WEB OF SEMANTIC Universal Journal on Innovative Education

Volume 3 Issue 6, Year 2024
ISSN:2835-3048
https://univerpubl.com/index.php/semantic

Article

The Role of Previous Language Learning Experience in Acquiring L3

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Abstract: In this paper, the role of previous language learning experience in acquiring L3, which is an integral part of our research, is highlighted as one of the major factors that contribute to the successful acquisition of a third language. For this, certain observations by particular scientists will be looked through and the analysis of the study conducted where English (L3) is taught as an extra foreign language for uzbek (L1) students of German (L2) language major to prove that previous language learning experience plays a crucial role.

Keywords: Previous Language Learning Experience, PLLE, Language Interference, Statistic Approach to Language Learning, Language Transfer, Students Performance Of L3

1. Introduction

It is generally assumed that an individual who has learned a second language to a high level of proficiency or who has obtained near-native competence will be more successful in learning a third language than an individual who has only basic knowledge of a second language [1]. This assumption is based on the idea that the greater the similarity between the L2 and the L3, for example in specific linguistic features, the more the learner will be inclined to transfer knowledge of the L2 to the L3. This reasoning in itself is logically sound [2]. However, it is also based on the belief that when a language learner has difficulty with a specific L3 feature, he/she will be consciously aware of this and will attempt to remedy the situation by reference to the L2 [3]. This assumption moves into the realm of hypothetical second language transfer and requires separate investigation in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency [4].

It is essential to define what is meant by "previous language learning experience". This term encompasses a wide range of experiences from classroom-based learning of a specific language to more informal learning situations such as exposure to a second language in childhood, or transmission of a heritage language [5]. Previous language learning experience is often considered to be the most significant factor separating successful language learners from unsuccessful ones. It is our belief that not enough attention has been given to the qualitative and quantitative aspects of previous language learning experience and the extent to which they affect the individual learner [6].

The initial observations were made in a high school in Ankara, where the subjects were preparing for the university entrance exam [7]. This is an environment that is becoming increasingly common in many countries, where students are required to learn a second foreign language in addition to the usual English classes, in order to aid their prospects of getting into university. This is partially due to policies of the European Union,

Citation: Qizi, I. S. X. The Role of Previous Language Learning Experience in Acquiring L3. Web of Semantic: Universal Journal on Innovative Education 2024, 3(6), 71-75.

Received: 7th Sept 2024
Revised: 15th Oct 2024
Accepted: 24th Nov 2024
Published: 3th Dec 2024

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which aspires its member states to produce bilingual high school graduates. This is very different from the traditional foreign language learning in English-speaking countries, and even though the UK has now implemented learning a foreign language as a compulsory subject in primary school, the situation there is still not the same as countries such as Turkey, and the resources available there are not adequate for successful L3 learning. These elements make it an interesting and important area to investigate and also hold great implications for the TEFL industry.

Transfer between the languages is a key factor in L3 acquisition. Schachter (1996) defined transfer as the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired. This takes place at various levels, for example at the level of phonology, word-formation, syntax, etc. The type of transfer and the success of the learner in avoiding negative transfer (i.e. interference) leading to errors in the L3 are directly dependent on the learner's entire linguistic repertoire in all languages and the context in which the L3 is being learned. This is contrasted with L2 learning which is often studied from the perspective of learners with a specific L1 learning a specific target language in a classroom situation.

The definition encompasses a wide range of learner experience, from someone who is near-simultaneously learning a second foreign language at school whilst continuing with the first one, to someone who begins learning a language at a much later date. This experience will have a significant impact on the process whereby the learner moves to the "end-state", i.e. a complete and balanced competence in the three languages (L3) from a variety of initial states. The linguistic and psychological factors involved in this type of transfer have been the focus of much recent research in the field of third language acquisition.

2. Materials and Methods

Development of practical proposals on L3 teaching strategies with the example of teaching English as tertiary language to the uzbek students who learned German language before.

