



THE ROLE OF COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: THE BRIDGE BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14963991>

ARTICLE INFO

Qabul qilindi: 20-Fevral 2025 yil
Ma'qullandi: 25-Fevral 2025 yil
Nashr qilindi: 28-Fevral 2025 yil

KEYWORDS

Comparative linguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), language teaching, linguistic interference, phonetics, grammar, pronunciation.

ABSTRACT

By examining the similarities and differences between languages to improve second language acquisition (SLA), comparative linguistics is crucial in language education. Understanding these linguistic connections helps educators predict learning challenges, design effective teaching strategies, and improve students' overall comprehension. This study examines how comparative linguistics contributes to SLA by focusing on grammar, pronunciation, and common learning difficulties. A qualitative analysis was conducted—incorporating error analysis of language learners' spoken and written production, as well as surveys and interviews with language instructors. The results highlight specific areas where linguistic interference affects learning and demonstrate how targeted teaching methods can mitigate these difficulties. This paper argues that integrating comparative linguistic insights into language education can make instruction more efficient and tailored to learners' needs.

Introduction

Language acquisition is influenced by linguistic, cognitive, and social factors, and individuals experience varying degrees of success in learning a second language. Challenges often stem from differences between the native and target languages, with language transfer playing a significant role, as learners may apply native language rules that can help or impede their learning. For example, while similarities between Spanish and English can help, false cognates can cause confusion. Languages like Chinese and English, which have vastly different structures, present even greater challenges, especially with aspects like tense usage and sentence structure. Additionally, phonetics and pronunciation can be difficult, particularly with sounds absent in a learner's native language.

Literature review

While some learners acquire a second language (L2) with relative ease, others face significant challenges due to the structural differences between their native language (L1) and the target language. These differences influence multiple aspects of second language acquisition (SLA), including grammar, pronunciation, syntax, vocabulary, and even pragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts (Ellis, 1994).

One of the key issues in SLA is the phenomenon of language transfer, where learners apply rules from their L1 to their L2. This transfer can be positive when similarities between the two languages facilitate learning, or negative when L1 structures interfere with correct L2 usage (Odlin, 1989).

In contrast, languages with significantly different linguistic structures, such as Chinese and English, pose greater learning challenges. English has a well-developed tense system, distinguishing between simple past (I ate), present perfect (I have eaten), and other verb forms, whereas Chinese relies on context and aspect markers instead of explicit tense inflection (Comrie, 1985). Apart from grammar, phonetics and pronunciation also pose difficulties in SLA. Many L2 learners struggle with sounds that do not exist in their native language. Arabic speakers often have difficulty distinguishing between /p/ and /b/, pronouncing park as bark (Flege, 1995).

Japanese learners may confuse /r/ and /l/, leading to mispronunciations such as lice instead of rice (Best & Tyler, 2007).

Russian speakers tend to omit English articles (I bought car instead of I bought a car), as Russian lacks a definite/indefinite article system (Swan & Smith, 2001).

Beyond pronunciation and grammar, cultural and pragmatic differences also influence language acquisition. Certain speech acts, such as making requests, giving compliments, or expressing politeness, vary greatly across languages.

Methods

A qualitative research method was used to investigate the effects of language noise on second language acquisition (SLA). The purpose of this research is to examine phonetic and grammatical mistakes produced by English as a second language (ESL) learners from various linguistic origins. Two primary strategies were used in the study: Analysis of mistakes made by language learners: 120 recorded speech samples and written essays from ESL students of different native tongues were collected. According to their original tongues, the participants were divided into four groups: thirty Spanish speakers, thirty Russian speakers, thirty Chinese speakers, and thirty Arabic speakers. In order to find recurring phonetic and grammatical problems that might be connected to L1 interference, these samples were examined. The following categories apply to detected errors: -Errors resulting from syntactic structure discrepancies between L1 and English. For example, Russian and Arabic speakers often struggle with the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order in English, leading to incorrect sentences such as "I went to store". Instead of "I went to the store".

- Language learners from languages with simpler tense systems, such as Chinese, often find English tenses challenging. They may confuse the simple past, present perfect, and past perfect. An example of this is the error of saying "Yesterday I have eaten lunch at 12" instead of the correct "Yesterday I ate lunch at 12." Additionally, learners from languages without articles, such as Russian and Chinese, often omit them in English. An example is a Russian speaker saying "I bought car yesterday" instead of "I bought a car yesterday."

