



A STUDY OF LANGUAGE TRANSFER IN THE PROCESS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract. Language transfer is one of the crucial factors in second language acquisition. Based on the language transfer theories the article analyses the language factors which affect language transfer in the process of second language acquisition from the perspective of phonetics, pragmatics and syntax in the method of comparative analyses, which can help teachers stimulate their language teaching.

Key words. Second Language Acquisition; Language Transfer; Mother Language; Target Language.

Introduction. The term “transfer” refers to the process of automatic, uncontrolled and subconscious use of past learned behavior the attempt to produce new response. On average, transfer refers to the effect that mother language of ancient language knowledge has on target language or on the novel language knowledge. This effect can be positive or negative, so the transfer can be classified as positive transfer or negative transfer. This positive or negative effect might occur in the process of second language learning so as to have the idea of language transfer. Language transfer is a phenomenon in the circumstance of second language learning, learners of the mother tongue knowledge, like pronunciation, semantics, structure and other rules of the new language science of the phenomenon of learning. Language transfer refers to inter – language transfer, that is, the transfer between a number of languages, such as the mother tongue and the aim language, but also refers to intro – language change, like the transfer between vocabulary, structure and the skills of writing and reading. Positive transfer is the process of in which mother language has a positive impact on English learning. That the influence of the language rules of mother tongue is incompatible on goal language is negative transfer. Language transfer could be used to explain the interact among factors in the



circumstance of second language in learning and impact the acquisition and usage of language, and help learners to learn the correct language learning strategies.

The theories of language transfer. Language transfer is a vital topic in second language acquisition research. In the 1950s, Robert Lado proposed the comparative analysis hypothesis in his linguistic book *Cross-Cultural Language*. This hypothesis is based on behaviorism and structuralism linguistics, which concluded that the negative direction of the mother tongue in second language learning is often greater than the positive effect. The greater the difference between the mother tongue and the target language, the greater the difficulty in learning, and vice versa. Learners can easily grasp those language points in the target language which are close to or similar to the mother tongue.[3] Ellis (1999) also argued that the difficulty of second language acquisition depends on the difference between the mother tongue and the target language. Greater differences lead to more obstacles and errors during learning. However, in practice, this learning disability will vary due to differences in individual cognitive levels. For example, when the mother tongue and target language share similar language rules, learners might become confused.[1] In the 1960s, Chomsky proposed the Universal Grammar theory, suggesting that the human brain has inherent universal grammar, specifically divided into core grammar (common to all languages) and surrounding grammar (specific to different languages). The creative construction theory posits that the second language learning process is influenced by universal grammar, with learners from different mother tongues following the same process and order of second language acquisition. The deep sharing ability hypothesis posits that mother tongue transfer exists not only at the surface level but also in psychological cognitive processes. Mother tongue and target language are interdependent at a deeper level, where developing one language skill can promote the learning of another. The positive effect of the mother tongue on the target language is far more significant than the negative impact.

Factors of language transfer. Language Factors: English and Chinese belong to different language families. English is part of the Indo-European Germanic language system, whereas Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language system. The differences in phonetics, vocabulary, and syntax result in more negative than positive transfer for Chinese learners of English. English is an intonation language, where meaning is determined through voice and intonation, while Chinese is a tonal language with meaning determined through its four tones. These differences often lead Chinese learners to use a monotone when reading English, influenced by the negative impact of their mother tongue. Teachers should emphasize tone practice



and guide students in pronunciation. English phonemes and Chinese phonemes differ significantly. For instance, English contains voiced and voiceless phonemes absent in Chinese. For example, /θ/ and /ð/ are challenging for Chinese learners to pronounce correctly. Age also plays a critical role in language acquisition, as younger learners are more adaptable to new phonemes. Additionally, cultural and semantic differences between English and Chinese also contribute to transfer challenges. Words like "red," "green," and "dragon" carry different connotations in English and Chinese, which can confuse learners. Teachers should focus on teaching cultural context and meaning differences to bridge these gaps. In syntax, while both English and Chinese follow an SVO word order in declarative sentences, other elements like modifiers and question formation differ significantly, leading to negative transfer. Examples include errors such as "You are going to the school?" instead of "Are you going to the school?"

Inspiration for positive transfer of mother tongue in teaching. Teachers can address both positive and negative transfer in teaching. Conducting comparative analyses between the mother tongue and the target language can help identify key difficulties and areas of focus. Highlighting cultural and structural differences between languages can also aid in comprehension. The appropriate use of the mother tongue in teaching, especially for explaining abstract concepts, can enhance understanding. However, overusing the mother tongue might reduce exposure to the target language, hindering proficiency development.

Conclusion. The changing of the mother tongue to the goal language is inevitable in second language acquisition, with both pros and cons effects. Scientists should realize and recognize negative transfer phenomena to mitigate their impact and inspire positive transfer. This approach will retain learners in acquiring better habits and improving their language skills successfully.

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