Contrastive Analysis And The Teaching Of The French Sound System

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is, firstly, to consider the underlying assumptions and rationale behind the contrastive analysis hypothesis (henceforth CA), and, secondly, to apply the CA hypothesis as a methodological tool in teaching the French sound system to Malay learners. More specifically, the first part of the paper will discuss the various controversial claims made for CA and its implications on pedagogy; the second part will study the direct application of CA as a possible linguistic strategy in predicting and locating phonological errors among Malay learners of French as a foreign language.

Contrastive Analysis: Background and Assumptions

Anyone interested in the field of applied linguistics would have known of the many controversies surrounding CA and the widely divergent views on its feasibility and usefulness in L_2 or foreign language teaching. Nevertheless we shall consider its claims and assumptions so as to provide us with a better insight into its applicability in pedagogy

The term 'Contrastive Linguistics' was first used by the American linguist, Benjamin Lee Whorf in 1941 in an article called 'Language and Logic' In 1945 Charles Fries published *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language,* a book which was responsible for adding a new dimension to foreign language learning. It was, however, Robert Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957) that gave the impetus to studies in contrastive analysis. Fries (1945·9) claims that.

> the most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner

Lado in the preface of his book (1957) writes that:

> the plan of the book rests on the assumption that we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student. In our view, the preparation of up-to-date pedagogical and experimental materials must be based on this kind of comparison.

The two quotations above briefly tell us what CA is initially all about Ever since the 1950's, CA has played a major role in applied linguistics, especially in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Two years after the publication of *Linguistics Across Cultures,* the Centre for Applied Linguistics in Washington started work on the *Contrastive Structure Series*

edited by Charles Ferguson. The aim of the contrastive studies undertaken was to discuss the similarities and differences between English and the five major European languages, namely French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish. Three such studies, i.e. English-German, English-Spanish and English-Italian were published between 1962-1965 Despite the influence of transformational grammar (TG) at the time, the *Contrastive Structure Series* was clearly part of the Fries-Lado structural linguistic tradition.

The fundamental assumptions underlying the CA hypothesis are as follows.

(i) Learning a language is a question of habit formation.
(ii) Students of a foreign language transfer the items, categories and structures of their native language to the target language. This means that their old habits may interfere with their learning task.
(iii) Interference (or negative transfer) takes place at all levels of linguistic structure (phonological, syntactic and semantic) and affects both productive and receptive skills
(iv) Comparison will reveal both the differences and similarities between native language and target language.
(v) Systematic comparison depends on the availability of scientific description of the two languges concerned. These descriptions must be based on the same theoretical framework.
(vi) Comparison of whole languages is impossible; we can only compare equivalent sub-systems.
(vii) Similarities between native language and target language will cause no problems, but differences will. The student's learning task is in fact the sum of the differences between the two languages.
(viii) On the basis of the differences between two linguistic systems CA can predict the difficulties the students will have.
(ix) Difficulties can be arranged in hierarchies based on the extent to which the two systems diverge.
(x) It is the task of the linguist to discover the differences and the task of the text book writer to develop appropriate teaching materials

The above points summarise the major claims of the CA hypothesis. They sound very well in theory but what can be said about the feasibility or practicability of these claims? What do we understand by a scientific description of a language? How do we carry out a systematic comparison of two languages? These were the kinds of questions asked, and such questions eventually led CA to be the subject of many controversies and much scepticism.

The CA Debate and Implications on Pedagogy

Despite the fact that CA has given a new insight into foreign language teaching, we cannot overlook the various arguments and disputes put forth by linguistis over its assumptions and applicability It is the claims made for applied CA that have led to differences in opinion.

Subsequent works in the field, particularly in the second half of the 1960s, indicate criticisms which challenge the earlier assumptions made. These range from the assertion that the claims made for CA as stated by Lado are too

strong, to the opinion that CA has very little to contribute towards improving L_2 or foreign language learning. There are some linguists who insist that a contrastive description of two languages is impossible without a particular theoretical framework, whereas others are of the opinion that in language teaching it is not necessary to have a linguistic model as the underlying frame of reference.

Criticisms directed against the methodological procedure of CA focussed on the fact that CA was concerned mainly with differences between L_1 and L_2 and with interlingual interferences, without paying much attention to other factors that affect learners' performance.

The word 'predict' seems to be the keyword in Lado's statement and it follows that it is essentially the predictive power of CA that seems to be the main point of argument among linguists. There are two bases for prediction as claimed by Carl James (1980:1981), 'either one can predict by generalisation from observed instances, or, more ambitiously, one can predict one phenomenon on the basis of observation of some other phenomenon' While the error analyst would choose the first path, the 'contrastivist' (a linguist involved in CA) would prefer the second.

