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The influence of the Mother Tongue on Second Language learning in Faculty of Arts and Science, Zamzam

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A B S T R A C T

The study investigates how the mother tongue influences second language learning, focusing on students at the Faculty of Arts and Science in Zamzam. It examines the impact of native language on acquiring English, considering factors like input, motivation, and learning strategies. Through a mixed-method approach, data from English department students were analyzed, revealing a significant effect of the mother tongue on learning English. Key findings include challenges in mastering core language skills—reading, speaking, listening, and writing—due to reliance on the native language. The study underscores the importance of strategies that minimize mother tongue interference, suggesting practices such as fostering thinking in the target language, interactive classrooms, and extensive reading to improve language acquisition outcomes. These insights aim to enhance pedagogical approaches, ensuring effective language learning by addressing the specific needs arising from native language influences..

تأثير اللغة الأم على تعلم اللغة الثانية بكلية الآداب والعلوم زمزم

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الملخص

تبحث الدراسة في كيفية تأثير اللغة الأم على تعلم اللغة الثانية، مع التركيز على طلاب كلية الآداب والعلوم في زمزم. وهو يدرس تأثير اللغة الأم في اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار عوامل مثل المدخلات والتحفيز واستراتيجيات التعلم. من خلال نهج مختلط الأسلوب، تم تحليل البيانات من طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، وكشف عن تأثير كبير للغة الأم على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. وتشمل النتائج الرئيسية التحديات في إتقان المهارات اللغوية الأساسية - القراءة والتحدث والإستماع والكتابة - بسبب الاعتماد على اللغة الأم. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية الاستراتيجيات التي تقلل من التدخل في اللغة الأم، وتقترح ممارسات مثل تعزيز التفكير في اللغة المستهدفة، والفصول الدراسية التفاعلية، والقراءة المكثفة لتحسين نتائج اكتساب اللغة. تهدف هذه الأفكار إلى تعزيز الأساليب التربوية، وضمان التعلم الفعال للغة من خلال تلبية الاحتياجات المحددة الناشئة عن تأثيرات اللغة الأم.

Introduction

Mother tongue refers not only to the language acquired from one's mother but also to the dominant and home language of the speaker, often called the native language. It is typically learned unconsciously in a natural setting through input and interaction. Children are believed to possess an innate ability to grasp the fundamental rules of a language system, a concept Noam Chomsky (2008) termed Universal Grammar. In the context of second language learning, factors such as input, feedback, aptitude, motivation, instruction, and social interaction play crucial roles. The key question we aim to explore is whether a learner's first language (L1) facilitates or hinders the process of learning a second language.

This paper will address the following topics:
What is second language acquisition?
What is second language learning?
What are the main differences between language learning and language acquisition?
The relationship between learning strategies and second language acquisition.
Aim of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to investigate how students' native language affects their learning of English as a foreign language.
Research Question

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Based on this objective, the study seeks to address the following question:

What impact does the mother tongue have on the process of learning a second language?

Review of the literature

Second language learning (SLL) focuses on the process by which individuals acquire a language beyond their native language, often referred to as L2 or target language, in contrast to L1, the first language. In this context, the term "second language" can apply to any additional language learned after the native one, including a third or fourth language. SLL is distinct from bilingual learning, where a child simultaneously acquires two languages, typically due to exposure from parents who speak different languages. In summary, second language acquisition refers specifically to the learning of another language after the first language has been established (Ellis, 1997; Chomsky, 1965).

Definitions of Key Terms:

A second language refers to any language learned in addition to a person's native language. While the term "second-language acquisition" (SLA) typically describes the learning of a second language, it can also encompass the acquisition of third, fourth, or additional languages. SLA focuses on the learning process itself, rather than language teaching practices. Originally, the term "acquisition" highlighted the unconscious nature of language learning, though more recently, "learning" and "acquisition" have become largely interchangeable.

SLA may include heritage language learning but generally does not cover bilingualism. Most SLA researchers view bilingualism as the outcome of learning a language, characterized by native-like fluency, rather than the process of acquiring it. However, in fields like education and psychology, "bilingualism" is often used broadly to refer to all forms of multilingualism. SLA should not be contrasted with the acquisition of a foreign language, as both involve similar underlying processes in different contexts (Ellis, 1998).

