



The Language Interference: What is it and in What Ways it Affects the Use of L2

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Abstract: Generally, it is possible to think that the "language interference" did not attract that much attention but there was plenty research on this topic. The current review of literature focuses on «language interference» and tries to bring some possible effects it may have on L1. Moreover, there will be provided some plausible impacts of language interference on writing, speaking, reading and listening abilities of a learner. Finally, we will review some research which whether confirms or contradicts the negative or positive effects of the language interference.

Key words: discrepancy, phonological rules, language interference, natural language acquisition, merge hypothesis, bilingualism, syntax, phonology, morphology, native language interference, code switching.

HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE DISCREPANCY RESULTS IN DIFFICULTY.

When it comes to language interference, it would be wise to start with some hypotheses drawn by a number of researchers to find out if the discrepancy leads to challenges. Indeed, Sobhani and Abolhassan (2012) investigated the differences in consonant clusters orally in the L1 and L2, and found that when the structures of first and second language are distinct, learners have challenges in L2 pronunciation because they encounter unfamiliar phonological rules. Moreover, it was also investigated that structural (grammar) differences may cause some challenges. As it was stated by Decherts & Dllis, as cited in Bhela, (1999) that when the structures of L1 and L2 are not similar, then some difficulties arise showing the occurrence of language interference. Similar assumption was given by Hayati (1998) which says "the degree of difference between L1 and L2 determines the degree of difficulty", accordingly, "the degree of similarity indicates the degree of simplicity of acquisition" (p. 2112). Of course, when talking about the language interference effects, we cannot skip the degree of challenge faces beginner, intermediate or advanced language user. Surprisingly, a research done by Adebayo (2015) showed that the grammatical and structural extent of Yoruba and English determines the amount of mistakes (in the case of Yoruba vs English even advanced students used to make mistakes). On the other hand, it was said that the class setting (with much emphasis on grammar) increases the interference. For instance, it was stated in the exploratory case study called "Native language interference on target language writings of Indonesian EFL students" that the variety of L1 and L2 may not cause as much interference when the acquisition takes place in the natural environment as when it occurs in a class setting. It leads us to the conclusion that the natural acquisition of language somehow solves the interference problems.

ERRORS OF L1 CAN TRANSFER TO L2 AS WELL, BUT SOMETIMES THE OPPOSITE IS ALSO POSSIBLE

The following research is a typical example for this type of interference. The merge hypothesis of Fleg (1987, 2005) says that “the merging of phonetic properties of phones that are similar in the L1 and L2 can potentially impact not only the acquired language but the native language as well”. Nevertheless, this hypothesis leads us to the unanswered question, what is the likelihood of interference in relation to the similarity of languages? And what part of a language (grammar, syntax, phoneme, morphology, etc.) is more prone to such “reverse interference of language”? A similar presumption was given by Beardsmore (1982). He pointed out that when the learner has problems related to phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L2, it might be transferred from L1 of that learner. Similarly, Dulay, Burt, & Krashen (1982) said that the errors of L1 and L2 are almost identical. Dulay et al, (1982) noted more confidently that L1 mistakes result in L2 errors later when the acquisition starts.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE TRANSFER

In the article “Code switching as a countenance of language interference” by Richard Skiba (2010), we can see that the language switching was suggested for usage to facilitate the development of L2. Furthermore, it was proven that bilingualism decreases language interference during learning a new vocabulary. (Margarita Kaushanskaya and Viorica Marian, 2009 “Bilingualism reduces native-language interference during novel-word learning”, in a Journal of experimental psychology). Similarly, Papagno & Vallar, 1995; Van Hell & Mahn, 1997 showed in their research that bilingualism helps in word learning. On the other hand, it was pointed out that Similarity creates a difficulty, for example, if the phonological structures of two languages (L1 and L2) have much resemblance, the errors are likely to occur (Flege, 1992, 1995).

INTERFERENCE IN WRITING

It was stated that when the learner has some deficiency of syntactical structures of L2, he might use those structures of L1 to compensate the language gap (Bhela, 1999). As it was with the case of speakers compensating second language deficiency by switching to the L1 “Code switching as a countenance of language interference” by Richard Skiba (2010). Similarly, Karim & Nassaji (2013) pointed out that when a learner has a lack of knowledge in L2 he may cover that gap by using his L1. In addition, evidence with past investigation carried out in 1995 by Matsumo, four Japanese university instructors who had already posted some articles in both (English and Japanese) languages were examined and it was revealed that the participants used the same process and strategies in L1 and L2 writing. Though this time it was a positive interference where those Japanese instructors showed a high writing knowledge in both L1 and L2.

INTERFERENCE IN READING

After having mentioned writing interference, we could not skip interference in reading. There were some studies that investigated this type of interference and showed that the reading is not an exception when it comes to language interference. According to Carson & Carrel, as cited in Namati & Taghizade (2013), “L2 learners use their L1 as a reading strategy to comprehend the text better” (p. 2481). More precisely, learners of a new language sometimes resort to use L1 to get the gist of target language texts. Similarly, Jiang (2013) noted that when the learner has a good background knowledge of L1, and developed some reading strategies during the acquisition of the L1, then he is highly likely to utilize those strategies while coping with the texts in L2. This is a really convincing theory, because there is no point of saying that a learner with a poor reading knowledge of his/her L1 can easily succeed in comprehending L2 texts.

THE EFFECT OF AGE ON LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE

The role of age in the language interference was not in the center of attention. As a result, there is not so much data regarding the impact of age on language interference. Nevertheless, Lennberg (1967) suggested that early (before puberty) learning can prevent interference. Similarly, Birdsong, 1999;

MacWhinney, 2007 stated that L1 interference with L2 can be more serious obstacle for adults than children. However, the solution was proposed by Margarita Kaushanskaya and Viorica Marian (2009) in an article called “Bilingualism reduces native-language interference during novel-word learning” that bilingualism neutralize those effects and help bilinguals to learn a new language even after puberty.

CONCLUSION

After having reviewed a number of articles, some questions were answered by research data while some left with no or subtle answer. For instance, Richard Skiba (2010) in an article called “Code switching as a countenance of language interference” proposed to use code switching as a facilitator of the learning process. However, language interference can create misunderstanding if used in a non-native atmosphere (e.g. in a conversation with a person whose L1 differs from another speaker). The effect of age on language interference did not attract a considerable attention. Some researchers (Lennberg, 1967; Birdsong, 1999; MacWhinney, 2007) noted that early (before puberty) language learning can eliminate the language interference which is heavier burden for adults than children. Darus and Ching (2009) said that lack of knowledge about the structural rules of the language results in mistakes. Moreover, “code switching” which was mentioned by Einar Haugen in 1954 is due to language deficiency. As a final point I would say that the articles I covered give us a clear picture how and in what ways the language interference has a positive/negative effects on the language producer (speaker or writer), but there is still little known about a link between age and interference (as far as this literature review coverage is concerned, there was no precise data found on the age-based impact language interference (e.g. which age group is more prone to use language interference). This is the reason why it would be useful to carry out a further analysis to clarify the effects of language interference according to age groups.

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