

Making Languages Visible: Exploiting Contrastive Analysis in the Sanandean Creole-speaking Environment

Resumen

Dentro del marco de la enseñanza del idioma inglés en la isla de San Andrés, el presente texto propone una reflexión en torno a la metodología analítica contrastiva, como opción en la búsqueda de soluciones a las dificultades encontradas por los docentes sanandresanos en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje del idioma inglés estándar en el entorno isleño de habla criolla.

La naturaleza plurilingüe y pluricultural de la isla hace necesaria la realización de observaciones encaminadas al desarrollo de estrategias pedagógicas, y a la búsqueda de procedimientos y metodologías que contribuyan a orientar, de la manera más adecuada la enseñanza de lenguas. En este contexto, el artículo ilustra dos observaciones alrededor de la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa en la isla y contextualiza brevemente acerca de la situación lingüística y la enseñanza del inglés.

El eje fundamental del artículo consiste en la exposición y evaluación de la metodología contrastiva utilizada con 24 docentes de lengua inglesa, asistentes al Programa de Formación Permanente de Docentes, PFPD, en San Andrés Isla (2004-2005) desarrollado en convenio con la Universidad Nacional de Colombia y el MEN (Ministerio de Educación Nacional), y un grupo de estudiantes de secundaria del colegio Flowers Hill Bilingual School en San Andrés.

Los resultados de las observaciones cualitativas y cuantitativas, sugieren una significativa aceptación y receptividad del enfoque contrastivo, presentándose de esta manera como alternativa metodológica dentro del marco de la enseñanza de lenguas en ambientes multilingües y de habla criolla.

Introduction

Although ELT has been characterized successively by the domination of different methods, ranging from the structural to the communicative ones, class observations¹ carried out during my stay in San Andres Island (SAI) have shown that the inductive approach has been the most common underlying principle when teaching and learning standard English in public schools on the island. It is interesting to notice this trend in several English teachers, even though there is no empirical evidence to state that

1. The observations reported are based on my BEd. Dissertation submitted to the National University of Colombia. 2005. See References.

Por: Carlos-Alberto Aldana-Sánchez
Licenciado en Filología e Idiomas
con énfasis en inglés
Universidad Nacional de Colombia
caaldana@msn.com

inductive approaches may be superior to deductive ones. Therefore, it is my purpose with this paper to report on two experiences in teaching and learning English in the multilingual setting of San Andrés Island, using deductive contrastive analysis as opposed to the “traditional” inductive approach.

In this paper, the inductive approach will be mentioned on the assumption that exposure to comprehensible language will result in the internalizing of the linguistic system; and the deductive approach will be considered on the rationale that it is necessary to understand some elements of the linguistic system before putting them into practice and, as a result, this understanding combined with memorization and frequent use will result in the internalizing of the system.

The Context: a Problematic Crossroad

In this part of the world, as it is many other *creole* speaking communities, there is a common misguided attitude and unawareness which, unfortunately, reside in people who should know better –like teachers- that the *creole* they speak is as much a language as English or other languages in the world are. Sometimes it is forgotten that human languages are complex phenomena organized for the expression of meanings or messages, which on the surface manifest differently, but at their roots, are essentially the same.

However, many people still believe that Sanandreaan *creole* is an improper or broken version of English and allow social factors and the stigma imposed on *creoles* to affect their judgments. Perhaps, they forget the genesis and coming into being of languages, ignoring that, possibly, they were formed and developed in response to conditions similar to those of *creole*.

One important difficulty resides in persuading people -teachers and students in particular- that *creole* is not the product of a failed attempt at learning standard English, just as English is not the product of a failed attempt at learning the different languages that influenced it, but the result of a rearrangement of languages in social contexts.

The reflection this paper focuses on is based on the proposal that English teachers could arrange lessons in which students learn to notice that messages are said one way in English and another way in *creole*; that the *creole* language and the English language have their own rules and regulations: in pronunciation, intonation, grammar, discourse, and much else; and that it is a false belief that the English way is right and the *creole* way wrong. “Di buai de plie” is not inferior in any way to “The boy is playing”. Consequently, this approach intends to stress the fact that both languages are two different ways of grammatically expressing the same, and that this knowledge will help students have a better understanding of both languages.

Two Experiences on Contrastive Analysis

This paper aims to illustrate two experiences on contrastive analysis in the Sanandreaan *creole*-speaking environment. The focus of these observations were young sanandreaan students from the Flowers Hill Bilingual School, a very traditional secondary school on the island, and twenty-four English teachers enrolled in an intensive teacher development program, PFPD (Programa de Formación permanente de Docentes, San Andrés, 2004-2005), sponsored by the MEN (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia) and developed by the Department of Foreign Languages of the National University of Colombia (Bogotá) in coordination with its headquarters at San Andres.

