L2 effects on L1: Cross-linguistic influences

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The concept of a first language affecting a second language instills the notion that language learning is linearly influenced by a leaner’s L1. However, languages do not become obsolete once another language is added, instead both languages are kept and impact one another. Obvious examples of this impact can be seen in the fact that some languages induct loan words into their own vocabularies. The introduction of these overt forms of language mixing, whether formally through the government, or informally through society, show influence from other languages.

Languages are not elliptically affected by other languages in an unconscious manner. Rather people draw on both of their languages in order to communicate as well as to develop individualism. Within the consciousness of a bilingual, either language can conceptually affect the other since both are mixing within the minds of speakers. Looking at lexical data that exemplifies the direct relation of the L1 concepts onto the L2 during language acquisition, a first language might seem more linear than it ought to. However, when looking further into these lexically driven experiments, there can also be evidence that supports the opposite. Language cannot just simply be defined as a branch of an already existing language, which trickles down vocabulary and its meaning. Conceptually languages broaden the minds of leaners in such a way that both languages are affected together despite some influences seeming more prominent is certain instances.

**Codeswitching**

Since languages are inseparable certain ideas regarding the blatant mixing of more than one language have become recognized and even introduced as a means of bilingual education. Codeswitching (a bilingual switching between languages) has been both chastised and seen as an efficient means of relaying information (Baker, 2011). This perfectly natural way of dual language use also resides in translanguaging, as seen when languages are mixed in a classroom and students use those languages respectively depending on the task at hand and what has been asked of them (Baker, 2011).

These ideas and practices encourage the mixing of both languages; while the idea of translanguaging is focused on teaching, it still emphasizes how important the idea of language mixing is. When two or more languages come into contact with each other there is more happening than what is seen on the surface; these impacts also take form conceptually.

**L1 on L2**

Language learners sometimes wonder why others seem to learn language more easily than them. While there can be many explanations as to why this is, there is one exploration which seems most prominent: a learner’s first language. Each language has a plethora of factors that make it unique, however, there are still languages that are more similar to others. This idea has been explored and several people have developed theories that explain this L1 affect on the L2. Although these theories do not tend to focus on the advantages some learners have over others, it could help explain how individuals relate their L2 to their L1.

Gass & Selinker (1993) quoted Robert Lado’s claim, “individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture.” In the past, this type of belief was common; however, recently there have been researchers looking into other effects and types of language transfer.

Vocabulary in particular is acquired in three stages: word association, L1 lemma mediation stage, and full integration (Jiang, 2004). As language learners progress in language acquisition and become more familiar with the target language and the use of particular vocabulary, they tend to disassociate the L2 from the L1. This dissociation means that at one point both the L1 and L2 were though of laterally and therefor were grouped together.

During the first stage of vocabulary acquisition-word association- a learner uses their L1 to relate their newly learned L2 vocabulary to ideas that they understand and have been previously exposed to. As they receive more exposure to the vocabulary they start to identify the L2 words with their own meanings. However there are still lingering relations to the L1 when the learner is still in the second stage of L1 lemma mediation. Finally, during the full integration stage, does the learner completely disconnect any ideas that may have occurred in the L1 from the L2 (Jiang, 2004).

Kroll et al (2002) also did a similar study that examined how language learners associated vocabulary with their L1. Particularly in order to assess the revised hierarchal model that includes word association and concept mediation alternatives into vocabulary acquisition (Kroll et al, 2002). Their study followed Bilingual English speakers that were learning French; half of these speakers being more fluent that the other.

Within the study they specifically focused on cognates, words that 50% of the time could be guessed correctly by an English speaking monolingual. Kroll’s interest in cognates was due to the similarities both lexical and conceptually. Interestingly enough, while the more fluent French speakers were faster than the more novice French speakers when saying both cognates and other words that were categorized, they showed not much variation in time differences between the cognates and the non-cognates. On the other hand the less fluent speakers showed a more drastic difference in time between naming the cognates and non-cognates (Kroll, 2002). This shows how more novice individuals rely more heavily on the association of the L2 to the L1.

Not only did this experiment provide evidence that supported the revised hierarchal model, specifically for word association through cognates, but also through simple translation of non-cognates. Since Kroll’s study contained two sections that offset each other they were able to compare transfer affects that correlated to the revised hierarchal model. By having participant name words given in their L2 and translate them into their L1 along with another section that required the opposite, Kroll found that in accordance to the revised hierarchal model that translation was faster and more accurate from L2 to L1than from L1 to L2 (Kroll, 2002).

In order to prove that people connect meanings to the their L1 Jiang also examined Chinese speakers learning English. In this study Jiang had words that were both unique to English and words that had very similar meanings to Chinese counterparts. Jiang was able to conclude that the Chinese learners were quicker producing meanings when the English words related more to the Chinese counterpart. While this Jiang’s (2004) three step theory explains how vocabulary transitions as it is used, there is little acknowledgment of what happens to those words of the L1 that were used to relate to the L2.

**L2 on L1**

Contradictory to the previously mentioned theories that promote the idea that the L1 affects L2 learning exist other ideas that take said idea further. These theories attempt to look at how languages combine in order to create a web of influences that string bilaterally from both languages.

Cook’s theory of multicompetence and Grosjean’s thought that bilinguals are not patched together but instead blended in order to create “a specific speaker-hearer with a unique, but nevertheless complete, linguistic system.” (Pavlenko, 2000). These ideas do not look down on bilinguals and rank their language ability, but rather promote the idea that language is affected by other factors. By blending a language with another, it is not simply the L2 that changes- both languages have equal influences within bilingual individuals.

