

**THE IMPACT OF FIRST LANGUAGE ON SECOND LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION: TRANSFER AND INTERFERENCE**

Raisa Fitri^{1*}, Tuti Alawiyah²

¹ Universitas Negeri Malang

² STKIP Hamzar

E-mail: ¹⁾ raisa.fitri.fe@um.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to explore the impact of first language (L1) on second language (L2) acquisition, focusing on the phenomena of transfer and interference. The background of the problem shows that second language learning is often a complex process, influenced by similarities and differences between the first and second languages. Positive transfer occurs when first language elements facilitate second language learning, while negative interference arises when language differences cause errors or difficulties in the learning process. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive design, with data collected from various relevant academic literature, such as journals, books, and research articles. The results show that transfer from the first language to the second language can have both positive and negative impacts depending on the similarities between the two languages. In addition, social, cultural and psychological factors such as age, anxiety and motivation also affect the level of first language interference. Older learners tend to experience greater interference compared to younger learners. These findings emphasize the importance of teaching strategies that can capitalize on the positive transfer and minimize the negative impact of first language interference in the second language learning process.

Keywords: First Language, Second Language Acquisition, Language Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Second language (L2) learning is often a challenging process, and one of the main factors influencing this language acquisition is the first language (L1) of the learner. Research shows that features of a person's native language can have both positive and negative impacts on their ability to learn a second language (Nor & Ab Rashid, 2018). Positive transfer occurs when similarities between the first and second languages facilitate the learning process, while negative transfer or interference occurs when differences cause errors or confusion in the language learning process (Cao, 2018). For example, research Osborne (2008) shows that the phonological characteristics of a learner's first language can affect their pronunciation in a second language, leading to challenges as well as adaptations in their speech patterns.

The influence of mother tongue on second language acquisition can be seen in various linguistic domains, such as vocabulary, syntax, and phonology, where mother tongue transfer often appears as a source of pronunciation difficulties as well as the implementation of language learning strategies (Cao, 2018; Marzuki, 2012; Osborne, 2008). This relationship demonstrates the complexity of language acquisition, where learners must navigate not only the rules of the new language but also the deep patterns of their native language, which can both help and hinder their progress in learning a second language (Cao, 2018; Osborne, 2008). In addition, the interaction between the age

of the learner and their native language can affect their proficiency in a second language, as older learners often bring different cognitive and social competencies to the learning process, which sometimes results in varying levels of anxiety and motivation that can affect their language development (Cao, 2018; Marzuki, 2012; Yuwinda & Insani, 2018).

These individual differences can exacerbate the complexity of language learning, as older learners may experience psychological burdens related to foreign language learning, further complicating their mother tongue transfer and interference during the acquisition process. Research shows that while mother tongue transfer can be beneficial, it often introduces unique challenges stemming from psychological barriers and systematic differences in phonological features that affect pronunciation accuracy and overall fluency in the second language (Osborne, 2008; Yuwinda & Insani, 2018). Thus, the interaction between the learner's native language and the developing interlanguage can lead to better learning opportunities through positive transfer as well as significant barriers caused by negative interference, which requires a customized teaching approach to address these dynamics in the classroom (Kan & Ito, 2020). For example, phonological analysis of learner speech suggests that native language transfer is a significant source of pronunciation challenges, where learners often exhibit limitations and deviations derived from their native language sound system, thus emphasizing the need for targeted pronunciation training and cognitive support to facilitate fluency that is closer to that of native speakers (Kan & Ito, 2020; Marzuki, 2012; Osborne, 2008; Yuwinda & Insani, 2018).

By considering the various linguistic, social and psychological factors that influence language transfer, this research offers a new perspective on how the first language can facilitate or hinder second language learning. This approach not only focuses on linguistic aspects alone but also involves a deeper understanding of the individual and social factors that influence language learning. In addition, this research contributes to the development of a learner-oriented pedagogical approach by capitalizing on the advantages and potential of the learner's first language, as well as addressing the challenges of interference through appropriate interventions in language teaching.

