

## THE ADOPTION OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the present study is to bring the evidence of a foreign language adoption. In the famous article on the interlinguistic language, Selinker (Selinker, 1984 [1972]: 35) puts the influence of the previously learned language (mother tongue / L1) as one of the main factors in the development of the interlinguistic language. Any experienced teacher after having taught a foreign language is aware of some problems in mastering the language which are repeated from generation to generation. This can clearly be brought into connection to the characteristics of L1 of the students and their background. However the question of the role of L1 in second / foreign language acquisition provokes a lot of discussion in this and related disciplines and of course understandings in the scope, nature and mechanisms of transfer (or transfer) of language elements from L1 to the new language being taught differ among scientists.

The role of L1 in the adoption of a L2 language is really important when speaking of learning foreign languages. Although people have always been aware of the 'foreign accent' and the impact of languages on top of each other when they come in contact, intense scientific discussions about the role of L1 in the study and teaching of a foreign language begin in the first half of the 20th century. Finally, according to the mental theories of learning, the learner has a central place in the process of adoption. The active participation of the learner presupposes creating their own strategies, and in that context the use of knowledge remains central.

**Keywords:** interlinguistics, language, foreign language, mother tongue language, adoption.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although people have always been aware of the 'foreign accent' and the impact of languages on top of each other when they come in contact, intense scientific discussions about the role of L1 in the study and teaching of a foreign language begin in the first half of the 20th century. Attitudes towards language transfer fluctuate from fully accepting the influence of L1 in the 1940s and 1950s, within the Hypothesis for contrast analysis (HCA), to its fullest denial from the late 1960s and 1970s (in learning theories language). In the late 1970s a revision of the views began and reformulation of definitions, but during the 1980s examination of the role of L1 occupies a deserved and real place in all theories of language learning. The stages in this process will be discussed in details and the basics views and reasons for certain allegations will be presented along with the criticisms that have been leveled and led to a change of attitudes.

### 2. THE ROLE OF L1 IN THE ADOPTION OF THE L2 LANGUAGE

The first attempts to define interlinguistic influence occur in within the framework of linguistic contact research in the nineteenth, and in particular in the early twentieth century. In Weinreich research (Weinreich, 1953/1968, in Odlin, 1989: 12) the term 'interference' is used for different types of language transfer, which occur in different socio-cultural conditions and cause different language consequences. The influence of MT (mother tongue) in learning a second / foreign language and its consequences in that process is central to the Contrast Analysis Hypothesis. It was created in the period before and after World War II in the United States mainly for pedagogical goals and is a theoretical basis for learning and teaching second / foreign language. It is based on the behavioral theory according to which learning is creating a habit through trial and error, and before the acquired knowledge can help or make learning difficult. In accordingly, when learning another language, learners rely on L1 which has a key influence in that process: where there are similarities there is positive transfer, which facilitates learning while differences lead to a negative transfer, i.e. errors, which, if not removed quickly, become habits, fossilize and interfere progress. It is therefore recommended that the teaching be concentrated on problem areas, i.e. where there are differences between L1 and L2. It was thought that time should not be wasted on structures that are similar therefore which they will easily overcome through a positive transfer. To minimize possible confusion, the term L1 was defined as a student's native language, the mother tongue, or own language (Hall and Cook 2012).

In order to discover the similarities and differences between L1 and the language they have to study, it is suggested to perform an exhaustive contrast analysis (CA). This part from the hypothesis is based on the structural linguistics that in that period was the leading theory in the United States. The famous linguist Charles Fries laid out the basic principles for the use of CA for pedagogical purposes in the book Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign

Language) in 1945, which they later applied in two influential textbooks which “started a real one a revolution in the philosophy and practice of learning a foreign language ” (Danesi & Di Pietro, 1991: 62). A classic guide to the application of CA in The second / foreign language acquisition discipline is Robert's book Lado "Linguistics in different cultures" (Robert Lado, 1957, Linguistics Across Cultures).

