

The impact of mother tongue on second-language acquisition of English

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تأثير اللغة الأم على اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية

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Abstract:

The challenges faced by students learning English as a second language have persisted throughout history and will continue to do so in the future. Because of this, it becomes essential to shed light on the issues and difficulties that students encounter, particularly the impact of their home tongue, "Arabic language." The author of this study aims to review the literature on how mother tongue influences English language acquisition. The author begins the conversation by providing a conceptual explanation of behaviorism theory using the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), a structural approach to second language learning that shares behaviorists' viewpoint. Next, a potent theory that explains the majority of L2 errors is discussed in order to understand second language faults. The five causes of interlanguage as well as Selinker's interlanguage theory are examined. Next, keep an eye on Krashen's model theory and discuss all five of its hypotheses. Additionally, a thorough explanation of the idea of second language learning and acquisition for Krashen. The approach utilized to comprehend these challenges is then presented in the study. Qualitative methods were employed for data gathering in order to determine the primary issues and challenges that Libyan student had when learning English as a second language. The author concluded by presenting and analyzing the results. This work is significant and may be valuable to scholars interested in this field as well as to all English learners, students, and teachers. According to the study, it is essential to comprehend both SLA and SLL second language acquisition theories of acquisition to comprehend all the obstacles and problems that second language learners have because of the influence of their mother tongue.

Keywords: CAH Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, SLL second language learning, TL target language, SLA second language acquisition, LL language learning, L1 first language, L2 second language.

المخلص

لطالما شكلت التحديات التي يواجهها الطلاب الذين يتعلمون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية تحدياً مستمراً عبر التاريخ، وستستمر في المستقبل. ولذلك، يصبح من الضروري تسليط الضوء على المشكلات والصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب، ولا سيما تأثير لغتهم الأم، اللغة العربية. يهدف كاتب هذه المقالة إلى استعراض الدراسات المتعلقة بتأثير اللغة الأم على اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية. يبدأ الكاتب حديثه بتقديم شرح مفاهيمي لنظرية السلوكية باستخدام فرضية التحليل التقابلي، وهي منهجية هيكلية لتعلم اللغة الثانية تتبنى وجهة نظر

السلوكيين. بعد ذلك، يناقش نظرية مهمة تفسر غالبية أخطاء اللغة الثانية، وذلك لفهم هذه الأخطاء. ويتناول البحث الأسباب الخمسة للغة الوسيطة، بالإضافة إلى نظرية سيلينكر في هذا الشأن. ثم يتطرق إلى نظرية كراشن النموذجية ويناقش فرضياتها الخمس. كما يقدم شرحاً وافياً لمفهوم تعلم اللغة الثانية واكتسابها من منظور كراشن. وأخيراً، يعرض البحث المنهجية المستخدمة لفهم هذه التحديات. استُخدمت الأساليب النوعية لجمع البيانات بهدف تحديد القضايا والتحديات الرئيسية التي واجهها الطلاب الليبيون عند تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية. واختتم الباحث بعرض النتائج وتحليلها. يُعد هذا العمل ذا أهمية بالغة، وقد يكون ذا قيمة للباحثين المهتمين بهذا المجال، وكذلك لجميع متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية، من طلاب ومعلمين. ووفقاً للدراسة، من الضروري فهم نظريتي اكتساب اللغة الثانية (SLA) واكتساب اللغة الثانية كلغة ثانية. (SLL) لفهم جميع العقبات والمشاكل التي يواجهها متعلمو اللغة الثانية نتيجة لتأثير لغتهم الأم

الكلمات المفتاحية: فرضية التحليل التقابلي، تعلم اللغة الثانية، اللغة الهدف، اكتساب اللغة الثانية، تعلم اللغة، اللغة الأولى، اللغة الثانية.

