Making the most of Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis

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Since the advent of learner corpus research in the late 1980s, the learner corpus has established itself as major resource in interlanguage analysis, gradually coming to maturity and earning respectability among SLA practitioners. One method of analysis that has been very popular among researchers is Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA), which compares native and learner varieties of language (see Granger 1996). This method has highlighted an unprecedented number of features that characterize learner interlanguages. To date, however, most studies have failed to exploit the full potential of the CIA model, focusing on the comparison between a learner corpus and a native reference corpus, but neglecting the comparison of different learner corpora of the same target language. In our presentation, we will report on a large scale study of the lexical means used in the sixteen L1 sub-corpora available in the second edition of the *International Corpus of Learner English* (Granger et al. forthcoming) to fulfil organizational or rhetorical functions typically prominent in academic writing, e.g. contrasting (*on the other hand, in contrast to*), exemplifying (*for example*, X *is an example of* Y) or concluding (*in conclusion, it can be concluded that*). We will show that comparisons of several learner corpora are indispensable if we want to identify the distinguishing features of learner language at a given stage of development (cf. Bartning 1997) and that learner language "looks rather different when we look at a lot of it at once" to use Sinclair's (1991:100) phrasing. By way of illustration, we will compare data from one learner corpus with results from the ICLE as a whole. We will also show that the type of reference corpus chosen (e.g. a corpus of native student vs. professional writing) may have an influence on the results and that this choice should be made in accordance with one's research question.

References
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