

Psycholinguistic insights for Teachers of English: The Cognitive Processes Involved in Language Learning.

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Abstract .This research investigated some studies and theories of cognitive processes in language learning firstly, and after that, a study was conducted to check the usefulness of such a theoretical background in an Algerian context. In the study, a questionnaire was distributed to 23 students and teachers; six of them are PhD students from Biskra University, and the rest are Master degree holders from Boumerdes University. The results showed that 40% of them had positive training influence, while 10% witnessed a negative one, and the rest fluctuated between positivity and negativity, depending on their teachers' methods of teaching. As far as the communication strategies are concerned, the results revealed that the participants' strategies encompassed; asking for clarification, paraphrasing, using their body language, and speaking slowly using simple language. Lastly, and most importantly, the participants' opinions of their teachers' competency in the mastery of the linguistic knowledge exhibited that 48% of the students see that their teachers master enough linguistic knowledge, and that 39% of them believe that some teachers were sufficiently knowledgeable and some were not that competent. The last percentage (13%) stated that all their teachers lacked adequate linguistic knowledge.

Keywords. Cognitive processes; language transfer; learning strategies; communication strategies.

ملخص. خلال هذا البحث قمنا بتحليل بعض الدراسات و النظريات المختصة في العمليات المعرفية (الإدراكية) المتبعة لتعلم اللغة. بعد ذلك قمنا بإجراء دراسة للتحقق من الاستعمال و الاستفادة من هذا الكم الهائل من المعلومات في سياق جزائري بحث. خلال هذه الدراسة تم توزيع نموذج استبيان على 23 طالب و أستاذ، من بينهم 6 طلبة دكتوراه من جامعة بسكرة، و الباقي طلبة من جامعة بومرداس حائزين على شهادة ماستر. أظهرت النتائج ان نسبة 40% كان لهم تأثير تدريبي ايجابي بينما نسبة 10% منهم شهدوا تأثير ايجابي سلبي، و الباقي لاقوا الإيجابية و السلبية معا، على حسب طريقة تدريس الأستاذ. في ما يخص إستراتيجيات التواصل فإن نتائج التحليل أظهرت أن طلب التوضيح، إعادة الصياغة، استعمال لغة الجسد، و التحدث ببطء و استعمال لغة بسيطة كانوا من بين الإستراتيجيات المستعملة من طرف المشاركين في الاستبيان. و في الأخير، آراء المشاركين حول كفاءة أساتذتهم في ما يخص معرفة مجال اللغويات و اللسانيات أوضحت ان 48% منهم يرون أن أساتذتهم لهم معرفة واسعة في المجال، 39% منهم يعتقدون أن بعض الأساتذة لهم معرفة واسعة بينما البعض الآخر ينقصهم القليل من الكفاءة. أما البقية (13%) ذكروا أن أساتذتهم يفتقرون إلى المعرفة اللغوية الكافية.

الكلمات الدالة. عمليات الإدراكية؛ نقل لغوي؛ إستراتيجيات التعلم؛ استراتيجيات التواصل.

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1. Introduction

Historically speaking, language learning has been the concern of a myriad number of researchers (Selinker 1972; Ellis 1994; Gass, 2000; Crystal 2003 ...etc.). That is to say, an unlimited number of theories, approaches, perspectives and ideas have been put forward as an attempt to make this process easier. Nevertheless, do we, as Algerian teachers, really make use of such a giant background of knowledge appropriately in the present time?

The fact that human beings are distinctively different has made language learning a very strenuous task. Yet, it seems that a scientifically-based approach would make the process much easier. Gone are the days when teachers used to deal with language classroom relying on fruitlessly old methods of teaching English. We are living in an era where there is no room for intuition in the classroom, every step should be based on knowledge and science, where responsible and highly trained teachers are wanted and where English classrooms must provide our learners with beneficial teaching.

Despite the fact that learning English as a foreign language is a long and difficult task, research has never ceased to make it uncomplicated. Over the years, many attempts were made to overcome the obstacles that the learning process faces. However, the results were always unsatisfactory, in one way or another, until the pros of psycholinguistics started to claim that meticulous attention has to be paid to the mental processes involved in language learning. Therefore, the importance of cognition in learning a language is never to be underestimated because getting closer to the learner's way of learning might lead to fruitful results of learning.

We believe that awareness is very important. If both teachers and learners are aware of the significance of cognitive processes in language learning, it would be very helpful for them to improve the learning atmosphere.

1.1.Statement of the problem

In the Algerian educational context, beneficial results of English classrooms are rarely witnessed. Unfortunately, many students who study English for 4 years still cannot produce the language appropriately. Seemingly, teachers' feedback may be one reason of this problem. The latter depends heavily on the linguistic knowledge the teacher possesses. If his knowledge about the language learning processes is insufficient, he would be incapable of guiding his students to the best way of learning the language

1.2.Aims of the study

The major aim of this research is to look at the usefulness of Selinker's five cognitive processes of Language learning in the Algerian context. Moreover, its sub objectives encompass providing both teachers and learners of English with readily accessible information of this matter; raising their awareness of the crucial importance of such a giant background of knowledge; and testing the participants' knowledge of these cognitive processes. Mainly, this is a call for both teachers and learners of English to improve their understanding of psycholinguistics in relation to English language learning for its unlimited number of benefits to the classroom outcome.

