

THE ROLE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE IN LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Annotation: This study explores the influence of a learner's native language (L1) on acquiring a second language (L2). It examines both the benefits and challenges of L1 in L2 learning, focusing on linguistic transfer, cognitive development, and interference. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through case studies, interviews with language learners and educators, and literature reviews. The findings indicate that while L1 provides a foundation for L2 learning, it can also introduce difficulties such as grammatical errors and pronunciation challenges. The study suggests that structured bilingual education and comparative linguistic instruction can enhance L2 acquisition while minimizing L1 interference.

Keywords: Native language, second language acquisition, linguistic transfer, cognitive development, language interference, bilingual education, cross-linguistic influence

I. Introduction

Language is a vital component of human communication and cognitive development. In an increasingly globalized world, learning a second language (L2) has become essential for personal, academic, and professional success. However, the process of acquiring an L2 is significantly influenced by the learner's native language

(L1), which can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition (Ellis, 1994). The role of L1 in L2 learning has been extensively studied in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Some researchers argue that a strong foundation in L1 enhances L2 learning by supporting cognitive development and linguistic transfer (Cummins, 2000). Others suggest that L1 interference can lead to errors in grammar, pronunciation, and syntax[1]. This study aims to explore the following key questions:

1. How does L1 influence L2 learning through linguistic transfer?
2. What challenges arise due to L1 interference?
3. What strategies can educators adopt to minimize L1 interference and optimize L2 learning?

II. Methods

Research Design: A qualitative research methodology was used to analyze the impact of L1 on L2 learning. Data were collected through case studies, structured interviews, literature reviews, and error analysis.

Participants: The study involved 30 university students learning English as an L2, 10 bilingual individuals proficient in multiple languages, and 5 experienced language instructors. Participants came from various linguistic backgrounds, including Uzbek, Russian, Spanish, and Chinese speakers[2].

Data Collection Methods

1. Case Studies – Observing students in L2 learning environments to analyze patterns of L1 influence.
2. Interviews – Conducting structured interviews with students and teachers to gather insights on language learning experiences.

3. Literature Review – Examining prior studies on linguistic transfer and second language acquisition.

4. Error Analysis – Analyzing common L2 errors to determine patterns of L1 interference[3].

III. Results

1. Positive Influence of L1 on L2 Learning L1 can facilitate L2 acquisition in several ways: Linguistic Transfer: When L1 and L2 share similarities in grammar, vocabulary, or phonetics, learners can transfer knowledge to the new language. For example, Spanish and Italian learners of English benefit from common Latin roots in vocabulary (Cummins, 2000). Cognitive Benefits: A strong foundation in L1 literacy enhances cognitive skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking, which are transferable to L2 learning (Bialystok, 2009). Metalinguistic Awareness: Learners who understand grammar structures in their L1 often apply this awareness to L2 learning, improving comprehension and accuracy[4].

2. Negative Influence: L1 Interference and Challenges. Despite its benefits, L1 can also create obstacles in L2 acquisition: Pronunciation Difficulties: Differences in phonetic systems cause pronunciation errors. For instance, Chinese learners of English struggle with distinguishing between /r/ and /l/ sounds due to the absence of the /r/ sound in Mandarin. Grammatical and Syntactic Errors: Different sentence structures between L1 and L2 lead to mistakes. For example, Russian learners of English often struggle with word order since Russian allows more syntactic flexibility than English. False Cognates and Misinterpretations: Words that look similar but have different meanings in L1 and L2 cause confusion. For instance, the Spanish word “embarazada” (pregnant) is often mistakenly interpreted as “embarrassed” in English[5].

3. Strategies for Effective L2 Learning

To address the challenges posed by L1 interference, educators and learners can adopt the following strategies: Comparative Linguistic Instruction: Teaching students the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 helps reduce errors and increases awareness of structural differences. Code-Switching as a Learning Tool: Controlled use of L1 in language classrooms can help learners understand complex concepts before fully transitioning to L2 instruction. Immersive Language Environments: Exposure to L2-rich environments, such as language exchange programs, accelerates learning by reinforcing direct L2 usage. Bilingual Education Programs: Schools implementing bilingual instruction allow students to use L1 as a support system while gradually increasing L2 exposure.

IV. Discussion

The findings reveal that L1 plays a dual role in L2 learning. On one hand, it provides a cognitive and linguistic foundation for acquiring an additional language. On the other hand, it can introduce challenges due to structural and phonetic differences. Several factors influence the extent of L1 impact on L2 acquisition:

1. Linguistic Distance Between L1 and L2: The more similar the two languages, the easier it is for learners to transfer knowledge.

2. Age and Language Exposure: Younger learners tend to develop native-like L2 proficiency more easily, while older learners rely more on L1 structures.

3. Teaching Methods: Effective language instruction minimizes L1 interference and maximizes positive transfer through structured learning approaches. This study supports the view that while L1 can introduce challenges, it is an invaluable tool in second language acquisition. With the right teaching strategies, educators can leverage L1 to enhance L2 learning rather than hinder it[6].

One of the main purposes of the current study was to highlight the use of native language in comprehending the L2 vocabulary. The results of the second tests show a significant difference between the two groups learning of vocabulary means 12.15 by controlled group as compared to 9.4 of the normal group. It is obvious that the performance of the participants in controlled group was significant because of adoption of the translation method in learning vocabulary of L2. Thus, we can say that Saudi EFL students if exposed to vocabulary learning with translation method would perform better than those who are taught without the help of translation methodology especially in a pure Arabic culture where English is only present in higher educational institutions. The current study also displays that the translation method wherein the two groups conducted the two different tests by participants, although partially dependent on the language proficiencies of these participants in each group, were also dependent on a number of other characteristics of vocabulary learning which at this point we can only guess at: the students' perception of the test, of learning English (and their motivation to continue to do so), of the researchers, of the EFL teacher, and of the assessment tools etc. Various researches have shown that native language plays a beneficial role of these efforts where the purpose of the current article is to look at some of this research clearly identify those parts of a language course where there is value in using the L1 vocabulary. The role of L1 in classroom can be minimized by an effective classroom management strategy where the useful use of academic vocabulary and grammatical structures may maximize the role of L2 inside language classroom[7].

Conclusion

This research highlights the significant role of L1 in L2 learning, demonstrating that native language influence can be both beneficial and problematic. Linguistic transfer and cognitive advantages facilitate L2 acquisition, while phonetic and syntactic differences present challenges. To optimize second language learning,

educators should adopt bilingual teaching strategies, promote comparative linguistic instruction, and create immersive learning environments. Future research should explore the long-term effects of bilingual education and examine how L1 influence varies across different language pairs. By understanding the role of L1 in L2 learning, language educators can develop more effective teaching methodologies that support multilingual learners in achieving fluency and competence in their second language.

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