

Open Learning
Translation Department

Fourth Year
First Term

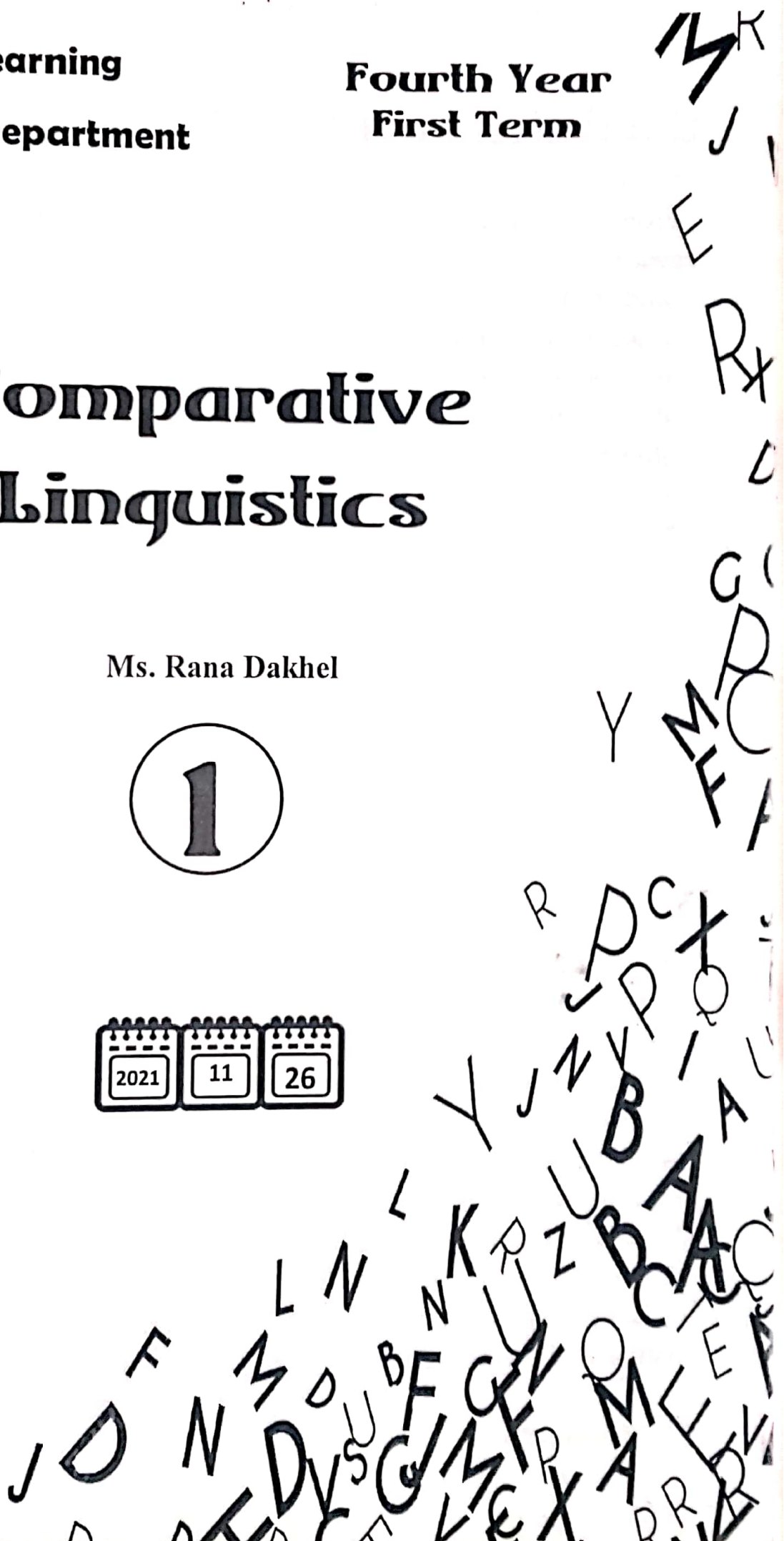
Comparative Linguistics

Ms. Rana Dakhel



ALNAWAR EDUCATION FOUNDATION | مؤسسة الأنوار التعليمية

Let's study!
English



Good afternoon!

