INVESTIGATING INTERLANGUAGE GRAMMAR: THE INFLUENCE OF NATIVE SYNTAX ON ENGLISH SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract. *This article explores the phenomenon of interlanguage grammar with a particular focus on the influence of native syntactic structures on English sentence construction among second language (L2) learners. It draws on theoretical foundations from second language acquisition (SLA) and contrastive analysis to examine how native language (L1) syntax interferes with the development of correct English grammar. By analyzing specific syntactic patterns and error types among learners, this study highlights how interlanguage forms, though transitional, are shaped and constrained by the grammatical framework of the learner's first language. The findings suggest practical implications for foreign language instruction, particularly in multilingual classrooms.*

Keywords: *interlanguage, syntactic interference, sentence construction, second language acquisition, native language influence, L1 transfer, ESL grammar*

Introduction. When individuals acquire English as a second language, especially after having internalized the structure of their first language, their developing English grammar is often influenced by native syntactic rules. This transitional grammar, known as "interlanguage," reflects both the learner's progress and the constraints of their L1. Interlanguage is dynamic and systematic, but it also includes consistent patterns of errors—particularly in sentence construction—that stem from structural differences between languages. This process is further complicated when learners are exposed to multiple foreign languages or when formal instruction does not sufficiently address syntactic contrasts between L1 and L2. Without targeted support, learners may carry over deeply ingrained habits from their native syntax, which can lead to fossilized errors. This article investigates how such influences manifest in learners' English syntax and considers effective pedagogical strategies for addressing them.

Materials. Interlanguage theory, first introduced by Larry Selinker (1972), offers a framework for understanding how learners create a unique linguistic system influenced by their L1, the target language input, and their own internal hypotheses. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Lado, 1957) similarly suggests that language learners compare new structures to familiar ones from their native language, often subconsciously. These theoretical models highlight that learner errors are systematic, not random. For instance, Selinker emphasized that interlanguage is governed by its own evolving rules, including simplifications, omissions, and substitutions rooted in L1 patterns. In syntactic terms, this often means incorrect word order, tense formation, or clause structuring. Exploring this further requires real-world learner data and contrastive linguistic analysis.

Research and methods. To explore syntactic interference, this study analyzed English sentence production by learners whose first languages include Uzbek, Turkish, and Russian. Data were collected from written compositions and oral tasks completed by undergraduate students.

The goal was to identify patterns of interference in sentence construction, focusing on issues like auxiliary use, word order, question formation, and clause integration. These samples were evaluated through qualitative content analysis and cross-linguistic comparison, with special attention to error consistency and frequency.

Classroom observation and short interviews were also conducted to understand learner awareness of grammar rules. This mixed-method approach ensured a comprehensive view of how native syntax influences English learning at multiple levels.

Discussion. The data revealed several recurring syntactic errors that suggest strong L1 influence. These included:

• Misplacement of adverbs: "He yesterday went to the market."

• Omission of auxiliary verbs: "What you are doing?"

• Subject-verb disagreement: "She go school every day."

In many cases, learners transferred word order rules from their native language to English. Uzbek and Turkish, for instance, permit flexible word order, unlike the relatively rigid SVO structure of English. The omission of auxiliary verbs, such as "to be" in the present tense ("He tired" instead of "He is tired"), is common among Turkish and Uzbek speakers, whose languages use different or fewer auxiliary constructions. Learners also struggled with relative clauses and passive voice, particularly when their L1 does not include or rarely uses those structures. These syntactic issues were present even in intermediate learners, suggesting a need for more focused instruction.

Result. The analysis confirms that interlanguage grammar is deeply shaped by native syntactic systems. The learners displayed repeated sentence-level errors aligned with their L1 grammar, demonstrating that interference from native structures is both predictable and persistent. This supports the utility of contrastive analysis in identifying grammar teaching priorities. For example, instructors can anticipate that Uzbek-speaking students may omit linking verbs or struggle with fixed word order. Targeted instruction that directly compares L1 and L2 structures proved effective. In fact, learners who received grammar exercises designed with this comparison in mind showed improved accuracy in constructing English sentences. These findings emphasize the need for diagnostic tools that assess syntactic awareness and provide corrective feedback early in the learning process.

Conclusion. Understanding the role of native syntax in shaping interlanguage grammar is vital for improving English language instruction. Teachers can significantly reduce learner errors by highlighting key syntactic differences between English and students' L1. Early exposure to correct sentence models, combined with contrastive grammar instruction, helps build syntactic awareness and fluency. Additionally, leveraging technology—such as grammar analysis software or learner corpora—can assist educators in identifying common interference patterns and tailoring instruction accordingly. Further research could examine how specific syntactic errors evolve over time and which ones are most susceptible to fossilization. Addressing these challenges will enable language learners to achieve more accurate, native-like English usage.

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