

Interlanguage is the unique linguistic system that a second-language learner develops while in the process of learning a new language. It is a transitional system that has its own internal rules, which are different from both the learner's native language and the target language they are trying to acquire.

This concept was a major breakthrough in second-language acquisition research, as it shifted the view of learner language from a collection of errors to an evolving, systematic, and rational system. A learner's interlanguage is a creative construction based on their hypotheses about how the target language works.

Key Characteristics of Interlanguage

- **Systematic:** Interlanguage is not random. It has its own set of rules and logic, even if they don't align with the target language. For example, a learner who consistently says "I goed" for the past tense of "go" is following a systematic rule they have created.
- **Dynamic:** It is constantly changing and developing as the learner receives new input and tests new hypotheses. It's a "stepping stone" on the path to fluency.
- **Varied:** The same learner might use different forms for the same rule at different times, often depending on the situation or context.
- **Fossilization:** A learner's interlanguage can stop developing at a certain point, leading to persistent errors that are difficult to correct, even with explicit instruction.

The features of a learner's interlanguage are influenced by both their native language (known as **transfer** or **interlingual errors**) and their generalizations of rules within the target language itself (**intralingual errors**). The study of interlanguage provides crucial insights into the cognitive processes that underpin language learning.