Two related questions here would be *what* it is that CAs are supposed to predict, and how *reliable* will be the prediction. James thinks that Lado uses 'predict' to mean 'identify' and not 'prognosticate' What Lado's CA identifies moreover is just two categories of errors, the hard and the easy The 'reliability' of these errors is yet another issue. They can fail in two ways: either in being indeterminate or in being wrong. Indeterminacy refers to the CA being unable to specify which of two or more structurally likely substitutions the learner will select. For example, as Wilkins (1968) pointed out, a CA can predict that a French speaker will use either L_1 /s/ – /z/ or /t/ – /d/, for English /θ/ – /ð/, but not which one. Cases of false CA predictions are again of two kinds They may predict errors which fail to materialise, or, conversely, fail to predict those which do. Gradman (1971), for example, questions Lado's CA prediction that English learners of French will find the phoneme /ʒ/ difficult in word-initial position, as in 'jamais' or 'jaune', since it does not appear in the English phonological structure. However, after having observed English speakers in cinema queues, he found that they could easily pronounce the /ʒ/ in Dr *Zh*ivago without any difficulty!

Ronald Wardhaugh (1970) distinguishes two versions of the CA hypothesis. a strong version and a weak version. While both versions are based on the assumption of L_1 interference, they differ in that the strong version claims predictive power, i.e. two languages can be contrasted in order to predict learners' difficulties, while the weak version claims merely to diagnose errors that have been committed, i.e. only an explanation of actually observed interference phenomenon can be expected. The strong version is *a priori* in nature whereas the weak version is *a posteriori,* which forms part of the field of Error Analysis.

Jack Richards (1974:172-88) pursues the problem of error identification without prior CA in what he calls 'a non-contrastive approach to error analysis' While he maintains that some errors are the result of L_1 interference (interlingual), others are not. The second type of errors he considers as intralingual

and developmental and he attributes them to i) over generalisation, ii) ignorance of rule restrictions, iii)
concept hypothesised.

Another tenet of the CA doctrine that came under attack was the claim that 'what is different is difficult and what is similar is easy' Pit Corder (1973) makes two important observations about this. He does not think there is a connection between 'difference' and 'difficulty' The fact that 'difficulty' is a psycholinguistic rather than a linguistic matter makes it hard to predict whi features in L_2 are difficult to learn and which are not. Corder suggests that learners must not only learn the differences between L_1 and L_2, they must also discover the similarities.

Dulay and Burt (1974) in
which analyses errors of children learning L_2, do not deny that there is evidence to partly confirm the CA hypothesis at the product level (i.e. level of actual errors), but the hypothesis does not seem very valid at the process level (i.e. level of its actual theoretical assumptions). This is so since psychologists are questioning its theoretical base (i.e. the interference theory). Dulay and Burt observe that the child's organisation of L_2 does not include transfer (positive or negative) or comparison with his native language, but relies on his dealing with L_2 syntax as a system.

Despite what James (1980:166) calls the 'pangs of insecurity concerning its theoretical foundations' it seems to us that CA still has high 'face validity' Judging from the number of CA projects funded in the last ten years and from the number of papers written and published, it will be difficult to infer that CA is now in the doldrums The 'contrastive industry' looks optimistic although the proponents, having had to live with a protracted 'crisis of confidence', are reducing some of the earlier claims and formulating them with greater caution and modesty Fe T Otanes (1978:165) thinks that.

> to abandon contrastive analysis as a tool in
> discarding the hammer just because power-driven tools have been acquired. Just as there are tools in carpentry where the hammer is useful and even irreplaceable, so perhaps there are tasks in language teaching where CA is not only useful but indispensable as a complement to other tools

This is to substantiate Corder's (1974.17) belief that:

> contrastive analysis, error analysis and elicitation procedures, used as a trio of complementary techniques, are going to represent one of the most powerful research tools in our repertoire.

Phonological Contrasts

Since the second half of my paper applies CA to the sound system or phonology, I would like to touch a little on the subject of phonological contrasts in general.

Most of the valid CA evidence seems to be at the level of phonology rather than syntax. Besides attributing this to the fact that phonology is a closed sub-system which is more feasible or amenable to exhaustive description, it is also the fact that the sound system is a basic feature of a language and

deserves priority of description. Indeed it is a traditional 'procedural orientation' as James calls it, that in the task of producing a total description of a language, phonology comes before morphology, and morphology before syntax. Phonological problems are much easier to handle than syntactic or semantic ones, and it is hardly surprising that the volumes of the *Constructive Structure Series* devoted to phonology should have been more successful than the others. However, even in the field of phonology the problem could be quite complex if morphophonemic and suprasegmental aspects are involved.

Phonology consists of two areas of analysis.

