

Inter-language and Causes and Measures of Fossilization

Psychological Cognition

(中介语以及僵化心理认知的起因和措施)

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1. A Brief Introduction of the Theory of Inter-language

An inter-language is an emerging linguistic system that has been developed by a learner of a second language (L2) who has not fully expert yet but only knows some about that language: preserving some features of their first language (L1) in speaking or writing the target language and creating innovations. An inter-language is unquell based on the learners' experiences with the L2. It can ossify in any of its developmental stages. The learner creates an inter-language with different learning strategies such as language transfer, overgeneralisation and simplification.

The concept of inter-language was put forward by Selinker in 1972¹ in order to draw attention to the possibility that the learner's language can be viewed as a distinct language variety or system with its own particular characteristics and rules. Based on the theory that while learning a second language, learners set up a system for themselves which is different in some ways from their first language and second language systems. The learners build up the system for themselves which has been called inter-language.

Inter-languages consist of a set of linguistic rules which can generate novel expression. The structure of inter-languages can be derived from grammatical theory; and like natural language, inter-languages can be idealized to make them amenable to linguistic analysis. The universal generalizations that hold for the primary languages also hold for inter-languages. Inter-languages are languages and, further, that proposed linguistic universals are fully universal, in the sense that they apply to non- primary as well as primary languages. According to Ellis, inter-language theory can provide an explanation for how both children and adults acquire a second language. According to Tarone, interlanguage productions have the following characteristics:²

- a) Second Language speakers seldom produce the same as what one expects native speakers of the target language to produce;
- b) Inter-language productions are not an exact second language learning of native language utterances (i.e., first language interference does not play the primary role in the information of inter-languages);
- c) Utterances in the second language are not randomly produced;
- d) Inter-languages are spoken either by adults or by children when second language acquisition is not simultaneous with that of the first language.

The theoretic basis of Inter-language is that there is a "psychological structure latent in the brain" which is activated when one attempts to learn a second language. Larry Selinker proposed the theory of inter-language in 1972, and he noted that in a given situation the utterances produced by the learner are different from those native speakers would produce had they attempted to

¹Selinker, L. (1972). Inter-language.

²Cited from Tarone, E. (1976). The phonology of inter-language. In J.C. Richards (Ed.), *Understanding second and foreign language learning: Issues and approaches*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

convey the same meaning. This comparison shows a separate linguistic system. This system can be observed when studying the utterances of the learners who attempt to produce a target language norm.

To study the psychological processes involved one should compare the inter-language of the learner with the following:

1. Speeches in the native language to convey the same message made by the learner
2. Speeches in the target language to convey the same message made by the native speaker of that language.

And so what we are going to present is more on the structural differences of native language, from the target language, of which the learners tend to be confused of thus leading to the emergence of inter-language.

In other words, inter-language is the type of language produced by second- and foreign-language learners who are in the process of learning a language. In language learning, errors by learners are caused by several different processes, including:

- a. borrowing patterns from the mother tongue
- b. extending patterns from the target language.
- c. Expressing meanings using the words and grammar.

Here inter-language refers to the separateness of a second language learner's system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target language.

Inter-language is neither the system of the native language nor the system of the target language, but instead falls between the two; it is a system based upon the best attempt of learners to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them. By a gradual process of trial and error and hypothesis testing, learners slowly and tediously succeed in establishing closer and closer approximations to the system used by native speakers of the language.

Selinker first used the term inter-language to refer to the systematic knowledge of an L2 which is independent of both these learner's L1 and the target language³. The term is used with different but related meanings:

- (1) to refer to the series of interlocking systems which characterize acquisition;
- (2) to refer to the system that is observed at a single stage of development (in inter-language);
- (3) to refer to particular L1/L2 combinations (for example, L1 French/L2 English v. L1 Japanese/L2 English).

Teachers can give appropriate feedback after checking out learner's inter-language. Learners do not need to worry so much about making mistakes. They can assume that making mistakes is a procedure of development from mother tongue to second language.

The concept of inter-language has had a major impact on the field of second language acquisition. Studies on inter-language focus on the linguistic and psychological aspects of second language acquisition research.

The fact is that before the 1960s language was not considered to be a mental phenomenon. Language is learnt by processes of habit formation, like other forms of human behavior. A child learns his mother tongue by imitating the sounds and patterns he hears around him. By approval or disapproval, adults reinforce the child's attempts and lead the efforts to the correct forms. Under the influence of cognitive linguists this explanation of first language acquisition was criticized.

³See Selinker, L. (1972). Inter-language.

