

CHAPTER-9

Linguistic barriers in English language learning: a study of mother tongue impact on UG students

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ABSTRACT

The influence of a learner's native language on their acquisition of English is an important consideration in multilingual education; however, the extent and degree of interference can be significant. Factors such as phonology, grammar, vocabulary and discourse will all play a role in this interference. Students who are enrolled in English courses at an undergraduate level have utilized both their native language learning strategies in conjunction with their English language learning strategies, which has resulted in continuous problems in regard to how they pronounce and write sentences and words. This issue will become further complicated as students tend to experience limited opportunities to utilize their English language skills beyond the classroom and are often reliant on literal translations for their English language acquisition.. Through observations and findings in applied linguistics research, it can be established that negative transfer hampered students' communicative competence and achievement in learning English. The research supports a learning approach that takes cognizance of learners' linguistic profiles and proposes contrastive analysis and communicative learning approach methods to counteract difficulties related to mother tongue influence in learning English.

KEYWORDS: Mother Tongue Influence, English Language Learning, Language Transfer, Multilingual Education, Communicative Competence

1 Introduction

The globalized higher education scenario has established English as the undisputed language of academic and professional communication. However, in multilingual countries like India, undergraduate English learning occurs as a second or third language. Students think, feel, and engage in social interaction with their mother tongue. Against this multilingual background, learners' experience of English is partly set by this dynamic, which paradoxically influences the rapidity and ease with which learners acquire English. It is recognized that the learners' first language, in the area of second language acquisition research, is a significant cognitive tool; it aids in learning but can and often does cause negative transfer problems due to the learning context and structural differences or similarities. (1, 2).

One of the important areas in which the impact of the mother tongue has appeared clearly to me is in the adaptation of language being used on the various levels language functions. Looking at the most phonological level, most of the UG learners have native phonological systems in the process of pronouncing words in English. Some phonological systems in the English language which are often replaced in the process of pronunciation due to the influence of the mother tongue include consonant articulation, phoneme articulation, as well as those that are closest. The adaptation of the second language in the process.

The pronunciation of English is done through various tones of emphasis, stress, and Intonations. The phonological systems convey the transfer systems, which are carried from their native language. The diffusion of this system from their native language to their L2 speech is not random. The system is planned according to their cognitive use. This means that the system of transfer defines the level of learners' ability cognitively. In an Academic Environment, learners who hail from English-speaking countries, as their native speakers of English, they will portray poor performance regarding the ability to communicate their ideas through fluent speech of English.

Another source of difficulties caused by NL is lexical transfer. Direct methods of translation apply to UG learners, leading to wrong choices, literal expressions, or meanings. Overuse of dictionaries, over-generalization, and false friends signify lexical poverty. In addition, code-switching and code-mixing are commonly observed in academic writing and formal speaking, imparting ambiguities rather than boosting language communicative power, though they are quite helpful in informal contexts. Inadequate use or nonexistent transition signals and overuse/intensive use or dependency on bilingual dictionaries, over-generalization, backfire or hamper language vocabulary flexibility.

The cultural and rhetorical conventions of the L1 influence L2 learners' thought organization, structuring arguments, and problem-solving at the discourse level. BA-level L2 learners may differ from expected norms in English academic discourse by employing strategies of indirectness, circular reasoning, and delayed thesis stating. When dealing with essay writing, research papers, and presenting at seminars, problems related to cohesion, paragraphing, and conventions of genres become most apparent.

What is more, the above-mentioned difficulties can be exacerbated through certain surrounding conditions within the undergraduate framework. The lack of exposure to English input within the surrounding community can limit the opportunities for effective language practice. Teaching to the examination within the English language learning framework can promote the language learning method within the framework of the language course more effectively. As a result, learners can develop language passiveness. The overall translation learning method can make the learners lose their intuition to the language grammar (3, 4).

The pattern of errors will most likely include errors that are typical among UG learners, both in their spoken and written outputs. The effects on these learners will be a lack of effectiveness in their educational performances and classroom participation, thus damaging their personal confidence to fully and meaningfully participate in English-medium higher education.