1.3.Theoretical background of the study

1.3.1. Cognitive processes involved in second language learning

To enhance our understanding of language learning and communication, linguists (Selinker 1972; Ellis 1994; Gass, 2000; Crystal 2003 ...etc.) recently, have started to borrow findings from other areas of study such as cognition. Apparently, this kind of cross-disciplinary approach to language proves to be beneficial to the field of teaching and learning languages since it opens doors for new perspectives, debates and insights.

Based on the idea that adult learners usually develop some clues about languages relying on their mother tongue, the process of their second language learning is, to some extent, different from that of their first language. From a cognitive point of view, as an attempt to explain the mental processes influencing L2 learning, interlanguage, proposed initially by Larry Selinker (1972), is the first significant theory that deals with this subject. By definition, interlanguage is the internal linguistic system that an adult second language learner constructs during his learning of a second language (Ellis, 1994, p.350-352).

To put it another way, interlanguage is a linguistic system that is used by L2 learners and it is affected by their L1. It is, that is to say, the process of second language acquisition where L2 is not fully acquired yet and is still influenced by the features of the mother tongue. During the learning phase, learners build their own system of language which is dissimilar from their L1 and L2. Thus, interlanguage can be seen as a zone between the native language and the target language.

According to Selinker (1972), There are five cognitive processes linked to L2 acquisition: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of L2 learning, L2 communication strategies, and overgeneralization of rules and principles.

1.3.1.Language transfer

The learner tries, in one way or another, to make it easy for himself to use the second language. However, his attempts may sometimes be inappropriate causing him language deficiencies. Language transfer is one of those attempts, apparently. It is here where the teacher's intervention is crucial to guide him to the correct way of learning a language. Thus, knowledge about the nature of language transfer and how to make it useful for the learner must be mastered by the teacher in order to improve the learning process.

Concerning the language transfer theory, historically speaking, it has witnessed three major phases, the initial phase was under the influence of behaviourism (1950s-60s) back then, the so-called contrastive analysis hypothesis suggested that through meticulous comparison between the mother tongue and the second language, the obstacles of acquisition could be anticipated. This theory was proved to be ineffective to reach sufficiently beneficial conclusions. As a result, the shortcomings of behaviourism had caused contrastive analysis harsh criticism, particularly from the part of mentalism in the late 1960s.

From that time on, research on language transfer experienced the second phase. Over the 1970s, following Chomsky's universal grammar theory and Dulay and Burt's morpheme studies, the significant role of language transfer was highly considered to be important. Eventually, from 1980s up to the present time, research about language transfer has seen many revolutionary studies. That is, these last decades have been witnessing the introduction of new perspectives and insights into the field of second language acquisition, under the

umbrella of cognitive studies, which have deepened our understanding towards the language transfer phenomenon.

By definition, Crystal (2003) states that, language transfer is “peculiar to foreign language learning and can be manifested notably as the influence of the person’s first language on the language being acquired” (P. 471). To put it differently, this is the phenomenon in which acquisition of a new language is affected by the grammar, pronunciation, orthography, or other aspects of a first language (or another previously learned language), that might either prevent or simplify the learning process.

Moreover, language transfer has experienced a reformative movement recently with several researchers placing it within a cognitive approach to language learning. A cognitive approach defines transfer as habits, and highlights the learner’s significant role as somebody who decides, as being a conscious learner, what should or should not be transferred to L2 learning (Gass, 2000). Still, language transfer is considered as the major reason behind learner’s errors. At this level, teachers’ guidance is crucial to make the learner aware and conscious of what is happening in his learning. Pursuing this further, language transfer is generally divided into two types; namely, positive and negative transfer which are explained as follows.

1.3.1.1.a Positive transfer

Often resemblance between the native language and the target language leads to positive transfer. In other words, similarities between L1 and L2 at the level of writing systems, syntactic structures, vowel systems and vocabulary can decrease the period of time needed to make the acquisition easier (Odlin, 1989). For instance, in vocabulary acquisition, positive transfer stands for the recognition and acquisition of words with similar or identical orthography, and/or pronunciation, in both the native language and the target one. A French learner of English is more likely to transfer words like “Maniféstation” and “accident” into his English vocabulary learning. However, some words seem to be the same, but they are different at the level of meaning such as “parents” and “souvenir”. It is at this point that errors are usually made by learners because those words are called “false friends” which means that although they are written in the same way they are different (in meaning) in the two languages.

1.3.1.1.b Negative transfer

Another type of language transfer is known as negative transfer. Generally speaking, this is most of the time dealt with as the source of errors which happens when learners transfer structures and items of their mother tongue that are not the same in the second language they are learning. In addition, negative transfer can be seen in the following types of errors: underproduction, over production and production errors (Odlin 1993).

The first kind is about the errors which occur when learners fail to mention some elements in the target language due to the influence of their mother tongue. For example, when Arab learners of English produce “Where he live?” instead of “where does he live?”. Perhaps this is because of the fact that the Arabic language does not include auxiliaries. According to Odlin (1993), underproduction is witnessed when a language learner desists from using difficult structures in L2 because they are different from L1. Therefore, the learner tends to “under produce” some incorrect structures in L2.