Based on the above background, this study aims to explore the impact of first language (L1) on second language (L2) acquisition, focusing on the phenomena of linguistic transfer and interference. Specifically, it seeks to identify how first language features can influence the second language learning process either positively (positive transfer) or negatively (negative transfer or interference). In addition, this study also aims to analyze the factors that influence the degree of transfer and interference from the first to the second language, including the similarity of linguistic structures between the two languages, as well as learners' socio-cultural and psychological factors such as age, motivation, and anxiety. With this understanding, this study hopes to provide deeper insights for the development of more effective teaching strategies that can minimize the negative impact of first language interference and harness the potential of positive transfer to support the second language learning process.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design, where data is collected from various relevant literatures to describe the phenomenon under study, namely the influence of the first language on second language acquisition. The main data sources are academic

journals, books, and research articles that discuss transfer and interference from first to second language. These sources will be identified through searches in academic databases such as Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. The data obtained is analyzed using content analysis to identify key themes related to the influence of the first language in second language learning. The validity of the research is maintained through data triangulation and peer review to ensure accuracy and consistency of findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Transfer Process from First to Second Language in the Context of Second Language Acquisition

The process of linguistic knowledge transfer from first language (L1) to second language (L2) is an important aspect of second language acquisition. This transfer can significantly affect language comprehension and production, where learners often rely on language structures and rules from their L1 when encountering a new language, which sometimes results in both positive and negative outcomes in their learning experience (Moattarian, 2013). The understanding of transfer becomes more complex as it is influenced by social, cultural and pragmatic factors, which interact with linguistic knowledge and can affect the effectiveness of transfer across different learning contexts (Moattarian, 2013). In the context of second language comprehension, transfer is often open-ended and facilitating, as learners see similarities between the input in the second language and existing knowledge in their L1, which positively impacts their comprehension (Ringbom, 1992). However, in second language production, the influence of transfer can be more difficult to assess, as learners may use covert transfer, by adopting L1 forms and procedures when they have no equivalent in L2, which can sometimes hinder effective communication (Ringbom, 1992).

Research suggests that an understanding of the dynamics of language transfer can guide teaching strategies that support learner autonomy and adaptability in using a second language, emphasizing the importance of integrating these elements into the language curriculum to facilitate a smoother acquisition process (Thomas & Mady, 2014). Therefore, designing pedagogical approaches that capitalize on students' first language knowledge while addressing potential negative transfers through targeted interventions can create a more supportive environment for second language acquisition, taking advantage of the cross-linguistic connections that exist in the learning process (James, 2018). This approach is important for educators to facilitate better interaction between the two languages, allowing learners to build on their existing linguistic framework while encountering new language structures, which can ultimately improve second language acquisition outcomes (Ringbom, 1992).

In addition, creating a learning environment that emphasizes the connectedness of language skills and cultural context is essential, as this allows learners to draw on their first language experience in a meaningful way while developing intercultural communication abilities that are crucial for successful language use in a variety of settings (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Liu, 2019). This approach not only supports language acquisition but also enriches the overall educational experience by building awareness of how linguistic and cultural backgrounds can be valuable resources in the learning process,

thus enhancing learners' capacity to transfer their skills effectively across different languages and contexts.

3.2. Factors Affecting First Language Interference in Second Language Acquisition

Second language (L2) acquisition is a complex process that is influenced by various factors, including the learner's first language (L1). One significant factor is the degree of similarity or difference between the first and second languages, which can lead to positive or negative transfer during the learning process. This transfer has an impact on overall proficiency and fluency in the target language (Cao, 2018; Marzuki, 2012; Yuwinda & Insani, 2018). Learner psychological aspects, such as anxiety and motivation, also play an important role in language acquisition. Learners with high anxiety may have difficulty understanding the nuances of the second language, leading to increased interference from their first language (Cao, 2018; Yuwinda & Insani, 2018).

The age of the learner when learning a second language also plays an important role. Research shows that younger learners are usually more adept at acquiring the phonological and grammatical structures of a new language, often showing less interference from the first language compared to older learners. Older learners tend to rely more on their existing linguistic knowledge and struggle more to overcome the influence of their native language (Fu et al., 2022; Marzuki, 2012; Yuwinda & Insani, 2018). In addition, individual learner characteristics, such as learning strategies, style, and aptitude, can affect the degree of first language interference in second language acquisition. Learners who use effective learning techniques and adapt to the demands of the target language may be able to minimize the impact of their first language (Lou, 2023).

Bilingualism and second language acquisition have been the focus of extensive research, with an emphasis on the role of the first language in facilitating or inhibiting second language acquisition, as well as its effects on pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary retention. Interaction between the first and second languages often leads to the transfer of styles and structures, where features of the first language are inadvertently applied to the second language, causing errors and misunderstandings (Cao, 2018). Research Cao (2018) and Yuwinda & Insani (2018) shows that a learner's native language has a significant impact on new language acquisition, with phenomena such as cross-language priming affecting accuracy and response time in communication..