The significance and relevance of this study thus lie in its aim to explore and analyze the nature and effect of barriers created by the mother tongue in English language acquisition among UG students. This qualitative analysis and study thus intend to explore and pinpoint the type and significance of transfer errors and suggest a remedial approach with an emphasis and focus on applied linguistics and multilingual education studies to convert and transform a student's mother tongue into a resource with a positive effect on English language acquisition and communicative skills (5).

2 Review of Literature

Research on the role of the first language in second language acquisition has evolved through successive theoretical paradigms, reflecting changing conceptions of how language is learned. The early structuralist approaches-the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis CAH-suggested that native languages facilitate as well as inhibit SLA according to whether linguistic structures are

similar or dissimilar. As Lado 1957 succinctly put it, structural similarities between the learners' native language and the language being acquired facilitate learning, whereas differences lead to predictable errors. Thus, many learners whose native language does not have specific tense forms or articles omit or use these incorrectly in English. Criticism of the overestimation of the predictive value of cross-linguistic comparison in later research undermined the contrastive analysis hypothesis. However, its insistence on the value of systematic error analysis remains current, at least in revealing common learner problems in phonology, syntax, and morphology.

After the CAH, the approach in Error Analysis (EA) changed the focus from predictive analysis to the empirical study of learner language. Corder in 1967 insisted that errors were more than just indicators of failure but were instead indicators of intellectual engagement in the learning process and the learning individual's attempts at forming hypotheses for the rules of the second language. This view of errors led to the use of the error as an informative tool for understanding the learning process. The typical error made by Indian undergraduate students might be seen in the following sentence: "He go to market yesterday." The error here reflects the overgeneralization of the present tense rules as well as the partial application of the past tense marks. The error instead emphasizes the establishment of the interlanguage system instead of the straightforward transfer from the first language rules.

The idea of inter-language was introduced by Selinker in 1972 and contributed to knowledge on the ever-changing systems found within learner language. "The idea behind the theory of inter-language is the recognition of the learners developing a 'transitional grammar' shaped simultaneously by L1 knowledge, target language input, and the learners' individual hypothesis on the rules of the language" (Selinker 3). One important factor to consider within the knowledge base for undergraduate students would be the idea of fossilization. This refers to errors on the part of the learner being "locked-in" despite much instruction" (Selinker 2). This will commonly be found within the areas of pronunciation or the usage of prepositions/articles.

In Indian settings, there have been studies conducted on English as a Second Language (ESL) to understand Moose peer interference along various levels. Phonological Moose peer interference occurs when English speakers substitute L1 phonology with similar phonology in their second language. In syntactic Moose peer interference, there are some standard patterns such as grammatically incorrect word ordering and loss of auxiliary verbs. Lexical Moose peer interference occurs commonly in performing an exact translation and using wrong words. For instance, a student speaking Telugu would translate "He is going to office yesterday" with tense wrong usage accompanied by L1 influence on sentence structuring. In addition to it, there have been studies highlighting certain complications in social and scientific writing applied in ESL with inappropriate cohesion, lack of clarity in writing with cultural rhetorical patterns differing from English scholarly writing norms (9, 10).

Recent pedagogical research emphasizes exploring the mother tongue as a pedagogical resource rather than a barrier. Communicative Language Teaching, contrastive awareness exercises, and translanguaging pedagogy encourage learners to use L1 knowledge helpfully to improve comprehension and expression in English. For example, bilingual scaffolding may enable students to first express a complicated idea in their mother tongue and then reformulate it in English, which enhances both fluency and accuracy. Research has shown that such practices enhance confidence, metalinguistic awareness, and reduce error fossilization.

In general, it can be seen from the literature that the influence of mother tongue in second language learning is pervasive all across phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and discourse. The underlying influences may thus form a conceptual basis for exploring error occurrences among

undergraduate students and for interventions aimed at changing L1 from a source of interference to a tool in learning. The present research study will take inspiration from these theoretical and empirical bases and explore L1-induced barriers in learning English for Indian undergraduate students.