Moreover, the second type, for Odlin (2003), is sometimes the result of underproduction (p.36). During the learning process, learners might attempt to avoid employing some forms, structures, or words. Rather, they make excessive use of what they reckon to be correct, thus the consequence is the overuse of certain forms or words, which violate the norms of second language. Overproduction can be illustrated in producing sentences of double negation like “Nobody doesn’t know”, or using double subjects such as “I use the pen I bought it”.

According to Odlin (1989), production errors are divided into two types; substitutions and calques. While the former is due to the use of the native language forms in the target language, the latter is about the interference of L1 structure (p.37). In other words, substitution is when a French learner of English writes „probleme” rather than “problem”. Calques represent the learner’s mother tongue structure. For instance, French learners often make errors like saying „I have 21 years old”, because the French structure for that is “j’ai 21 ans”.

Finally, the interest of applied linguists is more likely to be much more in the negative transfer than in the positive one. This is because it is generally believed that only negative transfer constitutes teaching and learning defiance.

1.3.1.2. Transfer of training

Another process that foreign language learners encounter, most of the time subconsciously, is that they acquire their second language exactly as the source of teaching (the teacher or the presentation ... etc) has taught them. That is to say, their learning is influenced by the way they were trained, and as always, this could be either beneficial or disadvantageous for the learner because it depends on the nature of training, i.e., if the teacher is a reliable source of the target language, the learning will be in the right way, and if not, they will learn the language wrongly. Needless to say, thus, some learners’ errors are due to faulty teaching which is considered as a serious problem when the teacher is not competent and qualified. This, again, highlights the pivotal role of the teacher in the classroom.

As far as teaching English in Algeria is concerned, a language which is considered as a foreign one, Richards’ (1972) quote is very relevant to explain what transfer of training is:

“In a foreign language setting, where the major source of the input for English is the teaching manual and the teacher, the concept of transfer of training may be a basic analytic approach, since many of the errors observable are directly traceable to the manner of presentation of the language features in the school course“ (p.89).

Simply put, Odlin (1989) states that transfer of training stands for the errors, at the level of production or comprehension of a second language, which are due to the way the learner has been taught (p.169). By the same token, Selinker (1972, p.37) says that when we are dealing with errors that are the “result of identifiable items in training procedures” it means that we are dealing with transfer of training. Another way to say this is that the teacher (or the way of teaching) can be the reason behind learners’ proper or improper performance of the target language, i.e., it can either help or inhibit them from learning the language appropriately. To illustrate, if the teacher keeps using the present continuous form, this may lead learners to produce wrong progressive forms such as “I am admiring you”.

Finally, the level of the teacher and appropriateness of the curriculum appear to be central for the language learning to take place in the correct manner. Hence, although the learners have to undergo such transfer of training, the teacher has to be there to assist, guide, and help them endeavour the best process of language acquisition.

1.3.1.3 Strategies of L2 Language Learning

During the period of language learning, learners' minds never cease to figure out the best ways to learn, so they set all what they have as approaches, methods and techniques that can help them use the language more effectively. In other words, from the very beginning of learning to the most advanced levels of the second language performance, the learner is more likely to use different types of strategies striving for better quality of acquisition.

Selinker (1972), in his article entitled "Interlanguage", explains that learning strategies are cognitive activities, by learners, that embody L2 data processing to express meaning (p. 32). That is, the learner, in the learning process, opts for some strategies, often consciously, that help him master his target language. Be forewarned though that this is not a detailed explanation of all the learning strategies, because there are many. Therefore, we shall concentrate on two main ones, namely, Hypothesis formation, and hypothesis testing.

1.3.1.3.a Hypotheses formation and hypotheses testing

Ellis (1985) indicates that for the establishment of the L2 rules, learning has to go through two processes; hypotheses formation and hypotheses testing (p.171). For him, hypotheses formation includes two strategies, simplification and inferencing. The former is when the learner simplifies or leaves out some elements of the language (for example when he puts all the verbs in one tense). In other words, simplification is an attempt to make hypotheses which are easy to facilitate communication (Ellis 1985, p.171). The latter, on the other hand, occurs when simplification fails to take place. Instead, the learner must receive the target language input to form proper hypotheses (Ibid, p.172). Simply, inferencing happens when the learner has to read a text in order to infer certain clues "or hypotheses" about the reading strategies.

Pursuing this further, after formulating those hypotheses the learner has to test their validity by a process called hypotheses testing. When producing language, the learner always relies on some sort of tacit hypotheses (the ones that he has already formed through simplification and inferencing). So, he has to check and test his hypotheses when practicing the language receiving feedback, from an interlocutor, which enables him reprocessing the hypotheses if necessary. O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p.33) have explained the phenomenon of hypotheses testing in the following table:

We can say that, thence, interlanguage is a corrupted version of the target language, and the more it is refined using those hypotheses, the more we are getting closer to the correct performance of the language being learnt. Once more, the teachers' feedback is significant to assist the learner to form and test proper hypotheses.

1.3.1.4. Communication strategies

All along the path of learning a language, the learner often faces communication obstacles due to some gaps in his linguistic system. Thanks to some communicative strategies he can overcome such problems in order to produce the intended meaning. To go into details, substitutions, switching to the first language, asking for clarification, coining new words, and

paraphrasing are amongst learners' communication strategies (VanPatten & Benati 2010, p. 73). To put it otherwise, communication strategies are employed by second language learners when using language in order to find solutions to the communicative problems they face.

