

FIRST LANGUAGE EFFECTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Mrs Mahiddine-Benchabane Nadia

Maitre de Conférences en Langue Anglaise.

Département de traduction.

Université Alger II.

This paper investigates the source of cross linguistic transfer in the learning of a second or third foreign language. . By linguistic transfer, we mean what the learners generalize in their knowledge about their first language (NL) to help them learn to use a target language (TL). Here transfer does not indicate whether what is carried over is bad or good. This meaning that transfer is a neutral word in origin and nature.

One special aspect of the second or third language is the fact that the learner having already acquired one or two languages is not a novice language learner. The role of a foreign language in subsequent language acquisition, has engendered considerable investigation from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Here we first consider the notion of transfer and the issues surrounding it, before addressing the interaction between transfer and the developmental stages.

The notion of transfer derives from the application of behaviourist psychology and structural linguistics to language teaching. Lado (1964) claimed that making a comparison of the structures of the L2 so that the L1 teachers could determine the learners' real learning problems. The underlying assumption was that in L2 acquisition the learner would transfer on the L2 the L1 elements that were similar. Structures could be similar in three ways: They could be signaled by the same formal device, have the same meaning or have a similar distribution in the language system. Lado illustrated this comparison between structures with yes/no question formation.

According to Lado the learning difficulties would be predictable. While most language professionals-theorists and practitioners alike- will attest to the fact that The L1 does play some role in L2 acquisition., the extent to which the learner's L1 affects

the learning acquisition process has been an ongoing debate since the rise of error analysis and creative constructions in the 1960's and 1970's and the issues in the debate has changed somewhat over the years (Flynn 1997).

The use of the term transfer itself became an issue for several reasons. It was stated that the student tended to transfer the sentence forms notification devices, the number gender and case patterns in his native language. Some linguists saw transfer as the use of overt L1 grammatical structures into the L2. In other words transferred language habits. With characterization of transfer in mind, some researchers felt that the term 'transfer' was too closely connected with to the behaviorist theoretical framework. Corder (1983) for instance argued that the danger of using such technical terms closely associated with particular theories is that they may perhaps quite unconsciously constrain one freedom of thinking about the particular topic. It was also argued that the term transfer was too narrow because it did not allow all the different phenomena evidenced in the L2 acquisition data (for example; transfer, avoidance and borrowing). Nor did it apply to related phenomena, such as L1 or L2 language loss. Sharwood-Smith and Kellerman (1986) suggested the term 'cross linguistic influence' as a broader more encompassing term. These terminological disputes underscore the nature of transfer. In other words transfer has been characterized by a learning and communication strategy, a process of superimposing L1 structures on the L2 (Gass 1983) a filter on the learners' input (Anderson 1983) and a constraint on the learner's formulation of hypothesis. A more general view of transfer such as that offered in Odlin's (1992) working definition, subsumes the notions of strategy, process filter and constraint; 'transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly acquired).' Odlin (1992).

A broader definition such as this serves to include a number of L1 influences that were not originally considered in Lado's narrow definition, including but not limited to delay rule restructuring. (Zobl 1984.). Resetting of abstract grammatical constraints (Flynn 1997 White 1991). This broad range of L1 effects demonstrates that the influence of the first language is indeed as persuasive as subtle as Corder (1983) predicted.

Although it has generally come to be accepted that L1 influence manifests itself in these subtle and complex ways, how then is transfer identified? This issue has been somewhat problematic. In contradiction to Lado's structure-by structure predictive approach, Felix (1980) noted that the crucial problem is that we do not possess any well-established criteria by which it can be decided in a unique and principled way, which ungrammatical utterances are demonstrably utterances of language transfer. In other words is everything that looks like transfer is indeed transfer and how can we tell the difference? Celce-Murcia (1999) agrees that many errors can be ambiguous; that is, they may be the result of transfer, or alternatively an example of a developmental error which reflects the characteristics of the language acquisition process.

This situation is clearly exemplified by Felix (1980) with a comparison of Spanish German and learners of English who all produce similar errors. A Spanish learner of English produces sentences with the copula *be* which omit the subject pronoun required in English; *Is man --- is boat*.