3 Methodology & Data Collection

The present study reports data obtained from 60 Under-Graduate students who are non-English majoring, at a degree college in Hyderabad, Telangana, India. A majority of the respondents were native speakers of Telugu; a sizeable minority represented all other regional linguistic variable profiles, which is not uncommon in Indian higher educational setups. Despite these students receiving formal instruction in English for over a decade, both at school and in college, they claimed to use very little English pragmatically outside the classroom either for daily discourse, academic deliberations, or interpersonal relationships. This is a typical characteristic in a multilingual environment where the L1 strongly influences cognitive processing, peer interactions, and affective displays."

A variety of research instruments were employed to ensure a well-rounded and multi-dimensional study of the influence of the mother tongue on English Language learning. The framework for the study of the data was designed in such a way as to capture the phonological, grammatical, lexical, and discourse aspects of the errors committed by the students in the process of conducting the activities in the English Language.

The instruments used in the experiment were:

- **Diagnostic Grammar and Vocabulary Test:** This test analyzed the learners' knowledge regarding the grammatical structure of English, the way tense has been marked, agreement between the subject and verb regarding number, usage of prepositions, and vocabulary in English to pinpoint the structural mistakes taking place due to the influence of the learners' native language.
- **Reading-Aloud Task:** The students were required to perform the reading-aloud task for selected passages while being recorded. This task enabled the investigation of phonological transfer about the incorrect articulation of vowel/consonant sounds, stressed patterns, as well as intonation patterns because of the mother language.
- **Short Written Composition:** The candidates were required to do a short composition in writing. This exercise gave an insight into the degree of discourse interference in issues dealing with sentence formation, word choice, coherence, and patterning affected by the first language.
- **Observational Checklists in the Classroom:** Observation entries were documented during the regular English language lessons with respect to the language use patterns of the students, including the aspects related to code-switching and the use of translation methods and the use of the First Language during the problem-solving tasks.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Individual interviews were conducted to explore the attitude, perceptions, and learning methods related to English learning among the students. The students were asked about the confidence levels and perceptions reined within the students related to English learning difficulties.

Table 1: Overview of Data Collection Methods and Objectives

Tool Used	Focus Area	Purpose
Diagnostic Grammar Test	Grammar & Vocabulary	Identify recurrent structural errors
Reading-Aloud Task	Pronunciation	Examine phonological transfer and stress patterns
Written Composition	Writing Skills	Investigate discourse-level influence

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Classroom Observation	Learning Behavior	Record mother tongue usage in classroom interactions
Semi-Structured Interviews	Learner Attitudes	Explore learning strategies and perceptions

The combination of different methods of analysis and databases has enabled us to conduct a secondary analysis of the results and validate them by using these methods to improve validity and reliability (14). The utilization of both quantitative data (scores, written texts) with qualitative information (observations/interviews) provided an opportunity for researchers to generate a full understanding of how the first language affects the learning of English at many levels. By ensuring that all of the results associated with both the type of mistakes made, as well as the cognitive/affective aspects, were explored within the context of real class behaviours and students' experiences, the methodology of the current research was able to provide a framework for determining what aspects of language transfer influence the development of an individual's ability to learn English, and through which means these factors are mediated by personal attitude toward English and the strategies learners utilize for learning English in a multilingual, higher education environment.

For the research design of this study, a descriptive-analytical type approach will be taken; both quantitative as well as qualitative procedures will be used. These will provide a complete analysis of how the first language affects university-level learners regarding their ability to acquire English. The quantitative methodology will involve error analysis and the development of categorization systems for errors by identifying patterns and frequencies. The primary objective is to generate concrete evidence demonstrating a measurable level of phonological, grammatical, lexical or discourse error produced as the result of significant influence from the first language.