From the name of this course, what do you think comparative linguistics is about?

Student: It compares between two languages.

Teacher: It compares between languages; it can compare between two, three or more.

What do we mean by comparing between languages?

Students: Syntax, semantics, pragmatics, meaning, differences in pronunciation, dialects, etc.

Student: We say that Arabic and Syriac languages have the same roots. There is a German scientist who talked about the roots of languages; he mentioned something about اللغات السامية و الحامية و الرافدية و تقسيماتها where he said that English and German have the same roots, and French and Latin have the also the same roots.

Teacher: Excellent. Now, let us answer the question.

To compare between languages like English and Arabic, is it only to compare similarities, differences, or both?

You all know the word “contrastive”; what is the difference in meaning between ‘comparative’ and ‘contrastive’?

Student: In contrastive, we only talk about the differences.

Teacher: Yes, and the word ‘comparative’ means to talk about both similarities and differences.

Now, you are translation students. Do you think comparative linguistics is related to translation? If your answer is ‘yes,’ you need to tell me how.

Student: When we know the differences between languages, we can know the exact meaning of the word that we need to use.

Teacher: This is in terms of meaning; excellent.

Student: the order of the words

Teacher: this is related to syntax.

What about teaching?

Student: When teaching the foreign language to non-speakers, we can use comparative linguistics in order to make it easier for them to understand.

Teacher: So, comparative linguistics is concerned about similarities and differences between the languages compared in the fields of teaching and translation.

Translators and learners of the second language face difficulties when they compare between the source language (mother tongue) and the target language (second language).

If I am an Arabic person who speaks Arabic, and I want to learn English from zero, I want to translate this utterance:

قطع على نفسه عهداً

How can I translate this sentence into English?

Students:

He made a promise to himself.

He promised himself.

He committed to himself.

Teacher: committed means أَلْزَمَ. Your answers are good because you are fourth year students, but if you ask the same question to first year students, they would translate it: *he cut a promise on himself.* This is literal translation.

So, comparative linguistics helps you to know the difference between English and Arabic. We cannot translate word by word; this is in terms of **lexical**.

Now, in terms of **pronunciation**, the sound /p/ is only in English; we do not have it in Arabic. We face this problem with English learners when they pronounce the words containing /p/ as /b/.

For example: most students pronounce /park/ as /bark/ which has a completely different meaning.

So, when we transfer from source language to the target language, we have this problem which we call: **Negative Transfer or Interference.**

I want you to pay attention to the fact that this course is very practical; it is good to deal with theoretical points, but practical aspects are more important. So, try to practice.

I do not know if you have read the questions of previous terms, but try to read them in order to know what is required. However, we will not have the exact same questions because I will add something more.

* * *

Let us go back to:

- **Negative Transfer**

- **Positive Transfer**

What is the difference between them?

Student: In negative transfer, there are problems in dealing with the second language.

Student: The positive transfer conveys the true message and the translation happens in a good way, but in the negative transfer, the translation does not give the same meaning.

Teacher: When we talk about problems, we mean something related to second language learners. These problems occur when learners transfer from the source language to the target language, but the positive transfer happens when there are similarities between the source and the target language.

For example, in morphology, we have some similarities between English and Arabic. The similarities are related to genders; male or female, or to numbers. However, the gender verb in English is the same:

He speaks.

She speaks.

In Arabic:

هو يتكلم

هي تتكلم

In numbers, there is a similarity:

They speak. هم يتكلمون

This is what we mean by positive transfer; it happens when the two languages have similar features. Thus, negative transfer happens when the two languages have different features.