Language cannot be verbal behavior only, since children are able to produce an infinite number of utterances that have never heard before. This creativity is only possible because a child develops a system of rules.

A large number of studies reveal that children actually do construct their own rule system, which develops gradually until it corresponds to the system of the adults. There is also evidence that they pass through similar stages acquiring grammatical rules. Through the influence of cognitive linguists and first language acquisition research the notion developed that second language learners, too, could be viewed as actively constructing rules from the data they encounter and that they gradually adapt these rules in the direction of the target language. However wrong and inappropriate learners sentences may be in regard to the target language system, they are grammatical in their own terms, since they are a product of the learner's own language system. This system gradually develops towards the rule-system of the target language.

There comes the concept that various shapes of the learner's language competence are called inter-language. The term draws attention to the fact that the learners' language system is neither that of his mother tongue nor that of the second language, but contains elements of both. Therefore, errors need not be seen as signs of failure only, but as evidence of the learner's developing system.

It is worth mentioning that the behaviorist approach led to teaching methods which use drills and consider errors as signs of failure, while the concept of inter-language offered new idea and new approach to language teaching and paved the way for communicative teaching methods. Since errors are considered a reflection of the learners' temporary language system and therefore a natural part of the learning process, teachers could now use teaching activities which did not call for constant supervision of the student's language. Group work and pair work became suitable means for language learning. When the learner is attempting to communicate in the target language, he employs a linguistic system distinct from the source and the target language.

There are some continuous stages from the source language through successive learning stages to the acquisition of the target language. For every stage there is an inter-language, one for the learner's first attempts to communicate in the target language, one for his experienced use of it, and many more in-between. But this evolution is marked at every stage by systemic influence from the source language. It also represents an collection of elements from the target language. The various stages can be defined in quantitative and qualitative terms.

A second or foreign language learner is on the linguistic way from mother tongue to the target language and naturally constructs a personal linguistic system in the interim time. This individual system is given the name of 'inter-language'.

In a narrower sense, inter-language refers to the intermediate status of the second or foreign language learner's system between his or her mother tongue and the target language.

In a broader sense, it stands for the second/foreign language learner's present knowledge of the language that is learned, while in a general sense, inter-language is defined as 'the interim grammars constructed by the second-language learners on their way to the target language.'

According to Selinker, the development of inter-language depends on five central cognitive processes involved in second or foreign learning, that are first language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second/foreign language learning, strategies of second or foreign language communication, and overgeneralization of the target language linguistic material.⁴

⁴Selinker, Larry. 1972. Inter-language. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*

Inter-language is an individual, single and unique system which is agreeable to the target language norms and evidently shows deficient language ability or errors representing the learner's current linguistic level and implying what one needs to acquire to reach a standard of the target language. However, there exists a substantial degree of uniformity in the characteristics of inter-language and in the types of errors of various second or foreign language learners.

Besides, Tarone explains inter-language as a set of styles dependent on the context of use⁵. Research reveals that the utterances of the learner are systematically variable in at least two senses.

Firstly, the linguistic context may have a variable impact on the learner's use of related phonological and syntactic structures.

Secondly, the task used for the elicitation of data from the learner may have a variable effect on the learner's production of related phonological and syntactic structures.

To summarize, the study of inter-language can help determine what the learner already knows at a certain point of time and what one has to be taught when and how in a particular second or foreign language teaching program. Based on this conclusion, the present study has been designed to make further and more detailed study on the relevance of the study of inter-language.

II. A Brief Introduction of the Theory of Fossilization Psychological Cognition

Inter-language is an important concept in second language acquisition field, which refers to the continuum of a second language learner's systematic knowledge of the target language. It is between the learner's mother tongue and the target language, and moves toward the target language with the target language input increasing.

Theoretically and practically, a learner is expected to make progress further along the learning continuum so that the inter-language becomes more and more approximating to the target language and finally reaches the destination of the target language.

However, a lot of studies show that most learners' inter-language, which has reached a certain level, will stay at a certain place without continuing progressing steadily as before toward the target language. Some errors will be fixed permanently. This is what is called fossilization in inter-language. Fossilization, which is identified as a prevalent phenomenon in second language acquisition, refers to the phenomenon that linguistic items, rules, and subsystems of learners of a particular native language are liable to preserve their inter-language relevant to their specific target language competence, according to Selinker.⁶

Fossilization has become an imperative characteristic of great importance in inter-language theory. In this sense, some causes they have can not be transformed and evaded, what the causes can be observed in second language writing. The study is focused on the fossilization in second language writing. First, an implicational study is focus on inter-language fossilization in second language writing of university students. Then, some causes lead the fossilization in second language writing and puts some methods to prevent or solve the fossilization.