Addedly, Communication strategies is a term that was first coined by Larry Selinker, in 1972, referring to these processes as one of the five central mechanisms that happen during the development of a learner's interlanguage. Later on, experimental studies (Bialystok, 1983b) (Ellis, 1983) and (Tarone, 1977) have concluded that learners with restricted proficiency favoured strategies like message abandonment, topic avoidance, language switching and literal translation while the interlanguage of higher-level learners comprised strategies like: circumlocution (using many words), word coinage (creating new words and meanings) and approximation (giving an approximate meaning).

Important factors that influence the learner's choice of strategies are his personality and the context of the communication (Tarone, 1977 see also Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: 186). In this respect, the results of studies such as Piranian's (1979) and Ellis's (1985) revealed that American university students learning Russian in the classroom used more avoidance while naturalistic learners opted for paraphrasing and avoidance strategies. Communication strategies, hence, are among the constituents of one's interlanguage towards the acquisition of a foreign language.

In short, and again, teachers' competency is very important since they must deal with and cure such situations to get a preferable outcome of teaching. That is, teachers who are knowledgeable about the communicative strategies of students can be of much help to guide them through the obstacles they face.

1.3.1.5- Over generalisation of rules and principles

Learners most of the time go for the easy way to learn a second language. For that, they frequently apply grammatical rules where they are not possibly applicable and this often leads them to commit errors. Jacobvits (1969, p.55) suggests that generalisation is the application of the former formulated strategies in new situations. Some of these strategies may work correctly, thanks to certain similarities of the L1, but others could be misleading and irrelevant (see also Richards 1971: p.174).

Consequently, these generalisations, in most cases, turn into over generalisations of the second language rules and principles (Selinker, 1972: p.37). Thus, we see those learners' generalisations of second language rules as their personal attempts to form their version of the interlanguage which in turn leads them to acquire the language. Still, meticulous guide is needed not to fall into over generalisations, and then, fossilisation of errors.

2. The study

This researcher lies on a qualitatively descriptive study that looks at the perceptions, attitudes and opinions of some teachers and students about the cognitive processes involved in language learning. Seeking objectiveness, pertinent data were collected using a well-designed questionnaire that was mailed to a non-randomly selected sample of students and teachers. This convenience sampling includes 23 participants among which 6 are PhD students of English at Biskra University, the rest (17) are Master degree holders of Boumerdes University, and 10 amongst the 23 participants are teachers of English.

2.1. Data collection methods

Data collection methods are methods used by researchers to carry on their studies. In our case this method is a questionnaire. The latter is about a set of questions posed to participants for the purpose of gathering facts or opinions about a research topic. To go into details, this is about a semi-structured questionnaire containing 8 questions among which 2 are factual, 4 are closed-ended, and 2 are open-ended

2.2. Data analysis procedure

The results were calculated using Microsoft Excel and then demonstrated in tables, graphs and pie charts by the same hardware. Thereafter, we interpreted those results through describing, and commenting on, them. We reckoned that this approach is an appropriate one because our study sought to characterise the cognitive processes involved in language learning, and to see some Algerian students and teachers' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions about these processes. Addedly, due to the limited time we had, we, unfortunately, were not able to adopt other methods which are based on other techniques of analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1- Question 1

- Are you male or female?

Yes

No

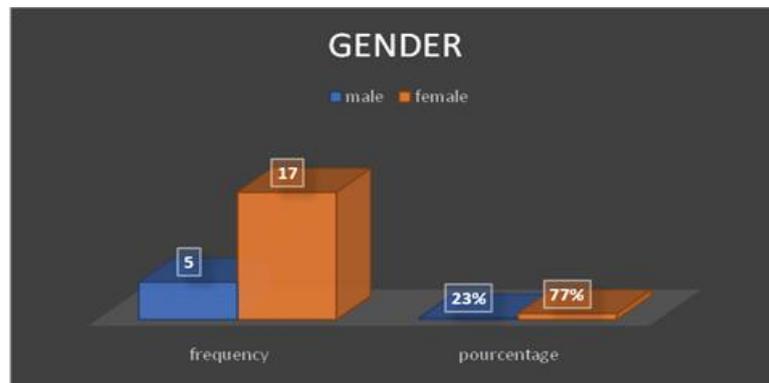


Figure 01: The participants' gender

As an attempt to know the participants, we have posed such a question. Also, to assure the representativeness of our study there must have been the participation of both genders. This graph shows that the majority of the participants are females. That is, out of 22 students, 17 are females (77%), while 5 of them (23%) are males. Thus, it has to be mentioned that since female learners of English outnumber the male ones, and this is even noticeable in our universities, there must be a reason behind. Maybe this is due to the fact that males need to get a job early, so they quit their studies at the expense of their work.

That is, the goal of this question was to recognise the gender of the respondents which in turn can give the reader an idea about them since their identity is kept anonymous. Perhaps, also, this means that a larger number of females have a tendency to study the English language.

3.2- Question 02

- How long have you been studying/teaching English?