-Many students face pronunciation difficulties because their native languages lack certain sounds. For instance, Arabic speakers often confuse /p/ and /b/, pronouncing "park" as "bark." Japanese and Chinese speakers may struggle with /r/ and /l/, resulting in mispronouncing "rice" as "bit." Additionally, Spanish speakers frequently misplace stress patterns in English, impacting their

In addition to error analysis, fifteen experienced ESL teachers were surveyed to evaluate their understanding of comparative linguistics and its influence on their teaching methods. Five of these teachers engaged in semi-structured interviews to share insights on their approach to linguistic intervention in the classroom. The collected data was organized by error type and students' native languages to identify common communication challenges and successful teaching strategies.

Results

Grammar Interference: The error analysis revealed that different L1 language groups exhibit specific grammatical interference patterns. Russian and Chinese speakers often omit articles in English due to the lack of definite and indefinite articles in their languages. In contrast, Turkish speakers commonly make word order mistakes in English because of the different sentence structures, often using a Subject-Object-Verb order instead of the English Subject-Verb-Object order. Chinese learners struggle to differentiate between the simple past and present perfect tenses, often resulting in errors like using "I have eat breakfast" instead of the correct form "I have eaten breakfast." Since Chinese relies on context rather than verb conjugation to indicate tense, learners often omit auxiliary verbs in English (Comrie, 1985).

Pronunciation difficulties. Phonetic differences between first languages and English lead to varying pronunciation difficulties among language groups. For instance, Arabic speakers commonly confuse the sounds /p/ and /b/, causing them to mispronounce words such as "park" as "bark." Japanese learners had difficulty distinguishing between /r/ and /l/ sounds (e.g., light vs. right) because the Japanese language does not distinguish between these phonemes (Best & Tyler, 2007). Spanish speakers often misplace stress in polysyllabic words, saying REcord for the noun instead of the correct stress on reCORD for the verb. This error is related to the predictable stress rules of Spanish, which do not correspond to the irregular stress patterns of English (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Teacher awareness and strategies. About 60% of surveyed teachers were aware of language intervention, but not all applied contrastive analysis in their lessons. Only 40% adapted their teaching methods to target learners' specific errors related to their first language. Teachers using clear contrast instruction between first and second language grammar and pronunciation noted enhanced student engagement and language accuracy.

Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with previous studies (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Lado, 1957) that highlight the important role of linguistic interference in second language acquisition (SLA). This study reveals repetitive errors in language learning and emphasizes the importance of integrating comparative linguistics into teaching methods. By recognizing the influence of a learner's first language on second language development, educators can create more effective strategies to tackle common language issues.

Main effect of language teaching: Implementation of clear contrast instruction. To reduce L1 interference in second language acquisition (SLA), specific contrastive instruction

is effective. This method involves teachers highlighting structural differences between students' native languages and the target language, making students aware of potential mistakes. For example, Spanish speakers may face pronunciation challenges due to different stress patterns in English. By clearly identifying these differences, teachers can help students avoid misapplying their native stress patterns, thus improving intelligibility. Incorporating contrastive analysis into pronunciation exercises like minimal pairing and rhythmic exercises can enhance students' pronunciation and reduce misunderstandings. This strategy is also applicable to grammar and vocabulary, allowing teachers to create focused activities based on known difficulties, such as teaching Russian speakers about English articles.

Focused Grammar Instruction. Lesson plans should focus on the specific grammatical challenges learners encounter due to their native languages. For example, Russian speakers require exercises on the use of articles, while Chinese learners benefit from instruction on verb tense distinctions. By customizing lessons to address these issues, educators can improve accuracy and fluency in second language learning.

Pronunciation training. Phonetic exercises, such as minimal pairing, should be part of the curriculum to reduce phoneme confusion and stress errors, particularly for Japanese learners. The study involved 120 students and 15 teachers, but future research should include larger samples for more generalizable results. Additional studies are also necessary to explore the long-term effects of contrastive teaching methods on second language acquisition.

Conclusion

Comparative linguistics plays a crucial role in language teaching by analyzing how a learner's native language affects the acquisition of a second language. Differences in language structure can either help or complicate the learning process. Teachers can use this understanding to develop customized teaching strategies that address specific linguistic challenges faced by students. Contrastive analysis is a key method in which educators compare grammar, pronunciation, and syntax between the first and second languages, aiding in predicting common errors and tailoring lessons accordingly. Integrating comparative linguistics into curriculum design fosters personalized learning experiences, improving comprehension, accuracy, and fluency. Future research should focus on how structured comparative methods can enhance language teaching, including the effectiveness of contrastive teaching, the creation of specific materials, and the use of technology for pronunciation improvement. By applying principles of comparative linguistics, educators can offer a more effective, learner-centered approach to language acquisition.

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