⁵See Tarone, E. (1976). The phonology of inter-language. In J.C. Richards (Ed.), *Understanding second and foreign language learning: Issues and approaches*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

⁶See Selinker, L., & Lakshamanan, U. (1992). Language transfer and fossilization: The "Multiple Effects Principle". In S. M. Gass, & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Language transfer in language learning* (pp. 197-216). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Doubtlessly, the study on fossilization has somewhat significant impact both on theory and practice. Initially, the study put up the causes of inter-language fossilization in second language writing and it contributes much to second language acquisition research. Secondly, in practice, it takes efficient measures to evade the occurrence of fossilization or eliminate fossilization in their second language writing.

1. Phenomenon of Inter-language Fossilization

Concept of Fossilization

The concept of fossilization was first introduced into the second language acquisition (SLA) literature by Larry Selinker, in his paper "Inter-language" published in 1972. He explained in his paper the concept of fossilization:

“ Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular native language will tend to keep in their inter-language relative to a particular target language, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the target language.” ⁷

It can be seen that fossilization as it is conceptualized; the term involved both a cognitive mechanism which is recognized as a performance-associated structural phenomenon and the fossilization mechanism. As for a performance-associated structural conception, it indicates specifically the regular reappearance in second-language performance of linguistic phenomenon which was regarded to be disappear in the performance of the learner.

As for a cognitive mechanism, it was considered to be a component of an underlying psychological structure which states a learner's acquisition of a second language.

And as for the term fossilization, regardless the age of the learner or the total of training he obtains in the target language, a mechanism underlies exterior linguistic substance which speakers will have a tendency to maintain in their inter-language industrious performance, according to Selinker.

Fossilized forms may sometimes seem to disappear but are always likely to reappear in productive language use, a phenomenon known as backsliding, or going backwards. And Bley-Vroman emphasized that L2 learners often ceased to develop and also backslide, that is, return to earlier stages of development.

It is known that the term “fossilization” derives literally from “fossil” which refers to a kind of stone turned from a buried piece of soft wood because of the steady drip of calcium-containing water. By fossilization in language acquisition is meant the rigidity of mind and habit induced by the steady drip of wrong and harmful methods in learners

Classification of Fossilization

Language fossilization can be classified, just according to its form and property. In form, fossilization falls into two major categories, namely individual fossilization and group fossilization.

Individual fossilization refers to different fossilized items or fossilized language competence occurring in different individuals.

Group fossilization is the process through which some established language variations of the individuals of a language community have been widely accepted by the whole community. That is

⁷Selinker, L. (1972). Inter-language. *IRAL*, 10, (3), 209-231.

to say when some language variations are accepted by the whole community, a dialect would be created, such as India English or pidginization. In a word, the remarkable resemblance of group fossilization and individual fossilization may largely enlighten us about individual fossilization.

On the other hand, fossilization can also be divided into temporary fossilization and permanent fossilization. The key issue of the classification lies on whether the fossilization is an irreversible phenomenon. The majority of researchers maintain that fossilization is a permanent condition and the fossilized inter-language items and structures defy any exposure to the inter-language environment and instruction, and the reappearance of errors rest for a long period which is five years according to Selinker. Permanent fossilization often occurs among the adult learners who have no intention to improve their target language, and most commonly in pronunciation.

Anyway, there are also many researchers insisting that fossilization is a temporary condition. To them repeated errors can be regarded as the pre-stage of fossilization or the stabilization period. Optimal input or a long-time immersion in the native language environment will help them have another breakthrough in their inter-language and reach a new level.

2. Causes of Fossilization Phenomena

Seeking out the causes of fossilization phenomena is of significance, of course undoubtedly. Selinker viewed the term fossilization as the tendency of many learner's to stop developing their inter-language grammar in the direction of the target language. He maintained his idea that inter-language is a separate linguistic system resulting from the learners attempted production of the target language norm; he identified five fossilization processes as follows:⁸

1. Language Transfer: that means that sometimes rules and subsystems of the inter-language may result from transfer from the first language.

2. Transfer of Training: that means that some elements of the inter-language may result from specific features of the training process used to teach the second language.

3. Strategies of Second Language Learning: that means that some elements of the inter-language may result from a specific approach to the material to be learned.

4. Strategies of Second Language Communication: that means that some elements of the inter-language may result from specific ways people learn to communicate with native speakers of the target language.