Based on the structure of the L1, these errors are considered the result of the transfer of subject less sentences into English. However two English learners of L2 German similarly produce subject less sentences, although neither language allow the omission of the subject pronoun in independent clauses

Felix (1980) noted that such subjectless sentences are also evident in the L1 acquisition of English and might just as easily be the result of language development rather than of transfer. Therefore these data highlight the fact that L2 acquisition

includes the influences both of the L1 and of acquisition processes, and identifying transfer of syntax is more difficult than transfer in an area such as phonology, because learners can more easily paraphrase or simply avoid difficult syntactic structures. Hence identification of transfer is not as clear-cut as originally proposed. For instance while research has also shown that L1 transfer may manifest itself in a variety of ways, research has also shown that there are myriads of other influences involved in the course of L2 acquisition in addition to the L1 that need to be taken into account in the analysis of learner data. A final important consideration is at Lado was comparing and contrasting surface syntactic structures; he was not concerned with abstract linguistic constraints. This consideration figures prominently in more recent versions of transfer in L2 acquisition to be examined in the following lines.

What is transferable and why?

A broader definition of transfer leads to a wider range of questions. For example, in delayed rule restructuring can we predict which rules will be delayed and which ones will not? Similarly can we predict which structures will be avoided and conversely, which structures will be overproduced?

Kellerman (1984) addressed some of these concerns when he posed the question 'What is transferable?' in relation to L2 acquisition of vocabulary, and successfully argued that not every structure that looks transferable is transferable. His work revealed that L2 learners transferred L1 structures that they perceived as transferable. He suggested that L2 learners' notion of transferability were based partially on their 'perception of language distance' between the L1 and L2 or the learners' psycho typology. And partially on their perceptions of the nature of a particular structure. Structures that were perceived as infrequent, irregular, semantically or structurally opaque, or in any other way exceptional, what we could in other words call 'psycho linguistically marked' would be less likely to be transferred than those structures that were considered less psychologically marked.

While Kellerman's view of transferability focused on the role of the learner, Zobl emphasized the role of the L2 linguistic system noting that some linguistic structures seemed more transferable than others, based in part on linguistic congruity between the L1 and the L2 and on the linguistic ambiguity or instability of the L2 structure. For instance this type had an effect on transfer. In the yes/no questions the learner did not transfer the L1 rule of subject-base verb inversion to verbs marked for progressive aspect (V-ing) although these verbs occurred in declarative sentences elsewhere in the IL data. These would result in forms such as that in Go you to school? For Do you go to school?

Going you to school? For Are you going to school?

Zobl also noted a difference between yes/no questions regarding transfer, subject base verb inversion lasted two or three months longer in yes/no questions than in WH questions. Zobl further argued that in order to make adequate predictions about the transferability of L1 structures in the acquisition of particular L2 structures, independent evidence was needed that the L2 structures was inherently ambiguous, unstable, opaque' Zobl (1983).

How first language knowledge interacts with the developing second language knowledge.

The final influence on transferability is the actual developmental stage of the learner, which brings us back to contrastive analysis and creative construction which were seen as two opposing theories of L2 acquisition. Researchers have pointed out that L2 acquisition can include both processes of transfer from the learner's previous language knowledge and at the same time processes of creative hypothesis testing (Anderson 1984, Wode 1986).

Wode claims that a particular developmental stage may create the prerequisites that allow learners to transfer their L1 rules into their L2 grammars. For example English and German have the same structure in relation to the copula, they note that the structures are the same in the L1 and in the L2. In the subsequent stage of development, the learners vary freely between pre- and post-verbal negation, with the L1 structure-post verbal negation- winning out. Wode's hypothesizes that post-verbal negation is favoured because the L2 learners have formulated the notion of similarity between the structures of the L1 and the L2 based on the copula, thus allowing the transfer of L1 structures into the IL grammar.