More recent approaches, such as the communicative approach, also emphasise the use of authentic language and a rich L2 environment, which help to maximise exposure to extensive L2 input and opportunities for L2 output (Bruen and Kelly 2014; Ghobadi and Ghasemi 2015), which implicitly discourages L1 use. For this reason, the role of L1 in the teaching of L2 seems to have lost position in modern language lessons aimed at practical communication.

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HCA is based on the following assumptions, which are reflected in teaching materials (compare Gass & Selinker, 2008: 96-97): Differences lead to interference (negative transfer), which means that the differences between L1 and L2 are the cause of learning difficulties and errors in the language of learners. That implicitly means no there are other difficulties in mastering the target language itself, though it is not was explicitly emphasized.

### 3. L1 AND L2 DIFFERENCES

The differences between L1 and L2 can be determined by contrast analysis, and the results of the analysis should serve as an indicator for making teaching materials for those elements, which will prevent the occurrence of errors in the language of the learners. So, CA is used a priori for predicting difficulties - this is the strong version of CA.

The HCA had a major influence, especially in the United States, but it originated in the 1960s changes that cast doubt on its validity and even complete rejection. After the euphoria about the theoretical prediction of learning difficulties the growing number of empirical studies in which they are examines the language produced by learners. It turns out that:

1. not all types of errors are predicted by CA occur;
2. errors occur that CA does not predict and which cannot be explained via CA;
3. the positive transfer that was predicted was not always realized (according to Saville-Troike, 2006: 37). For example, in conditional sentences in both Macedonian and English language does not use the future tense marker (will in Macedonian, will in English) in the dependent sentence, so KA would predict that they would not occur here mistakes of Macedonian English language learners. However, in the language of learners often come across such sentences: \* If she will come, I will call you. What cannot be explained by the influence of L1. Interestingly, so do English speakers when they learn Macedonian they make the same mistake at the beginning: \* If it comes, it will I call you. Obviously, there are some universal reasons to be explained.

Some researchers are beginning to question the power of CA to predict errors and consider that it can only be useful for explaining the reasons for the mistakes in the language of the learners. They are adherents of the weak version of CA - a posteriori, which has a diagnostic function.

HCA supporters have not completely denied that there are others types of errors other than transferable, but interference was thought to be the central obstacle to successful language learning and in accordance with behavioral theory should pay the most attention to it elimination. In fact, the biggest reason for HCA attacks is the change in theoretical understandings: in psychology mentalism gradually suppresses behaviorism, and in linguistics the generative is imposed theory. Gass & Selinker (Gass & Selinker, 2008: 97-98) list the following changes in perceptions of language and language learning:

- language is an organized system of rules, not habits;
- language learning occurs through the formation of those rules with active participation, not mechanical imitation.

These views first enter the examinations for the adoption of L1 and then are also transferred to the acquisition of another language. While according to HCA the role of the learner is completely neglected, mentalists believe in adoption.

Also, translanguaging has been used as a pedagogical strategy to support these practices within bilinguals by offering permission for students to use their own language repertoire fully and freely to facilitate L2 learning (García and Kleyn 2016; Wei 2018).

Language is a creative process in which the learner has a central place. The results from empirical studies provide evidence for the efforts of scholars to establish rules in the language they are learning, as in the example He comed yesterday (by Gass & Selinker, 2008: 98), which often match the data from the adoption of children's first language. These circumstances prompted them examinations of the natural order of adoption (initiated by Duley and Burt in 1974). The results of these trials seriously undermine the basic HCA settings that are refer to the manner of language



acquisition. First, it turns out that they exist internal mechanisms of language acquisition. Elsewhere, Duley and Burt analyze the psycholinguistic origin of the errors in the collected material from Spanish children highlighting four types of errors. They conclude that only 3% of the errors can be explained by transmission from L1. On this basis they claim that when learning a second / foreign language children transfer less from L1 and rely more on their abilities to construct the L2 system, similar to the L1 learning (Ellis, 1985:28).