5. Overgeneralization of the Target Language Linguistic Materials: that means that some elements of the inter-language may be the product of overgeneralization of the rules and semantic features of the target language.

Selinker's early explanation of the causes of fossilization includes the following five points or basic elements: ⁹

1) Language transfer: learners' inter-language systems are greatly influenced by their first language, and they can not produce correct second language output. Selinker regarded language transfer as the most decisive factor in leading to fossilization.

2) Transfer of training. Lack of ceremonial instruction in the target language is sophisticated as another ground of fossilization. Deficient in formal instruction in English can be regarded as one of the main causes of fossilization of erroneous language forms.

⁸See Selinker, L., & Lamendella, J. T. (1980). Fossilization in inter-language learning. In K. Croft (Ed.), *Reading on English as a second language* (pp. 132-143). Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.

⁹Cited from Selinker, L. (1972). Inter-language.

3) Inappropriate learning strategies. Inappropriate learning strategies which the second learners' explicitates tend to lead to fossilization. Inter-language improvement replicates the maneuver of cognitive learning strategies. According to this vision, the second language learners do not unavoidably exploit the same language-acquisition device. If there are no appropriate learning strategies, it is tough to reach the same level of target language as native speakers and it is susceptible to result in fossilization.

4) Inappropriate communication strategies. When the essential linguistic resources are not accessible while learners are confronted with having to communicate messages, they frequently resort to a diversity of communication strategies. These enable them to compensate for their lack of acquaintance. On the contrary, inappropriate communication strategies will bring about fossilization.

5) Overgeneralization. In the second language acquisition literature, overt and implied rationalizations of fossilization abound. Some of them are based on empirical studies apparently contribute to the subject matter of fossilization, and some are absolute supposition without any practical basis.

It is followed that students' integrated abilities can be fully performed by the composition, so the impact of study of inter-language fossilization upon the level of second language writing could be strongly affected. Therefore, it is so significant that study of inter-language fossilization can be utilized to back up the perceptiveness of the procedure of second language learning for seeking out pedagogical strategies which can make second language teaching and learning more efficient.

Unfavorite Learning Motivation of Students

Evidences indicate that students' motivation plays a key role in second language acquisition. Students who are interested in the social and cultural customs of native speakers of the language they are learning are more likely to be successful. Similarly when students have strong instrumental need to learn a second language (e. g. in order to study through the medium of the second language), they will probably succeed. Conversely, students with little interest in way of life of native speakers or with low instrumental motivation can be expected to learn slowly and to stop learning somewhere.

Thus, once students have obtained sufficient second language knowledge to meet their certain needs, say communicative or emotional, they may drop learning. In such case, fossilization may well happen. No matter how much input and no matter in what form the input is provided, the students do not learn.

As is known, motivation involves four aspects, a goal, effort, a desire to attain the goal and favorable attitudes toward the activity in question. The goal, in spite of a factor involved in motivation, is not a decisive component of motivation. That is, although the goal is a stimulus that gives rise to motivation, individual differences in motivation itself are reflected in the latter three aspects listed above, effort expended to achieve the goal, desire to achieve the goal and attitudes toward the activity involved in the achieving the goal. In assessing the students' writing motivation three components play an important role.

If students thought the target language would not be required much in their future jobs, their initiative motivation instrumental motivation was just to pass various language tests, saying that they will throw away all their boring target language books once they have passed the tests.

On one hand, they are always failing to get good achievements in studying language, which made them frustrated and lose confidence.

On the other hand, the language teacher's lecture appeared to be a little dull, for the teacher went on explaining the texts directly without paying much attention to their response, which resulted in their failure to understand less than three fifths of the text's content. In turn, they kept silent and seldom had eye contact with the language teacher in class. Therefore, their motivational intensity and desire to study foreign language are weakened. The weakened motivation and desire were liable to result in their poor result of language learning which is likely to weaken their motivational intensity and desire to study the foreign language further. It is a vicious circle.

It has to be admitted that attitudes and motivation are important because they determine the extent to which individual will actively involve themselves in stage language writing.

Ineffective Feedback of Errors to Teacher

Error correction is an important but not an easy job to do. Some of the teachers just give a mark from an overall impression of the composition, or just give a simple comment on the whole article like:

"You should pay attention to your grammar", or

"Try to avoid some pidgin expressions".

They do not have enough time or they are not proficient to spot every single bit of lexical or grammatical error and tell the students to correct in time. Therefore, the teacher's ineffective comments to the students' language errors in written teaching are one of the factors leading the students' errors to be fossilized.