The two groups were oriented with a basically deductive approach with extensive explanation. In the case of the secondary students, a computer program was especially designed to teach English contrasted to Sanandean *creole* (SC) at beginning and intermediate levels (Aldana C. 2005). In the case of the teacher training program, sets of copies were used.

The essential difference between the traditional inductive approach and the treatment given to these groups laid on the teaching of the Contrastive Analysis (CA) input. The course contents were taught on the basis of explanations on the differences and similarities between the two languages. For the secondary school students, for instance, such explanation was necessarily in Spanish at the beginning of classes but it decreased by the end of the course to the point where explanation was completely done in English. Teachers enrolled in the teacher training program were taught entirely in English.

As the nature of the methodologies used is crucial to the implications of the findings, it is important to be aware of the two approaches and the essential differences between them. The classes in the school followed basically a structural-functional method with the regular teacher. They were inductive in that the language used in any one lesson was paramount. So, where explanation was used, it had a summarizing role and emphasized form rather than meaning.

With the alternative methodology proposed, the same book was used, and the selection of the items was based on those parts of the syllabus susceptible to CA treatment. They were:

1. Greetings (including cultural differences) (for both teachers and students)
2. Pluralization (teachers and students)
3. Tense marking (teachers only)
4. Conditionals. (teachers only)
5. Lexical and pronunciation awareness (teachers and students)

The lessons began with an explanation on how the two languages differed with respect to a particular item. Various exercises were used to afford practice on the items, and great emphasis was placed on the understanding of grammar, lexical meaning and the importance to use and differentiate languages properly.

20 hours were taught to the school students and 15 to the teachers enrolled in the training program. There were various series of tests. The group of students from the Flowers Hill Bilingual School was assessed using the computer program developed for this purpose. The teachers, instead, solved exercises consisting of sentence completion with multiple choice exercises, fill-in-the-gap drills, oral interventions and controlled compositions.

The following is an example of one of the exercises done in class with the group of teachers²:

2. Exercise based on the book *The comparative analysis of Jamaican Creole and English*. By Brown, V. Corvado, P, and others. University of West Indies Press (2001). And *A contrastive Grammar Islander – Caribbean standard English – Spanish*. By Bartens, A. - Academia Scientiarum Fennica. (2003).

EXERCISE

1. Combine the tense marker [**Wehn - de**] with these Sanandreaan *creole* verbs. Does it mark simple past or past-before-past? Can you explain the differences between the verbs?

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Tek (take) | 5. Biliv (believe) |
| 2. Disaya (desire) | 6. Sik (be sick) |
| 3. Kaal (call) | 7. Lov (love) |
| 4. Fala (follow) | 8. Laan (learn) |

Here is a sample answer to help you along:

1. [**Wehn - de**] + TEK >>> *Past-before-past*.

This is because TEK is an **action verb** and with the marker [**Wehn - de**] produces *Past-before-past*.

2. [**Wehn - de**] + DISAYA >>> *Simple past*.

This is because DISAYA is a **stative verb** and with the marker [**Wehn - de**] produces *Simple past*.

2. Translate these sentences into SC. When *MUST* a tense marker appear in the SC translation, and when can it be left out? Can you explain the difference between the sentences in this respect?

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. They took the boys home | 5. They believed the story |
| 2. She desired a better life | 6. The dog was sick |
| 3. He called the dog | 7. He loved dogs |
| 4. The dog followed her home | 8. She learned to write patois |

Here is a sample answer to help you along:

- Dem tek di buai dem juom.

3. Make some sentences of your own with the following verbs, and explain the tense of the sentences:

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. Trai (try) | 3. Waan (want) |
| 2. Rait (write) | 4. Liv (live) |