Comparison between Language Acquisition and Language Learning

	Language Acquisition	Language Learning
Meaning	Picking up a language	Studying a language
Focus	Practical Knowledge	Theoretical Knowledge
Method	Unconscious, implicit	Conscious, explicit
Situations	Informal situations	Formal situations
Grammar	Does not use grammatical rules	Uses grammatical rules
Dependency	Depends on attitude	Depends on aptitude
Meaning	Language Acquisition	Studying a language
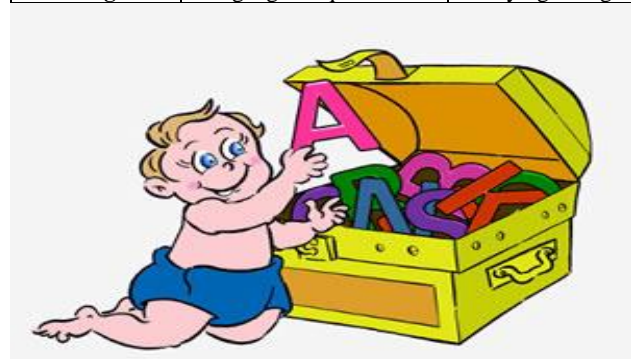
Language is the primary means of communication for humans. However, it is not explicitly taught to children; rather, they acquire their native language naturally by interacting with others, primarily their family members. This process, known as language acquisition, occurs without deliberate effort or study. By the age of five, children can typically express ideas clearly and use language and grammar effectively, even without formal education in the language.

In contrast, language learning is a structured process involving the study of vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar, commonly employed in schools and language learning centers. This method is typically slower than language acquisition, with many people studying a language for years without mastering it. The key difference between language acquisition and language learning lies in the approach: acquisition involves learning through immersion and practical use, enabling individuals to communicate fluently without necessarily knowing formal grammar rules, while language learning focuses on systematic study and understanding.

In contrast, language learning emphasizes theoretical knowledge, where students may understand proper grammar rules and sentence structures but still lack the confidence to converse with native speakers. As Stephen Krashen suggests, students taught through formal, structured methods may "learn" the language but never fully acquire it (Mitchell, 2004).

LEARNING STRATEGIES IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION,

Griffiths (2008) defined learning strategies as "activities consciously chosen by learners to regulate their own language learning" (p. 87). Research has highlighted the effectiveness of using L2 learning strategies in ESL classrooms and how teaching methods can influence the use of these strategies (e.g., Oxford, 2003). However, Brown (2006) noted that some learners succeed in acquiring their L2 regardless of the teaching methods used, as they have developed their own successful strategies. Others, however, require additional support. Therefore, educators are encouraged to adopt L2 approaches and models that promote the use of learning strategies among students. To achieve this, teachers must understand the philosophies and research that both support and critique the value of different approaches (Herrera & Marry, 2011, p. 195).

Kumaravadivelu (2001) argued that language teachers should not merely be consumers of existing theories but should go beyond these limitations by developing their own context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge, making their teaching practice meaningful (p. 541). Educators are encouraged to become post-method or autonomous teachers who engage in continuous self-exploration and improvement. This involves conducting teacher research by observing, listening, and reflecting on daily teaching practices to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their classroom pedagogy. As a result, teachers can design or adapt approaches that align with their educational context and meet students' needs effectively.

Second Language Learning Strategies

Second language (L2) learning strategies refer to the specific actions, behaviors, techniques, or steps that students intentionally use to enhance their ability to internalize, store, retrieve, and apply the L2 (Oxford 1990b, following Rigley 1978). These strategies serve as tools for active, self-directed participation, which is essential for developing communicative competence in the L2 (O'Malley and Chamot 1990, Wenden 1991, Wenden and Rubin 1987). There are hundreds of L2 learning strategies, many of which are well-established and commonly utilized by students. For instance, in a classroom, Lazlo might seek conversation partners, while Like organizes words into groups and labels them. Marcie might use positive self-talk to motivate herself before delivering a speech in the target language (Bialystok 1981).

Problem Statement of the Study:

Learning the target language presents several psychological challenges, which we will explore.

Many learners struggle with English, often viewing it primarily as a means to pass exams and obtain a degree rather than as a tool for communication. This approach can hinder their ability to effectively learn a second language, as they may fail to develop the necessary skills for proficiency. Additionally, these students often lack confidence when communicating in English.

When learners are not encouraged to speak publicly, their language skills are likely to diminish. In summary, it is essential to provide students with opportunities to use the language in the classroom and to encourage them to overcome their fear of speaking in public and applying the language in real-life situations.

Methodology:

This chapter outlines the research design and details the data collection methods used. It also provides a description of the participants, the sample size, and the approach to data analysis.

Research Design:

This study combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. The rationale behind this is that while numbers are essential for obtaining precise data, it is also necessary to describe aspects such as people's judgments, feelings of comfort, emotions, ideas, and beliefs, which can only be expressed in words. (William, 2011, p71).

Sample Description:

Description of the sample of the study;

Table 1 personal information about respondents

No.	Nationality	L1	Age	Gender		Type of people	Students level
				M	F		
15 students	Libyan	Arabic	21-26	7	8	Students	Undergraduate students sixth\seventh

Sampling involves selecting a smaller, more manageable group of learners to participate in the study. Eight students are chosen randomly to complete the questionnaire that has been created.

The influence of mother tongue in the language skills

	Yes	No	To some extent	Never
Reading	3	5	9	1
Speaking	9	3	2	1
Listening	6	5	3	1
Writing	5	3	9	1

QUESTION	YES	NUMBER OF STUDENT	NO	NUMBER OF STUDENT	SOMETIMES	NUMBER OF STUDENT	NEVER	NUMBER OF STUDENT	PRESENTEGE
2	✓	4	✓	1	✓	9	✓	1	—
3	✓	4	✓	1	✓	7	✓	4	—
4	✓	7	✓	1	✓	4	✓	2	—
5	✓	9	✓	2	✓	4	✓	2	—
6	✓	1	✓	4	✓	8	✓	1	—
7	✓	5	✓	1	✓	6	✓	3	—

Data Collection Instruments:

There are several methods for data collection, including interviews and questionnaires. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. However, the tool used in this study is a close-ended questionnaire. One reason for this choice is that we believe it is the most suitable way to gather information from the respondents.

Data Analysis:

In question one, the subjects were asked whether they face difficulty when practicing various well-known language skills. Three students reported facing difficulty with reading, five said they do not face difficulty, six indicated they face difficulty to some extent, and one stated they never face difficulty. Regarding speaking skills, nine students mentioned they face difficulty, two said they face difficulty to some extent, and one said they never face difficulty. For listening skills, six students answered yes, they face difficulty, five said they do not, three indicated they face difficulty to some extent, and one stated they never face difficulty. As for writing skills, five students reported facing difficulty, six said they experience difficulty to some extent, and one student claimed they never face difficulty. In question two, which asks whether the subjects encounter difficulty forming English sentences, four students answered yes, one answered no, nine students said they sometimes face difficulty, and one stated they never face difficulty. Question three asked whether the subjects face difficulty when constructing English sentences, with four students answering yes, one saying no, and seven claiming they never face difficulty. Question four, which asked whether they encounter problems and resort to the L2 when consulting a monolingual dictionary, found that seven subjects confirmed they do, one said they do not, and four indicated they sometimes resort to the L1, while two said they never face difficulty. In question five, which asked whether they prefer using a monolingual or bilingual dictionary when looking up the meaning of a word, nine students preferred bilingual dictionaries, four sometimes preferred monolingual dictionaries, and one student confirmed they never prefer consulting any type of dictionary. In question six, which asked if their translation to Arabic makes sense, one student said yes, four said no, eight said sometimes, and one said never. Finally, in question seven, which asked whether they spend time preparing silently when producing English, five students said yes, one said no, six said sometimes, and one said never.

Summary:

This chapter covered the crucial aspects outlining the methodology employed to accomplish the objectives of the current research. It included the research design, the demographic

background of the respondents, the instruments used, and the data analysis procedures.

Conclusion:

This paper explored various definitions of language acquisition and language learning as presented in the literature on the subject. It also highlighted the distinction between language acquisition and language learning, as well as the differences between first and second language learning. The study's findings provide evidence of the significant influence of the learner's mother tongue on second language learning. The participants confirmed experiencing difficulties when practicing the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The statistical analysis revealed that most participants face challenges when using monolingual dictionaries, often reverting to their mother tongue during these activities. This supports the conclusion that the learner's mother tongue plays a crucial role in second language learning.

Recommendations:

1. In addition to teaching listening, speaking, and reading skills at the early stages of learning English, it is important to focus on helping students develop the ability to think in the target language. Therefore, these skills should be designed in a way that fosters the development of thinking in English.

2. Establishing a language café where students can gather to practice the language in an informal setting could help build their confidence in speaking and increase their exposure to English.

3. Teachers should aim to make their classes more interactive and student-centered. They are encouraged to use a variety of teaching methods that accommodate both the content being taught and the varying levels of students' understanding.

4. Promoting a reading culture among students is essential. This should include both intensive and extensive reading. Encouraging students to read books, articles, and other materials will help expand their vocabulary and provide exposure to different types of texts and their structures.

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