

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERFERENCE IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the nuanced role of interference in language acquisition, shedding light on its significance in shaping the learning process. Interference, both positive and negative, manifests as the influence of a learner's native language on the acquisition of a new language. The discussion encompasses various aspects of interference, including phonological, grammatical, and cultural dimensions. Positive interference, exemplified by cognates and shared vocabulary, can expedite language learning, while negative interference may lead to errors in pronunciation, grammar, and cultural expressions. Recognizing and understanding interference becomes crucial for educators and learners alike, as it informs targeted instructional strategies, minimizes potential pitfalls, and enhances overall language proficiency. The article emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that acknowledges the complexities of interference, ultimately contributing to more effective and culturally sensitive language acquisition.

KEY WORDS: *interference, negative interference, positive interference, phonological interference, grammatical interference, cultural interference, individual differences.*

The importance of interference in language acquisition lies in its profound impact on how individuals learn and use a new language. Interference refers to the influence of a learner's native language on the process of acquiring a second language. Understanding this phenomenon is crucial for educators, learners, and researchers, as

it has both positive and negative implications for language acquisition. The importance of interference in language acquisition is multifaceted, influencing the learning experience positively through shared language elements and presenting challenges that require targeted instructional interventions. A nuanced understanding of interference enhances language instruction, promotes cultural competence, and contributes to the broader knowledge base of language acquisition.

In general terms, interference might be defined as deviation from linguocultural norms caused by one language influencing another. For a while the leading opinion suggested the first (mother) language (L1) have the leading effect onto the processes taking place in the second and further language (FL1/FL2+), but later research has made a valid point of it not always being the case. At the turn of the century many linguists argued that the impact of FL1 on the learner's FL2+ is more prominent than that of one's L1 [2]. This interference can either facilitate or hinder language learning, depending on various factors. Here are some aspects of interference in language learning:

Positive Interference (Facilitation): some aspects of the learner's native language may facilitate the learning of a new language. For example, if the learner's native language shares similarities in vocabulary, grammar structures, or phonetics with the target language, it can make the learning process easier. Positive interference, also known as facilitation, occurs when elements of a learner's native language contribute positively to the process of acquiring a new language. This phenomenon can make certain aspects of language learning easier and more efficient. Here are some examples of positive interference:

- *Cognates* are words that have a similar form and meaning in two or more languages. For example: the English word "telephone" and the Uzbek word "telefon" are cognates. Recognizing such similarities can help learners understand and remember new vocabulary more easily.
- *Shared Vocabulary:* some languages share a significant amount of vocabulary due to historical, cultural, or linguistic influences. For example: English and French share many words, like "communication" in English and

"communication" in French. Knowledge of shared vocabulary can accelerate vocabulary acquisition.

- *Grammatical Similarities*: similarities in grammatical structures between the native language and the target language can aid understanding and production. *For example*: if a learner's native language and the target language have similar word order or verb conjugation rules, it can simplify the learning process.
- *Language Transfer*: transfer of skills or knowledge from the native language to the target language. If a learner's native language uses a specific grammatical structure that is also present in the target language, the learner can transfer that knowledge, making it easier to understand and apply.

While positive interference can be advantageous, it's important for learners and educators to be aware of potential challenges and negative interference as well. Awareness of both positive and negative influences from the native language can contribute to a more effective and nuanced language learning experience.

Negative Interference (Interference/Interlanguage): learners may make errors in pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary due to the influence of their native language. These errors are often referred to as interference errors or interlanguage errors. Some words in the new language may look or sound similar to words in the native language but have different meanings. Learners may use these false friends incorrectly based on their native language associations. Negative interference, also known as interference or interference errors, occurs when elements of a learner's native language hinder the acquisition of a new language. These influences can lead to errors in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and overall language use. Here are some examples of negative interference in language learning:

Phonological Interference: pronunciation errors influenced by the sounds of the native language. An Uzbek speaker learning English may struggle with the /θ/ sound in "think" because Spanish lacks this sound, and the learner might substitute it with a similar sound.

Grammatical Interference: errors in sentence structure, verb conjugation, or word order influenced by the grammatical rules of the native language. A speaker of a language without articles (like Uzbek) may omit or misuse articles (a, an, the) in English sentences.

Lexical Interference: incorrect word choices influenced by the vocabulary of the native language. Example: A French speaker might use the word "sympathique" in English, thinking it's a direct translation of "sympathetic," but the more appropriate word is "friendly."

Cultural Interference: Cultural differences in communication styles and pragmatic conventions can influence how a learner uses language. Misunderstandings may occur if these differences are not addressed. Cultural interference in language learning refers to the influence of a learner's cultural background on their language use, including communication styles, pragmatic conventions, and expressions. Cultural differences can impact how individuals express themselves, convey politeness, and interpret social cues. Here are some examples and explanations of cultural interferences:

Communication Styles: In some cultures, direct communication is valued, while in others, indirect communication is preferred. A learner may unintentionally come across as too direct or too indirect, depending on the cultural norms of their native language. Politeness expressions and conventions can vary significantly between cultures. A learner might use politeness markers that are appropriate in their native culture but might be perceived differently in the target culture.

An urgent need to address the discrepancy between linguistic and cultural proficiency levels was convincingly stated by C. Hoffmann when exploring the matters of bilingualism at the threshold of the 21st century. Namely, she argued "the more fluent the bilingual becomes, the fewer allowances will be made and the less tolerant the native speakers of the other language will be of violations of cultural assumptions" [4]. Despite the fact that the author refrains from naming it cultural interference, this is exactly how we perceive the above-mentioned "violations", namely as an attempt to compensate for the knowledge, skills, and abilities one might lack by either substituting (or even transforming) them with those at your immediate disposal, or giving preference to the structures more predominant in your mentality. Addressing cultural interference involves developing cultural awareness and sensitivity. Language learners

benefit from exposure to the cultural context of the target language, including cultural norms, social conventions, and everyday practices. Language educators often incorporate cultural elements into their lessons and provide guidance on appropriate language use in different cultural contexts. Additionally, immersion experiences and interactions with native speakers can help learners navigate cultural differences and enhance their overall language proficiency.

Individual Differences: The extent to which a learner is aware of the potential influence of their native language can impact the degree of interference. Some learners may be more conscious of these influences and actively work to overcome them. Individual differences in language learning refer to the unique characteristics, preferences, and abilities that vary among language learners. These differences can significantly influence how individuals approach, experience, and succeed in the process of acquiring a new language. The idea that there is a critical period during childhood when language acquisition is optimal. Younger learners often acquire languages more easily and with native-like pronunciation.

The ability to analyze language patterns and structures. Some learners may have a natural inclination for understanding grammatical rules and linguistic patterns. Recognizing and accommodating these individual differences can enhance language teaching and learning experiences. Language educators often employ varied instructional strategies and provide personalized support to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of learners. Additionally, learners can benefit from self-awareness and exploring methods that align with their individual learning styles and motivations.

To minimize interference and enhance language learning, educators often employ strategies such as explicit instruction, cultural awareness activities, and providing opportunities for immersive language experiences. Additionally, learners who are aware of potential interference can take proactive steps to identify and address challenges as they arise.

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