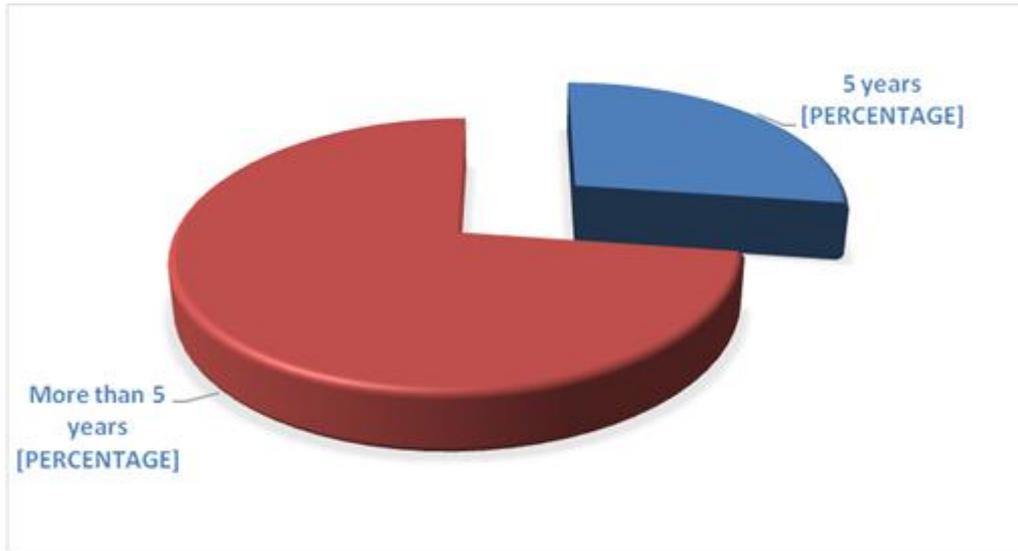


Figure 02: The participants' experience with the English language

The above pie chart displays that the predominance is for the participants who have more than five years of experience dealing with the English language, whether studying or teaching it. The purpose behind asking this question was to show the trustworthiness of the answers. It means that all the participants have a robust idea about learning and/or teaching English.

To explain, 73% of the participants have either studied or taught the English language more than 5 years, and the rest (27%) have 5 years of experience. This reflects the acceptable level of the participants whose answers, so, can be taken seriously. In other words, to make this study reliable and credible, we have selected, as it is revealed by the answers, English students and teachers who have considerable experience in the field. The respondents' level, in our case, is crucial because it is the only proof that the answers can be taken into consideration.

3.3- Questions 03

- According to your own experience, **please indicate how far you agree or disagree with the following statement.** (Tick in (✓) the box that best fits your response)

- **Statement:** Language transfer is a phenomenon that **must** take place at some time during the second language learning process. ["Language transfer is the influence of the person's first language on the language being acquired"] (Crystal, 2003. P. 471)]

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>

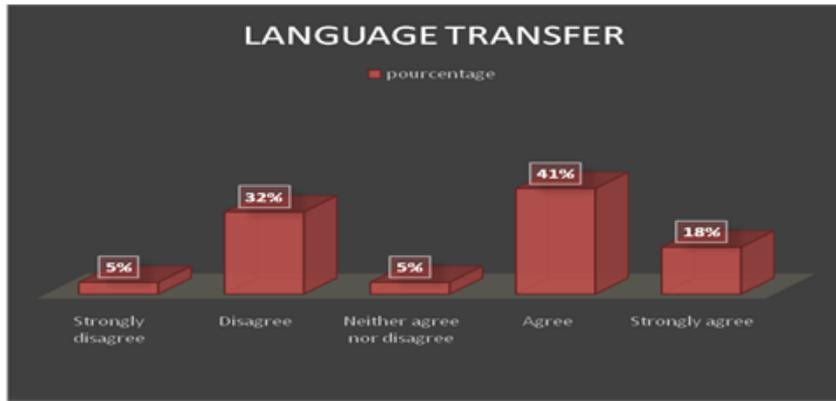


Figure 03: The participants’ attitudes towards language transfer phenomenon

The goal of this question is to examine the participants’ position concerning language transfer, which is the first cognitive process that our research deals with. The results, illustrated in this graph, reveal that 41% of them agree on the fact that this phenomenon occurs in some time during the learning process, 18% strongly agree on that, and 5% take a neutral position. However, 32% of them disagree meaning that they don’t believe that language transfer must happen to second language learners, and 5% strongly disagree on that.

Based on this data, it is clear that most of the participants assent to the idea of language transfer considering that learners have to witness such a phenomenon. As opposed to Selinker (1972) and Crystal (2003), many of our respondents think that the mother tongue influence is not a compulsory process in the learners’ interlanguage. Hence, maybe this means that the majority of them (59%) have experienced language transfer during their learning while the other (37%) have not experienced, or noticed, it, this is why the former agreed and the latter disagreed.

3.4- Question 04

- Do you think that the way your teacher taught you influenced your learning somehow? (Alternatively, do you think that the way you teach influences your student’s learning?)