(i) *phonetic,* which is concerned with an accurate representation of speech sounds in all their varieties called 'phones',

(ii) *phonemic,* which is much more essential for the understanding of speech sounds with reference to their function. Such sounds are referred to as 'phonemes' A phoneme is defined as 'the minimum acoustically significant unit of speech which is in meaningful contrast with all other such units in a given language' (Kadler·1970).

In a phonological analysis the spotlight is on contrasting phonemes. This is then the concern of the second part of this paper

Hans Wolf in his article *'Phonemic Structure and the Teaching of Pronunciation'* (1955-56) says that:

> learning to pronounce a second language is more than the acquisition of articulatory habits. It amounts to a complete reshuffling of the phonemic system, the creation of new contrastive patterns and the establishment of entirely new sets of distinctive features. Phonemic substitutions will be made in terms of the learner's system of distinctive features and are predictable if the distinctive features in both L_S and L_L are known.

This assumes the applicability of the CA hypothesis at the phonological level.

Phonemes are not learnt in isolation but always in relation to other phonemes. To determine whether a sound in a given language is a phoneme, we must find at least one contrastive minimal pair of words, e.g. /pin/ — /bin/ Learning a new language is actually learning to operate a set of contrasts and this can only be possible if the contrast itself gives the learner the opportunity to relate one sound to another As a solitary unit, a phoneme has no phonetic form. We can only know how it is realised phonetically when we know its position and phonetic environment. The contrastive technique as Wilkins (1972.51) claims is used both to:

(i) ensure that the pupil does not simply subsitute the nearest mother tongue segment for the one he is acquiring.

(ii) enable him to discriminate contrasts of the foreign language when he hears them as to produce them when he speaks.

A comparison of the phonemic inventories of the languages concerned should be the first step to phonological contrasts. But this alone is not enough to elicit any kind of information on the problem areas of the learner Phonotactics or a list showing the distributional pattern of the phonemes and allophones

in a language is equally invaluable for phonological analysis. Wilkins (1972:51) maintains that 'pronunciation problems are not caused only by strange sounds with unaccustomed articulation, but also by familiar sounds in unfamiliar places'

The next step then in phonological contrasts is to determine the similarities and differences in the pattern of phonemic distribution between the given languages. This means analysing the occurrence of similar phonemes in different distribution and similar phonemes in different patterns of combination. This also means looking into allophonic and phonetic variations of similar phonemes in similar distribution.

Having looked into the analysis involved in phonological contrasts, I shall now attempt to apply the CA methodology to the teaching of the French sound system, specifically to Malay learners.

CA and Teaching

In the second half of the paper, Lado's CA procedure is used with a view to predicting and diagnosing pronunciation difficulties and errors in performance that exist among Malay learners of French as a foreign language at the most basic level of instruction.

The language models used here are standard Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) and standard French[1], i.e. the official language and not any of the dialectal varieties The description of Malay phonemes is based on M. Yunus Maris' *The Malay Sound System* and French phonemes on M-L Donohue Gaudet's *Le Vocalisme et le Consonantisme Français*

The essence of the analysis is the comparison between L_1 and L_2 in order to locate sources of errors. It must be borne in mind that French is not an L_2 among Malay learners within the Malaysian context. Rather it is an L_3 or a foreign language and as such one might expect the phenomenon of interference to be correspondingly more complex. English as an L_2 could be a facilitating influence in the learners' attempt to learn French. This facility, however, would be more apparent at the syntactic and lexical levels, rather than at the level of phonology In learning to speak a new language, the transfer process, positive
should not invalidate the applicability of CA since our primary concern here is to determine and analyse the main areas of difficulties and sources of errors that are the direct result of mother-tongue interference (and not any other kind of interferences).

The findings based on this analysis could be used as a body of information or as reference material for teachers (French and non-French) involved in teaching the language to Malay learners. A systematic analysis would afford the teacher a better insight into the learner's linguistic system and the similarities and differences that exist between the two languages This would in turn enable him, hopefully, to understand better the learning problems of the students and the areas of difficulty at the phonological level.

The analysis is restricted only to the study of segmental phonemes in Malay and French. Suprasegmental features like stress, juncture, and intonation, being rather complex, do not come within the scope of this analysis.

Lado's procedure in problem analysis.

Lado's approach in comparing two sound systems is basically the following:

(i) analysis of sound segments
(ii) comparison of units
(iii) location and description of segmental problems or troublesome contrasts by classifying phonemes according to the following categories:
  1 identical sounds
  2 almost identical sounds
  3 sounds found only in L_1 but not in L_2

A linguistic analysis of the sound systems would involve a complete and thorough description of the language to be compared. This description should include segmental phonemes and relevant data on the phonetic or articulatory features of these phonemes as well as their variants, and their distribution. The descriptive analysis of the segmental units would normally be presented in the form of a phonemic chart of consonants and vowels indicating their respective place and manner of articulation. A table of distribution would indicate the occurrence of each phoneme in word position, whether it be initial, medial or final. These data would then constitute the phonological structure of the language.