Internal and external factors, such as age and psychological characteristics, contribute to first language interference. Research shows that individual differences, such as anxiety and motivation, can affect the level of success in second language acquisition, with more anxious learners possibly struggling more than their less anxious peers (Yuwinda & Insani, 2018). Factors such as contextual exposure and classroom setting also play an important role in reducing or exacerbating L1 impairment, emphasizing the importance of a supportive learning environment (Daskalovska et al., 2012; Gonzalez Resendez, 2023; Zhang, 2009; Zhao, 2015).

Overall, the factors that influence first language interference in second language acquisition are complex and involve a variety of internal and external variables. Understanding the interaction between these factors can help educators develop more effective teaching methodologies, which reduce the challenges of first language interference and capitalize on learners' abilities and motivation to create a more conducive language learning environment.

4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the important role of first language (L1) in second language (L2) acquisition. The transfer process from L1 to L2 can have both positive and negative impacts, depending on the similarities or differences between the two languages. Positive transfer occurs when features from L1 make it easier for learners to learn L2, while negative transfer or interference occurs when differences between L1 and L2 cause difficulties in the learning process. In addition, this study also shows that social, cultural, and psychological factors such as anxiety, motivation, and age, affect the level of first language interference in second language acquisition. Older learners tend to experience greater interference from the L1 compared to younger learners, who adapt L2 phonological and grammatical structures more easily. Thus, it is important for educators to understand these dynamics of transfer and interference in order to design teaching strategies that can minimize the negative impact of L1 and maximize the potential for positive transfer, as well as create learning environments that support second language development effectively.

REFERENCES

- Cao, M. (2018). Current Research Trends of SLA and Challenges and Strategies for Native Chinese English-learners. *2018 5th International Conference on Education, Management, Arts, Economics and Social Science (ICEMAESS 2018)*, 1017–1023.
- Daskalovska, N., Gudeva, L. K., & Ivanovska, B. (2012). Learner motivation and interest. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 1187–1191.
- Fu, N., Li, G., Sun, Y., & Zhao, Z. (2022). A Study on Motivational Strategies of Adult Second Language Acquisition from the Perspective of TESOL Teaching. *2022 3rd International Conference on Mental Health, Education and Human Development (MHEHD 2022)*, 246–253.
- Gonzalez Resendez, M. L. (2023). Motivation and Lack Thereof: Effects of Students' Motivation on Their Second/Foreign Language Learning Process. *Open Journal for Psychological Research*, 7(1).
- James, M. A. (2018). Teaching for transfer of second language learning. *Language Teaching*, 51(3), 330–348.
- Kan, M. S., & Ito, A. (2020). Language cognition and pronunciation training using applications. *Future Internet*, 12(3), 42.
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural language teaching and learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Liu, X. (2019). An Audio-Visual Integrated Approach to Japanese Language and Culture. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 6(1), 1–7.
- Lou, W. (2023). The Influence Factors of Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study. *Advances in Educational Technology and Psychology*, 7(4), 125–131.
- Marzuki, D. (2012). Language acquisition: The influential factors and its connection with age. *POLINGUA*, 1(1), 8–11.
- Moattarian, A. (2013). Bidirectional crosslinguistic influence in language learning: Linguistic aspects and beyond. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 5(4), 38.

- Nor, N. M., & Ab Rashid, R. (2018). A review of theoretical perspectives on language learning and acquisition. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 39(1), 161–167.
- Osborne, D. (2008). Systematic differences in consonant sounds between the interlanguage phonology of a Brazilian Portuguese learner of English and standard American English. *Ilha Do Desterro A Journal of English Language, Literatures in English and Cultural Studies*, 55, 111–132.
- Ringbom, H. (1992). On L1 transfer in L2 comprehension and L2 production. *Language Learning*, 42(1), 85–112.
- Thomas, R., & Mady, C. (2014). Teaching for transfer: Insights from theory and practices in primary-level French-second-language classrooms. *McGill Journal of Education*, 49(2), 399–416.
- Yuwinda, Y., & Insani, S. (2018). Language Learning: What Factors May Influence It. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 3(1), 1–10.
- Zhang, C. (2009). A study of age influence in L2 acquisition. *Asian Social Science*, 5(5), 133–137.
- Zhao, L. (2015). An Analysis of the Learners' Factors in Second Language Teaching and Learning. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, 7(4), 130–135.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).