Yes

No

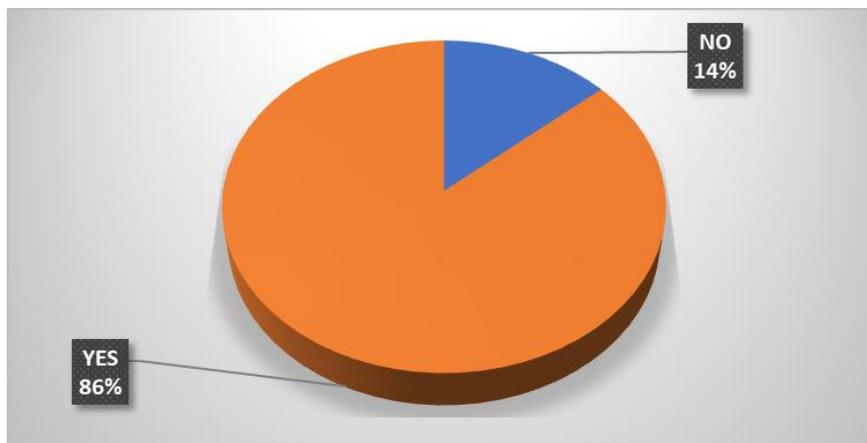


Figure 04: Participants’ opinions about transfer of training

The aim of this question was to see the participants' attitudes towards the influence of the way they were taught. 86% of them have witnessed transfer of training, whereas, 14% chose "No" as an answer. As a joint question to this one, we asked the ones whose answer is "yes" to tell us which kind of transfer they experienced (positive or negative), and their answers are demonstrated as follows:

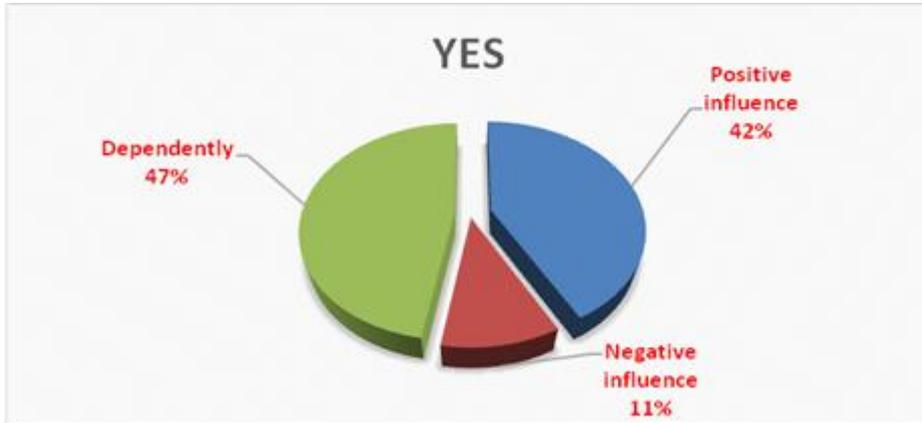


Figure 05: Type of the transfer of training

To comment on this chart, it is obvious that 42% of the participants have witnessed positive transfer of training. This implies that their teachers (or the way they taught them) led to construct a correct version of the second language. Nevertheless, 11% of them suffered from faulty teaching which has led them to commit errors during their language learning. Moreover, the rest 47% fluctuated between negative and positive transfer of training stating that it depended on the way they were taught, i.e., if the teacher was competent enough, they would be positively influenced and vice versa.

3.5- Question 05

- During your second language learning, how would you describe the efficiency of your leaning strategies? (Circle the description that suits your answer)

Very good – Good – Fair – Poor – Very poor

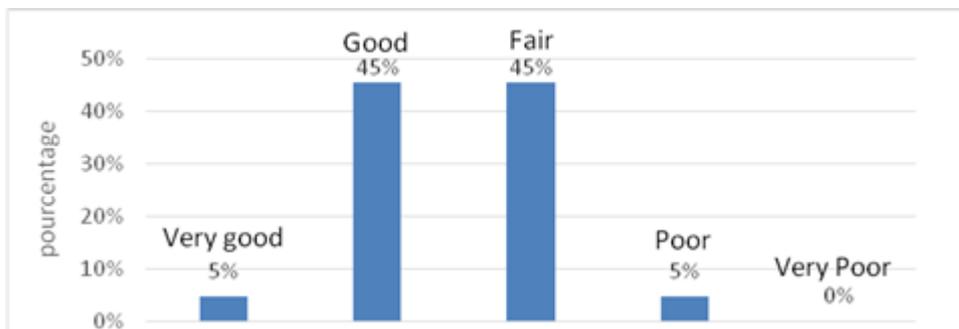


Figure 06: The efficiency of the participants' learning strategies

As this graph exhibits, 5% of the participants have opted for "very good" for the efficiency of their learning strategies, some (45%) have selected "good" to describe it, others

(45%) have chosen ‘‘fair’’, while the last 5% of them believe that the efficacy of their learning strategies was ‘‘poor’’. We can understand, here, that the overwhelming majority of our participants have positively benefited from their learning strategies that, probably, have helped them to learn the target language. By way of explanation, the study reveals that the majority of the respondents view that their learning strategies were successful enough to aid them acquire the English language. Notwithstanding, some of them have not built beneficial strategies.

As a result, it seems that even the choice of the learning strategies has an impact on the quality of learning the language. Once more, the teacher’s intervention in this case is very significant. That is to say, the teacher is, undoubtedly, able to, at least, guide his students to utilise useful techniques and strategies of learning, and the students on their part should be aware of such learning strategies that can be of much help for them.