According to Zobl, this notion of similarity also plays a role in constraints to transfer as evidenced in the different stages of acquisition of English questions by L1 French speakers. Zobl argues that while the use of a dummy auxiliary as in *Is the breakfast is Good?* is common in L2 acquisition of English questions, French speakers utilize this structure much more frequently than do other learners of English. Once French learners have acquired pronouns subject-auxiliary inversion: *Est-ce que Marc est touriste?* - *it that Marc is tourist?*

At this point they transfer the French restriction against noun subject-auxiliary inversion into their English interlanguages(ILs), resulting in dummy auxiliary structures which are overwhelmingly confined to noun subject as opposed to pronoun subject.

While perceived similarity between the L1 and L2 may influence the form that a subsequent developmental stage takes, it may also prolong the length of a developmental stage. This phenomenon has been observed in the acquisition of English negation by Spanish and Italian speakers who remain in the no+verb stage of development longer than do speakers of other L1s such as Japanese.

A final interaction developmental stages and L1 transfer can be seen in the constraints on the hypothesis testing made by learners. Tarone (1988) proposed that the structure of the L1 would influence the hypothesis made by the L2 learners. That is once learners discover that the French L2 does not have post-verbal pronominal objects as does the English L1, they will hypothesize that zero anaphora is allowed. i.e no objects as opposed to pre verbal pronominal objects. Strozer (1994) finds suggestive results that learners do in fact allow for zero anaphora following a stage in which the IL pronominal structure mirrors that of the L1.

The interaction of developmental stages and transfer phenomenon includes the developmental stage as a prerequisite for the transfer of an L1 rule, due to the similarity to the L1 structure and the form of a developmental stage as a result of L1 constrained hypothesis testing

In practice, transfer has attracted people of different academic backgrounds and led researchers to different interpretations and definitions of the term. Schashter (1983), for instance, was interested in the transfer of discourse accent and believed that it is a reflection of 'conversational features' such as forms and functions of conversational management. Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith (1986) studied the exactitude of the term and tried to draw a distinction between transfer and influence. To them, transfer is not the same thing as cross-linguistic influence. Whereas transfer refers to those linguistic behaviors incorporated from L1 into IL without capturing other interlingual effects. Cross-linguistic influence, on the other hand, refers to those L1 effects such as avoidance, L1 constraints on L2 learning and performance. This view is further elaborated in Sharwood-Smith (1994).

For Odlin (1989), transfer just means the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been imperfectly, acquired. This definition thus suggests that transfer can occur at any levels, strategic, linguistic, discoursal, and pragmatic. Young (1996) analyzed how the transfer

of speaking rules from one's own native speech community influences interacting with members of the host community. She insisted that transfer mainly stands for the use of rules of speaking from one's own native speech community when interacting with members of the host community or simply when speaking or writing in a second language. Hence for Cohen (1991), "apologies" and "complaints" are pragmatic, while turn-taking discursual. In terms of the scope of transfer, he held that transfer consists of both cross-linguistic influence and cross-cultural transfer elements. Kasper (1995) focused on pragmatic transfer and defined it as "the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production, and acquisition of L2 pragmatic information" (Kasper, 1992; 1995).

The identification of transfer was first discussed by Corder (1981) who remarked that it is the duty of both teachers of languages and native speakers of the language to point out the transfer according to the rules of language. At the same time, Corder (1981) implied the source of data for transfer research lie in the learners' production or utterances, that is the observed output which results from the second language learner's attempted production of a TL norm (1981). Kasper (1992) also reiterated that it is imperative to find certain constraints on a pragmatic transfer, so that our work will be operational.

The usual way to identify a transfer in SLA research is something like an informal estimation method (Kasper, 1992). In informal estimations, we decide whether a transfer can be established by looking at the similarities and differences of the percentage by which a particular category of interlanguage features (such as a semantic formulae, strategy, or linguistic form) occurs in the NL, TL, and IL data. Similar response frequencies in all the three data sets are classified as positive transfer (Faerch & Kasper, 1989), while different response frequencies between IL-TL and NL-TL combined with similar frequencies between IL-NL register as negative transfer.