The results

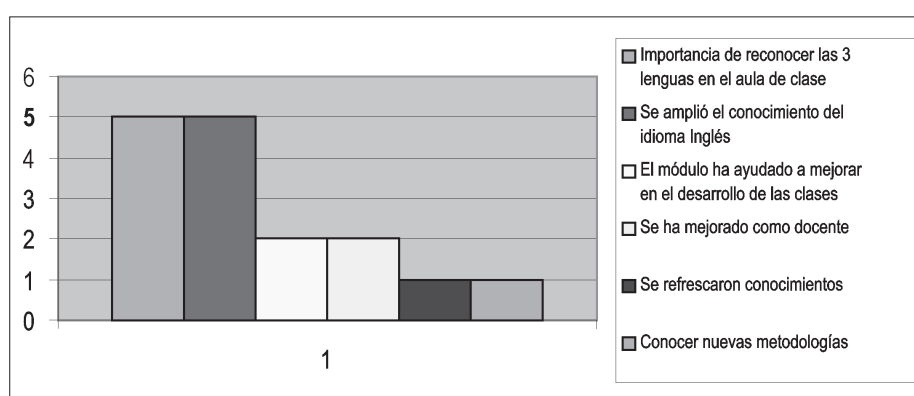
Chart 1 contains the results of a survey carried out at Flowers Hill Bilingual School with respect to the methodology used. To facilitate students' understanding, the survey was done in Spanish but explanations were given in English. The number of students and evaluation criteria are explained below.

| | Grado 9 | | | | | Grado 10 | | | | | Grado 11 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|---|----|----|----------|---|---|----|----|----------|---|---|----|----|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | | | | | |
| (1) Receptividad | | | | 3 | 12 | | | 1 | 4 | 18 | | | | 19 | 5 | | | | | | | | |
| (2) Uso del computador | | | | | 15 | | | | 2 | 21 | | | 2 | | 22 | | | | | | | | |
| (3) Percepción de lo aprendido | | | | 4 | 9 | | 1 | | 13 | 9 | | 1 | 2 | 16 | 5 | | | | | | | | |
| (4) Uso del modelo compartivo inglés-creole | | | 5 | 10 | | | | 3 | 13 | 7 | | | | 3 | 21 | | | | | | | | |
| (5) Metodología utilizada por el profesor | | | | 2 | 13 | | | | 4 | 19 | | | | 8 | 16 | | | | | | | | |
| Totales | 0 | 0 | 5 | 19 | 49 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 36 | 74 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 46 | 69 | | | | | | | | |
| <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Noveno grado: 15 estudiantes</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Décimo grado: 23 estudiantes</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Undécimo grado: 24 estudiantes</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">5 = Si, muchísimo</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">4 = Si, bastante</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">3 = Más o menos</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">2 = Poco</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">1 = No</td> </tr> </table> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Noveno grado: 15 estudiantes | Décimo grado: 23 estudiantes | Undécimo grado: 24 estudiantes | 5 = Si, muchísimo | 4 = Si, bastante | 3 = Más o menos | 2 = Poco | 1 = No |
| Noveno grado: 15 estudiantes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Décimo grado: 23 estudiantes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Undécimo grado: 24 estudiantes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 = Si, muchísimo | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 = Si, bastante | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 = Más o menos | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 = Poco | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 = No | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Chart 2 shows the results obtained from a qualitative evaluation of the English Language module at the PFPD (Teachers development program) SAI 2005.

It is important to emphasize that this evaluation included aspects other than just the use of the Contrastive Analysis method. Yet, for the purposes of our analysis, special attention will be given to the role of CA in the learning and improvement of the teachers' language knowledge at phonological, morphological and syntactic levels; and, the influence of the mother tongue on the basis that examination of the similarities, differences or partially similar features between Sanandreaan *creole* and English would help to improve language knowledge and to predict possible errors. (See questions 1 and 2).

| Módulo de Lengua Inglesa | |
|---|---|
| Importancia de reconocer las 3 lenguas en el aula de clase | 5 |
| Se amplió el conocimiento del idioma inglés | 5 |
| El módulo ha ayudado a mejorar en el desarrollo de las clases | 2 |
| Se ha mejorado como docente | 2 |
| Se refrescaron conocimientos | 1 |
| Conocer nuevas metodologías | 1 |



The general conclusion we can draw from these observations is that the treatment of the CA input in both groups was significantly effective. Nonetheless, ambiguity remains in the overall interpretation of these findings as multiple factors influence language learning processes: explanation and subsequent understanding, time and emphasis devoted to CA input, availability of materials and resources, difficulty of topics, age, and cultural characteristics, amongst others.

Although these experiences provide interesting information for English Language Teaching (ELT) on the island, the assumption that similarities will lead to facilitation and differences will cause interferences is only a prediction and a partial understanding of the problems and prospects of ELT in San Andrés. Difficulties in teaching and learning are not necessarily constrained to the predictions of a contrastive study. Culture, teachers' competence, motivation, attitude of learners, teaching methods and instructional materials are other variables that can significantly influence these processes. It seems to be clear that further research is needed to discover which particular treatment of CA is optimally effective in both teaching and learning Standard English in the particular environment of San Andrés island.

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