

## Types of Language Transfer

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### ABSTRACT

*Commonly discussed in the context of English language learning and teaching, the phenomenon of language transfer is also known by various terms, including L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross linguistic influence. However, it is not limited to English and can occur in any situation where someone does not have native-level proficiency in a language, such as when translating into a second language. Bilingual child language acquisition is another area where language transfer is frequently observed, particularly when one language is dominant.*

There are two distinct categories of language transfer, namely positive transfer and negative transfer. When the relevant unit or structure of both languages is the same, linguistic interference can result in correct language production called *positive transfer*: here, the "correct" meaning is in line with most native speakers' notions of acceptability<sup>1</sup>.

*Positive transfer* helps the learning of a second language. In other words, the learner's native language can make easier the second language learning<sup>2</sup>. Odlin points out that "The effects of positive transfer are only determinable through comparisons of the success of groups with different native languages". The effects of positive transfer are evident not so much in the absence of certain errors but rather in a reduced number of errors and, also in the rate of learning<sup>3</sup>. By comparing groups with different languages we will have evidence that cross-linguistic similarities can produce positive transfer in several ways. Similarities between the native and target languages in language vocabulary, phonetics, syntax, grammar will help learners in an easier second language learning. According to Odlin<sup>4</sup> "Similarities between native language and target language vocabulary can reduce the time needed to develop good reading comprehension... Similarities between vowel systems can make the identification of vowel sounds easier... Similarities between writing systems can give learners a head start in reading and writing in the target language. And any similarities in syntactic structures can facilitate the acquisition of grammar: Learners speaking a language with syntax similar to that of the target language tend to have less difficulty with articles, word order and relative clauses". Similarities in other areas can also promote acquisition.

<sup>1</sup> Shatz, Itamar (2017). *Native Language Influence During Second Language Acquisition: A Large-Scale Learner Corpus Analysis* (PDF). Proceedings of the Pacific Second Language Research Forum (PacSLRF 2016). Hiroshima, Japan: Japan Second Language Association. pp. 175–180. Retrieved 10 September 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Odlin, J. (1989). *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press.

Ellis notes that acquisition is promoted when two languages share a large number of cognates. He states that because of the similarities between Chinese and Japanese languages, Chinese learners of L2 Japanese have an enormous advance over English learners. For example, Japanese and Chinese are similar in written form; French and English are similar in grammar system and written form. Such language similarities undoubtedly help second language learners to learn a second language<sup>5</sup>.

Positive transfers are common among related languages. Genetic aspects of Altaic languages in a number of studies of Turkologists were based on the fact that they are relatives. In the book "Languages of the World" by J. Deny, the following general features of languages belonging to the Turkic group are shown:

1. At the phonetic level: harmony of vowels, not using sonorous sounds at the beginning of the word, non-occurrence of consonants in the word instability of the n sound at the end of the word;
2. At the morphological level: the absence of a grammatical root, independent meaning of stem, having agglutinative properties; suffix character, that is, the absence of prefixes, the use of auxiliaries instead of prepositions, the presence of grammatical number - singular and plural.
3. At the syntactic level: the sentence has a certain construction, the participation of accusatives in the expression of the interrogative meaning, the quality, number, pronouns that come in the role of determining, etc.
4. At the lexical level: the presence of a common layer in the vocabulary, clear sense of commonality in words with one-syllables, political and social acquisition of the lexicon of the dominant language under the influence of the environment, and so on<sup>6</sup>.

These general features lead to occurrence of positive transfer which is why it is easy to learn the relative languages as a second language.

Richards<sup>7</sup> and Schmidt<sup>8</sup> stated that "Positive transfer is learning in one situation which helps or facilitates learning in another later situation". In the process of SLA, many students unconsciously use grammatical rules and methods used in learning their native language. If there are more commonalities between L1 and L2, students can master the grammatical rules of L2 more easily and accelerate the learning speed for L2 more effectively, which can prove that the positive transfer of native language plays a vital role in promoting the learning of second language.