3.6- Question 06

- when speaking English, you often face communication obstacles which are due to some weaknesses at the level of your mastery of the language such as; lack of comprehension, difficulty to express yourself, and forgetting some words ... etc., **what are the techniques and strategies that you frequently rely on to overcome such obstacles?**

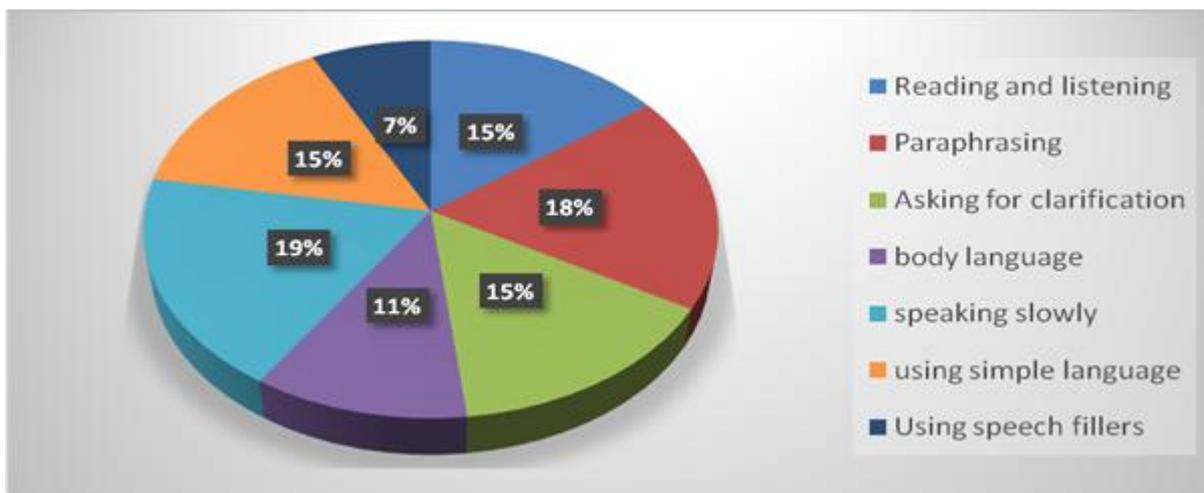


Figure 07:The participants’ communication strategies

This pie chart is our reference about our student’s learning strategies. It says that ‘‘speaking slowly’’, is the strategy that they mostly use to overcome the obstacles they encounter when talking. In addition, paraphrasing is the second technique they use to speak about terms they forget. Moreover, asking for clarification and using simple language are other strategies they rely on to control the communication.

The results also show that body language is used too to overcome the problems of communication. Few participants have indicated the use of speech fillers (uhm, emm, I mean...) as an attempt to gain time in order to remember a word and gather ideas when conversing. Certain students tend to base on reading and listening to improve their vocabulary learning, and they considered it as a communication strategy. Hence, communication strategies are good tools to be used by learners notably if they are well guided by the teacher.

3.7- Question 07

- To what degree did your learning process witness the overgeneralization of English grammatical rules?

High degree 3 – 2 – 1 – 0 – 1 – 2 – 3 Low degree

Figure 08: The degree of the overgeneralization of rules in the participants' leaning.

	High degree					Low degree	
Degree	3	2	1	0	1	2	3
Frequency		6	4	1	6	2	3
Percentage		27%	18%	5%	27%	9%	14%

To illustrate the degree to which the participants have experienced the phenomenon of over-generalization of rules, we have put the results in a table to make it easy to be interpreted. Generally speaking, 27% of the participants experienced the overgeneralization of rules to a high extent circling number (2) towards (high degree). As it is shown, 14%, (the lowest degree), of them have not really experienced such a process in their learning which means that their errors were committed because of other reasons. Thus, the degree of overgeneralization among participants swung between the range (2) towards high degree and (3) towards low degree.

In this respect, over generalisation of rules is a phenomenon that should be avoided at all costs, so the acquisition of this knowledge by both teachers and learners can develop their learning and make them bypass many obstacles which in turn makes them gain time to learn the language. Thus, it is decidedly recommended that raising awareness among these partners (teachers and students) is very important to improve language classrooms.

3.8- Question 08

- To what extent do you think that your previous (or present) teachers of foreign languages master sufficient linguistic knowledge that allows them to teach the language thoroughly? (To what degree do you think they are knowledgeable about the language learning process?)

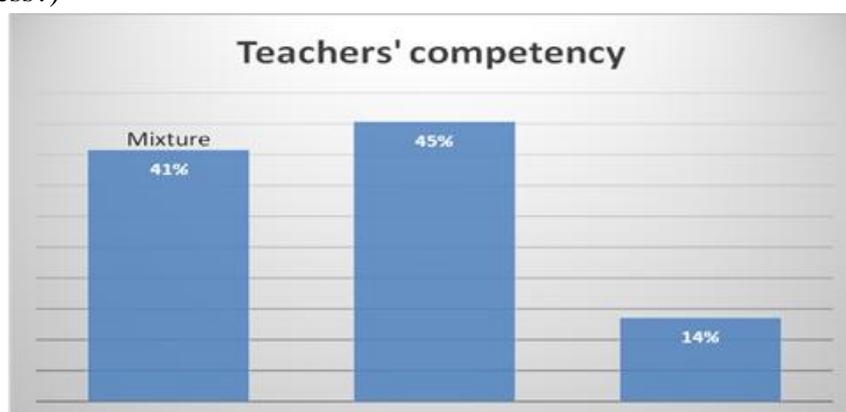


Figure 09: The participants' attitudes towards their teachers' level

This graph is the manifestation of the participants' opinions, perceptions, and attitudes about their teachers' mastery of the linguistic knowledge that allows them to teach the English

language thoroughly. Well, frankly, this question is amongst the most important questions in this questionnaire because, by asking it, we sought for the real quest of this research which is whether our teachers of English language are competent enough to do their job.

