Abstract

The main subject area “Language learning” in the curriculum for English states that learners should be able to see “relationships between English, one’s native language and other languages”, presumably to facilitate English language learning. I will look into some areas where Norwegian and English are different and discuss how awareness of such differences can be beneficial to learners. Arguably, if knowledge about relationships between languages is to work as a strategy for learning English, learners need to be aware of relationships between linguistic forms and their meanings and functions.
The curriculum

Language learning
The main subject area Language learning focuses on what is involved in learning a new language and seeing relationships between English, one's native language and other languages. It covers knowledge about the language, language usage and insight into one's own language learning. The ability to evaluate own language usage and learning needs and to select suitable strategies and working methods is useful when learning and using the English language.

Selected competence aims for “Language learning”

The aims of the studies are to enable pupils to

- [after year 7] “identify some linguistic similarities and differences between English and one’s native language”
- [after year 10] “identify significant linguistic similarities and differences between English and one’s native language and use this knowledge in one’s own language learning”
- [after Vg1] “evaluate and use different situations, working methods and learning strategies to further develop one’s English-language skills”
A blast from the past?

Robert Lado 1957: *Linguistics Across Cultures*

- “…in the comparison between native and foreign language lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning” (1957: 1)
- “The teacher who has made a comparison of the foreign language with the native language of the students will know better what the real learning problems are and can better provide for teaching them. He gains an insight into the linguistic problems involved that cannot easily be achieved otherwise.” (1957: 2)
- “The most important new thing in the preparation of teaching materials is the comparison of native and foreign language and culture in order to find the hurdles that really have to be surmounted in the teaching”. (1957: 3)

A more recent approach: the Integrated Contrastive Model

- A combination of Contrastive analysis and Interlanguage analysis.
- Contrastive analysis to predict and diagnose transfer and learner problems.
- Transfer can be negative or positive.
- CA cannot explain all NL/IL differences.

The integrated contrastive model (quoted from Gilquin 2000/2001: 100)
The integrated contrastive model in research

Contrastive Analysis
- The English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (ENPC)
- 50 text extracts in Norwegian and 50 in English, all with translations into the other language.
- Can be used for surveying cases of differences between English and Norwegian, which might potentially cause learning difficulties.

Interlanguage Analysis
- Corpora of English writing by Norwegian advanced learners compared to corpora of English written by native speakers of English.
- ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English) – argumentative essays.
- VESPA (Varieties of English for Specific Purposes dAtabase) – disciplinary writing.
- Native speaker corpora with similar structure and content (LOCNESS, BAWE)

First language: a help and a hindrance

...the foreign learners’ first language is both a help and a hindrance to their learning of English: a help because they understand the nature of language and can draw analogies with the patterns and processes in their own languages; a hindrance because sometimes the analogies are false.

The role of grammar teaching is to provide some controls in the early stages in the acquisition of English. At a later stage it can help to guide students away from permanently internalizing wrong generalizations about English.

Greenbaum (1988: 31)
English, one's native language and other languages

• “One’s native language” – Norwegian is not everybody’s native language
  – On the other hand, Norwegian is a language that should be mastered to some extent by everybody
  – And not least – it’s probably the only language other than English that we as teachers and all the pupils have in common.
  – i.e. Norwegian must be the primary comparison.

• Other languages – what are they?

More difficult to understand English by learners with a very different L1
English and Norwegian are relatively similar

- The many similarities between English and Norwegian are helpful to learners; differences may present challenges.
- Example 1: Word order rules
  - Similarity: *Har du vært i England?* – *Have you been to England?*
  - Difference: *I England er fotball utrolig populært – In England is football incredibly popular.*
- Example 2: Modal auxiliaries
  - Similarity: *Du kunne ha skadet deg* – *You could have hurt yourself.*
  - Difference: *Han hadde ikke kunnet unngå det.* – *He had not could avoid it.*

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Examples of transfer (Norwegian–English)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive ☀</th>
<th>Negative ☀</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognate</td>
<td>similar meaning/use (e.g. hear/here)</td>
<td>Different meaning/use → false friend (eventual/ eventually)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collocation</td>
<td>both/all parts of collocation can be transferred (gi en gave / give a gift)</td>
<td>Different word combinations (holde tale / give a speech)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor/abstraction</td>
<td>same type of metaphor, potential for abstraction: <em>sterk som en okse/hest → strong as an ox/a horse; på rett spor → on the right track</em></td>
<td>?strong as a bear, *sleep like a stone [log]; *lucky pig [thing]; være på bærtur ≠ be out berry-picking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar feature</td>
<td>Similar in L1 and L2, e.g. use of present perfect (<em>I have read the book → jeg har lest boka</em>)</td>
<td>Different in L1 and L2: e.g. (un-)countability: news are, the furnitures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>if similar items have similar frequencies in L1 and L2</td>
<td>Overuse / underuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse feature</td>
<td>Similar norms in L1 and L2</td>
<td>Different norms in L1 and L2 → pragmatic oddity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of errors based on negative transfer from Norwegian L1 (lower secondary school)

