

Interlanguage theory describes the transitional linguistic system that a second language learner develops on their way to acquiring the target language. It's a dynamic, rule-governed system that is distinct from both the learner's native language and the language they are learning. The development of this interlanguage is influenced by several key processes and strategies.

Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization is a common phenomenon where a learner applies a rule of the **target language** too broadly, extending it to cases where it doesn't apply. This demonstrates that the learner is not just imitating, but is actively **constructing** and testing hypotheses about the language. A classic example is a learner of English saying "**I goed** to the store" instead of "**I went**." Here, the learner has correctly identified the pattern for regular past tense verbs (add "-ed") but has overgeneralized it to an irregular verb. This is a natural part of language development, similar to how children learning their first language might say "**I bringed** it."

Transfer of Training

Transfer of training refers to the application of learning from one context to another. In SLA, this specifically relates to the influence of classroom instruction and learning materials on the learner's interlanguage. It's the impact of formal teaching methods—such as drills, specific grammar explanations, or vocabulary lists—on how a learner produces language. For instance, a learner who is heavily drilled on a particular grammatical structure may overuse it, even in contexts where it's not the most natural choice. This is distinct from **language transfer**, which deals with the influence of the learner's native language.

Strategies of Second Language Learning and Communication

Learning strategies are the conscious steps or actions learners take to improve their language skills. These include things like:

- Using flashcards to memorize new vocabulary.
- Keeping a vocabulary notebook.
- Looking for cognates (words that have a common origin and similar meaning) between their L1 and L2.
- Mentally rehearsing new sentences.

Communication strategies are the techniques learners use to overcome a lack of linguistic knowledge during a conversation to get their message across. These are often used when a learner can't find the right word or phrase. Examples include:

- **Circumlocution:** Describing a word they don't know (e.g., saying "the thing you use to open a door" instead of "key").
 - **Word Coinage:** Creating a new word or phrase (e.g., "picture place" for "art gallery").
 - **Code-switching:** Inserting a word from their native language into the conversation and hoping the listener understands.
 - **Paraphrasing:** Restating a sentence in a different way.
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Language Transfer

Language transfer, also known as **cross-linguistic influence**, is the effect of a learner's native language (L1) on their second language (L2) production. This can be positive or negative.

- **Positive Transfer:** Occurs when the L1 and L2 share a similar structure, making it easier for the learner. For example, a Spanish speaker learning Italian may benefit from the similar word order and many shared vocabulary items.
 - **Negative Transfer:** Occurs when the L1 structure is different from the L2, leading to errors. This is also called **interference**. For example, a French speaker might say, "I have 18 years," a direct translation of the French "J'ai 18 ans," instead of "I am 18 years old."
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Stabilization and Fossilization in Interlanguage

Stabilization is a stage in interlanguage development where the learner's language use temporarily "plateaus" or becomes fixed. During this stage, errors may persist, but they are not necessarily permanent. With further exposure to the language and continued motivation, the learner can overcome these errors and continue to progress.

Fossilization, on the other hand, is a more permanent state. It is the process by which some incorrect linguistic features or forms become a permanent part of a learner's interlanguage, regardless of further instruction or exposure to the target language. These fossilized errors can become ingrained and are often resistant to change, explaining why some long-term language learners may retain certain systematic errors or an accent. Fossilization is a central and debated concept in interlanguage theory, suggesting that for many learners, achieving native-like proficiency is rare.