Another way to determine a transfer is to use a statistically significant method. Kasper (1992) strongly recommended Selinker's (1992) operational definition of transfer. To her, it can be adapted to a suitable method for identifying pragmatic transfer in interlanguage production. Parallel trends towards one option in a binary choice schema as was pointed out by Selinker (1992), however, can rarely be established. A statistically significant method determines whether the differences between the interlanguage and the learner's native language on a particular pragmatic feature are statistically significant, and how these differences relate to the TL. A general guiding principle is, if a pragmatic feature is lack of statistically significant differences in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature in NL, TL, and IL, then it can be operationally defined as positive transfer. On the contrary, statistically significant differences in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature between IL-TL and NL-TL and lack of statistically significant differences between IL and L1 can be operationally defined as negative transfer (Kasper, 1992). KASPER further elaborated on positive transfer as "similarity in terms of response frequencies in NL, IL, and TL", while negative transfer as "similar response frequencies in NL, IL with different response frequencies between NL and TL and between IL and TL".

L1-L2 transfer was first discussed in Selinker (1992) and other follow-up studies either provided but further evidences of transfer or its role in understanding the learner's error in particular and interlanguage as a whole.

Transfer was considered responsible for error occurrences in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies; Corder, 1983). Nevertheless Odlin (1992) evidenced that transfer of strategies was but partially responsible for the learner's errors. In a similar manner, it was reported that transfer was but one of the sources of error .Since then, transfer was more and more indirectly mentioned as an apparent factor of error (Corder, 1981). The learner language was contrasted with the basic features and hints of transfer and the

tradition has continued into the 90's where Celce-Murcia (1993) made a theoretical categorization of the errors in terms of phonetics, word-formation, syntax, and semantics. Transfer helped us to see the grammatical element universal in human languages. And from the teaching point of view, Palmberg (1985) discussed the amount of words learners already had before they took up the learning of the TL and its impact on the acquisition of new word formation processes in second language acquisition. This practice was by and Odlin (1989). Both provided evidences that NL-based transfer also occur in the learning of word-formation in a second language.

Non-linguistic perspectives of transfer

Non-linguistic perspectives towards transfer are multi-factorial. Young (1996) discussed the transfer of NL-based conversational rules. She observed that the learner had a tendency of using conversational rules other than that from the TL to finish an interaction or playing his part in an interaction to impress the audience that he is trying to be cooperative. Such transfer had an impact

On the development of the learner's TL communicative competence suggested that social factors are closely related to transfer and he looked into how Singaporean learners of English manipulated their learned English (Richards, 1982). A recent cross-cultural study of transfer is by Strozer (1994) who analyzed the responses of the immigrants in Melbourne to arguments, identification and cultural styles. Earlier attempts at transfer as strategy was documented and further evidence that learners would rely on the use of communicative strategies to convey lexical meaning when they were at a loss of what they wanted to say. All this led to White's (1991) book-length discussions of communicative strategy transfer. Communicative strategy was also evidenced in Cohen's (1995) investigation of transfer from the angle of code mixing. He reported that code mixing comes from an unbalanced requirement of foreign language competence and communicative prerequisites argued that code mixing is not a norm to be recommended in EFL teaching for two reasons: it hinders comprehension and slows the speed of TL acquisition. Cohen (1995) added that the learners both shifted their previous knowledge about politeness principles and communicative strategies into the comprehension and production of the TL.

The effort to study how non-native learners understand and realize a statement in the TL has spiraled into a tradition identified as the study of pragmatic universals.