In comparing the sound systems of L_1 and L_2, it is safe to take each phoneme separately, regardless of any general pattern of differences that may be observed. Pertinent questions to be asked are: a) Does the native language have a phonetically similar phoneme? b) Are the variants of the phonemes similar in both languages? c) Are the variants and their phonemes similarly distributed?

Phonological Description of the Malay and French Sounds

The phonemic charts in Table I and Table II (See Appendix) compare the inventory of consonantal phonemes and vowel phonemes that exist in Malay and French respectively They help to locate the similarities and differences between the two phonemic systems.

A contrastive study of the Malay ad French consonants would tell us immediately that there are more phonemes in Malay (27) than there are in French (17). The identical phonemic units are /p—b/, /k—g/, /f—v/, /ʃ/ and semi-vowels /j/ and /w/ The almost identical sounds are /t—d/ /n/ /s/ /z/ /l/, the only difference being the fact that these phonemes are alveolars in Malay and dentals in French. The pronunciation of these sounds would not be foreseen as a problem since the difference is only phonetic and not phonemic. The sounds that are exclusive to the French consonantal system are the voiced uvular fricative /ʁ/, the voiced palatal fricative /ʒ/ and the semi-vowel /y/

The analysis of the systems of Malay and French indicates that there are many more vowels in French than there are in Malay The French vowel system is made up of 12 oral vowels, /i, e, ə, a, a, y, o, œ, ɔ, u, ø, ɔ/ ɑ -and 4 nasal vowels /ɛ̃, œ̃, ɔ̃, ɑ̃/ In the case of the Malay system, there are only 6 vowels, all of them oral sounds, viz. /i, ɔ , e, a, o, u/ The identical sounds in Malay

and French are /i, e, a, u, o/ Although these sounds are comparable in terms of their place of articulation, they vary slightly in their acoustic representation. While all Malay vowels are pronounced with a relaxed and casual manner, the French equivalent vowels are pronounced with a distinctly tense and energetic articulation. The schwa phoneme / ə / in Malay can be considered as almost identical to the French / ə / However, the main difference lies in its 'labiality' The phoneme / ə / in Malay is non-labial whereas the French / ə / is characteristically labial, a feature that involves lip-rounding and vowel tension in its production. This articulatory difference does not however constitute a phonemic problem. The vowel sounds that are exclusive only to the French system are the oral vowels / ɛ, y, o, œ, ɔ, a/ and the nasal vowels /ɛ̃, œ̃, õ, ã/. All the nasal vowels are new sounds to Malay learners of French and would pose a learning problem. But among the oral vowels, phonemes /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ might not appear as totally unfamiliar, since as we shall see later, these two sounds do occur in certain speech utterances as allophones to the vowels /e/ and /o/

Having undertaken the above analysis, it can be predicted that the troublesome contrasts or 'blind-spots', as Lado terms them, would be evident in the recognition and production of consonantal and vowel phonemes exclusive to the French system, and absent in the Malay segmental structure.

As has been mentioned earlier, a mere comparison of phonemic charts is not sufficient since it does not tell us the variations of the phonemes due to certain distribution, the possible phonemic combination or the arrangement of phonemes, or the environment of arrangement. Thus we have to resort to the phonotactic patterns of the two languages, as indicated in Table III and Table IV (See Appendix) These two tables illustrate the distributional patterns of phonemes existing in the Malay and French phonological systems respectively. They would roughly help to locate the possible areas of distributional errors that might occur among Malay learners of French. The different combination and distribution of consonant sequences or clusters are seen in Table V (see Appendix) The indications given in the table would serve to again predict the kind of pronunciation difficulties or errors arising out of the use of new clusters.

Types of Predictable Errors

Based on the analysis and description of the Malay and French phonological systems as was carried out according to Lado's procedure, the predicted errors of Malay learners can be categorised as the following: (i) phonemic errors, (ii) allophonic errors, (iii) distributional errors and (iv) phonetic errors.

In considering the above errors, I must qualify that it would not be possible for me here to present an exhaustive and complete analysis of all of them I shall only be illustrating the most basic and salient among them, i.e. those troublesome contrasts and problem areas that are the direct result of mother-tongue interference and which, if left 'untreated', would impair effective communication or render it unintelligible.