In response to this phenomenon, the teacher can observe the similarity and differences of the students' errors, analyze the common grammatical errors and lexical errors in their written presentation, and then discuss these errors in class and taught them some useful rules of lexis and grammar. As a result, teacher's effective feedback to errors committed by the students contributes a lot to their written performance. Therefore, the ineffective feedback is the main reason why the college students' persistent errors tended to be fossilized.

Interference of the Mother Tongue

Generally speaking, the differences between mother tongue and the target language are the root of mother tongue interference. Any foreign or second language learner who has acquired a first language is likely to receive mother tongue interference. The knowledge systems and thinking patterns that he has already acquired in his native language are always ready to impact his target language learning. In many target languages as second language learning cases, mother tongue interference seems minor. In the foreign language as a second language learning situation; however, it is a substantial barrier in learners' progress toward the target language competence.

Firstly, it is interference from mother tongue environment which leads to the fossilization in target language writing.

For example, situation in China is quite different because Chinese students learn target language in the mother tongue environment. Unlike immigrants who learn target language as a second language, Chinese students learn target language merely as a foreign language. The status of Target language as a foreign language and as a second language is substantially different, though they are often confused. In the second language situation, immigrants acquire target language. In the foreign language situation as in China students learn target language. They lack the acquiring environment as the immigrants have. Target language learning environment and conditions for Chinese students differ both from immigrants in target language-speaking countries, and from native learners in Singapore and India.

Take India for another example. As a result of language pervasion policy, English language had long set its foot deep in India. English is one of the government official languages and the second language of the common Indian people. The Indian people have a good access to English acquisition rather than English learning. They can learn English unconsciously in family life, work, and entertainment, while in China the situation of English learning is much different.

Comparatively, before the early 19th century, Chinese people had hardly access to English language. Nearly a century after the Opium War, English language education was available only to a countable minority of the Chinese people. It is interesting that when English language has become the first major foreign language in China and has been learned by up to 300 million Chinese students, it is still a foreign language rather than a second language in language teaching and learning. It is Chinese language that is most widely and frequently used in all walks of life. The mother tongue environment has inevitably caused fossilization in English writing for many college students.

Secondly, it is negative transfer of mother tongue which leads to the fossilization in second language writing. Language transfer refers to the transfer of the learner's mother tongue, including linguistic and cultural aspects, to his or her organizing the target language data. The basic concept of 'transfer' in second language acquisition research is that, when one learns a second language, one transfers some or all of the properties of the mother tongue into second language. When communicating with the target language, the learner would sometimes resort to mother tongue experience in phonetics, word meaning, grammatical structure or cultural customs as a means of expressing ideas. When the characteristics of the mother tongue expressions the learner refers to are the same as or similar to those of the target language expressions, the transfer would be positive; when they are different, the transfer would become an interlingual interference.

Therefore, the interference of mother tongue is the big causation to lead the fossilization in target language learning.

3. Individual Fossilization and Group Fossilization

Fossilization can also be classified into individual fossilization and group fossilization.

As its name implies, individual fossilization refers to different fossilized items or different degrees of fossilized language competence that occur in different individuals. It consists of two types including error fossilization and language competence fossilization. Error fossilization is the repeated appearance of errors that have been corrected many times but still remain in inter-language and language competence fossilization refers to the fossilization of the pronunciation, structure and vocabulary etc. of the inter-language. Error fossilization can be easily found in the beginners or learners with low proficiency. On the contrary, language competence fossilization is always found in the L2 learners who have been learning the TL for a long period of time or the learners who are very fluent speakers of L2.

And group fossilization exists when fossilization occurs to a whole language community instead of different individuals, or even to a larger society such as a nation. It may lead to a new dialect like Indian English and Singapore English. The result of the study on group fossilization always throws light on individual fossilization.

4. Temporary Fossilization and Permanent Fossilization

And fossilization can also be classified into temporary fossilization and permanent fossilization.

Due to different fossilizing degrees, fossilization can be divided into temporary fossilization

and permanent fossilization. The former means that the fossilized items last a comparatively a short time, usually less than five years as Selinker suggests¹⁰, and are possible for further development to target-like forms. For example, in China many errors by Chinese English learners, especially young school students, are temporarily fossilized. This kind of error reappearance is not real fossilization, but a prophase of fossilization, which Selinker refers to as stabilization. If learners are in the natural target language environment, their language competence can break through the present temporary fossilization state and reach another climax.