1. London, where it is about 150.000 people ...
2. My brother could easily made the bonfire.
3. He screamed all he could.
4. It's a fantastic weather.
5. Sometimes I writes some poems on English.
6. That letter have I an answer to.
7. After a while the clock was very much.

Thinking of language as both structure and meaning

- Grammar instruction needs to take meaning and function into account.
- “Having the grammar is not enough: it is a tool that you have to learn to use competently, and the apprenticeship to this competence is language awareness” (James 1996)
- Consciousness raising → facilitating noticing (Ellis 2012)
  - Noticing features of one’s mother tongue, about the foreign language and about the relationship between them.
Surface similarities – meaning differences

• Han vil bli fotballspiller – He will be a football player.
• Han skal bli fotballspiller – He shall become a football player.
  • Transfer may produce grammatically correct utterances that nevertheless do not convey the intended meaning
  • “Formal similarity is no guarantee that there is identity of use” (Johansson 2012)

Modal auxiliaries

• Pairs of cognates – same origin, similar form, potentially false friends
  – skal – shall, skulle – should
  – vil – will, ville – would

• Frequency information from English and Norwegian fiction per 100,000 words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Norwegian</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>skal / shall</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skulle / should</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vil / will + ’ll</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>82 + 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ville / would</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (ENPC)
What is behind the numbers?

- The most common future-time-referring expressions in English and Norwegian use *will* (*’ll*) and *skal*, respectively.
  - The use of *vil* for future in Norwegian easily carries a connotation of willingness (*Liket vil obduseres.???)*
  - The use of *shall* for future in English, outside questions with first-person subject, is rare and denotes strong obligation or destiny (*You shall not kill; He shall not get away with it.*)
  - English *should* means *ought* (i.e. obligation) and can’t be used for “future in the past”.
- Some uses of *would* are not matched by *ville*:
  - Habit in the past: Fibich *would end up* taking the letters home with him. (*AB1*) → *Det endte gjerne med at Fibich tok med seg brevene hjem.*
  - Future in the past as a “matter of course”: Everybody *would be* friendly to him, though. (*JSM1*) → *Skjønt alle kom til å være vennlige mot ham.*

Any learner problems? (Evidence from NICLE)

- A certain overuse/misuse of *shall*
  - One may ask: Why *shall* some people have more money than others?
  - What the society wants is that all *shall* be equal.
- A certain overuse/misuse of *should*
  - A great man once said: "I have a dream!" This *should* not pass into history as a single sentence quoted by one single man many years ago.
  - How can anyone predict what your difficulties would be when you *should* decide abortion or not?
- Use of modals as infinitive forms
  - The thing is that probably people are too busy and they’re not aware that they might *should* give dreaming and imagination time.
Preposition + that are like dog and cat

A that-clause does not follow a preposition in English, but Norwegian at-clauses occur in this position:

- Jeg var helt sikker på at Susanne stod rett ved siden av meg.
- I was quite sure that Susanne was standing right next to me.

Negative transfer found in NICLE:

- …making us scared and at the same time aware of that there exists danger that could harm everybody.
- I will conclude with that it has never been easier to dream and to fulfil your dreams than it is in our world today.
- When we are talking about that some are more equal than others, it’s based on the individual alikeness, interests.

A student text (Vg1): A speech to schoolmates about the problem of bullying and harassment

... I have to say that our society today is better then it was for a couple of years ago, I mean, when we talk about harassing and bullying. The society today isn’t stainless either, but as I said, better. And it’s necessary to do something. What can we do about the harassing and bullying? If everybody could help and behave, isn’t the society going to grow more happily then? Something that is crossing my mind is; why in hell should people make shit of each other? Does that make a happy life? What about what the victim feel? And what does the bully feel? Happy? …. I don’t think so. This makes the society more unsafe and doubtful, more unfriendly and of course less happy.
Are any of the non-native features related to Norwegian?

I have to say that our society today is better than it was for a couple of years ago. I mean, when we talk about harassing and bullying. The society today isn’t stainless either, but as I said, better. And it’s necessary to do something.