By comparing how people in different languages and cultures realized a speech act, we are now rested on a ground that enables us to tell in what way people share something in common in making a request, and to sort out a positive transfer from a negative one. Take "request" for example. In realizing such a speech act, people in most languages tend to use either a directive statement, and in putting forth a conventional indirect speech act, linguistic hints such as "Would you mind V-ing?" for a request from others were used (Kasper, 1992). In general, people from different cultures fall back on their knowledge on how to make a request

Another main aspect tackled in communicative effect studies is pragmatic failure. was that in cross-cultural communication, learners expressed their ideas in a way that was different from the native speakers. This interlanguage phenomenon, free of grammatical errors, sometimes led to miscomprehension in cross-cultural communication. Approached closer, a pragmatic failure was sometimes related to the misuse of a learned linguistic form and sometimes it was associated with NL-based influence. Pragmatic failures were divided into two types, pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic, both terms being indebted to the discussion of the scope of general pragmatics

An example of pragmalinguistic failure is the learner of French who uses of the expression "Never mind" in replying to "Thanks a lot. That's a great help" (He, 1988). In the French language we use 'de rien' pas de quoi' in reply to "Thank you".

However, their equivalents in English, “Never mind”, “Not at all” and “You are welcome” are slightly different in use from one another, though they all may be translated as “’pas de quoi” in French. The students often failed to see the discrepancy and, due to their mother-tongue influence, used these expressions interchangeably.

A sociopragmatic failure may sometimes be resulted from a French-based influence. For instance, our learners sometimes fall back on their French ways in interpreting an intended meaning in an utterance or in observing the rules, factors in a social situation of the TL. If a student helped the professor clean the chalkboard, he would normally say “thank you” to the student. But instead of saying “My pleasure”, as native speakers normally do in this situation, French students would often say, “it’s nothing”. This shows the students’ falling back on the French situation where it is wholesomely all right for people to say “It is my duty.” But he failed to realize that in English ‘It is my duty” also implies an obligation instead of a volunteer help.

Reports revealed that in terms of the communicative effect, transfers were of two categories, positive and negative. Those transfers from the learner’s NL that do not lead to misunderstanding in the TL are positive. Negative pragmatic transfer is different, as it was evidenced that some of the transfer-based pragmatic failures are serious. Thus negative pragmatic transfer is more complicated and requires further investigation (Cohen 1995).

Approaches of transfer study

Although ways to get data for transfer analysis were addressed in Flynn(1997) who argued that quantitative method should be used, we observed three main methods recurrently utilized in transfer study: cross-sectional, longitudinal and theoretical. The cross-sectional method compares how samples of L2 learners at different levels of proficiency understand and produce linguistic action.

A longitudinal method reports how individuals or groups of learners from the early stages onward rely on a few prepackaged or prefabricated routines which are later analyzed into rules and elements that become available for productive use. There have been but very few longitudinal reports on the development of learners’ pragmatic knowledge (Cohen 1995). Different from either cross-sectional or longitudinal methods, theoretical accounts resort to cognitive theory and research. Compared with the other above-illustrated methods, theoretical accounts of pragmatic development are even fewer. To date, there have been two different but compatible frameworks. One was Schmidt’s (1993) theory of the role of consciousness in pragmatic development, and the other was a proposal put forward by Strozer (1994) to look at

learners’ interlanguage pragmatic knowledge development in terms of language use and proficiency. It seems that the two methods, though divergent from one another, converge in that they address different stages of pragmatic learning: Schmidt showing more interests in the conditions of initial intake, while Bialystok considering how acquired pragmatic information is represented and restructured. Of course, both proposals need to have empirical testing.

Impacts on the elicited data were observed in the use of different instruments, and different production tasks would also impose different processing demands on learners and influence the selective activation of pragmatic knowledge. It seemed that the written conditions gave the learners time to assemble the material for literal translation in a controlled fashion, whereas under the greater demands of conversational interaction, lack of time and attention resources preclude the on-line production of formal L2 equivalents..

However, it was a fact that different instruments were used in data collection. Introspection, self-reporting, verbal reports, diary writing (Cohen, 1996), assessment questionnaire and production questionnaire observing written production questionnaires. Cross-cultural surveys, for instance, made frequent uses of

questionnaires to elicit native speakers' comments on identified transfers in the learner language. Informants were invited to scale each linguistic fact on a questionnaire. Investigations were conducted on both the linguistic and the pragmatic levels.