Permanent fossilization refers to that the learners errors in his inter-language have remained for a pretty long period, usually more than five years according to Selinker's time standard or even life time. Those errors seem to have already become fixed and cannot be corrected. Permanent fossilization mainly occurs to those who don't have chances or intention to improve their English, or those who don't obtain appropriate feedback.

5. Measures to Overcome Fossilization¹¹

Some measures will be discussed next to reduce or avoid the fossilization for college students after the above comparatively detailed account for fossilization.

Promoting Students' Motivation

In the explanation of the causes of fossilization, the students' unfavorable learning motivation affected the students' English writing negatively. Learning motivation is usually influenced by such factors as the degree of students' are being frustrated, the degree of students' favorable attitudes toward learning and their external goals and learning grades. So the teacher should help the students promote their learning motivation. In order to promote students' motivation, an second language teacher should do as this:

First of all, second language teacher must be enthusiastic, earnest and responsible. A warm-hearted, open-minded and responsible teacher plays a key role in creating a relaxing and pleasant second language learning environment.

Secondly, the teacher should help students take right attitudes toward the frustration in their second language wring. Frustration mainly stems from difficulties and bad results of learning. If learners are afraid to commit some mistakes, the confidence of learning second language will be weakened. Then the teacher is responsible to help them solve problems in their second language writing so as to enhance their confidence.

Thirdly, the teacher should keep the teaching contents interesting and original. Under the pressure of various tests, many teachers attach much importance to the cultivation of learner' abilities of taking examinations. They spend a lot of time in explaining grammars, syntax and morphology, etc. Such classroom settings are teacher-centered rather than learner-centered.

Finally, the teacher should emphasize the importance of learning second language writing and help those set learning goals. Promoting learners' motivation in second or foreign language acquisition can be able to avoid the fossilization.

Providing Right Feedback

If the fossilization is an obstacle to clear communication, correction surely is important. Right feedback remains an important vehicle for facilitating second language knowledge construction and enhancing knowledge use. In a research program carried out by Harmer concerning "What makes a good teacher?" One of the responses comes like this:

¹⁰See Selinker, L. (1972). Inter-language.

¹¹Students' motivation has been given more attention now in China in Teaching research.

"A good teacher should be able to correct people without offending them."

At this time, if the teacher criticizes students and corrects the lexical and pragmatic mistakes one by one, this will increase students' anxiety and students can develop a negative attitude towards writing and this may reduce their interest and confidence in writing.

In turn, if the teacher merely corrects a few errors made by students, they might feel that the teacher has not spent sufficient time looking at their work and if the teacher ignores the fossilized errors persistently, this will fossilize the students' errors and even limit their progress. During the course of the correction, the teacher should not criticize and sneer at students' mistakes, but should point out the students' mistake sincerely and help them to set up confidence to correct.

Teachers should patiently mark the grammatical errors in the students' assignments and ask them to correct those errors on their own. Students may also be given a check list for marking the errors in their partners' speeches. Besides the work of error correction, it is also necessary for students to read, transcript and recite idiomatic language materials. Therefore, it can help the students to reduce and avoid the fossilization in second or foreign language teaching and learning.¹²

Avoiding Mother Tongue Interference

Interference will accompany learners since the very beginning when they pick up the target language. Learners' mother tongue provides abundant hypotheses about the target language. To reduce mother tongue interference, improving learning and teaching conditions is quite necessary. The situation of learning target language in the mother tongue environment has to be bettered off. The feasible and effective measure at present might be to offer larger quantity of target language input and restrict mother tongue input to an extent no high than necessary. Our final aim is to help students establish the cognitive systems of the target language.

Negative transfer is at the root of the fossilization problem of the learners' inter-language. Some go so far as to believe that the mother tongue interference represents the whole fossilization problem. However, one thing is sure, that is great importance should be attached to it.

According to the point of view of the positive and negative fossilization, teachers and students may accept behaviorists' views of target language so that the adequate input could become positively fossilized in the students' inter-language system. But that requires that the teachers respond promptly to the students' errors related to mother tongue reference by ways of intensive techniques such as having the students repeat the right forms so as to overcome the mother tongue interference and establish the new language habits. In this sense, the feedback becomes a bridge between teachers and students. When errors occur, the students will sometimes ignore or unaware of them. If these errors are not found and corrected, the student will take them for granted and continue to use them. Gradually the errors will become part of their language habit and thus difficult to be eradicated, and it is essential that the teachers correct the errors at the first place and give the students extra drills related the errors.

Conclusively, the learners should learn to avoid the interference of mother tongue to reduce and avoid the fossilization in target language teaching and learning.

