Transferring as a Source of Error or Language Learning Strategy: The Way Forward

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Abstract
Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis have adopted the concept of "Transfer" to explain the errors made by language learners. However, this study views "Transfer" as a language learning technique used by learners to overcome language barriers when speaking the target language. The transfer of mother tongue notions is considered a beneficial method that accelerates language learning. The aim of the research is to provide teachers with guidelines for distinguishing between transfer as a source of errors that require correction and transfer as a language learning technique based on communicative error analysis. In conclusion, this study provides recommendations for teachers on how to approach transfer as a language learning technique and communication strategy, as well as how to respond to any potential challenges that may arise when using it.
Keywords: Transferring in Language, Interlanguage, Communicative Error Analysis, Contrastive Analysis, Comunication Strategy

1. Introduction

The concept of "transfer" has been a topic of interest for researchers in the area of second language learning, teaching and acquisition. This paper begins by providing an overview of the concept of transfer and how it has been approached by contrastive analysis and error analysis. The focus then shifts to viewing transfer as a cognitive process and discussing its relevance in language learning and communication strategies.

Although transfer has been considered an important step in second language acquisition, its worth has not fully been recognized in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, teaching, or educational settings. Early studies on transfer can be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s, a time when behaviorism had a significant impact on linguistics. Transfer from the native language was seen as a way that L1 habits could influence L2 learning. Scholars like Fries (1945) and Lado (1957) focused on the importance of comparing a learner's native language to the target language, noting L1 interference as a significant issue for persons learning a second language.

Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) was developed to describe the role of L1 in L2 learning, emphasizing that similarities and differences between L1 and L2 are major predictors of the ease and challenge of L2 learning. While the importance of transfer has undergone various revisions over the past century, its significance in language learning remains relevant at present.

The present study aims at providing insights into transfer as a language-learning strategy, discussing its relevance in language acquisition and offering guidelines for teachers to differentiate between transfer as a source of errors and transfer as a language-learning approach. The study also offers recommendations on how teachers can approach transfer as a language learning technique and/or communication strategy and respond to any potential faults that may arise when using it.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Transfer is a widely used strategy by language learners to acquire knowledge of a second or third language. However, it can also lead to errors in language acquisition if not properly understood and utilized. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that learners perceive errors as part of the learning process rather than a deficiency in their ability. Therefore, a deeper understanding of transfer as both an error and a language learning strategy can lead to more effective language learning and teaching outcomes.

1.2. Objectives

The main objective of the present research is to explore the potential benefits of the transfer strategy for non-native language acquisition. The study aims to provide insights into how transfer can be used as an effective language-learning strategy by language learners.

1.3. Research Question

The study addresses the following research question:
How can transfer strategy be helpful in learning second language and third language?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to provide an inner understanding of the role of transfer in language learning, regarding its relation to errors as a potential source of learning. By highlighting the importance of transfer strategies

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in teaching and learning, the study offers new insights that can help improve the efficacy of language instruction. Moreover, the findings of this research will inform the development of new teaching methodologies that address the needs of non-native language learners, and potentially contribute to the enhancement of language learning outcomes. Additionally, the study has the potentials to provide practical implications for teachers and educators seeking to optimize the learning experience of their students/learners.

2. Literature Review

Motivation and transfer have been identified as critical factors for successful language learning. The study by the Eric Development team in 1998 highlighted the interplay between transfer and motivation in providing a conducive learning environment. The study showed that students are more motivated to learn if they perceive that the information or skill they are learning is transferable to other situations. To achieve transfer, learners need to be able to identify opportunities for transfer and have the drive to seize them. Thus, teachers must comprehend the nature of motivation and transfer to optimize learning.

Motivation is the most complex and burning problem for English language teachers now a days (Schiedekr & Freeman, 1999). It is a key contributing factor for second language learning (Gardner, 1985). It also determines the success or failure in L2 learning. However, without this it is difficult to teach or learn.

