

Article

Interlingual Interference In English Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of interference in English language learning. Interference, defined as the influence of a learner's native language on the acquisition and use of a foreign language, affects all linguistic levels, including phonetic, lexical, grammatical, stylistic, and sociocultural domains. The paper examines the primary types of interference—linguistic, cultural, and psychological—and explains how they manifest in learners' speech and writing. Particular attention is given to typical errors caused by interference and the factors influencing its intensity. The article also proposes practical strategies for minimizing negative interference while utilizing its potential positive effects in language acquisition. Understanding interference is essential for improving teaching methodologies and enhancing learners' communicative competence.

Keywords: Interference, language transfer, linguistic interference, cultural interference, psychological interference, second language acquisition, communicative competence, English learning.

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1. Introduction

In the modern world, knowledge of a foreign language is an essential condition for the personal and professional development of the younger generation. However, mastering a second language inevitably involves challenges. One of the most significant among them is interference, a phenomenon in which elements of a learner's native language influence the acquisition and use of a foreign language (L2). Studies conducted in multilingual contexts such as the USA, France, Great Britain, and Russia have shown that languages inevitably influence one another. This interaction often leads to the mixing of linguistic systems during language learning [1, 2]. Learning English is not limited to grammar and vocabulary; it also involves understanding the culture of English-speaking communities. As noted by V.S. Vinogradov, culture represents a system of material and spiritual values unique to a particular society. These cultural differences play a crucial role in language learning and can contribute to interference [3, 4].

2. Theoretical Background of Interference

The term interference is interpreted differently across linguistic and psychological studies, but most scholars agree that it refers to the transfer of elements from one language to another, resulting in deviations from standard usage. This transfer can occur consciously or unconsciously and may be either beneficial or detrimental. From a linguistic perspective, interference is often associated with language transfer, which can be [5]:

Negative transfer: leading to errors

Positive transfer: facilitating learning due to similarities between languages

Interference is studied in multiple disciplines, including [6]:

- Linguistics
- Psycholinguistics
- Sociolinguistics
- Language pedagogy

It occurs at all levels of language structure and is influenced by both objective factors (such as language similarity) and subjective factors (such as learner motivation and psychological readiness) [7, 8].

3. Methodology

Linguistic Interference

Linguistic interference is the most visible and widely studied form. It involves the direct influence of the native language on different components of the target language

a) Lexical Interference

Lexical interference occurs when learners transfer vocabulary directly from their native language into English without considering differences in meaning, usage, or collocation. This often leads to:

- Literal translations
- Incorrect word combinations
- Misuse of idiomatic expressions

Example: "I have 25 years" influenced by languages where age is expressed with "have" instead of "I am 25 years old"

A major issue here is that words rarely have exact equivalents across languages. Even when meanings appear similar, usage contexts may differ significantly.

b) Syntactic Interference

Syntactic interference involves transferring sentence structure and word order from the native language into English.

Since English has a relatively fixed word order (Subject–Verb–Object), learners from languages with flexible structures often make errors.

Example: "He really likes this book" instead of "He very likes this book"

Such errors occur because learners rely on familiar patterns from their native language rather than internalizing English syntax.

c) Grammatical Interference

Grammatical interference refers to the incorrect application of morphological and grammatical rules. Common issues include:-

- Incorrect tense usage
- Misuse or omission of articles
- Errors in subject-verb agreement
- Confusion with modal verbs

For example, learners whose native languages lack articles often omit "a," "an," or "the" in English.

d) Phonological Interference

Phonological interference affects pronunciation and arises from differences in sound systems. Learners may:

- Substitute unfamiliar sounds with familiar ones
- Misplace stress in words
- Struggle with intonation patterns

Examples:

- Difficulty pronouncing /θ/ and /ð/ (often replaced with /s/, /z/, or /t/)
- Confusion between long and short vowels (e.g., *ship* vs. *sheep*)

4. Results and Discussion

Cultural Interference

Cultural interference occurs when learners interpret or express ideas in English using the norms, values, and assumptions of their native culture. Language is deeply connected to culture, and differences can lead to misunderstandings in [9]:

- Idioms and expressions
- Social etiquette

- Communication styles

For instance, idioms often cannot be translated literally because their meanings are culturally embedded [10].

Examples:

- *Kick the bucket* → “to die”
- *Birds of a feather flock together* → people with similar characteristics associate

Literal translation of such expressions leads to confusion or incorrect usage. Cultural interference can also affect politeness strategies, levels of formality, and conversational behavior [11, 12].

3. Psychological Interference

Psychological interference refers to internal mental and emotional factors that hinder language acquisition. Key Factors:

a) Fear of Making Mistakes: Many learners avoid speaking due to anxiety about errors, which limits practice and slows progress [13].

b) Overgeneralization: Learners apply rules too broadly, assuming that all structures follow the same pattern.

Example: Adding “-ed” to all verbs (e.g., *goed* instead of *went*)

c) Cognitive Load: Learning multiple aspects of a language simultaneously can overwhelm learners, leading to confusion.

d) Motivation and Attitude: Low motivation reduces engagement and increases the likelihood of interference-related errors [14].

Factors Influencing Interference

The extent and nature of interference depend on several factors:

- **Typological similarity between languages**
- **Level of proficiency in L1 and L2**
- **Duration and intensity of exposure to L2**
- **Learner’s cognitive abilities**
- **Teaching methods used**

Interestingly, languages that are structurally similar may produce more interference due to false similarities.

Common Errors Caused by Interference

Interference results in a wide range of errors:

1. Phonetic Errors

- Mispronunciation of unfamiliar sounds
- Incorrect stress patterns

2. Grammatical Errors

- Incorrect sentence structure
- Misuse of tenses and articles

3. Lexical-Semantic Errors

- Wrong word choice
- Literal translation

4. Stylistic Errors [15]

- Inappropriate tone or register
- Incorrect synonym usage

5. Sociocultural Errors

- Misinterpretation of meaning
- Inappropriate communication strategies

Strategies to Mitigate Interference

Effective language teaching should aim not to eliminate interference entirely, but to manage it constructively [16].

1. **Raising Awareness:** Learners should be explicitly taught where interference occurs and why.
2. **Contrastive Analysis:** Comparing L1 and L2 helps learners understand differences and avoid errors.
3. **Regular Practice:** Frequent speaking and writing reduce anxiety and reinforce correct patterns [17].
4. **Constructive Feedback:** Timely correction helps learners recognize and eliminate errors.
5. **Use of Authentic Materials:** Exposure to real-life language improves natural usage and reduces reliance on L1 [18].
6. **Cultural Education:** Teaching cultural context enhances communicative competence [19, 20].

5. Conclusion

Interference is an inevitable and multifaceted phenomenon in foreign language learning. It arises from the interaction between linguistic systems and is influenced by cultural and psychological factors. Although interference often leads to errors, it is also a natural stage in language development. By understanding its types—linguistic, cultural, and psychological—educators and learners can adopt effective strategies to overcome difficulties. Ultimately, successful language acquisition depends on balancing the influence of the native language with the development of independent competence in English. With proper guidance, interference can be transformed from an obstacle into a valuable learning tool.

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