, and when comparing two languages, we can contribute to a fine-grained description of areas in both languages. The findings can be particularly useful when the languages compared differ typologically. Italian and English exhibit different structural features, due to their belonging to two different branches of the Indo-European family — Romance vs. Germanic languages — and two different types — the inflectional and synthetic versus the isolant and analytic type.

With regard to foreign language teaching, Lado (1957) advocated a contrastive analysis of the learner’s mother tongue and the foreign language for pedagogical goals. Before him, the British scholar Henry Sweet had recognised the (positive and negative) influence of the learner’s mother tongue on the learning of a foreign language (Pierini 1989:136–177). In *The Practical Study of Languages* (1899), Sweet identi-

fied the divergences between mother tongue and foreign language as one of the sources of difficulty for the learner, and wrote: “A good deal of help might be afforded by systematic summaries of the conflicting associations — the confusions and divergences — in each pair of languages” (Sweet 1964:197).

At present, reflection on language — learning about language as distinct from learning language — is intended as a tool of linguistic and cultural education. The inclusion of a contrastive component in the syllabus of degree courses in foreign languages is suggested by a reading of the opening chapter of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001), where we read:

The plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its own cultural context expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples, he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which *languages interrelate and interact* [italics mine]. (§ 1.3)

... On a person’s cultural competence, the various cultures (national, regional, social) to which that person has gained access do not simply co-exist side by side; they are *compared, contrasted* and actively *interact* [italics mine] to produce an enriched, integrated pluricultural competence. (§ 1.4)

The interrelation taking place in the learner’s mind can be brought to a level of awareness by presenting and discussing contrastive information in the classroom. One of the first scholars who suggested to introduce contrastive analysis in the classroom is Marton (1981: 151), who writes:

Warning the learner of language interference, showing him clearly and in advance where it may appear and what he would keep in mind to curb it, may greatly facilitate foreign language learning.

More recently, Rossini Favretti (2002:64–72) has pointed out that a contrastive perspective in teaching can achieve relevant pedagogical goals. By fostering students’ awareness of the differences between L1 and L2, it contributes to preventing possible negative interference from their native language and may facilitate their learning of the

foreign language. By juxtaposing the two languages, the characteristics of L2 are highlighted and clarified. In addition, comparison helps students to understand that languages function in a different but equivalent way from a communicative point of view.

The next field is Translation Studies (TS). CL is closely related to translation: by virtue of their object of study, CL and TS share a great deal of common ground, since they “are interested in seeing how ‘the same thing’ can be said in other ways, although each field uses this information for different ends” (Chesterman 1998: 39).

Salkie *et al.* (1998:ix) point out that a great deal of contrastive work has appeared under the heading of TS. Translation journals such as *Meta* and *Babel* have regularly published papers comparing features of two languages, and some books about translation are rich in contrastive material. Just a title: the famous *Stylistique comparée du français et de l’anglais. Méthode de traduction* (1958) by Vinay and Darbelnet. The journal *Languages in Contrast* explicitly states its aim to promote interdisciplinary studies, “particularly those that make links between contrastive linguistics and translation”.

Various scholars have discussed the contribution of CL to TS. In her integrated approach to translation, Snell–Hornby (1988:31–34) mentions CL as one of the areas of linguistics relevant for translation for its great potential. In the title itself of his book, Hatim (1997) links contrastive text linguistics to translation theory. Hoey — Houghton (1998:49) claim that translation (*scil.* translated texts) can be a source of data for CL, and CL may provide explanations of problems encountered in translation. Granger (2003) argues that with the emergence of corpora, currently exploited in both fields, the two fields have started to converge.

In Italy, Arcaini (1991:15) and (2000:17–18), who sees CL as the founding discipline of translation, has suggested a re–orientation of the field. First, contrastive work has to consider linguistic facts in connection with the factors involved in the communicative situation. Second, contrastive work is regarded as an activity that does not merely identify the asymmetries between language A and language B. Rather, its aim is to bring together divergent linguistic items into a relationship of ‘homology’ with each other. (‘Homology’ is the redefinition of the concept of ‘equivalence’ in pragmatic, cultural and intertextual terms). Operationally, it means to mediate and ‘compensate for’ the asymme-

tries identified. Pierini (2001) maintains that one of the component parts of translation competence is ‘contrastive knowledge’: translators as mediators should be informed about of the main asymmetries between the two languages/cultures. So she suggests to include a contrastive section in translation courses aimed at illustrating the main asymmetries, which can concern language system, language use and world knowledge, linked to system and activated in discourse. In particular, the comparison of ‘parallel texts’ (two linguistically independent texts produced in culture A and B, defined in terms of common situationality and informativity) can be a useful tool for increasing the trainee’s ability to identify the asymmetries that can cause translation problems and solve them.

Written in an accessible style, the present volume aims to introduce Contrastive Linguistics and give a survey of the main divergences between Italian and English. The contrastive investigation reflects the broadening in scope of recent CL, and seeks to account for both language system and language usage as realised in discourse and text, taking into account situational, cultural and discursive aspects. It is designed to serve as a coursebook for students attending courses in “English Language and Translation” in degree programmes. It is also a solid introduction to all those who are interested in starting a contrastive study, or are already engaged in contrastive research.

The book draws on the relevant literature on the subject and original research carried out by the author over thirty years. It is also based on current research in such areas as lexical studies, pragmatics, discourse analysis, genre analysis and corpus linguistics. Part of the material has been tried and tested over several years in various monographic courses and modules. It is self-contained: linguistic notions, categories and terms are glossed within the text.

The book is divided into two parts, and the progression of ideas is from the introductory to the more complex. Part I: Introducing Contrastive Linguistics (chapters 1–3) discusses the rationale behind research: it introduces scope, aims, methods and basic notions in CL. Part II: Italian and English in Comparison and Contrast (chapters 4–9), consists of chapters comparing the two languages in selected areas, covering all levels of analysis, from phonetics/phonology to discourse and text analysis. The linguistic data are presented as sets of conversions: on the left side, the Italian and on the right side, the

corresponding English entity, so divergences clearly emerge. The conversions make for a 'reversible' reading: the reader can move from Italian to English and vice versa. The book allows readers to navigate the subject with ease: conceptual links between chapters and sections are cross-referenced.

The volume ends with a comprehensive bibliography, which accounts for the works on which it is based, and the section *Further Reading*, providing a list of studies published from the 1990s to 2011. It enables readers to explore the research that has been carried out and is currently being carried out, thus stimulating further thought and investigation in CL.

PART I

INTRODUCING
CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS

