

Liming Yu and Terence Odlin: New Perspectives on Transfer in Second Language Learning

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New Perspectives on Transfer in Second Language Learning is a volume of the Second Language Acquisition series published by Multilingual Matters. This volume focuses on language transfer where previous language(s) play a vital role in learners' perception or production of new forms either positively or negatively. This phenomenon is not brand new; the ancient Greeks already perceived transfer in Homer, Herodotus and Flavius Phil stratus (see Adams *et al.*, 2002; Janes, 2002). In this reviewed book, eighteen researchers present their studies on transfer by shedding light on issues from new theoretical, including lexical, syntactic, phonological and cognitive, perspectives. The volume demonstrates new findings in language transfer. It consists of thirteen chapters. Chapter One is an introduction. Chapters Two and Thirteen are the overview of language transfer, and Chapters 3 to 12 discuss the four sections of the new theoretical perspectives with analysing empirical data.

Chapter One clarifies the definition of transfer and research methods from a historical perspective. Terence Odlin and Liming Yu define transfer as “the influence from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (p. X). They present language transfer as a positive phenomenon. In Chapter Two, Scott Jarvis claims the transfer research field's scope is a broad and multifaceted one. The scope includes empirical findings, theoretical advances, methodological tools and argumentation heuristics within other side goals such as detection, diagnosis, and treatment intervention. He clarifies its components by showing how they fit together. In Chapter Three, David Singleton focuses on the arrangement of lexical knowledge in bi/multilingual minds and how that framework implies the study of transfer. Based on previous reviews, he argues that L1 and L2 mental lexicons have high levels of connections. Singleton believes that the lexicons of L1 and L2 appear in the L2 learner's mind in distinct yet interdependent systems, rather than in separate ones. He adds that in L2 learning, the processes are operative based on experience-driven language awareness concerning language connectivity. In Chapter Four, Shaopeng Li and Jingting Cai explore L1 transfer in acquiring English as a foreign language among Chinese learners. Sixty Chinese learners of English and fifteen native English speakers accomplished the same sentence-completion task to elicit the use of English prepositions, especially ‘above’, ‘over’, ‘below’ and ‘under’. The researchers collected qualitative data from introspective interviews as well. The quantitative and qualitative data analyses show that participants differ in expressing

relations in space. Moreover, no positive transfer occurs in Chinese learners' acquisition of semantic networks of English spatial prepositions.

In chapter Five, Sima Paribakht and Marjorie Bingham Wesche explore how language learners from different L1 backgrounds infer word meanings. Twenty post-secondary students of French, Persian and English participated in this experiment. To conduct the study, the researchers used three lexical processing tasks: The English Reading Comprehension Test (reference?), The VLT (Nation, 1990) and The Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) (Paribakht & Wesche, 1997). The results revealed that readers from different L1 backgrounds have different deduction routes, and transfer patterns in word meaning inference involve L1 procedural knowledge influence along with L1 structural influence. Socio-cultural factors show a vital role in explaining the lexical transfer.

In chapter Six, Shoopeng Li and Lianrui Yang investigate transfer from syntactic perspectives; their study explores whether the topic-prominent (TP) features in Chinese discourse exist in the interlanguage of Chinese learners of English. Ninety native Mandarin Chinese speakers studying English (30 first-year high school students, 30 first-year university students and 30 first-year postgraduate students) in China took part in this experiment in a translation task. The collected data indicate that due to Chinese syntactic features, at lower levels, Chinese students, more often than advanced learners, tend to omit the overt anaphora required in English targets and the authors conclude that the lack of discourse awareness causes negative transfer.

Yusong Gao, in Chapter Seven, detects the impact of L1 morphology and semantics on L2 acquisition of English ditransitive constructions by Chinese and Korean learners. Three groups with different mother tongues (30 Chinese learners of English, 16 Korean learners of English and 24 native speakers of English) were asked to take a grammaticality judgment test (GJT) and a forced-choice task (FCT). The overall findings suggest that transfer sometimes reflects the underlying organizational principles of specific languages. In this study, the results show that the Koreans were more conservative than the Chinese learners in both tests: in English middle constructions' judgment and in the selection of active verbs in the FCT. It indicates that the interaction between L1 morphology and several other factors affect L2 learners; these factors transcend patterns of formal similarities and differences between L1 and L2. Hui Chang and Lina Zheng, in Chapter Eight, continue to investigate transfer problems by focusing on the role of L1 in the acquisition of Chinese causative constructions by English-speaking learners. Forty-five adult native speakers carried out a translation task designed by the authors. The results show that participants acquired the periphrastic types earlier and better than the morphological and lexical types from among the different types of causative

constructions, which were more difficult for them. The authors suggest that L1 (English) positively influences the periphrastic type acquisition in L2 (Chinese). At the same time, it restrains the acquisition of Chinese morphological and lexical causative constructions. Hui Chang and Lina Zheng suggest that language transfer results from word-by-word translation.

The next chapters (9 and 10) present empirical examples of phonological transfer in language learning. Hong Li, Lei Zhang and Ling Zhou, in Chapter Nine, investigate the effect of Chinese language on learning English lexical stress patterns. Ninety early and late Chinese EFL learners participated in this experiment. They completed three English tests: a dictation test, a stress placement test and an oral production test. The analysis reveals that neither early nor late Chinese EFL learners illustrate native-like knowledge of English stress patterns based on lexical class and syllabic structure. In addition, the age of L2 exposure does not affect learning English word stress patterns. According to the researcher's sum-up, Chinese phonetic intuition transferred to EFL learning takes more time and effort to overcome. They advise English foreign language teachers to give more attention in teaching to English word stress and its abstract knowledge.

In Chapter Ten, David Mitchell reports on a conducted experimental study on Retroflexion where a consonant sound produced with the tip of the tongue curled back toward the hard palate. The participants repeated the Spanish words uttered in a recording by a native speaker of Spanish. The data analysis proves that the participants often used retroflexes instead of dentals. The author clarifies that borrowing from retroflex consonants in L1 leads to phonemicization and Retroflexion in L2.

The last part of the book covers transfer issues from cognitive perspectives. Terence Odlin, in Chapter Eleven, examines language transfer and the relation between comprehension and production. Six groups with different ages, L1 backgrounds and English learning experience took place in this study. The participants watched two silent films (Charlie Chaplin), and then they wrote the episodes' accounts. Odlin claims that the degree of cross-linguistic similarity affects the link between comprehension and production. In Chapter Twelve, Chuming Wang continues to detect the relation between EFL contexts and language transfer. He concludes that language transfer is a context-mediated cognitive process that involves interaction between internal and external contexts. In the last chapter (13), Terence Odlin provides an overview of the book by forwarding three issues concerning the transfer process. The first one is that researchers should focus more on the relationship between human cognition and language-specific processing. The second issue is about transfer research methods and the last one covers transfer research, from which researchers, teachers and students would benefit.

Overall, this volume presents an excellent account of transfer process research both theoretically and methodologically by providing several empirical studies in the interaction of English and Chinese L1 and L2 (among others), in a unique arrangement from theoretical perspectives to data-based studies. There is no doubt that this book is a valuable contribution to the rapidly expanding body of literature.

References

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