What can we do about the harassing and bullying? If everybody could help and behave, isn’t the society going to grow more happily then?

Something that’s crossing my mind is: why in hell should people make shit of each other? Does that make a happy life? What about what the victim feels? And what does the bully feel? Happy? … I don’t think so. This makes the society more unsafe and doubtful, more unfriendly and of course less happy.

How can we help students to see “relationships between English, one’s native language and other languages”?

- Parallel texts (Haukås 2014)
  - Translations, including subtitles
  - Other parallel texts, e.g. instruction manuals in different languages
- Error correction
  - Own errors; other people’s errors
  - Google translate
Parallel texts (Kjell Askildsen, *En plutselig frigjørende tanke*)


His suspicion was confirmed: the shortest way from Osmundsen's residence to the Police Station went past Irma's. But how had Osmundsen been able to track him down? Had he simply followed him to the gate and afterward described him to some other tenants who gave him his exact address? Carl Lange didn't stop outside the apartment house, and he didn't walk in. He walked another couple of hundred yards, then turned and went home by an alternate route. He didn't wish to be seen. Again he had a feeling he was doing something illegal. On the stairs he ran into Osmundsen coming down, alone. Carl Lange, engrossed in his own thoughts, was caught off guard. "There you are," Osmundsen said. He didn't answer.

Correction of errors that reveal transfer

1. London, where it is about 150.000 people ...
2. My brother could easily made the bonfire.
3. He screamed all he could.
4. It's a fantastic weather.
5. Sometimes I writes some poems on English.
6. That letter have I an answer to.
7. After a while the clock was very much.
Kjell Askildsen through Google translate – with apologies!

It was as he had suspected: the shortest path from OSMUNDESEN residency to the Police Station went past Irma. But how had Osmundsen have identified him? Had he simply just followed him to the gate and since described him for other tenants and given the exact address? Carl Lange did not stop outside the apartment building, and he did not enter. He walked a few hundred meters further, so he turned and went another way home. He would not be seen. Again he had the feeling of doing something illegal. In the recovery, he met Osmundsen, on the way down, alone. Carl Lange went in separate tanks and were caught off guard. - Where are They jo, said Osmundsen. He did not answer.

How much do they need to know about grammar? (or how little can they get away with?)

- Grammar on a “needs-to-know” basis.
- Metalanguage not for its own sake, but as tools for generalizing, talking about language.
- Grammar patterns attached to lexical items
- Modal auxiliaries
  - The meaning of individual auxiliaries / auxiliary forms
  - Future construction(s) and their meanings
- Prepositions & that-clauses (or infinitive clauses)
  - Prepositions (such as ...)
  - That-clause – can be explained by reference to its translation.
From research to teaching (S. Granger)

- The L1 – L2 comparison is helpful, as it helps "teachers identify the lexical, grammatical and discourse features that differentiate learners' production from the targeted norm and are therefore a very rich source of data for pedagogical applications." (2009: 19)
  - Note: L1/L2 here both refer to English, as a first and second language, respectively. But a similar principle could be applied to native and target language comparisons.

Selecting topics for teaching and awareness raising

![Diagram](Diagram.png)

Areas of formal and functional similarity and difference – potential for positive and negative transfer

- Learner needs
- Teaching objectives
- Teachability

Select | Ignore
Cross-linguistic language awareness

• Focus on noticing features in one’s L1 and the language(s) to be learnt (taught).
  – A certain degree of generalization, systematization

• Develop a cross-linguistic awareness that helps the learner to filter out misleading parallels between languages (“false friends” in lexis and grammar), but take advantage of the real similarities.

• Move from the compartmentalized view of L1/L2 (and L3) competence to a more multilingual (plurilingual) view.

And no need to throw out the baby with the bath water

• Teaching material often highlight contrastive points, e.g.
  – Som norsk har engelsk to måter å uttrykke større grad av noe på. Den ene er ved å legge til endelsene -er og -est,…
  – På norsk kan adjektiv og adverb se helt like ut, .... På engelsk er det ofte slik at adjektiv og adverb har ulik form. *(Exploring English)*
  – The two English words *it* and *there* are easily confused by Norwegians since they can both correspond to the Norwegian word *det*.
  – English uses possessive determiners in some contexts where Norwegian uses a definite article... *(Introducing English Grammar)*

• “Seeing relationships between English, one’s native language and other languages” is not yet another item to fit into the lesson, but can be a shortcut to language learning.

• In other words: *There’s hope in hanging snore!*
References / further reading