Introduction

In order to contribute to the study of linguistics and assist students in recognizing typical mistakes and their causes, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pattern when learning English as a second language, this research aims to explore and analyze. There has been much discussion among linguists and applied linguists over the difference between language learning and language acquisition. These arguments, which go all the way back to the first investigations into human language, are still pertinent today. One of the main questions is whether these two processes are essentially different, and if so, when and how each might be observed. The process of learning a new language is frequently difficult and full of obstacles for second language (L2) learners. Analyzing these difficulties thus requires an understanding of the mechanisms underlying both first language (L1) acquisition and L2 learning. To show how languages are taught and acquired and to pinpoint the elements that affect SLA success, a theoretical overview is required. As a result, an overview of important theories in the subject of SLA is presented in the next section. laying the groundwork for comprehending the procedures involved in picking up and learning new languages. English's significance has grown significantly in recent years due to its widespread use and status as an international language. Students understand that proficiency in English will help them secure a good career in the future. The purpose of this study is to examine how mother tongue influences students learning English as a second language. There is a significant debate regarding the concepts of language learning and language acquisition and regarding the concepts of language learning and language acquisition. This discussion has persisted since the dawn of humanity and continues to this day. Questions arise about how a child acquires or learns a language and at what stage the terms "learning" and "acquisition" can be appropriately applied. Learning a second language can be a complicated process for learners, filled with difficulties and challenges, according to linguistic research and experience. This is evident in second language theories. To illustrate how L2 is learned, we first need to understand how L1 and L2 are acquired. For that, the following section presents significant theories to provide an overview of theories related to SLA.

Literature review

Behaviorism is considered one of the earliest theories to describe the process of language learning (Robinet & Schachter, 1983). As a psychological theory, behaviorism is associated with Skinner and dates back to the 1940s and 1950s. This theory influenced not only linguists but also psychologists and anthropologists. Although behaviorism has been widely criticized by later cognitive theories (John and Sharan, 1995), it remains important to analyze many of its principles when considering second language learning (L2). According to behaviorists,

language learning occurs through imitation and habit formation (Lado, 1964, cited in Lightbown and Spada, 1999). Skinner argued that learning is achieved through stimulus-response reinforcement in different contexts. Learners, therefore, imitate models in real-life situations and are reinforced when their responses are correct, while negative reinforcement is provided when errors are made (Ellis, 1997). Based on this view, behaviorists claimed that all L2 errors result from L1 interference (Dulay et al., 1982). However, it is not easy to explain the majority of L2 errors solely in terms of L1 interference. Mitchell and Myles (2004) note that behaviorists could not fully account for learners' difficulties in second language acquisition. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), which emerged from behaviorist assumptions, argued that L2 errors could be predicted by comparing the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). The theory suggested that when the structures were similar across both languages, learners would make fewer mistakes; however, when the structures differed, errors would arise from the transfer of L1 patterns into L2 (Dulay et al., 1982; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Cook, 2008). Despite its importance as the first systematic attempt to evaluate L2 errors, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) was later shown to be limited. Studies by Selinker (1972), Ellis (1997), and Collins (2007) demonstrated that only 3% of L2 errors could be attributed to "L1 interference." Errors often resulted from developmental factors rather than simple transfer. Furthermore, Maicusí et al. (2000) emphasized that errors should not be viewed merely as signs of failure or ineffective teaching, but rather as a natural part of the learning process. Building on these discoveries, Selinker (1972) developed the theory of interlanguage, which is still one of the most important explanations for L2 errors. He suggested five fundamental mechanisms that underlie interlanguage. First, learners are impacted by "L1 transfer," which applies L1 principles to L2; yet, in contrast to behaviorists, Selinker argued that it is not necessary for learners to simply imitate models; rather, they actively construct their own linguistic systems (Ellis, 1997). Second, students may oversimplify grammatical rules, which could result in developmental errors unrelated to L1 transfer. Therefore, interlanguage emphasizes dynamic competence, which might change between L1 and the target language. Third, because of "communication tactics," which are the various strategies that pupils want to use to engage with others. In this scenario, pupils ignore the usage of proper grammar in favor of concentrating only on meaning (Cook, 2008). Fourth, "learning strategies" are predicated on all of the knowledge that students have picked up while learning a second language, including all of the rules. As a result, they attempt to convey a complex idea with as many sentences as possible while disregarding the veracity of their claims (Myles 2005). The fifth reason is 'transfer of training' in which learners apply all the previous knowledge and rules they have gained throughout their learning journey, which may not always be correct (Bertolo, 2001). Selinker has discovered another idea that is regarded as the sixth principle of the interlanguage theory. The process known as "fossilization" describes how some learners are unable to acquire a higher level of the target language than they have previously attained. It seems as though the student is unable to advance in their understanding of grammar and syntax because they are trapped at a particular level. Such a scenario can be partially explained by age and specific cognitive limits. Ellis (1985) and Ellis (1997). One of the most significant and aspirational cognitive models of L2 acquisition is the Monitor model hypothesis.