(i) Phonemic Errors

1 Voiced Uvular Fricative Consonant /R/

This phoneme, though absent in standard Malay, does not pose as a difficult contrast to Malay learners except in word-final position. This is because phoneme /R/ does exist in the sub-standard or dialectal variety, either as an uvular or a velar sound. In closed word-final position however, this phoneme is non-existent in Malay Instead of occurring as a variant of the trill /r/, it is represented as zero phoneme before silence. e.g. initial /r/ as in /rumah/ can be given an allophonic realisation [Rumah], but final /r/ as in /besar/ is often realised as [bəsaɸ#]

We can predict that the final /R/ would constitute a troublesome contrast since in French it is markedly pronounced. A Malay learner should be able to recognise the contrast between:

i) /−R#/ — /o#/, e.g. /paR/ — /pa/, /tuR/ — /tu/

ii) final clusters /−R+C/ — /−R+C+R/, e.g. /suRd/ − /suRdR/

2. Voiced Palatal Fricative Consonant /ʒ/

This phoneme constitutes a phonemic problem and would be substituted by Malay learners by the nearest segment in L_1, i.e. palatal affricate /ǰ/ Having identified this likely error the phonemic exercise that could possibly help the learner's perception is to discriminate between the unvoiced fricative /ʃ/ which the students have in their L_1 repertoire, and the voiced equivalent /ʒ/ e.g. /ʃãa / — /ʒãa/ /kaʃ — kaʒ/, /leʃe/ — /leʒe/

3 Semi-vowel /ɥ/

This labio-dental palatal sound /ɥ/ undoubtedly has to be explained in terms of its actual acoustic realisation to avoid error of production. It would pose as one of the most difficult contrasts to a Malay learner from the point of view of both recognition and discrimination. This semi-vowel has to be perceived in relation to the front labial vowel /y/ which is another blind spot to the learner We can predict that /u/ would be substituted by the nearest velar semi-vowel /w/ Discrimination between the contrast /ɥ/ and /w/ can be shown by minimal pairs such as: /sãfwi R/ — /sãfɥir/, mwɛɪ/ — mɥɛɪ/, /bue/ — /bɥe/

4. Front Labial Vowels */y, ɸ, oe/*

Errors of production of the front labial vowels /y, ɸ, ɸe/ are certainly predictable in Malay learners who do not have this equivalent in their mother-tongue. Besides learning to produce each of these labial sounds, they would also have the problem of discriminating between these sounds. This involves recognising the difference in the degree of aperture between the close, half-close and half-open distinction in the phonemes while maintaining the same 'labiality' Error in perception will result in the following substitution. /y/ →[ju], /ɸ/ →[ə], /oe/ →[ə]

An effective way of overcoming these troublesome contrasts will be to discriminate between the non-labial — labial sounds and their equivalent back vowels, e.g. /i-y-u/, and /e-ɸ -o/, and /ɛ-oe- ɔ/, as in /Ri/ — /Ry/ — /Ru/; /fe/ — /fɸ/ — /fo/, and /kɛR/ — /koeR/ — /kɔR/

5 Back Open Vowel /a/

The back open vowel /ɑ/ is phonemically in contrast with the front open vowel /a/ in terms of its anteriority This contrast, however, is hardly observed today by native speakers of French, except in certain monosyllabic words where the distinction /a-ɑ/ is still respected. About 85% of the grapheme 'a' in the French orthography is realised phonetically by the front open vowel /ɑ/ However, in order not to commit phonemic errors, imperceptible though they may seem in certain word environments, it would be desirable for a learner to recognise the contrast between /a/ — /ɑ/ as is evident in such words as /pat/ — /pɑt/, /ʃas/ — /ʃɑs/

6. Nasal Vowels /ɛ̃, œ̃, õ, ã/

Phonemic interference that can be predicted with the production of the characteristic French nasal vowels /ɛ̃, œ̃, õ, ã/ are: (i) failure to observe the opposition between nasal vowels and oral vowel + nasal consonant, i.e. /NV-OV+NC/ and (ii) failure to discriminate between the nasal vowels.

In the first case, the predicted errors could be the substitution of NV by OV+NC, e.g. /sõ/ — [sãŋ], /lã/ — [lõg] To avoid this error, the learner should be made to see the contrast between /sõ/ — /son/, /pɛ̃/ — /pɛn/ Another difficulty that can arise as a result of the lack of discrimination between NV and OV + NC is the intercalation of nasal consonants /m, n, ŋ/ after a nasal vowel in word-initial open syllable, e.g. /gRɛ̃pe/ — [gRɛ̃mpe]; /mãke/ — [mãŋke] This error can be remedied by holding on slighty longer to the distinct nasal vowel sound before following up with the next segmental unit.