Although there were many omissions in the analysis of Duley and Burt (among other things and limiting only morphological errors) they were used for definitive rejection of HCA: if there is not much in the language of learners errors due to the influence of L1, then most errors cannot be predict with CA. However, many proponents of mentalism advocated the new views on language learning as a creative process disagreed with that the mother tongue has no (or quite insignificant) influence on it process. During the 1970s/80s, more research was done on the causes for the errors and the results for the representation of the transfer errors in them range from 23% to 50% (data from six trials are provided in Ellis, 1985: 29 and Danesi & Di Pietro, 1991: 20).

What can be deduced from these trials is that:

- the percentages vary considerably, but are still much higher than the three the percentage of Duley and Bert, which is an indication that the role of L1 is much larger than they claimed;
- because research has been done in various circumstances, it can be assume that the results depend on age, level of knowledge of L2 as well as from L1 of the learners, the way of learning (in the middle or not), as well as the type of data being examined.

#### 4. FURTHER ANALYSIS OF L1 AND L2 ADOPTION

From the 1980s until now in debates about the nature of adoption second / foreign language does not deny the role of L1, but is accepted as one of the many factors involved in that process — universal factors (internal language principles), learner-related factors (age, motivation, attitudes, ability to learn a language, general knowledge, etc.), the properties of L1 of the learner and the properties of J2 (Ellis, 1985: 36; Gass & Selinker, 2008: 99-100). It becomes clear that it is not illogical in theory for the adoption of a second / foreign language as a creative process, in which the learner has an active role, to accept that there is a transfer of knowledge from the mother and other previously learned languages. In that sense Gass & Selinker (Gass & Selinker, 1994: 7) point out that “there is irrefutable evidence that linguistic transfer is a real and central phenomenon ”and that this must be taken into account when it comes to the process of adopting a second / foreign language.

The efforts are aimed at integrating the role of L1 into mental theory and to be explained from a cognitive point of view.

In the new situation there is a need to introduce a new term for two reasons: first, because the terms ‘transfer’ and ‘Interference’ was associated with behavioral theory and theirs use was confusing; else, because viewed from a psycholinguistic point of view aspect shows that the influence of one language on another can be manifested in many different ways. As a more appropriate term Kellerman and Sharwood-Smith (Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith, 1986b: 1) suggest the term crosslinguistic influence. They think “The use of the term ‘transfer’ should be limited to those processes that lead to the incorporation of elements from one language into another”. In contrast hence the term interlingual influence (MLV) includes, in addition to transfer and interference, and other adoption processes known to occur under the influence of another language, such as avoidance, excessive use, borrowing, different pace of adoption, and language atrophy (in both L1 and J2). This term is now widely accepted and used in Discipline Adoption of a second / foreign language and in the examinations of linguistic contact, although the terms transfer and interference are also used for specific purposes without negative connotations. So we use in our research. From the mid-1980s onwards, MJV research acknowledged that is a complex process and focus on explaining this phenomenon.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Everything accepts the fact that there is also a transfer of semantic concepts (conceptual transfer), not just forms, and new research has opened up in that direction perspectives (Gass & Selinker, 2008: 150). The following questions are asked (see Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith, 1986a; Gass & Selinker, 1994; Ellis, 1994):

- What is it that can be transmitted from one language to another? What evidence is there needed to prove interlingual influence (ILI)?
- How does that transfer happen? More specifically, is it part of the competence or from the production?
- How that process fits into the process of creating hypotheses about language what is being taught?
- What linguistic and non-linguistic factors influence this process and how restrict? For example, Ellis (Ellis, 1994: 315-343) states more constraints that have been considered as factors influencing language transfer: linguistic,

sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic, including developmental factors, labeling, prototype, linguistic distance, psychotypology.

Adinolfi and Astruc (2017), however, point out that pedagogical use of translanguaging is not yet systematically fully developed. The authors noted that until now, all debates have mainly been tied to the instructional languages used in the classroom rather than to the objective of the lesson. They also noted that the direction that should be strived towards is one which creates opportunities to integrate pedagogic translanguaging opportunities into online FL classrooms

We cannot consider all of these issues here, but we will dwell on them just a few explanations that we think are important for understanding the place of the MUL in the modern understandings of the second / foreign adoption language. According to the mental theories of learning the learner has a central place in that process. The active participation of the learner presupposes creating their own strategies, and in that context the use of knowledge

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