It was also among the first theories to attempt to offer a thorough framework for comprehending L2. The Monitor model hypothesis was divided into five hypotheses by Krashen 'Affective filter', 'Natural order', 'input', 'Monitor', and 'acquisition-learning'. First, Krashen highlights the distinction between SLL and SLA. According to him, adults and children learn and comprehend a 2L in very similar ways, with very minor variations. While learning requires conscious focus on rules and forms, a kid picks up their L1 instinctively, without paying attention to linguistic forms. As a result, it is evident that while some language

acquisition comes easily, it still necessitates some forethought and fatigue in order to be a finished process that accomplishes all of its objectives. (Spada and Lightbown, 2006). According to Krashen, learning and acquisition have different effects and personalities. This is because learners' spontaneous speech and fluency are solely dependent on their acquired language (Krashen, 1981; Harmer, 2007). On the other hand, learnt language merely serves as a monitor or corrector for mistakes made by students either before or after speaking (Towell & Hawkins, 1994). Additionally, he notes that learners vary in how they use their monitor system to fix any mistakes made prior to, during, or following speech (Krashen, 1982; Towell & Hawkins, 1994). Conversely, some students abuse their monitor and are preoccupied with precisely applying L2 norms to generate correct forms (Richerds & Rogers, 2001). As a result, individuals are unable to effectively interact with their surroundings. Another kind is "monitor under user," in which students are aware of 2L grammatical norms but use their "feel" to assess and fix every mistake (Krashen, 1981, Krashen, 1982; Towell & Hawkins, 1994).

Krashen suggests that L2 input should be a little bit beyond the learner's present level (i+1) since he believes that acquisition happens when the input is understandable (Bertolo, 2001; Lightbown & Spade, 2006). Conversely, learners may succeed in communication when they comprehend the L2 input, but they may still be unable to develop or employ grammatical characteristics on par with native speakers (Schumann, 1986). Additionally, according to Krashen's "Natural sequence Hypothesis," learners pick up a variety of L2 grammatical structures in a predetermined sequence, just as native speakers (Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 1990). The final hypothesis, known as the "affective filter hypothesis," is named "filter" because it explains the effective elements that affect learners' success in SLA, including attitude, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Towell & Hawkins, 1994). Consequently, Krashen claims that a high filter inhibits the learner from interacting and communicating with the L2 society. On the other hand, a low filter enables students to take in more information and engage with their environment more successfully (Lightbown & Speda, 2006).

Methodology

All scholars can see how challenging it is to gather, analyze, and assess the language acquisition process using its many approaches. In order to determine the primary issues and challenges Libyan students encountered when learning English as a second language, qualitative methodologies were employed for data collecting. A handwritten test sheet and classroom observation were used in this study to gather data. During the 2025–2026 academic year at Tobruk University, around 20 students were monitored in the English department. This occurred throughout the course of two academic classes each week for a total of four hours. Students in their second and third years were included in the sample. Students also took two exams: one for the midterm and another for the final. This study examined the data to see what challenges students had when learning English as a second language. analysis concentrated on pinpointing certain obstacles and difficulties that students encounter when learning a second language, such as the positive and negative effects of L1 on L2. Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative information gathered from handwritten exam sheets and classroom observations. In order to shed light on recurring themes and problems pertaining to the challenges students have when learning a second language, this required finding and classifying patterns in the data. This study's primary goal is to give a thorough understanding of the issues and challenges Libyan students encounter when learning a second language, as well as recommendations for how to overcome and prevent these challenges.