To interpret the data manifested in this graph, 45% of these teachers and students reckon that their teachers were knowledgeable enough and they were able to teach them the language fully. 41% of them said that some of their teachers were competent, while, others were not sufficiently qualified. Still, 14% of the participants stated that all their teachers did not have ample knowledge and this was clear in their way of teaching.

If this means one thing it is that even the majority of the respondents answered that their teachers were acceptable, there still be others who claimed that theirs were not good enough. this means that we still have to improve our language classrooms, and some teachers need to do more practice and try to read more about such theories in order to reach better results.

4. Recommendations

Based on the previously analysed data and the results obtained, we recommend that some teachers, fortunately the findings revealed that their number is few, must develop their level concerning the linguistic knowledge (i.e., the learning process, the teaching methods ... etc), so that they would be a source of help to their students. Furthermore, when the teacher is highly trained in all the aspects of teaching, his negative training influence decreases or even vanishes because he would be able to know how to act in the classroom. Again, the teacher's role is significant, and for that, some teachers should develop his teaching capacities, so that he can make of his classroom a better place.

On the part of the learners, they must improve, too, their knowledge about the learning strategies so that they would be able to build beneficial strategies that can help them construct a sound version of the target language. Also, they must read books about communication strategies in order to be aware of such strategies to use them appropriately to make their communications better. Lastly, the learner, especially during an advanced level, can be of much help to himself if he understands the over generalisation process in order to be able to avoid it when producing, and dealing with, the English language.

5. Conclusion

Last but not least, as it was previously mentioned, awareness is very important. Though both teachers and students are responsible for what happens in the classroom, the teachers hold more responsibility. For that, we strongly suggest that the teacher has to be very knowledgeable of the linguistic theories and especially the learners' cognitive processes because recent studies and researches recommend that meticulous attention has to be paid to the learner way of learning so that the teacher can fit the lesson to the learners' needs and not the other way around. Finally, we can say, now, that the teacher's feedback relies heavily on the knowledge he possesses. Since that feedback is very important, the teachers' level is crucial.

On the part of the learners, they must improve, too, their knowledge about the learning strategies so that they would be able to build beneficial strategies that can help them construct

a sound version of the target language. Also, they must read books about communication strategies in order to be aware of such strategies to use them appropriately to make their communications better. Lastly, the learner, especially during an advanced level, can be of much help to himself if he understands the over generalisation process in order to be able to avoid it when producing English language.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The questionnaire

Questionnaire

Dear class mates,

You are politely requested to fill in this questionnaire, which is about cognitive processes involved in second language acquisition. This is for the purpose of putting some theories and studies of cognition and learning into practice to see their validity in our Algerian context. Ergo, we would be very appreciative if you could answer the following questions because your cooperation is very significant to our research. Thence, please fill it wholeheartedly.

N.B. Consider, safely, that your answers will be kept highly anonymous, strictly confidential and they will be used exclusively for academic purposes.

1- **Are you male or female?** (Tick in (✓) the box that best describes your answer)

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

2- **How long have you been studying/teaching English?**

.....

.....

3- According to your own experience, **please indicate how far you agree or disagree with the following statement.** (Tick in (✓) the box that best fits your response)

- **Statement:** Language transfer is a phenomenon that **must** take place at some time during the second language learning process. [“Language transfer is the influence of the person’s first language on the language being acquired”] (Crystal, 2003. P. 471)]

Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>

4- **Do you think that the way your teacher taught you influenced your learning somehow?** (Alternatively, **do you think that the way you teach influences your student’s learning?**)

(Tick in (✓) the box that best suits your response)

Yes

No

- If your answer is yes, please let us know whether that influence was positively or negatively.

.....
.....

5- During your second language learning, **how would you describe the efficiency of your leaning strategies?** (Circle the description that suits your answer)

Very good – Good – Fair – Poor – Very poor

6- when speaking English, you often face communication obstacles which are due to some weaknesses at the level of your mastery of the language such as; lack of comprehension, difficulty to express yourself, and forgetting some words ... etc., **what are the techniques and strategies that you frequently rely on to overcome such obstacles?**

.....
.....
.....

7- **To what degree did your learning process witness the overgeneralization of English grammatical rules?** [Over generalisation of rules is to apply a grammatical rule where it is not applicable] (Put the number that fits your answer between brackets)

High degree 3 – 2 – 1 – 0 – 1 – 2 – 3 Low degree

8- **To what extent do you think that your previous (or present) teachers of foreign languages master sufficient linguistic knowledge that allows them to teach the language thoroughly?** (To what degree do you think they are knowledgeable about the language learning process?)

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.....
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Thank you very much.

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