**Pavlenko’s cross-linguistic influences**

Pavlenko removes the idea that the L1 is strictly being used in order to attain another language, which is seen through Jiang’s (2004) view of vocabulary acquisition, and insists that there are several types of processes going on when the L2 is being acquired. This is not done at the expense of the theories fore mentioned that focus solely on the L2 being affected, but includes and develops those ideas.

In her ideology’ Pavlenko (2000) theorizes five changes within language that occur due to the mixing of both the L1 and L2. First is the idea of *borrowing transfer*. This refers to what is added to the L1 because of the L2. Secondly is *convergence*, which is not defined by either the L1 or the L2, and is a separate system of its own. Then the idea of shift covers the move away from the structure of the L1 in order to assimilate to that of the L2. Restructuring transfer, when the addition of L2 elements causes the L1 to change or become substituted. This idea of restructuring transfer is similar to shift but only considered a partial shift. The final change is that of LJ attrition (Pavlenko, 2000). This is the complete loss of L1 elements because of the introduction of the L2, which Jarvis (2004) points out, is seen on a large scale with the extinction of languages and the commodification of other languages. With these five categories of change Pavlenko attempts to explain why languages, although social, have individual aspects which often happen for bilinguals because of the mixing of more than one language.

Pavlenko (2005) delves further into her own framework and expands on the relationship between language and thought. While keeping the same ideas of *borrowing transfer*, *convergence*, *shift*, and *attrition*, Pavlenko alters and adds other ideas to her previous framework (Pavlenko, 2000). Although she uses a similar name to that of *restructuring transfer*, she explains this newer idea of *restructuring of a conceptual domain*. In comparison to *restructuring transfer*, Pavlenko does not single out one particular language that is being affected, in fact all Pavlenko states in defining what *restructuring of a conceptual domain* is is that it, “refers to a case where a shift is not complete but certain elements may be deleted from or incorporated in a concept or a conceptual domain.” This broadening of the definition, allows more to be included within a more versatile framework that has less focus on only how L2 affects L1 (Pavlenko, 2005).

New ideas that Pavlenko (2005) explains are even more inclusive to the reciprocal of her aforementioned framework. The first addition to her previous framework was the idea of *Coexistence of L1 and L2 conceptual domains,* which explains the unique mindset bilinguals have. The second addition was the idea of *L1-based conceptual transfer,* which that L1 influences the use and learning of L2 (Pavlenko, 2005). Due to the addition of this category within the framework Pavlenko can now take into consideration the ideas that Jiang had on vocabulary acquisition and the three steps involved.

**Evidence of L2 on L1**

In an experiment done by Pavlenko (2002), evidence was found that suggests the crossing of concepts between languages. This experiment –Kitchen Russian: Cross-linguistic differences and first-language object naming by Russian- English bilinguals—placed an emphasis on analyzing how (and in what areas) does the L2 affect the L1. The specific focus of the experiment was “on the possibility of a backward influence of the new language of Russian immigrants, English, on their use of Russian terms for drinking vessels” (Pavlenko & Malt, 2010. p. 22).

Language influences can be evaluated via examining how bilingual speakers of English and Russian name and place common kitchen items into groups. By juxtaposing bilingual speakers of both Russian and English and comparing their answers with those of a monolingual Russian and English speakers evidence has been found to support the notion that native bilingual Russian speakers are conceptually affected by the introduction and existence of having learned another language.

In order to further identify any factors that could contribute to the cross culture effects, the participants outside the two monolingual Russian/English control groups were placed into several smaller groups. Depending on their age of arrival within the United States, the Russian-English Bilingual participants were regarded as either early bilinguals, childhood bilinguals, or late bilinguals. Since this distinction was made, further analysis found that the early bilinguals did not develop certain ideological congruencies between English and Russian that the other bilinguals had. Pavlenko (2010) explains that this could be due to the culture relationship that the bilingual Russian speakers keep despite being in America.

Following Pavlenko’s ideas, Jarvis (2003) executed a case study examining a Finnish bilingual named Aino, who had plateaued levels of both their L1 and L2, in order to examine how languages affect one another. Instead of focusing on how the introduction of the L2 negatively affects the L1 through attrition, this case study provided evidence that supports dual additive bilingualism. Therefore instead of subtracting competency from the L1 in order to master the L2, there is actually a development of the L1 that occurs due to the addition of the L2 (Jarvis, 2003).

Furthermore Jarvis wanted to see where in particular the L2 was affecting the L1. Following the case study and analysis of Aino, it was concluded that there were mostly “item-specific” changes instead of influences that affected the L1’s system of grammar. It was also noticed that Aino indeed did transfer semantic processes over to Finnish, exemplified by the strict use of SVO word order in the non-strict norms of Finnish that would normally allow otherwise.

**Importance of recognizing language mixing**

How languages affect one another may seem erroneous to the average language leaner despite the involuntary effects they are undoing themselves. Whether one is in the midst of acquiring their second language or is fluent in more than one language they are a product of language and the mixing of those languages. Having gained experience with another language, learners have not only developed their L1 skill, but also in the form of communication, bilinguals have experience aiming to communicate.

Since languages are globalizing and while that implies a certain degree of language assimilation, it also signifies the importance of bilingual communication. In order to reach out to other cultures and, ultimately, people of different languages, it is important to aim for communication with whatever means are available (Pavlenko, 2003).

Despite the possibility of inequality in either language’s development, there is a continuum of impacts each language has on the other instead of a linear cause and effect beginning with the L1. Individualism, culture, experiences, and most importantly other languages all weave together in order to create a paradigm that is, in the end, its own language.

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