III. Conclusion

In this thesis the relation between inter-language and second language acquisition has been much discussed. Since 1972 when Selinker published his essay-Inter-language, inter-language

¹²About error correction, now we have debates about the appropriate way of error correction.

theories have become the core in the study of second language acquisition. He declared that inter-language is “the separateness of a second language learner’s system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target language”.¹³

According to this concept, it become known that inter-language is a language system that has the features of both mother language and target language. It approaches the correct form of target language with the development of the learner’s acquisition. That is to say, the learner’s language is transitional, and the grammatical rules included are based on the language system produced by second language acquisition. This language system has different influence on the learner’s phonetic, vocabulary, grammar, culture, etc. The influence produced by inter-language is not in static state and it process with the development of learner’s second language acquisition, so it is a dynamic continuum approximating to the target language.

The positive role of inter-language in second language acquisition has been admitted by linguistics.

Linguists agree that interlanguage will accelerate the acquisition of foreign or second language. Any language is inseparable from the three elements: voice, grammar and vocabulary. The unique form and rules in inter-language make it different in vocal, grammatical and lexical level, but in general, it still remains the nature of the target language. Learners, with no knowledge of foreign language, start approaching the target language along the continuum of inter-language.

Most foreign language learners are in a particular location of the inter-language continuum and they can use the rules they have learned in different points of the continuum but with different focuses. Researchers find that in the initial stage, learners usually focus on the recitation of the pronunciation and basic meaning of the words, as well as the grammar rules in the target language. They tend to replace some words with those words whose basic meaning is similar to them. They usually choose words and make Chinese sentences with their own mother tongue’s modes of thinking. With the increase and accumulation of their vocabulary, learners might use some explanatory language, trying to find the fact substitutes investigate.

Researchers also find that unexpected achievement or effective communication may enable learners to achieve great success and give them a sense of confidence so that they will continue to learn new words and syntax to enrich and complete the form and content of the foreign or second language, and also broaden the range of language communication and application.

The strain capacity of language is also trained in practical context. They can adopt a roundabout way when encountering an unfamiliar word or sentence.

Besides, inter-language can also foster the second language learners’ communication ability.

The social function of inter-language is communication. Foreign language learners create inter-language during the learning process. Its ultimate purpose is to communicate, so language is not purely a kind of knowledge but with a communicative function. It can be used as spontaneous flow to communicate, so it is also a kind of language skill. Prior to learning a foreign language, learners have mastered a series of rules in their mother tongue and have formed their own way of thinking.

When learners use a foreign language to express something, they are used to thinking with the modes of thinking in their mother tongue. Then they try to find the corresponding vocabulary and expressions in the foreign language.

In general, they construct sentences slowly, and with simple structure and limited scope.

¹³Cited from Selinker, L. (1972). Inter-language.

What's more, a variety of errors always accompany them in the entire learning process. When they are not able to check their language by the standard of accurate words or grammar, the exchange of meaning and the realization of communication become the focus of their language application. They do not care too much about the accuracy of the word or whether the language form is in agreement with the grammatical rules, but rather to see whether the listener can understand and accept their expressions. If the person accepts, the communication goal is achieved.

On the contrary, he will try to repeat and explain his remarks, till the other one can understand and accept his expressions. In the formation of the target language system, learners will further internalize the language rules to form the whole concept of the language they've learned and enlarge the extent of language application.

In addition, inter-language will also avoid the fossilization in second language acquisition.

The goal of learning a foreign language is that one is able to use the language with ease eventually. However, a large number of facts have proven that during the process of learning a foreign language, even though learners devoted considerable time and efforts, not everyone can successfully learn and master a foreign language.

At the cognitive stage, learners consciously study the way of expressing a certain phrase or structure under the guidance of teachers or by themselves and finally gain the declarative knowledge.

In association phase, the declarative knowledge becomes procedure knowledge. Learners try to put the knowledge of the previous stage into practice, continuously find errors and gradually correct them.

And they can use the language skills flexibly and reach the automatic stage. It has been proved that those who have reached the automatic stage are very active in learning and practice. They can give full play to association and associate the declarative knowledge, namely the basic structure, sound system, vocabulary and grammar with their mother tongue, then bravely construct new sentences.

The second language learners will soon master the foreign language and some skills due to the positive transfer of their mother tongue, while negative transfer will lead to some mistakes in learners' application of the foreign language. With the enrichment and improvement of foreign language, learners can gradually revise and simplify their language. At the same time, they can adopt some methods to avoid mistakes and finally achieve the goal of communication.