In the second area of difficulty, i.e. failure in discriminating between the four nasal sounds, the learner would have to learn to perceive the fine distinction between the phonemes /ɛ̃, œ̃, õ, ã/ The only solution would be to produce them in relation to thier non-nasal counterparts /ɛ, œ, o, a/ respectively Minimal pairs contrasting the sounds, such as /sɛ̃/ — /sõ/ — /sɑ̃/, /pɛ̃s/ — /põs/ — /pãs/ might help to ease the difficulty of perception.

(ii) Allophonic Errors

1 Non-observation of phonemic contrasts /e — ɛ/, /o — ɔ/

Although absent in the phonemic chart of standard Malay, the front half-open vowels /ɛ/—/ɔ/ do exist as allophonic variants of /e/ and /o/ in the Malay phonological system We can predict that the learner would have no difficulty in producing the sounds as individual segments, but the inability to recognise the phonemic contrasts between /e — ɛ/ and /o — ɔ/ in certain word environments may be the result of L_1 interference. In Malay for example /kəme?/ is rendered phonetically as [kəmɛ?], /belo?/ as [belɔ?] In the same way /bodoh/ → [bodɔh] and /loke?/ → [lokɛ?] This vowel lowering feature is not evident in French, either in closed final syllable or in open initial syllable. In order to avoid possible allophonic errors, a learner may use minimal pairs to discriminate between /e — ɛ/ and /o — ɔ/, e.g. /pRe/ — /pRɛ/, /ʃãte/ — /ʃãtɛ/, /pom/ — /pɔm/, /sot/ — /sɔt/

(iii) Distributional Errors

1 Non-occurrence of /k-g/, /ɲ/, /ʃ/ and /v/ in word-final position

The absence of velar plosives /k-g/, palatal nasal /ɲ/, palatal fricative /ʃ/ and labo-dental fricative /v/ in word-final position in Malay would lead to errors as a result of different distributional patterns. In the French phonemic arrangement, the same phonemes are pronounced or released in closed final syllable with marked articulatory force. Malay learners will have to be able to discriminate between /k-g/ in word-final position to avoid phonemic confusing, e.g. /bɛk/ — /bɛg/, /bak/ — /bɑg/ Emphasis should be given to the energetic articulation of these final plosives, as is evident in the French pronunciation.

The palatal nasal consonant /ɲ/ in final position will be substituted by the alveolar /n/ among learners, and the palatal fricative /ʃ/ by the corresponding alveolar /s/ or even the palatal affricate /č/. These possible errors could be avoided by discriminating between contrasts /n — ɲ/ as in /Rezin/ — /Reziɲ/, /Rɛn/ — /Rɲ/, and /s ʃ/ as in /kas/ — /kaʃ/, /mars/ — maRʃ/

In the case of the labio-dental voiced fricative /v/, we can eliminate erors in perception and discrimination with minimal pairs which contrast with the unvoiced fricative /f/ and its voiced equivalent /v/, e.g. /gRif/ — /gRiv/, /seRf/ — /seRv/

2. Difference in distribution of consonant clusters

A comparison of clusters between Malay and French as illustrated in Table V would help identify the problems of the learner in the pronunciation of new cluster-combinations. While it would not be difficult for him to produce initial clusters, he would certainly be faced with pronunciation difficulties in final clusters, a feature that does not exist in Malay The problem is aggravated if a troublesome contrast is located as a member of the cluster, e.g. /-Rz/-/-Rv/ or /-RbR/ It would be necessary to discriminate between phonemic sequence /CVC/ and /CVCC/ since failure to do so could lead to confusion in word-meaning or gender For example /koR/ 'corps' (body) would be totally different in terms of meaning from /kord/ 'corde' (string); /alɛR/ 'alert' (alert - masculine) is different in gender from /alɛrt/ 'alerte' (alerte-feminine).

(iv) Phonetic Errors

The following predictable errors in pronunciation are the result of the negative transfer of L_1 phonetic habit into the French system

1 Production of final plosives without release

Final plosives are not released in Malay Thus Malay learners of French would impose this phonetic habit in L_2 and produce their corresponding final plosives in the same manner, thus committing a pronunciation error Although this is not a phonetic error, an awareness of the phonetic difference could help the learner understand the reasons for not possibly being understood by a native speaker In order to create an awareness of the sharp release of final plosives in French, learners could be advised to add the schwa phoneme /ə/ at word-final, e.g. /napə/, /Rɔbə/, /taRtə/ This could help undo the L_1 habit or reduce it a little. A drill on minimal pairs distinguishing between zero phoneme and final plosives which in certain cases involve the change

of gender in adjectives, would also be in order, e.g. /gRɑ̃/ — /grɑ̃d /, /pəti/ — /pətit/

