

TECHNOLOGIES FOR PREVENTING INTER-LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN IMPROVING GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

In the field of second language acquisition inter-language theory suggests that there is an intermediate mental stage suspended between the native and the target language. This theory has been interpreted as a way to describe what the process of learning the target language is like.

Key words: *Second language acquisition, error analysis, language interference, inter-language, learners' errors*

INTRODUCTION

Humans are the only species naturally and genetically designed to use language. This intrinsic and unique trait has been the object of interest for the scientific community since time immemorial. The scientific study of language, the field known as linguistics, attempts to solve questions about what the components of languages are, how we produce them, and how languages evolve over time. In this study, we will focus on the question of how we learn a language. Language is a highly complex object of study, and what makes us innately predisposed to learning it has always been a crucial question. To understand how language acquisition evolved, we need to go back to the 1960s, when linguists like Noam Chomsky developed the theory that language, unlike other abilities, could not be learnt through a process of imitation, or trial and error. The study of human language presented interesting features hardly present in other learning processes, as individuals are able to produce an unlimited number of combinations of new words and meanings that exceed the variety of stimuli the individual in question could have been exposed to. In other words, children are able to produce content and weave together different linguistic elements to build a sentence they have never heard before. This was one of the principles used to confirm that the human brain possesses a unique trait known as “language faculty”. Later, Chomsky

put forward his Universal Grammar hypothesis, proposing that all human languages share an innate “system of categories, mechanisms and constraints”.

METHODOLOGY

Inter-language is defined by linguists as the “system of learner language produced by adults when they attempt meaningful communication using a language they are learning” (Tarone) or a “midway of a second language learner towards the rules of [that] language”. Other researchers also observe that when adults are learning a second language, “second language learners [...] are developing a grammar that is systematic even if it is not nativelike.” (Archibald, 1998, p.2). Inter-language is thus a representation formed in the learner’s mind that combines the learnt features of the L2 plus the transferred ones from their first language (L1).

Inter-language shapes learners’ utterances when they aim to produce content in their target language. Given the same meaning, utterances produced by most second language learners are generally not identical to what a native speaker would say to express the same concept, at least if we include phonetics in the equation (Selinker, 1972, p. 214). The two products (the second language learner’s utterances and the native speaker’s) are not exactly alike, which is why the theory of inter-language suggests the “existence of a separate linguistic system” (Selinker, 1972, p. 214) that works as a bridge between the first and the second language in the learner’s mind.

RESULT AND DICUSSION

Modal and auxiliary verbs in sequence: The future tense in Spanish is marked with inflectional affixes attached to the verb, while English uses the auxiliary ‘will’. To express a verb in the future, Spanish speakers need to use the future tense of this verb which, in most cases, has the same root as all the other forms of the verb: hablar-hablaré (‘talk’-‘will talk’). In English, while the future construction generally requires use of the auxiliary ‘will’ before the infinitive (without to) of the verb, sequences of two modal verbs are ungrammatical in standard English, so alternative constructions

must be used in some cases. In this example, the future tense for 'can' is not formed by the simple addition of 'will'; we need to use the semi-auxiliary 'be able to', which allows another preceding auxiliary ('will be able to'), while 'can' does not (*'will can'). Transferring the Spanish pattern of simply using the 'future morpheme' to English is likely to create errors like:

'Go to' construction

The next example shows a direct calque of the Spanish expression *ir a + verb*. *Ir a* is used to talk about an action that the subject is going to do in the near future, almost always in cases that involve physical movement (*Vamos a ir al cine*, meaning 'We are going to go to the cinema'). It is worth taking into account that when the word *ir* is conjugated, it can describe an action taking place in the immediate future which does not necessarily imply physical displacement (*No lo sé. Voy a buscarlo en internet*, meaning 'I don't know. I'm going to look it up online'). Depending on the context, this expression may have several equivalents in English, such as 'be going to', a present continuous or the simple future with 'will'. Since the Spanish construction is used in several situations that do not explicitly correspond to the English ones, failing to identify the actual tense and aspect of the intended sentence may cause errors. In this example, *ir a ver* was translated word by word as 'go to watch'. Here 'we can go to watch' could be *podemos ir a ver* ('we can go [to the cinema] to watch...'), where 'go to' would indeed refer to physical displacement. Since English does not usually use 'go to +infinitive' in this sense, a more appropriate translation would have been simply 'watch'.

CONCLUSION

All in all, it is clear that the native language does influence L2 production at least to a certain extent. The reality is that language learners inevitably turn to their L1 (and gradually separate from it as they progress in L2 learning) to produce content in the target language. Teaching them how to successfully move from the native language to the target language would be beneficial for them to find real communicative equivalents. As we mentioned before, in foreign language lessons, it is often

discouraged to translate from the native language, but interference is a reality, and language teaching can take advantage of that. In this final section we would like to suggest some paths that English teaching could explore to better suit and facilitate the learning process:

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