Another example:

We have in English 'you' to refer to single and plural, but in Arabic, 'you' might mean: أنت، أنتِ، أنتما، أنتم، أنتن. This is a negative transfer.

Just as we mentioned before that in Arabic, we do not have the sound /p/, also in English, we do not have: ط، ظ، ع، غ، ق، ح، ص، ض.

Another common mistake related to learners which is considered the most common one is: **adjectives**.

In English, we have adjective + noun, but in Arabic, it is noun + adjective. When some learners want to translate a phrase that has an adjective and a noun, they make mistakes in the word order and translate without changing it.

We also have mistakes concerning subject and verb order or agreement. We will have more examples for such mistakes where you need to define them.

What is the difference between an error and a mistake? When I say 'mistake,' it is different from when I say 'error.'

Student: Maybe 'error' is more used with technical devices, but the word 'mistake' can be used in reality.

Teacher: That is acceptable, but let me explain the difference this way: I have a student who pronounced the word /park/ as /bark/ today, in the next day, and even after a week, s/he kept pronouncing it as /bark/; this is an error. Here, there is a problem in her/his **competence** المقدرة اللغوية; s/he does not know the rules and needs someone to teach her/him.

When I make a **mistake** because I am exhausted, ill, or nervous, and I say /bark/ instead of /park/ only for one time, I might correct myself after realizing that I made this mistake.

Student: So error is considered bigger than mistake

Teacher: Yes. Some linguists classify errors as:

- **Performance Errors:** related to the act
- **Competence Errors:** related to the linguistic knowledge

If you want to know the difference between error and mistake, error is related to competence, and mistake is related to performance.

There are kinds of errors or mistakes.

You have all heard about Deadly Mistakes.

Some people talk and make mistakes while talking, but you still understand what they are saying. Others talk and you understand nothing of what they say.

So, we have:

❖ **Local Mistakes:** an example is difference in pronunciation between areas and regions.

❖ **Global Mistakes or Deadly Mistakes:** an example of deadly mistakes is word order (syntax).

In the example about the word /park/, if I pronounce it as /bark/ in the following example:

I parked my car there.

You will still understand that I mean /park/; it is a local mistake, but sometimes in different contexts, it may make some confusion.

If we are talking about writing, is punctuation a global or a local error?

Students: global

Teacher: Yes. When some students write without using punctuation at all, I do not understand anything. So, punctuation is very important because if you do not use them, I might misunderstand what you mean.

It is global because it is like intonation; adding commas while you write is like pausing for a second while you speak. A short pause means a comma, and a long pause means a full-stop.

With a question mark, we have a rising intonation.

These things are global because they are important in any language.

Let me ask this: if I say:

The clock is now 2:30.

Where is the problem here?

This is actually a local error because you understood what I mean, but the problem is in transferring literally from Arabic into English:

الساعة الآن 2:30

In English, you cannot say: the clock! We say:

What time is it? It is 2:30.

This error is lexical; vocabularies because I misused the word 'clock.'

So, when you understand what I say but there is a mistake, it is a local mistake. When you cannot understand, it is a global mistake.

Another example:

If I say "he agree." or "he eat," without adding /s/, you would understand. So, it is a local mistake related to grammar: subject-verb agreement.

If we want to talk about mistakes and errors, the first thing you need to do is to **(1) identify the error.**

In the exam, I might give you sentences with underlined words, and I ask you to identify the mistake.

For example:

The happiness is something you feel when you are with your family.

Which is the mistake here?

It is (The).

After identifying the mistake, we have **(2) classifying the mistake**. We need to know the kind of the error; is it lexical, syntactic, grammatical, semantic, phonological, or morphological?

We said that in the example: the clock is 2:30; the mistake here is lexical.

After classifying, we need to **(3) explain the error**. This means you need to mention the reason for making such errors.

We will talk about these reasons next lecture.

Then, we have **(4) evaluating the error**; is it local or global?

Finally, we have **(5) correcting the mistake**.

Thank you very much!

See you next week