A. Research objectives

a. To investigate whether having previous language learning experience positively affects the process of L3 learning and teaching.
b. To examine students performance of L3 when similar language taught as an additional foreign language.
c. To investigate the potential applications of strategies acquired during L2 in L3 acquisition.
d. To identify which skill is the most progressive in L3 acquisition.
e. Find similarities between both languages that can be of academic use.

B. Research Methods

Quantitative data analysis, primary research collected by observation of a chosen group throughout a session, descriptive research.

Scientific novelty of the study is as follows:

a. Expand the boundaries of L3 research and provide new insights into previously assumed ideas.
b. Through analysis of L3 learners' approach, the clear influence of previously learned foreign language patterns are identified and useful strategies of transfer highlighted.
c. determining the relevance of developing additional methodological techniques for students to become interference-competent in L3.
d. to facilitate the learning of additional foreign languages by turning "interference" into "facilitation" encountered when learning similar languages.

It has generally been assumed that the differences in the process of learning a first (L1), second (L2) and third language are such that prior second language learning benefits

L3 rather than hinders it. This is because the L1 has been thought to have a special representational status. That is, the L2 is learned and stored through the medium of the L1, so the L2 and its influence on the L1 become intermingled and form an integrated system distinct from both the native and L2 systems. When the learner attempts to learn a third language and the L2 is activated, it can inhibit access to L1 data and the new target language, ultimately resulting in negative transfer from L2 to L3. However, negative transfer is not the only type of interference that a learner with previous language learning experience may encounter when trying to learn L3. Positive transfer from the L2 or transfer from the L1 and L2 can occur in instances where the learner is unable to fill a gap in the L3 with L1 data, in the case of incomplete acquisition, or when there is no L1 equivalent to the L2 form. While positive transfer obviously has beneficial results, any kind of transfer from the second language is yet again an inhibition to accessing L1 data and the new target language and can therefore hinder the learning process as the learner is essentially trying to integrate three systems as opposed to two.; To address this case, another experiment is done at Fergana State University, foreign languages department where students' major is german language (L2) and taught for English as an additional foreign language (L3).

3. Results

Two groups of students observed throughout a session (from September till January) for the experiment. "A" group was the one where students' major was German language and all had previous language learning experience at certain levels, while "B" group consisted of only first-time learners of a foreign language. The same curriculum, materials, workbooks and activities used in both groups and for each classes the same methods applied for explanations of new themes to lead the research as equitable as possible.

Overall 36 students of two groups participated in this project (18 people in each groups) and 5 months spent for the research to highlight main differences between groups in learning patterns, approaches and general progress. Students were tested before the start to make sure all were at the same level and had little to no understanding of English.

It is commonly known, there are 3 main levels of language awareness with 2 subdivisions of them:

a. Beginner (Beginner and Elementary levels);
b. Intermediate (Pre-, Upper- levels);
c. Advanced (Advanced, Proficiency).

Or in other words, 6 levels determined as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. One of our research object was to help students reach to an Intermediate level in 5 months of study in a twice-a-week schedule while observing their participations, characteristics and defining what way would help them most to better accomplishment.

In the first phase, participants were introduced to the language, phonetics explained, very basic vocabularies given, such as numbers, weekdays/months/seasons, colors, etc. without any grammar explanations and rules to learn. In this session, B group was active and easy to except new sounds and phonetics while group A had some complain of phonetics and many challenges to learn the reading of certain words particularly those that start by "sp-" combination (speak, sport) or words endings with "-tion", as a result of interference came by previously learned language phonetic rules and unconscious misspelling of /ˈʃp/ insead of /sp/ and many others.

Second phase included minor grammar rules such as "to be", "to have", there is/are", pronouns, etc. where group A exceeded in getting new information as they once learned similar themes made rules sound familiar, while group B had a little understanding. In addition, the students with prior knowledge of language could easily form sentences for the given themes, while the others had some difficulties in terms of sentence structure rules for not having been introduced to such case before. Group A grabbed the theme at an utterance, parallelly comparing to their L2 and highlighting similarities as well as

differences, yet B side only tried to learn explanations by heart and it took more time and extra effort compared to the other group.

