The effect of mother tongue on learning English as a second language

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أثر اللغة الأم في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية

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Abstract:

From the past, till today and continues to the future the difficulties that face Second Language learners while learn English still appears clearly with the students. For that it becomes a necessary to shed the light for those problems and challenges that learners face, especially the effect of mother tongue, 'Arabic language'. In this paper, the author seeks to review the literature discussing the impact of mother tongue on the learning of English. The author opens the discussion with the conceptual explanation of the behaviorism theory with the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) that is a structural approach of SLA, carried the same opinion equal to behaviorists as attempt to understand the second language acquisition. Next, one of powerful theory in explaining most of L2 errors are discussed to understand second language errors Selinker's interlanguage hypothesis and all the five reasons of interlanguage are analysed. Then, monitor model theory for Krashen discussed with its all five hypotheses. Furthermore, a clearly explanation for Krashen about the conception of Second Language Learning and Second Language Acquisition. Then, the paper presents the methodology which used to understand these difficulties qualitative methods were used for data collection to identify the main problems and difficulties that faced by Libyan students while learning English as an L2.

Finally, the author presented the finding and analyzed it. This paper is important and could be of interest and worth for researchers who are interested in this filed and also for all of learners, students and teachers of English. The study suggests the necessity of understand all the SLL second language learning and SLA Second language Acquisition theories to understand all difficulties and challenges that face second language learners due to the effect of mother tongue.

Keywords: first language, Second language, TL target language, SLA Second language acquisition, SLL Second language learning, LL Language learning, CAH Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.

الملخص :

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل الصعوبات التي يواجها متعلمو اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية، ولا سيما الناطقون باللغة العربية، مع التركيز على أثر اللغة الأم في عملية اكتساب اللغة الثانية. يستعرض الباحث أبرز النظريات المفسرة لتعلم اللغة، مثل فرضية التحليل التقابلي، وفرضية اللغة البينية، اضافة إلى نظرية المراقب موضحا دورها في تفسير الاخطاء اللغوية الشائعة لدى المتعلمين.

اعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً وصفياً تحليلياً يعتمد على أسالب النوعية لتحديد المشكلات اللغوية والتربوية التي يواجهها الطلاب الليبيون أثناء تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. مما يستدعي توظيف نظريات اكتساب اللغة في تصميم مناهج تعليمية أكثر فعالية. وتؤكد الدراسة أهمية الوعي بعوامل اللغوية والنفسية المرتبطة بالتداخل اللغوي لتحسين أداء المتعلمين وتطوير عملية تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للناطقين بالعربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الأم، اللغة الثانية، اللغة المستهدفة، اكتساب لغة ثانية، تعلم اللغة، نظرية التحليل التقابلي.

Introduction

This research amid to investigates and analyses in order to give a contribution to the study of linguistics and help students in identifying commonly errors and causes for such errors for instance Grammar, vocabulary, and pattern while learning English as a second language.

The distinction between language learning and language acquisition has been a subject of considerable debate among scholars in linguistics and applied linguistics. This debate, which dates back to the earliest inquiries into

human language, remains relevant today. A central issue concerns whether these two processes are fundamentally different, and if so, at what stages they occur and under what conditions each can be observed.

For second language (L2) learners, the process of acquiring a new language is often complex and characterized by numerous challenges. Understanding the mechanisms underlying both first language (L1) acquisition and L2 learning is therefore essential for analyzing these challenges. A theoretical overview is necessary in order to illustrate how languages are acquired and learned, and to identify the factors that influence success in SLA.

Accordingly, the following section presents a review of significant theories presents a review of significant theories in the field of SLA. Providing a foundation for understanding the processes involved in acquiring and learning additional language.

The important of English has been increased a lot recently as it is become the international language and the one that use a lot all over the world. For that, students understand that the proficiency in English will promote them in future to gain a good career. This study seeks to investigate the impact of mother tongue on students' learning English as a second language and how such impact affects them.

