



Language transfer

Language transfer (also known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross meaning) is most commonly discussed in the context of English language learning and teaching, but it can occur in any situation when someone does not have a native-level command of a language, as when translating into a second language.

Positive and negative transfer

When the relevant unit or structure of both languages is the same, linguistic interference can result in correct language production called positive transfer – "correct" meaning in line with most native speakers' notions of acceptability. An example is the use of cognates. Note, however, that language interference is most often discussed as a source of errors known as negative transfer. Negative transfer occurs when speakers and writers transfer items and structures that are not the same in both languages. Within the theory of contrastive analysis (the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities), the greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative transfer can be expected.

The results of positive transfer go largely unnoticed, and thus are less often discussed. Nonetheless, such results can have a large effect. Generally speaking, the more similar the two languages are, the more the learner is aware of the relation between them, the more positive transfer will occur. For example, an Anglophone learner of German may correctly guess an item of German vocabulary from its English counterpart, but word order and collocation are more likely to differ, as will connotations. Such an approach has the disadvantage of making the learner more subject to the influence of "*false friends*" (false cognates).



Conscious and unconscious transfer

Transfer may be conscious or unconscious. Consciously, learners or unskilled translators may sometimes guess when producing speech or text in a second language because they have not learned or have forgotten its proper usage. Unconsciously, they may not realize that the structures and internal rules of the languages in question are different. Such users could also be aware of both the structures and internal rules, yet be insufficiently skilled to put them into practice, and consequently often fall back on their first language.

Multiple acquired languages

Transfer can also occur between acquired languages. In a situation where French is a second language and Spanish a third, an Anglophone learner, for example, may assume that a structure or internal rule from French also applies to Spanish.

Examples

Language transfer produces distinctive forms of learner English, depending on the speaker's first language. Some examples, labeled with a blend of the names of the two languages in question, are: Chinglish (Chinese); Czenglish (Czech); Denglich (German); Denglish (Dutch); Engrish (or "Japlish": Japanese); Finglish (Finnish); Franglais (French); Hinglish (Hindi); Konglish (Korean); Manglish (Malaysian); Penglish (Polish); Porglish (Portuguese); Runglish (Russian); Serblish (Serbian); Spanglish (Spanish); Swenglish (Swedish); Taglish (Tagalog); Tanglish (Tamil); Tinglish (Thai); Turklish (Turkish); and Yinglish (Yiddish).

Similar interference effects, of course, also involve languages other than English, e.g. French and Spanish (Frespañol).

These examples could be multiplied endlessly to reflect the linguistic interactions of speakers of the thousands of existing or extinct languages.



Such interfered-language names are often also used informally to denote instances of code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing (using loan words).

Broader effects of language transfer

With sustained or intense contact between native and non-native speakers, the results of language transfer in the non-native speakers can extend to and affect the speech production of the native-speaking community. For example, in North America, speakers of English whose first language is Spanish or French may have a certain influence on native English speakers' use of language when the native speakers are in the minority. Locations where this phenomenon occurs frequently include Québec, Canada, and predominantly Spanish-speaking regions in the U.S.

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