The results of positive transfer go largely unnoticed and so are less often discussed. Nonetheless, such results can have an observable effect. Generally speaking, the more similar the two languages are and the more the learner is aware of the relation between them, the more positive transfer will occur. For example, an Anglophone learner of German may correctly guess an item of German vocabulary from its English counterpart, but word order, phonetics, connotations, collocation, and other language features are more likely to differ. That is why such an approach has the disadvantage of making the learner more subject to the influence of "false friends", words that seem similar between languages but differ significantly in meaning. This influence is especially common among learners who misjudge the relation between languages or mainly rely on visual learning<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to positive transfer potentially resulting in correct language production and negative transfer resulting in errors, there is some evidence that any transfer from the first language can result in a kind of technical, or analytical, advantage over native (monolingual) speakers of a language. For example, L2 speakers of English whose first language is Korean have been found to be more accurate

<sup>5</sup> Ellis, R. (2008). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> X.A.Dadaboyev, Z.T. Xolmanova, TURKIY TILLARNING QIYOSIY-TARIXIY GRAMMATIKASI. "Tafakkur Bo'stoni" Toshkent – 2015, P 11.

<sup>7</sup> Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied linguistics*, 11(2), 129-158.

<sup>9</sup> Solé Alonso, Gemma; Pladevall Ballester, Elisabet (2017). False friends in advanced learners of English. The effect of task type and mode. *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*.

with perception of unreleased stops in English than native English speakers who are functionally monolingual because of the different status of unreleased stops in Korean from English<sup>10</sup>. That "native-language transfer benefit" appears to depend on an alignment of properties in the first and the second languages that favors the linguistic biases of the first language, rather than simply the perceived similarities between two languages.

However, language interference is most often discussed as a source of errors known as *negative transfer*, which can occur when speakers and writers transfer items and structures that are not the same in both languages. Negative transfer, on the other hand, impedes second language learning. More specifically, negative transfer involves divergences from norms of the target language. Even if negative transfer is associated with production errors and it is relative easy to identify, there are some other ways in which an individual's second language performance may differ from the behaviour of native speakers<sup>11</sup>. The carryover effects of the first language can negatively impact the pronunciation and grammar of the second language. Many scholars believe that, in the process of SLA, under the influence of native language, students often have errors at all levels, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, writing compositions, etc.

The concept of negative transfer involves the interference of previous learning experiences with subsequent learning situations. In language acquisition, it plays a prominent role in understanding the sources of errors or deviations in language production. Negative transfer is a kind of linguistic strategy or language process whereby learners transfer improperly the language features of their language into the target one that they are trying to perform, acquire or learn.

In my view, negative transfer occurs when the learner's mother tongue hinders the process of learning a foreign language. The mother tongue may not always facilitate the acquisition of new language knowledge and can even impede the learner's ability to master certain aspects of the foreign language. This interference arises when there are relative but different learning tasks between the two languages, leading the learner to substitute their mother tongue's expression and understanding methods for those of the foreign language. The reason is that the form and the regular system of the mother tongue and the target language are different but are regarded as same by the learner. The interference of mother tongue is common in the second language acquisition, negative transfer occurs in many ways of language.

Within the theory of contrastive analysis, the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities, the greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative transfer can be expected<sup>12</sup>. For example, in English, a preposition is used before a day of the week: "I'm going to the beach on Friday." In Spanish, instead of a preposition the definite article is used: "Voy a la playa el viernes." Novice Spanish students who are native English-speakers may produce a transfer error and use a preposition when it is not necessary because of their reliance on English. According to Whitley, it is natural for students to make such errors based on how the English words are used<sup>13</sup>. Another typical example of negative transfer concerns German students trying to learn English, despite being part of the same Germanic language family. Since the German noun "Information" can also be used in the plural – "Informationen" – German students will almost invariably use "informations" in English, too, which would break the rules of uncountable nouns<sup>14</sup>. From a more general standpoint, Brown mentions "all new learning

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<sup>10</sup> Chang, C. B.; Mishler, A. (2012). "Evidence for language transfer leading to a perceptual advantage for non-native listeners" (PDF). *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*. 132 (4): 2700–2710. Bibcode:2012ASAJ..132.2700C. doi:10.1121/1.4747615. PMID 23039462.

<sup>11</sup> Odlin, T. (1989). *Language Transfer. Cross-linguistic influence in Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Lennon, P. (2008). Contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage. In S. Gramley & V. Gramley (Eds.), *Bielefeld Introduction to Applied Linguistics* (pp. 51-60). Bielefeld, Germany: Aisthesis.

<sup>13</sup> Whitley, M. Stanley (2002). *Spanish-English Contrasts: A Course in Spanish Linguistics*. Georgetown University Press. p. 358. ISBN 978-0-87840-381-3. Retrieved 12 May 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Wahlbrinck, Bernd (2017) (2017). *German-English Language Interference: 56 Innovative Photocopiable Worksheets for Teachers & ESL Students*. ISBN 978-3-00-057535-8.

involves transfer based on previous learning"<sup>15</sup>. That could also explain why initial learning of L1 will impact L2 acquisition.