Introduction:

There is a huge argument between the concept between learning language and acquiring language, this argument is raised from the beginning of human being and continues until now. There is a doubt between how a child acquire or learn a language and in which stage can be the two terms learning and acquiring accepted. Learning a Second language for learners could be a complicated process and full of difficulties and challenges according to the linguistics and experiment. This was clear in second language theories. In order to illustrate how L2 is learned, however we need to understand first how 2L and 1L are acquired. For that, following section is presented for significant theories to gives an overview of theories related to SLA.

Literature review.

Behaviorism is considered one of the earliest theories to describe the process of language-learning (Robinett & Schachter, 1983). As psychological theory, behaviorism is associated with skinner and dates back to 1940s-1950s, this theory influenced not only linguists but also psychologists and anthropologists. Although behaviorism has been widely criticized by later cognitive theories (John and Sharan, 1995).it remains important to analyze many it is principles when considering second language learning L2. According to behaviorists, language learning occurs through imitation and habit formation (Lado,1964, cited in Lightbown, and Spada, 1999). Skinner argued that learning is achieved through stimulus-response reinforcement in different contexts (Rubin, 2011). Learners, therefore, imitate models in-life situation and are reinforced when their responses are correct, while negative reinforcement is given when errors are made (Ellis,1997). Bases on this view, behaviorists claimed that all L2 errors result from L1 interference (Dulay et al., 1982). However, it is not easy to explain the majority of L2 errors solely in terms of L1 interference, Mitchell and Myles (2004) note that behaviourist could not full account for learners' difficulties in second language acquisition Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), which emerged from behaviorist assumptions, argued that L2 errors could be predicted by comparing similarities and differences between L1and L2 (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). The theory suggested that when the structures were similar across both languages, learners would make fewer mistakes, but when the structure differed, errors would arise through transfer of L1 patterns into L2 (Dulay et al., 1982; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Cook, 2008). Despite its importance as the first systematic attempt to evaluate L2 errors. CAH was later shown to be limited. Studies by Selinker (1972), Ellis (1997) and Collins (2007) demonstrated that only 3% of the L2 errors could be attributed to 'L1 interference'. Errors often resulted from developmental factors rather than simple transfer. Furthermore, Maicusí et al, (2000). emphasized that errors should not be viewed merely as signs of failure or ineffective teaching, but rather as a natural part of the learning process. Building on these insights, Selinker (1972 introduced the concept of interlanguage, which remains one of the most influential theories for explaining L2 errors. He proposed five key processes underlying interlanguage. First, learners are influenced by the "L1 transfer", applying L1 rules to L2, however, unlike behaviourists, Slinker argued that it is not necessary for learners to simply imitate models; rather, they actively construct their own linguistic systems (Ellis, 1997). Secondly, learners may oversimplify the grammar rules, creating developmental errors that are not directly linked to L1 transfer. interlanguage, therefore highlights the dynamic competence, which may fluctuate between L1and the target language. Thirdly. Because of "communication strategies" which means that when learners intend to use verities of strategies to communicate with others. In such case, learners concentrate only on meaning and ignore using the correct grammatical structure (cook, 2008). Fourth, "learning strategies": these strategies rely on all the input that the learners have during their L2 learning, including all the rules that have learned. Thus, they try to use as much as they can in their sentences to present a complicated message, ignoring the accuracy to their statements (Myles

2005). The fifth reason is 'transfer of training' in which learners apply all the previous knowledge and rules they have gained throughout their learning journey, which may not always be correct (Bertolo, 2001). Another concept has been identified by Selinker and it is considered the sixth principle of interlanguage hypothesis. 'Fossilization' is a term that refers to phenomenon where some learners become unable to reach high level of target language than they have achieved. it is as if the learner is stuck in a specific level and cannot progress further in learning grammar and syntax. Age and certain cognitive limitations provide some explanation for such a case. (Ellis, 1985; Ellis, 1997).