2. Failure to observe phonemic contrast /s-z/ in syllable final position

The voiced dental fricative consonant /z/ at syllable final would almost certainly be substituted by the unvoiced fricative /s/ since the occurrence of the former is absent in Malay This phonetic generalisation could lead to possible errors of perception. Thus we can have minimal pairs to discriminate between the contrast /s-z/ in word-final, e.g. /kas/ — /kaz/, /Rys/ — /Ryz/

3 Production of comparable vowels /i-e/ and /u-o/ with articulatory differences

Malay vowels are generally produced without much tension of articulation. They are 'relaxed' in nature compared to the energetic and distinctly clear pronunciation of French vowels. The acoustic differences that differentiate the 16 French vowels are very clear, whereas vowel shifts or the lowering of front and back vowels are not uncommon in Malay For example, close front vowel /i/ can be realised as [e] in closed final syllable, e.g. /kəčil/ → [kəčel]; /ambil/ → [ambel] Correspondingly the close back vowel /u/ can be realised as [o[in the same word position, e.g. /səmut/ → [səmot], /hiduŋ/ → [hidoŋ]

To minimise confusion as a result of this tendency of changing vowel colour to a lower variety we can suggest that learners work with minimal pairs that differentiate /i-e/ and /u-o/, e.g. /gi/ — /ge/, /pRi/ — /pRe/, /mul/ — /mol/, /kut/ — /kot/

Conclusion

As stated earlier, the above classification of predicted errors and their locations is by no means a complete and thorough representation of the contrastive analysis between the two phonological systems. It is merely an attempt to identify the most basic and obvious troublesome contrasts as well as areas of difficulties that would feature in Malay learners as a result of the phonological differences between L_1 and French as an FL. It is also to assess the extent of the validity of CA in terms of its claims of predicting and locating errors as a result of mother-tongue interference.

The result of this analysis is not an end in itself but rather it is to be exploited further as a tool in language teaching. As Charles Fries (1945:37) suggests:

> These analysis and their comparison will be of little practical aid to ordinary students unless they are built into lessons to furnish the exercises through which the necessary habits can be formed.

The accuracy of the prediction and the validity of the analysis could be tested against classroom experience and the perception of the learners themselves. A language teacher, having at his disposal a scientific description of the L_1 and L_2 systems of his learners, coupled with his own experience and general observation of his learners' performance, would no doubt be in a better position to identify their learning problems. This in turn would help him to prepare

more effective teaching materials, grade teaching materials into different levels of ease and difficulty, diagnose the kind of errors committed, (whether they be interlingual or intralingual), determine the frequency of the errors, and eventually construct tests for evaluative, diagnostic and remedial purposes

Notes

1 'Standard Language' is defined as 'a variety of language accepted by members of a particular speech community as the norm or the prestige variety and it is the variety which is used in formal and official communication as well as the one used as medium of education' c.f Asmah Hj Omar (1982). *Language and Society in Malaysia*, pp. 107