Negative transfer befalls when previous performance interrupts the performance in a target language. In other words, first language causes as sources of errors when learners inadequately apply certain language items or structures that are not identical in both languages. It falls into two big types as *interference* and *overgeneralization*.

Inference takes place when a learner mistakenly applies knowledge from one system to another. For example, words in Uzbek are incorrectly translated due to L1 interference:

- The phrase “*derazadan qaramoq*” is translated as “*look from window*” while the correct version is “*look through window*”
- “*Hech narsaga tegmang*” is translated as “*Don`t touch nothing*” (*Don`t touch anything!* is correct form)
- “*ozod qilmoq*” is translated as “*make free*” but the correct version is “*set free*”<sup>16</sup>

In Japanese, there is no sound “*l*”, therefore Japanese people pronounce the word “*love*” as “*robi*”; In Uzbek, silent sounds occur mainly with constants, thus when Uzbek learners pronounce words as “*write*”, “*scope*” and “*wide*”, they forget about silent vowels in English and pronounce last “*e*” as well. Consequently, mispronounced words cause mistakes in the target language<sup>17</sup>.

Another type of negative transfer is *overgeneralization*. It is a particular subset of generalization. One of the most significant characteristics of overgeneralization is that it occurs only within one language. For example, English language learners have the following samples of overgeneralization:

The formation of plural forms in nouns:

*a flower – five flowers*

However, in English, some nouns` plural forms are arranged by changing their roots rather than adding some suffixes.

For example, *a tooth – six teeth, a man – ten men and etc.*

Learners overgeneralize one rule to all types of nouns that exist in English, in other words, they forget about exceptions.

Another example is past form of verbs: some verbs are formed by adding -d(ed) while others are created by changes in their roots. *to laugh – laughed, to sing – sang*. Even though learners learn by heart “Regular and Irregular list of verbs”, they sometimes make some mistakes owing to overgeneralization of certain rules in their target language.

In conclusion, it can be stressed that cognitive factors play an important role in second language acquisition. Transfer impacts positively to our learning process while interference and overgeneralization slows down this procedure. The more learners practice, the less they make these errors due to two latter causes<sup>18</sup>.

Language transfer may be conscious or unconscious. Consciously, learners or unskilled translators may sometimes guess when producing speech or text in a second language because they have not learned or have forgotten its proper usage. Unconsciously, they may not realize that the structures and internal rules of the languages in question are different. Such users could also be aware of both the structures and internal rules, yet be insufficiently skilled to put them into practice, and

<sup>15</sup> Bransford , J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. (Expanded ed., PDF). Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, ISBN 0309070368.

<sup>16</sup> <https://fayllar.org/cognitive-factors-in-learning-transfer-interference-and-overge.html>

<sup>17</sup> Ohata, K. (2004). Phonological Differences between Japanese and English: Several Potentially Problematic Areas of Pronunciation for Japanese ESL/EFL Learners. *Asian EFL Journal*, 6, 1-19.

<sup>18</sup> <https://fayllar.org/cognitive-factors-in-learning-transfer-interference-and-overge.html>

consequently often fall back on their first language. The unconscious aspect to language transfer can be demonstrated in the case of the so-called "transfer-to-nowhere" principle put forward by Eric Kellerman<sup>19</sup>, which addressed language based on its conceptual organization instead of its syntactic features. Here, language determines how the speaker conceptualizes experience, with the principle describing the process as an unconscious assumption that is subject to between-language variation<sup>20</sup>. Kellerman explained that it is difficult for learners to acquire the construal patterns of a new language because "learners may not look for the perspectives peculiar to the (target/L2) language; instead they may seek the linguistic tools which will permit them to maintain their L1 perspective<sup>21</sup>."

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<sup>19</sup> Kellerman, E. (1983). Now You See It, Now You Don't. In S. Gass, & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Language Transfer in Language Learning* (pp. 112-134). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

<sup>20</sup> Littlemore, Jeannette (2009). *Applying Cognitive Linguistics to Second Language Learning and Teaching*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 37. ISBN 9781349304936.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, Peter; Ellis, Nick (2008). *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Routledge. pp. 284. ISBN 9780805853513.