The qualitative part of the study was concerned with the interpretation of the errors in order to establish their underlying linguistic as well as pedagogical roots. The semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, as well as written compositions, were used to examine the strategies, attitudes, as well as the mental processes. The combination of numerical as well as descriptive data was used to ensure that the study gains a holistic view of L1 effects (15).

The study ensured that it complied with all proper ethical measures during the research process. The study was voluntary, and the respondents were promised anonymity and confidentiality. Unobtrusive observation was done to ensure there were no disruptions during teaching and learning. Moreover, all the results of the performances of the learners in writing and reading tasks were handled with utmost care to ensure that the identities of the learners were not revealed.

The identified mistakes in students' language use were classified into four categories:

- **Phonological errors** - relating to misarticulation, stress, and pitch due to the effects of the first language.
- **Grammatical errors**- such as incorrect word order, tense, aspect, preposition, or subject/verb agreement.
- **Lexical errors** – due to the literal translation method, misuse of words, over-generalization.
- **Errors at the discourse level** – related to issues within the cohesion of the text at the paragraph level, rhetorical organization, and culture-based.

Table 2: Research Methodology Framework

Aspect	Description
Research Design	Descriptive and Analytical

Sample Size	60 Undergraduate Students
Data Type	Quantitative and Qualitative
Error Categories	Phonological, Grammatical, Lexical, Discourse
Analysis Tools	Frequency Analysis, Interpretative Analysis

The use of the mixed-methods study allowed for the investigation of the level at which mother tongue influence existed, in addition to the motivations for such influence. This was possible in a way that could not be attained through the use of quantitative or qualitative research on its own. The quantitative results permitted the investigation of the level at which errors existed, whereas the qualitative data allowed for the investigation of the underlying psychological processes for such errors. This was possible in that the observation data allowed for the investigation of the level at which students relied on L1 in solving mathematical problems in English, while the interview data allowed for the investigation of the level at which translation was used.

In general, the methodology paradigm ensured the conduct of the research in a rigorous, ethical, and relevant manner to allow the formulation of evidence-supported conclusions and recommendations useful for intervention to counter mother tongue interference during undergraduate English language learning (16).

4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis conducted in this study shows that L1 transfer in this case affects the learning of the English language in various dimensions, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse. Of the four sources of error, phonological interference appeared as the factor that posed the greatest difficulty. Students appeared to replace the sounds in the target language with their closest counterparts in their native language, especially in the case of consonant clusters such as 'str'/'spl' in 'street'/'splitlead' that were replaced with 's-treet' due to Telugu syllable segmentation. Also, reduced vowel sounds such as /i:/ and /ɪ/ were identified to be equated, which posed problems in comprehension due to phonological difficulties that reduced confidence in classroom discussions and presentations (17).

Grammatical errors were the second most dominant type of interferences. The study showed patterns of omissions and incorrect uses of article marks (a, an, the), lack of uniformity in using prepositions (on, in, at), lack of uniformity in tense use, as well as subject-verb agreement. For example, errors included use of sentence structures such as "*He go to school yesterday*" or "*She is teacher,*" which demonstrate L1 syntactic interference as well as overgeneralization of grammar rules in English. Cognitive frameworks related to learners' first languages, which sometimes do not align with the principles of standard grammatical structure, are the principal source of the capture errors. A second major type of error identified in this research study is lexical interference; this occurs primarily due to the practice of translating literal word-for-word into Spanish, along with using familiar English terms in the wrong context.

For instance, an example of lexical interference is when learners write "*I have hunger*" instead of "*I am hungry*." Additionally, students often used English vocabulary incorrectly in reference to a definition, resulting in a lack of semantic accuracy. Lexical transfer has been shown to be significantly affected by both the vocabulary that learners already possess, as well as the amount of exposure they receive to authentic English input.