Data analysis and Findings

First of all, a large number of mistakes made by students might be linked to the transfer of rules from their native tongue, which is seen as proof of an overgeneralization process. For example,

a student may believe that adding "-s" applies to all nouns after understanding the fundamental function of generating plurals. As a result, learners make mistakes like (mans, womans, childs) rather than the proper irregular plurals (men, women, children). These mistakes can also be viewed as a form of simplification, where learners simplify categories and rules to support their growth and advancement in L2. For example, some students overgeneralize pronouns like I, We, You, and They + basic form of the verb and remove the third person (s). According to Yule (1996), applying expressions and structures from the source language (1L) to the target language (TL) might lead to a variety of mistakes. The learners may profit from the positive transfer if the first and second language structures are similar. Because the norms of the passive voice in Arabic and English are similar, transfer is successful with Libyan pupils. On the other hand, mistakes are more likely to happen when the two languages have different structures. The usage of superlative and comparative adjectives demonstrates this. A student might say, "This phone is "new" than yours," for instance. This kind of inaccuracy can be explained by "Cognitive" theory and "Contrastive Analysis" rather than "newer than," according to Lightbown and Spada (2006) the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), which holds that the first and second languages are similar, is connected to behaviorism theory. Where there are variances, learners should find it harder to pick up the second language. The influence of the first language may include both similarities and transfer patterns. Another thing that has been observed is that some pupils use forms that are not present in either Arabic or English, like subject pronouns instead of possessive pronouns. For instance, saying "This pencil is for me" rather than "mine" can be characterized as an internal process associated with "cognitive" growth. Additionally, it is evident that some students use negative forms incorrectly. For example, a student may say, "I want not to go to school," which translates as "I don't want to go to school." These mistakes happen because students prioritize meaning over proper grammatical structure, according to Slinker's "interlanguage" and "communication strategies" theories (Cook, 2008).

As a result, these mistakes continue to occur since students are still able to explain themselves. The absence of corrective pressure could potentially be the cause of this. According to Slinker (1972), these patterns suggest that the learner's interlanguage has become calcified. Furthermore, it has been discovered that the use of the word "monitor" may be crucial to creating proper structures. This was demonstrated by phrases that appropriately employed the form "used to" and base verb in the sentence "I used to go to school." Even though they had trouble remembering precise rules, the pupils demonstrated that they understood the sense of the sentence. Krashen's "Monitor theory" (1981) is consistent with this. It emphasizes how information acquired via formal education serves as an editor to fix mistakes made either before or after speech. On the other hand, some pupils utilize their monitoring system in different ways. They could be proficient in grammar norms but fail to employ them when speaking. Another thing to note is that many students utilize useful formulaic terms when speaking, like "what is gunna on" or "would you mind closing the window, please?" Learners frequently mimic and memorize these patterns, which can be referred to as "habit development," and they are frequently ignorant of the underlying grammatical structure (Ellis 1997). When students eventually grasp the structure and rule, it leads to comprehension based on "cognitive theory" and "Krashen's intelligible input hypothesis 1+ i." In these situations, learners prioritize meaning above form, and the language is frequently accurate because of memorization. This argument is further demonstrated by Lightbown and Spada (2006:40), who state that "these shifts have been described in terms of restructuring." These fixed patterns can be seen as an important communication tactic that keeps the discourse flowing and prevents communication problems. Krashen (1982), who contends that learners memorize a variety of ready-made expressions to make up for the limitations of their second language skills, supports this theory. After spending a lot of time with the students, it became evident that some of them were

exposed to the target language in its native context while growing up in an L2 nation. Additionally, there are other students who have studied and interacted in a real-world setting overseas for a portion of their lives. As a result, it is reasonable to believe that these kids' personal backgrounds play a big role. This supports Vygotsky's theory that learning happens when students engage with the L2 environment because they require social groups to enhance their learning experiences (Mitchell & Myles, 2006).

Conclusion

With an emphasis on behaviorism, the interlanguage hypothesis, the contrastive analysis hypothesis, and Krashen's Monitor hypothesis, this work has highlighted important facets of second language learning and main theories of second language acquisition. The results show that the mother tongue has a significant impact on learning a second language, both positively and negatively. By offering a linguistic foundation, it can aid in learning, but it can also impede through negative transfer. This dual effect is illustrated by the examination of learners' mistakes, highlighting the significance of comprehending first language influence to improve the efficacy of English language instruction.

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