4. Discussion

The same case happened in both vocabulary part of the classes and the third phase-Tenses. At the end of each class there was a 20-minute class vocabulary review. Observations proved that firstly, students with PLLE were aware of several vocabulary enlargement methods (association, repetition, learning by context, creating visual vocab aids, etc.) and the most importantly, they already knew which way worked most for themselves. Similar case observed in tenses. However, another interesting fact here was that A side students already started guessing the structures and rules of Tenses ahead which remained them motivated especially when their assumptions turned out to be true and made the teaching process more engaging, fun and easy though some differences between their L2 and L3 also occured, while B side still strived in learning by formal rules, taking notes, memorizing and doing book exercises.

Besides, every classes ran by modern methods integrating Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking activities, practicing the target language more. Hence, throughout the research, the development of each language skills were observed separately as well by a monthly tests and task-accomplishments and compared between chosen groups to have a clear view which skill benefits most by PLLE (Figure 1). And the estimated average image of this is as follows:

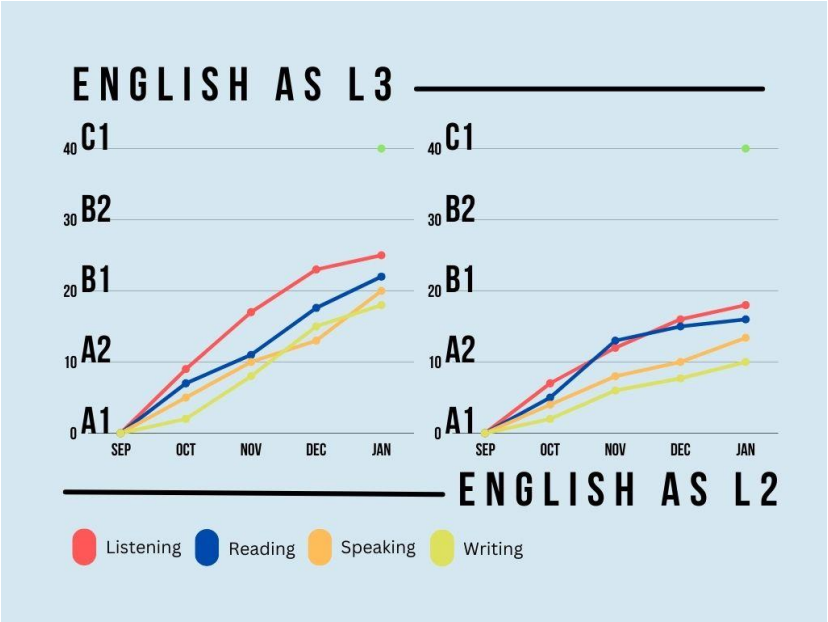

Figure 1. The comparison of students language development.

According to the results seen by the flow-chart above, when English is taught as L3 (the left side) students managed to reach a firm B1 level in 5 months, between 18-25 in numbers while those learning English as L2 (right side) did less to one whole level showing upper A2 result with 10-18 indexes, proves there is a high potential to learn the language faster and more effective with PLLE.

5. Conclusion

The process of acquiring a third language (L3) is significantly influenced by prior language learning experiences (PLLE), particularly through the interplay of first (L1) and second (L2) languages. While negative transfer from L2 to L3 can hinder access to L1 data, the overall impact of PLLE remains beneficial. PLLE enhances critical thinking, facilitates vocabulary development, accelerates grammar acquisition, and fosters metalinguistic

awareness, enabling learners to monitor and correct errors. Furthermore, learners with PLLE demonstrate higher motivation, better strategy adoption, and an improved ability to integrate language systems. In multilingual contexts, leveraging skills and strategies gained from L2 learning can streamline L3 acquisition. However, the success of this integration depends on individual attitudes, prior experiences, and the learning environment. Ultimately, learners who embrace their multilingual potential and adapt strategies based on past successes are better positioned to achieve proficiency in L3.

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