

Language Transfer

Gass, S. 1996. "Second Language Acquisition and Linguistic Theory: The Role of Language Transfer". In: Ritchie, W. & Bhatia, T. (eds). *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. San Diego: Academic Press.

Contrastive Analysis:

Systematic comparison of NL and TL (target language) was done, in order to be able to predict learners' difficulties. But not all mistakes could be attributed to NL and not all predicted cases of transfer really occurred. Developmental factors were often the reason for errors and not language transfer.

Creative Construction Hypothesis:

L1 and L2 acquisition are seen as potentially similar. Not the NL system, but the L2 system guides the process of acquisition. Universal innate principles are considered guiding forces in L2 acquisition.

Language transfer as a cognitive activity:

Transfer is not only a direct linguistic reflex, but also indirectly shows underlying principles of language. Transfer and developmental influences are interacting processes. Congruence between L1 and L2 allows learners to see relevant L2 features. It affects production and comprehension of L2. Similarities in L1 and L2 influence language development even where there is no structural similarity. Transfer is also seen as a constraint on the acquisition process.

Predictability of language transfer, areas of transfer studies:

Kellerman found two factors that interact in the determination of transferable elements:

- learner's perception of L1 to L2 distance (learners psychotypology)
- degree of markedness in L1 structure

Fledge found that phonetic learning includes superposition as well as creation. It seems that there are constraints on the notion of transfer. Variables such as experience, success in TL, social factors etc. and combinations of them are involved in the learner's decision to transfer.

Language transfer and UG (considering principles and parameters):

-learners have full access to UG, UG is the starting point; learners have partial access to UG, NL plays an important part too; learners have no access to UG, NL is the starting point
>Studies indicate that UG is the starting point for L2 grammar formation.

-*Principles*: "The general picture with regard to principles is that they are not available to L2 learners in an unadulterated form. The NL continues to exert major force, at times interacting with UG principles" (332).

-*Parameters*: "In general, it does appear that the NL parametric values cannot be ignored and that access to UG, if it exists, is mediated by the NL" (333).

-*NL is central*: No parameters or principles are available to adults. The NL replaces them.

Language transfer and the competition model:

"...learners are indeed faced with conflicts between NL and TL cues and cue strengths. The resolution of these conflicts is such that learners first resort to their NL interpretation strategies and upon recognition of the incongruity between TL and NL systems, resort to a universal selection of meaning-based cues as opposed to word order (or syntax-based) cues" (336).

Effects on grammars:

NL acts together with other factors > multiple effects principle.

Learners of L2 have wider grammars than the input would allow. Transfer from L1 leads learners to produce sentences that are possible in their L1, but aren't in the L2.

Ways in which the UG approach to transfer differs from earlier approaches:

- levels
- clustering
- interacting parameters
- learnability