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The Impact of Interference on Vocabulary Acquisition In Bilinguals

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of cross-linguistic interference on vocabulary learning among bilingual learners and suggests strategies to mitigate its negative effects. Research indicates that interference can either support or impede vocabulary acquisition depending on the degree of similarity between languages. The study involved a small group of bilingual learners who completed vocabulary tests and shared their experiences of interference. Findings revealed that transposition, such as cognates, facilitated learning, whereas interference, including false friends, led to errors and slower retention.

Keywords: Interference, acquisition, transposition, vocabulary, monolingual, bilingual, linguistic systems, lexical similarities.

Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of second language learning. Bilingual learners face unique challenges as they navigate multiple linguistic systems simultaneously. As an Uzbek native speaker studying English and French, I have personally encountered both advantages and difficulties caused by cross-linguistic interference. For instance, cognates such as information in English and information in French simplify word memorization. Conversely, false friends like *actuellement* (French: “currently”) versus *actually* (English: “in fact”) often create confusion.

Previous research has indicated that interference can either aid or obstruct vocabulary learning, largely influenced by the structural and lexical similarities between languages [Amengual, 2016; Paradis, 2004]. Yet, the precise influence of lexical interference on the long-term retention of new words remains underexplored. This study aims to investigate the role of lexical interference in the vocabulary retention of Uzbek learners of English and French. By understanding the dynamics of interference, learners can develop strategies to reduce negative effects and optimize

their vocabulary acquisition.

Method

The study employed a small sample of bilingual learners who were simultaneously studying English and French. Participants completed a series of vocabulary tests designed to identify the influence of positive and negative interference. Additionally, learners provided qualitative feedback regarding their experiences with cross-linguistic interference. Data were analyzed to determine patterns in learning outcomes, errors, and retention rates.

Results

The results showed that positive interference, particularly cognates, significantly enhanced learners' ability to acquire and retain new vocabulary. Participants reported that similarities between English and French words made memorization easier, supporting earlier findings on cognate facilitation (Amengual, 2016). In contrast, negative interference, such as false friends and syntactic differences, resulted in frequent errors and slower

retention, consistent with findings in other bilingual contexts (Kutsuki, 2020; Nurimbetova, 2020). Learners noted that words with similar forms but different meanings required additional practice to ensure correct usage.

Discussion

These findings underscore the dual role of interference in bilingual vocabulary learning. While cognates and other forms of positive transfer facilitate acquisition, negative interference presents a persistent obstacle. Awareness of these phenomena is crucial; learners who understand the potential challenges posed by interference can apply targeted strategies to overcome them. Educators can support learners by explicitly addressing false friends, encouraging metalinguistic reflection, and integrating activities that highlight cross-linguistic differences and similarities (Jalolov, 2021). Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of focusing on long-term retention rather than immediate test performance. Although positive interference may lead to faster initial learning, sustained practice and strategic review are necessary for durable vocabulary retention (Lipner et al., 2019).

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