The Monitor model theory considered as the influential and ambitious cognitive theories of L2 acquisitions. Furthermore, it was one of the earliest theories that sought to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding 2LL. Krashen was the one who divided it into five hypotheses 'Acquisition-learning', 'Natural order', 'Monitor', 'Input', and 'Affective Filter' (Ellis ,1990)

First, Krashen mentions out the different between SLL and SLA, He believes that children and adults acquire and understand a 2L in largely similar ways, with only slight differences. A child picks up their L1 unconsciously, without focusing on language forms, whereas the earning process involves conscious concentration on rules and forms. Therefore, it is clear that part of language learning is naturally, but it still requires a degree of weariness and planning to become a completed process that achieves all its aims, as learners have a sense of a weariness about what they are doing. (Lightbown, and Spada, 2006). Krashen believes that learning and acquisition differ from each other in bout of effect and character. This is due to the acquired language is the only system responsible for learners' spontaneous speech and fluency (Krashen, 1981.Harmer, 2007). In contrast, learned language acts only as a monitor or corrector to edit errors produced by learners before or after speaking (Towell &Hawkins, 1994). Furthermore, he points out that learners differ in how they use their monitor system to correct all errors, whether before, during, or after speech (Krashen, 1982; Towell &Hawkins, 1994). On the contrary, some learners overuse their monitor and constantly think about using L2 rules accurately to produce correct forms (Richerds &Rogers, 2001). Consequently, they are unable to communicate successfully with their environment. Another type is 'monitor under user' in this case, the learners are cognizant of 2L grammar rules but rely on their "feel" to correct and evaluate all the errors (Krashen, 1981, Krashen, 1982; Towell &Hawkins, 1994). Krashen considers that acquisition occurs when the input is comprehensible for this reason, he recommends that L2 input should be slightly above the learner's current level (i+1) (Bertolo, 2001; Light bown &spade, 2006). On the other hand, learners might successes in communication when they understand the L2 input but may still be unable to produce or use grammatical features equal to native speakers (Schumann, 1986). Furthermore, Krashen, in his 'Natural Order Hypothesis' stated that learners acquire a range of L2 grammatical structures in a pre-determined order, similar to native speakers (Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 1990). The last hypothesis, is 'the affective filter hypothesis' is called 'filter' because it describes the effective factors that influence the success of SLA for learners, such as, attitude, anxiety, self-confident and self-esteem (Towell &Hawkins, 1994). As a result, according to Krashen, a high filter prevents the learner from cooperating and speaking within the L2 community. In contrast, a low filter allows the learners to receive more input and interact with the surroundings more effectively (Light bown &Speda; 2006)

Methodology

It is obvious to all researchers how difficult it is to collect, analyses and evaluate the language learning process with it is various methods. for this reason, qualitative methods were used for data collection to identify the main problems and difficulties that faced by Libyan students while learning English as an L2.

This study employed classroom observation and a handwritten test- sheet as data collection techniques. More than 20 students studying in the English Department during 2023-2024 Academic year at Bani Walid University, were observed. this took place over two academic classes per week for a total of 4 hours. The sample included second- and third-year students.

In addition, students were tested twice: the first for the mid-term exam and the second for the final exam. This paper analyzed to the data to observer the students' difficulties while learning English as an L2.

The analysis focused on identifying a specific difficulties and challenges that students face in learning an L2, such as the impacts of L1 on L2, both positive and negative.

The qualitative data collected through classroom observation and handwritten exam sheet were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved identifying and categorizing patterns in the data to clarify common themes and issues related to the difficulties students face while learning an L2. The main purpose of this study is to provide a clear comprehensive understanding of the problems and difficulties that faced by Libyan students when learning an L2 and to suggest ways to improve and avoid such difficulties.