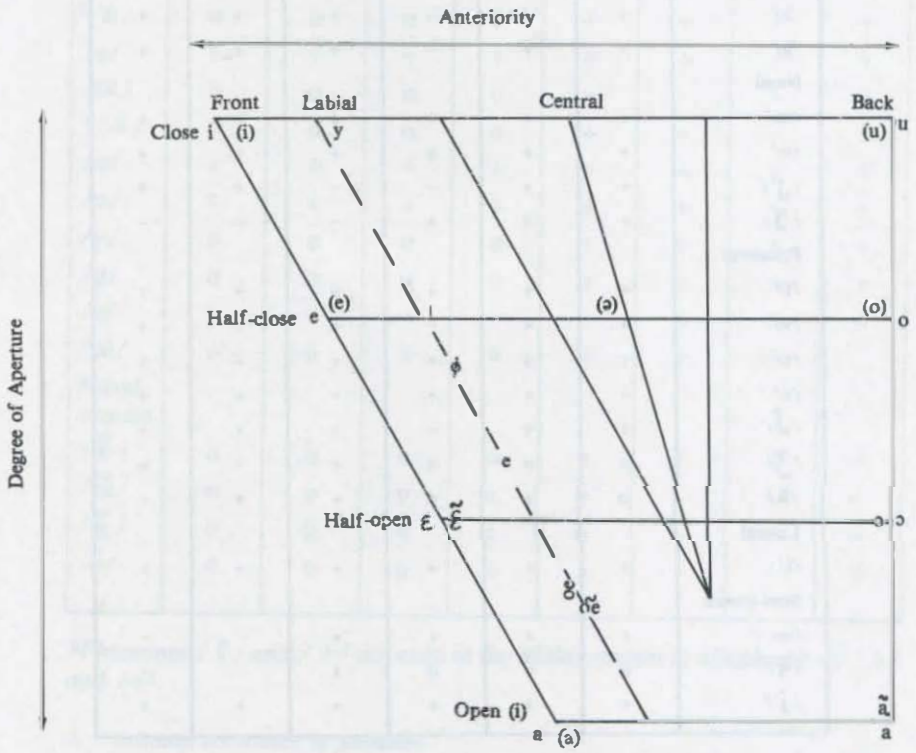
Appendix

Table I Phonemic Chart Of The Malay And French Consonantal System

Modes of Articulation	Sonority	Points of Articulation							
		bilabial	labio-dental	dental	alveolar	palatal	velar	uvular	glottal
plosive	unvoiced	p (p)		(t)	t		k (k)		ʔ
	voiced	b (b)		(d)	d		g (g)		
nasal	voiced	m (m)		(n)	n	n (ɲ)	ŋ		
affricate	unvoiced					č			
	voiced					ǰ			
fricative	voiced		f (f)	θ (s)	s	ʃ (ʃ)	x		h
	unvoiced		v (v)	ð (z)	z	(ʒ)		(R)	
lateral	voiced			(l)	l				
trill	voiced				r				
semi-vowel	voiced		w (w), (ɥ)			j (j), (ɥ)			

Note: French consonants are indicated in brackets.

Table II. Phonemic Chart of The Malay and French Vowel Systems



Note: Malay vowels are indicated within brackets.

Table III. Distributional Table Of Comparable Malay And French Consonantal Phonemes

Consonants:	Malay			French		
	Word Positions			Word Positions		
	initial	medial	final	initial	medial	final
Plosives						
/p/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/b/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/t/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/d/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/k/	+	+	−	+	+	+
/g/	+	+	−	+	+	+
Nasal						
/m/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/n/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/ʃ/	+	+	−	−	+	+
/ɔ/	+	+	+	−	−	−
Fricatives						
/f/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/v/	+	+	−	+	+	+
/s/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/z/	+	+	+	+	+	+
/ʃ/	+	+	−	+	+	+
/ʒ/	o	o	o	+	+	+
/R/	o	•	o	+	+	+
Lateral						
/l/	+	+	+	+	+	+
Semi-vowels						
/w/	+	+	+	+	−	−
/ɥ/	o	o	o	+	−	−
/j/	+	+	+	+	+	+

**Phonemes /k-g/ only appear in word final in loan words such as /č ɛ k/, /b ɛ g/*

Note:

\+ *indicates occurrence of phoneme*
− : *indicates non-occurrence of phoneme*
0 *indicates absence of phoneme in the system*

Table IV Distributional Table Of Comparable Malay And French Vowel Phonemes

Vowel	Malay				French			
	Syllable Initial		Syllable Final		Syllable Initial		Syllable Final	
	open	closed	open	closed	open	closed	open	closed
Oral vowels								
/i/	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
/e/	+	+	–	+	+	–	+	–
*/ɛ/	o	o	o	o	+	+	+	+
/a/	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
/ɑ/	o	o	o	o	+	–	+	+
*/ɔ/	o	o	o	o	+	+	–	+
/o/	+	+	+	+	–	+	+	+
/u/	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
/y/	o	o	o	o	+	+	+	+
/ø/	o	o	o	o	+	+	+	+
/ə/	+	+	+	–	+	o	o	o
/œ/	o	o	o	o	+	+	+	
Nasal vowels								
/ɛ̃/	o	o	o	o	+	+	+	+
/œ̃/	o	o	o	o	+	–	+	–
/ã/	o	o	o	o			+	+
/ɔ̃/	o	o	o	+	–	+	+	+

**Phonemes /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ can exist in the Malay system as allophones of /e/ and /o/.*

+ indicates occurrence of phoneme
— indicates non-occurrence of phoneme
o : indicates absence of phoneme in the system.

Table V Consonant Clusters In Malay And French

Malay	French
a) *Syllables Initial*	
pr br tr dr kr gr	pR bR tR dR kR gR
pl bl kl gl	bR bl kl gl
sp st sk sr sl	sp st sk sR sl
sm sn	sm sn
	sf sv
N.B.	
Consonant clusters are not generally inherent in the Malay system, but they come about as a result of:-	
(i) the elision of phoneme / ə /, e.g. /bərani/ ⟶ [brani] /səlamat/ ⟶ [slamat]	
(ii) the use of English loan words e.g. /drama/ /stɛm/	
b) *Syllables Final*	
Final clusters are generally absent in Malay except in the same English loan-words such as the following: bank [bɛnk], kompleks [kɔmplɛks], konteks [kɔntɛks]	pR bR tR dR kR
	pl bl kl
	fl
	sp st sk
	Rb Rt Rd Rk Rg
	Rm Rn Rv Rs Rʃ
	Rʒ
	lp lb lt ld
	lm ls lʒ

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