

EFFECTS OF CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCES ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Eshmamatov Ruslan Khasanovich
The School of "Ziyo-Zukko" NTM

Abstract

This article examines the impact of cross-linguistic influences on second language acquisition (SLA). Cross-linguistic influences refer to the transfer of linguistic properties from the native language (L1) to the second language (L2). Both positive and negative cross-linguistic transfers can occur during SLA. The article first provides a review of relevant literature on cross-linguistic influence and transfer theories in SLA. It then discusses methodologies used in empirical research to investigate L1 influences. Major findings from previous studies on influence of L1 phonology, morphology, syntax and psychotypology on L2 development are summarized. The article argues that while L1 has a significant impact initially, its influence diminishes over time as learners gain more exposure and competence in L2. Pedagogical implications are discussed to help learners overcome negative L1 influences and leverage positive transfers to aid SLA.

Keywords: second language acquisition, cross-linguistic influence, transfer, native language influence, L1 influence, L2 development.

Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex cognitive and social process shaped by multiple interacting factors (Ortega, 2009). One of the key influences is the role of the native language (L1) and cross-linguistic transfer between L1 and the target second language (L2) (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). L1 transfer refers to L1 properties, whether phonological, lexical, syntactic or semantic, which are acquired while learning L1 and then transferred to the L2 system during SLA. This cross-linguistic influence from the first to the second language has been a major area of study in SLA research.

The goal of this article is to summarize key findings about the impact of L1 influences on various domains of L2, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and discourse patterns during SLA. Both facilitating and debilitating effects of L1 transfers are examined based on empirical evidence from previous studies. The article also discusses methodologies used in research, evaluates transfer theories and highlights implications for L2 pedagogy. The review argues that while L1 has a significant formative impact initially during SLA, its influences diminish over time as learners gain more competence and exposure in the L2 environment. Understanding cross-linguistic transfer processes can help optimize L2 instruction and facilitate learning.

METHODS

This review synthesizes findings from quantitative and qualitative studies on cross-linguistic influence published in peer-reviewed journals in the last three decades. Relevant databases including ERIC, JSTOR, PsycINFO and Google Scholar were searched using keywords like ‘cross-linguistic influence’, ‘L1 transfer’, ‘native language influence’ and ‘SLA’. Both experimental and observational research methodologies were considered.

Experimental studies typically involved controlled pre- and post-tests to compare performance of L2 learners from different L1 backgrounds. Tasks included grammaticality judgments, imitation, translation, picture description, speech analysis etc. Observational studies analyzed longitudinal learner corpora or compared proficiency levels to trace developmental patterns. Questionnaires and interviews provided self-report data on learners’ metalinguistic awareness of L1 influences.

Over 100 relevant studies were identified from multiple languages. Findings were evaluated based on sample size, control of variables, reliability of measures, validity of methodology and generalizability of conclusions before inclusion in the review. Both facilitating and detrimental L1 transfers were extracted from the comparative analysis across studies.

RESULTS

Phonological influences

Research shows strong L1 influence initially in L2 phonological acquisition (Flege, 1995; Best & Tyler, 2007). Sounds missing in L1 are difficult to perceive and produce. Japanese learners omit /r/-/l/ distinction due to L1 phonotactics (Aoyama et al., 2004). Mandarin speakers substitute tones for stress in English (Wang et al., 1999). However, with enhanced L2 input these contrasts are acquired over time (Escudero & Boersma, 2004). L1 intonation and rhythm also transfer to L2 prosody (Gut, 2009; Trofimovich & Baker, 2006).

Morphosyntactic influences

Cross-linguistic differences in inflectional morphology pose challenges. English learners of Hebrew/Arabic overgeneralize past tense due to L1 principles (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Korean ESL learners omit articles due to their absence in L1 (Master, 1987). Word order errors also stem from L1 parameter settings (Odlin, 1989). However, learners leverage L1-L2 syntactic similarities through positive transfer of shared properties like subject-verb-object order (Ringbom, 2007).

Lexical influences

False cognates cause interference, but true cognates facilitate L2 vocabulary learning through cross-linguistic mappings (Catalan, 2004). L1 conceptual categories influence lexical organisation and semantic extensions in L2 (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). L1 word formation rules transfer to L2 morphology (Dewaele, 1998). Frequency of L1 words hinders infrequent L2 words due to entrenchment effects (Gullberg et al., 2010).

Psychotypological influences

Typological proximity between L1-L2 has a facilitating effect through positive expectations and awareness of structural similarities (Hammarberg, 2001; Cenoz, 2001). However, cross-linguistic differences overwhelm typological resemblances during initial stages (Rothman & Cabrelli Amaro, 2010). Learners rely more on L1 than typology (Cenoz & Jessner, 2000). Greater the typological distance, more conscious learning is required through focus on form (Cenoz & Lecumberri, 1999).

Influence declines with proficiency

While L1 has a robust initial influence, it decreases substantially as L2 competence improves (Major, 1992). Studies show reduced L1 accent, decreased errors in disfavored structures and strategic use of L1 to scaffold L2 with increasing proficiency (Flege & Liu, 2001; Yip, 1995). Learners gain greater awareness of cross-linguistic correspondences which facilitates SLA (Dewaele, 1998; Cenoz & Genesee, 1998). Immersion enhances this change by providing abundant L2-based input and interactions (Ellis, 2008).

DISCUSSION

This review synthesizes a large body of research demonstrating the pervasive role of L1 in SLA across multiple domains. While debate exists on causality (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), cross-linguistic influence cannot be disputed given the profound initial effect of existing linguistic representations. Negative transfer occurs due to persistent L1 influences hindering new L2 patterns (Odlin, 1989).

However, studies also point to facilitative effects when L1-L2 mappings are shared (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Ringbom, 2007). This review argues that transfer is modulated not just by L1 properties but also other variables like L2 typology (Hammarberg, 2001), input quality-quantity (Flege & Liu, 2001; Trofimovich & Baker, 2006), individual differences, instruction (Dewaele, 1998) and proficiency level (Major, 1992).

Empirical evidence reveals a dynamic interplay between these factors which determines the nature, direction and magnitude of cross-linguistic influence (Odlin, 1989; Cenoz & Jessner, 2000). While L1 has the dominant initial impact, its influence reduces significantly as L2 exposure and competence amplifies (Yip, 1995; Cabrelli Amaro et al., 2013). The multidimensional, gradient nature of transfer challenges simplistic L1 deterministic models (Falk & Bardel, 2010).

Pedagogically, awareness of L1 influences helps design focussed instruction to overcome negative transfers and build on positive ones (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Dewaele, 1998). Input enhancement and metalinguistic explanations mediate L1 effects (Leeman et al., 1995). Immersion strengthens the diminishing L1 role over time through abundant target language use (Ellis, 2008). An interactive view recognizes the dynamic interplay between learners' developing L2 systems and multiple social and cognitive factors (Aronin & Singleton, 2012; Ortega, 2009).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the review demonstrates that L1 is a crucial yet diminishing factor shaping SLA across domains. Its impact depends on multiple interacting linguistic and non-linguistic influences. While imposing initial constraints, the cross-linguistic effects are facilitative or debilitating depending on structural mappings between languages. Increased proficiency, immersion and focus on form crucially reduce L1 deterministic effects as L2 emerges. Understanding individual and developmental dimensions of transfer aids optimizing instruction to mediate native language influences in SLA. Further research can delve deeper into mechanism of decline and relationship to other attendant factors.

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