Data analysis and Findings:

Firstly, many of the errors that students make can be attributed to transferring rules from their mother tongue, which is considered evidence of over-generalization process. For instance, after learning the basic role for forming plurals, a student might assume that adding "–s" applies to all nouns. consequently; learners produce errors such as (mans, womans, childs) instead of the correct irregular plurals (Men, Women, Children) furthermore, these errors can be seen as a type of simplification, where the learners simplify rules and categories to aid their development and progress in L2. For instance, some students omit the third person (s) and overgeneralize for pronouns like I, We, You, They +base form of the verb. Yule (1996) stated that wide range of errors are result from transferring expression and structures from 1L and applying them to the target language TL (Yule, 1996). If the structures of the first and the second language are similar, in this case, the learners may benefit from the positive transfer. This is evident with Libyan students, as there is a similarity between Arabic and English in the rules of the passive voice; therefor, transfer is successful in this situation. In contrast, when the two languages have different structures, errors are more likely to occur. This can be seen in the use of comparative and superlative adjectives. For example, a learner might say, 'this phone is "*new*" than yours'. Instead of "newer than" this type of error can be explained "Cognitive" theory and "Contrastive Analysis" Also Lightbown and Spada (2006: 34: 35) support this view, stating:

> Behaviourism theory is linked to Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) in which the first language and the second language are similar. Learners should acquire the second language with ease; where there are differences should have difficulty... the influence of the first language may not only be transfer habits, but also points of similarity.

Another point that has been noticed is that some students produce forms that are not found either in either English or Arabic such as using subject pronouns rather than possessive pronouns. For example, "This pencil is for *me*", instead of 'mine' and this can be described as an internal process related to "cognitive" development. Furthermore, it can be observed that some students make mistakes when using negative forms. for instance, a student might say, "I want not to go to school" which means 'I don't want to go to school.' An according to slinker's "interlanguage" and "communication strategies" theory, such errors occur because learners focus primarily on meaning and neglect correct grammatical structure (cook, 2008). Consequence, these errors persist because the learners can still make themselves understood. This may also be due to lack of corrective pressure. Slinker(1972) assumes that such patterns indicate the learner's interlanguage has fossilized. Additionally, it is found that the use of the "monitor" may play an essential role in producing correct structures, this was evident when sentences correctly used the sentence "I used to go to school," employing the correct form "used to" and base verb". The students showed that the sentence's meaning was clear to them, even if they found it difficult to recall explicit rule. This aligns with krashen's 'Monitor hypothesis' (1981). Which points that knowledge gained from formal instruction acts as an editor for correcting errors before or after speech. In contrast, some students use their monitoring system differently, learners may know the grammatical rules well but not apply them while speaking. Another point is that a number of students use helpful formulaic expressions while communicating, such as "what is gunna on" or "would you mind closing the window, please?" These patterns are often imitated and memorized (Ellis 1997), this can be considered as "habit formation" and learners are often unaware of the underlying grammatical structure. When learners eventually understand the structure and rule, it leads to comprehension based on "cognitive theory" and "krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis 1+ i".in such cases, learners focus on meaning rather than form, and the language is often correct due to in memorizing. Lightbown and Spada (2006:40) also illustrate this point, stating: "these changes have been described in terms of restructuring". such fixed patterns can be considered a key communication strategy that helps keep the conversation going and avoids communicative difficulties. This idea is supported by Krashen (1982), who argues that the learners memorize a number of readymade expressions in order to compensate for limitation of their second language proficiency.

After spending a long time with the students, it became a clear that some were raised and grew up in an L2 country and were exposed to the target language in it is native context. Furthermore, other students who spent part of their lives studying and communicating abroad in a real-world environment. Therefore, it can be assumed that personal background is a significant factor affecting these students. this aligns with the Vygotsky's belief that learning occurs when learners interact with the L2 environment, as they need social group in order to improve their learning experiences (Mitchell &Myles, 2006).

Conclusion

This study has highlighted key aspects of second language learning and major theories of second language acquisition, focusing on behaviorism, the interlanguage hypothesis, the contrastive analysis hypothesis, and Krachen's Monitor hypothesis. The findings indicate that the mother tongue plays a crucial role in second language acquisition, exerting both positive and negative influences. While it can facilitate learning by providing a linguistic foundation, it my also cause interference through negative transfer. The analysis of learners' errors demonstrates this dual effect, emphasizing the importance of understanding first language influence to enhance the effectives of English language teaching and learning.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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