Studies of transfer in SLA suggested that transfers had been tackled in all facets, linguistic and pragmatic. Linguistically, transfer studies ranged from phonology, grammar, lexicon to meaning. On the pragmatic dimension, communicative strategies and pragmatic failure, among other things, were examined. Thus the transfer issue has been analyzed both structurally and functionally. Literature also indicated that most studies were linguistic rather than pragmatic. Transfer studies before mid 1980's were mostly of a linguistic orientation. A growing interest in pragmatic analyses emerged since mid 1980's and almost took up the whole scene after the 1990's. However, most

pragmatically related studies were clearly driving at cross-linguistic contrasts of speech act realization patterns, and there were little literature clearly aiming at pragmatic transfers. The tradition of transfer studies has also resulted in certain approaches so that further replications may be followed. However, most transfer studies were process-oriented. It is interesting to focus on the product of transfer.

Literature strongly indicated that findings pertaining to the pragmatic aspect revealed a deeper side of the learner's TL competence. Studies concerning pragmatic failure, for instance, unveiled not only another part of learning difficulties, but also seemingly the more difficult part, because a pragmatic failure can be checked only in cross-cultural interactions. This implies that more attention should be laid on the study of transfer along this direction.

This paper has also offered an extensive review of early L2 research dealing with stages of acquisition and with the effects of the L1 on L2 acquisition in general and the stages of acquisition in particular. The examination of developmental stages would reveal both universal properties of acquisition as well as the perspective of L1 influence. Once researchers began to extend the notion of transfer from Lado's restricted notion of structural transfer to other levels of analysis, it has become clear that transfer is a very complex phenomenon. These studies lay the theoretical foundations for subsequent work in L2 acquisition in which the extended notion of transfer is utilized in the analysis of data within different theoretical framework (for example with the proposal of universal grammar and typological universals). L2 researchers have begun to reconfigure the notions of what is transferable and why?

Bibliography

1. Anderson;R (1984) Transfer to Somewhere. Language transfer in language learning (pp 177-201) NewBurry House.
2. Celce_Murcia; M (1999) The Grammar book. An ESL teacher's course. Boston
3. Cohen, A (1995) strategies in learning and using Second language. London. Longman.

4. Cotder, S.P (1983) Error analysis and language transfer. Oxford University Press.
5. Faerch ;C and kasper, G (1989) Perspective of language transfer. Applied linguistics.(8,.111-136)
6. Felix; S.W.(1980) Second language development.Trends and issues. Gunter Narr verlag Tubingen.
7. Flynn, S(1997) .Interaction between L2 acquisition on Reflexive Binding in S. B; J,W
8. Choe (eds) 154-166 Graduate linguistic students.
9. Gass, S (1983) Language transfer and universal grammatical relations. In S. Gass & selinker L (eds) Language transfer and language learning ((pp 69-82) newburry House.
10. Hufeinsen; B (2000). Cross linguistic influence in third language acquisition. Psychological perspectives .Clevedon.
11. Kellerman ; E(and Sharwood-Slith. M(1986). Cross linguistic influence in SLA. Oxford UK. Pergamon Press.
12. Kellerman,E (1984) The empirical evidence for the influence of the L1 in interlanguage.In Davies;A(eds)
13. Lado, R(1964) Language teaching .A scientific Approach. Mc Graw-Hill.
14. Odlin,T (1992) transferability and linguistic substrates.second language research. .08.3-171-202.
15. Schachter,P (1988) A new account of language transfer. Rowley.Language learning.
16. Selinker,L (1992) rediscovering interlanguage .New-york. Longmann.
17. Strozer, A (1994) Language acquisition. GeorgetownUniversity Press.
18. Tarone, E(1988) Variation in interlanguage. Edouard Arnold.
19. White, L (1991) Second language competence versus performance. Studies in SLA. Oxford Pergamon.
20. Wode, H(1986)Some theoretical implications of the L2 asquisition research and the grammar of interlanguage.In davies,A(eds)
21. Young; R (1996) ,Form,function,relations in articles in English interlanguage. SLA and linguistic variation(pp 135-175). Amsterdam
22. Zocl;H (1984)L2 asquisition and the learning of word order. Lague learning. Rowley. Newbury House.