Additionally, the implication of inter-language for second language learning Inter-language is inevitable in second language acquisition. It is dominated by rules and it is a language system. Making good use of it can benefit the second language learning.

On the other hand, if a learner's inter-language rules are different from those of the target language and they are able to communicate by using the second language, fossilization will occur. So, learners should make full use of the affective filter. Affective filter here is intended to include factors such as motivation, attitude, self-confidence, and anxiety. Affective filter is considered one of the most important factors that cause individual difference in second language acquisition.

According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, if the filter is up, input is prevented from passing through; if input is prevented from passing through, there can be no acquisition.¹⁴

If, on the other hand, the filter is down, or low, and if the input is comprehensible, the input will reach the acquisition device and acquisition will take place.

¹⁴See Krashen, S.(1982). *Principles and practice In Second Language Acquisition*.

Learners usually have the strongest interest when they first learn the language, and the interest will gradually die down as time passes, so making good use of such psychological factor is important. In the primary stage of learning a language, learners are usually in the thirst of learning. If the teacher only teach them simple sentence and tell them to repeat again and again, the students may feel boring soon and lose interest. In this way, the learners' inter-language will stop processing and form some certain language habits, and then the learners will come across fossilization.

If the teacher does not add interest materials into the lesson, learners should find some interesting materials related to the target language and try to make learning more interesting. Such materials include movies, novels, songs, cartoons, and so on. Keeping interest is a good way to avoid fossilization.

Pay more attention to the culture and background knowledge of the English-speaking countries. Learner's understanding of the target language and affection for the culture and society of the countries of the target language, will restrain the occurrence of fossilization. Every language has close relation to the culture of the nation and each culture is unique.

Therefore, the more one knows about the target language culture, the better will he or she be able to understand and appreciate the language on a deeper level. Second language learners can only understand the differences of his native language and the target language by comparing the differences in culture, in this way, they can improve their inter-language which was brought about by culture differences. Listening to radio, reading target language novels, communicate with foreigners, are useful way to increase the quality of input. Besides, in the class, teachers can provide students with interesting media materials that contain culture information and custom of second language-speaking countries.

Evidently, inter-language theory, as a matter of fact, has the following features:

1) The learner constructs a system of abstract linguistic rules which underlies comprehension and production. The learner draws on these rules in much the same way as the native speaker draws on linguistic competence. The rules enable the learner to produce novel sentences. They also responsible for the systematicity evident in L2 learner language. An inter-language is a linguistic system in its own right. As such it is a natural language and is entirely functional.

2) The learner's grammar is not perfect. The grammar that the learner builds is incomplete and unstable. It is easy to be revised by new linguistic forms and rules, which may be derived internally, that is, by means of transfer from the L1 or overgeneralization of an inter-language rule, or derived externally, that is, through exposure to target language input.

3) The learner's competence is variable. At any stage of development the language produced by learners will display systematic variability. This variability reflects the particular form-function correlations which comprise the rules of the learner's grammar at that stage of development. The learner's competence must be viewed as heterogeneous rather than homogeneous.

4) Inter-language development reflects the operation of cognitive learning strategies. The process by which inter-languages are constructed identifies a number of cognitive learning processes such as SL transfer, overgeneralization and simplification. It is said that the similarity between L1 and L2 acquisition lies in the process of hypothesis-formation and testing. Hypothetical rules, formulated on the basis of learning strategies, are tested out in comprehension and production and amended if understanding is defective or if the utterances fail to communicate.

5) Inter-language use can also reflect the operation of communication strategies. When learners are faced with having to communicate messages for which the necessary linguistic resources are not available, they resort to a variety of communication strategies. These enable them to compensate for their lack of knowledge.

Inter-language systems may fossilize. This term is used to refer to the tendency of many learners to stop developing their inter-language grammar in the direction of the target language. Instead they reach a plateau beyond which they do not progress. This may be because there is no communication need for further development. Alternatively it may be because full competence in a TL is likely to be impossible for most learners. Thus, fossilization is a unique feature of inter-language systems.

In order to deepen the understanding of fossilization, which will be helpful to the language acquisition, more empirical researches and longitudinal study can be done. Therefore, further investigation should be conducted. In addition, fossilization has the positive effects on second language learning, and this should not be neglected in further research of it.

Based on the inter-language theories concerning fossilization in the course of second language acquisition, this thesis attempts to probe into the fossilization by students who are acquiring a second language in their mother tongue environment. The thesis will analyze students' target language output and get the causal factors of fossilization. And then, the thesis will put up some suggestions for measures for overcoming and avoiding the fossilization in target language learning.

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