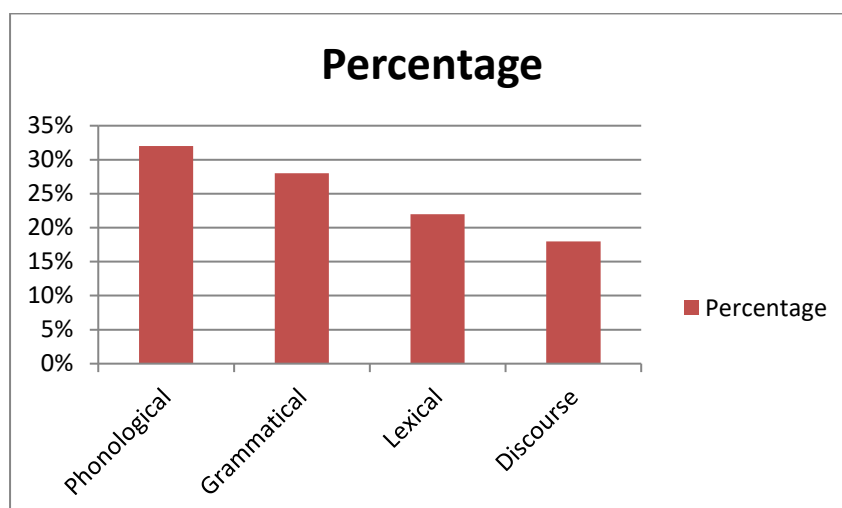
At the discourse level, learners experience several difficulties when attempting to create an organized sequence of ideas, maintain a coherent paragraph structure, and adhere to the rules of academic writing. For example, an essay or written composition may display issues with circular reasoning, random shifts from one topic to another within the paragraph, and

insufficient use of coercive devices. An example: A student may begin a paragraph with a general statement, include a detailed example in the middle, and close the paragraph without a summary or linking sentence, suggesting a style of organization that is typical of the student's first language. Consequently, these types of difficulties show that the influence of the first language continues into higher order writing processes such as developing ideas and creating logical flow within writing. The degree of influence that L1 has in developing writing skills extends far beyond just vocab and grammar and into his/her ability to communicate and perform academically, as shown in (18).

A summary of the frequency distribution of errors across the four categories can be found in table 3.

Table 3: Frequency of Error Types among UG Students

Error Category	Percentage
Phonological	32%
Grammatical	28%
Lexical	22%
Discourse	18%



According to the data presented in this study, the combined contributions of phonological and grammatical error types represent a full 60% of the total number of error types identified, while both lexical error types and discourse error types have been identified as being not as numerous but, nevertheless, are significantly important for all levels of clarity and overall effectiveness of the learner's performance in English.

The current findings reinforce the strong impact of negative transfer from the learner's first language on the learner's communicative competence. When learners rely upon the patterns from their first language, this results in a set of repeatable errors that negatively impact the learner's speaking and writing abilities in English. In addition, the findings emphasize the importance of the use of instructional strategies which focus on the types of errors the learner will make, and also reinforce the necessity for learners to have opportunities to communicate meaningfully in authentic contexts when they are learning English.

5 Summary and Conclusion

The focus of this study shows that the impact of the mother tongue continues to influence the way that undergraduate students learn English, including the phonological, grammatical, and

vocabulary levels of proficiency, and the level of ability to use English for effective discourse and communication. From this research it is clear that students adopted negative knowledge (interference) from their own languages, which has caused them to habitually make errors in English pronunciation and grammar, as well as have difficulty creating correct written discourse (20 & 21).

In addition, this study added further support to the argument that the first language (mother tongue) should not only be viewed as a problem for learners, but also as a resource that can be utilized in the classroom. Providing students with the tools necessary to understand the use of their mother tongue when learning English will, ultimately, assist in increasing language proficiency, while developing greater confidence in their ability to communicate fluently (19, 24). Furthermore, the findings from this research highlight an increased emphasis on a learner-centered perspective in language development; and the merging of the communicative language teaching approach with first-language interference to improve language development in the long term is encouraged.

Table 4: Recommendations for Addressing Mother Tongue Influence

Strategy	Implementation
Contrastive Analysis	Highlight differences between mother tongue and English in classroom exercises
Translanguaging	Encourage flexible use of multiple languages for comprehension and expression
Communicative Activities	Incorporate role-plays, discussions, and debates to increase practical usage
Vocabulary Enrichment	Focused exercises for contextually appropriate word use
Pronunciation Drills	Regular phonetic practice targeting commonly mispronounced sounds

These strategies can assist educators to turn the potential linguistic barriers into opportunities to develop communicative proficiency and reach academic goals. The influence of the student's first language will become a positive influence on their English-language acquisition and will not impede it.

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Appendix-A

Language Use Questionnaire

Instruction to the participant: if you are user of one or more Indian languages (Telugu, Hindi, and Urdu) and English, and use English routinely, please fill this questionnaire. The information you have provided will be used only for this research purpose and will be kept confidential.

I. General information:

1.0 Participant name:

2.0 Code :

3.0 Gender :

4.0 Date of Birth :

5.0 Residential address/ Number of years of stay in Hyderabad _____

6.0 Language(s) spoken at home: (Put tick mark ✓): Telugu/Daccani Urdu/Hindi/English/others

6.1 Which two languages you mix in your daily conversation _____

II. Educational History:

S. No	Course	Place of study	Year	Medium of Study
1	Primary/Secondary			
2	High School			
3	Under Graduate			

III. Self-Rating of language skills: (3-Point Rating Scale)

1=Poor

2=Good

3=Excellence

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Languages	Listening Ability	Speaking Fluency	Reading Proficiency	Writing Proficiency	Understanding Ability
Telugu					
Hindi					
Dakkhini Urdu					
English					

IV. Bilingual Dominance Scale adapted for Telugu and English

- At what age did you first learn English? _____
- At what age did you first learn Telugu? _____
- At what age did you feel comfortable speaking English? _____
- At what age did you feel comfortable speaking Telugu? _____
- Which language (English or Telugu) that you predominantly use at your home? _____
- When doing math in your head (e.g. multiplying 24 X 3) which language (English or Telugu) do you use to calculate the numbers? _____
- Can you translate English texts into Telugu? or Telugu into English? _____
- If you have to choose which language to use for the rest of your life, which one would it be? English or Telugu? _____
- How many years of schooling did you have in English? _____
- How many years of schooling did you have in Telugu? _____
- Which language do you feel comfortable speaking to children and pets? English or Telugu? _____
- Where have you been living during the past 10 years? _____

Scoring:

Q. 1 & 2 as well as Q 3 & 4

0-5 years – score is +5

6-9 years- score of +3

10-15 years – score of +1

>16 years – score of 0

Q. 5

If the answer is English: give score of 5.0

If the answer is Telugu: give a score of 5.0

If the answer is BOTH: give a score of +3

Q. 6

If the answer is English: score is +3

If the answer is Telugu: give a score of +3

If the answer is BOTH: give a score of zero

Q. 7

If the answer is can translate from Telugu to English give a score of +5

If the answer is can translate only from English to Telugu, score of +3

If the answer is BOTH: score should be Zero

Q. 8

If the answer is English; give a score of +2

Q. 9 & 10

If the answer is 1-6 years: score of 1.0

If the answer is > 6 years: give a score of +2

Q. 11

If the answer is English, score it as +3

If it is Telugu, give a score of +2

If it is BOTH languages, score of Zero

Q. 12

If the answer is Hyderabad, score should be +5

If the answer is coastal Andhra, score of +3

If the answer is outside the two Telugu states: Score of Zero.

Appendix-B

Appendices include samples of errors and research instruments employed in the study.

Table 1: Sample Learner Errors

Level	Example
Pronunciation	/school/ pronounced as /iskool/
Grammar	Omission of articles
Vocabulary	Literal translation of idioms
Writing	Poor paragraph organization

Table 2: Sample Interview Questions

Question No.	Question
1	Do you think in your mother tongue before speaking English?
2	What aspect of English is most difficult for you?
3	How often do you use English outside the classroom?

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