Paramasivam's (2009) research explored the use of language transfer as a communication and language learning strategy in an ESL classroom in Malaysia. The study revealed that a learner's first language can facilitate communication and the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, teachers should be aware of how a learner's first language fits into the language acquisition process.

Karin and Nassaji (2013) reviewed recent studies on the role of L1 transfer in L2 writing. The study focused on the knowledge of writing skills in both the first and second languages can help learners use writing strategies successfully. To achieve this, teachers need to provide training exercises based on research findings and assist learners in understanding and evaluating their own writing techniques. Adult learners need to learn how to use personalized, self-reflective writing projects to identify the techniques that work best for them.

Arbona and Chireac (2014) investigated the role of linguistic transfer in adult L2 and L3 language acquisition. The study found that cross-linguistic effects occur in both the L2 to L3 and L3 to L2 directions, with the L3 language having a greater influence due to increased interaction. These findings have significant implications for language instruction and suggest that transfer can be employed as a successful learning approach in the acquisition of several languages.

Forbes and Fisher (2018) explored the relationship between a learner's L1 and the learning of foreign languages. The study investigated how students' acquisition of writing techniques in an FL classroom impacted their writing in another FL and their L1. The study showed strong levels of cross-linguistic transfer, particularly in planning quality and error rates across students. These findings suggest the potential for a multilingual, strategy-based writing pedagogy in which L1 and FL teachers work together to promote and facilitate connections across linguistic contexts.

3. Transfer Strategies in Contrastive Analysis

Transfer strategies in contrastive analysis refer to the ways in which learners transfer the knowledge they have acquired in their native language to another language they are learning. The function of transfer strategies is to facilitate the acquisition of the target language while using the learner's existing knowledge.

In their study, Chen and Yang (2021) assessed the impact of transfer strategies on the acquisition of English as a foreign language by Chinese learners. The study demonstrated that the learners who used transfer strategies, especially positive transfer strategies, showed better performance in English than the learners who did not use transfer strategies.

Such strategies are a significant area of research in second language acquisition and have been studied by many scholars in the domain. Kong and Sun (2020) have investigated the role of transfer strategies in the acquisition of Chinese as a second language. Their study found out that the learners who used positive transfer strategies, such as transferring grammar rules and vocabulary from their native language, showed better performance in Chinese than learners who did not use transfer strategies.

As for practical applications, some language teaching approaches, such as the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), have emphasized the importance of transfer strategies in facilitating second language acquisition. For instance, the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program at the University of Birmingham in the UK incorporates contrastive analysis and transfer strategies into its curriculum (Rogers, 2020).

In their meta-analysis ,Wang and Zhang (2021) analysed 24 studies on transfer effects in second language acquisition. The findings of the study revealed that transfer effects were generally positive, especially when learners used transfer strategies effectively.

Transfer strategies in contrastive analysis are an important area of research in second language acquisition, with potential implications for language teaching and learning.

4. Research Methodology

The present study was conducted using a review of literature methodology, specifically utilizing documentation review. This type of research involved a meticulous examination of previously conducted studies and falls within the realm of qualitative research. Through this approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of existing literature on the topic at hand. The use of documentation review enabled the researcher to identify key themes, concepts, and gaps in the literature, which informed the development of the study's research questions and hypotheses. By employing this rigorous methodology, the study sought to contribute to the current body of knowledge on the subject matter and provide valuable insights for future research in the field.

5. Discussion
5.1. The Notion of Transfer

Language transfer is a fundamental idea in L2 learning that refers to the influence of one's native language (L1) on the acquisition and use of a second language (L2). According to Lado (1957), learners transfer their L1 knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the L2, which can have both positive and negative effects on their performance. Positive transfer occurs when the two languages share similar structures, vocabulary, or cultural norms, allowing learners to use their L1 knowledge to understand or produce L2 expressions accurately. Negative transfer, on the other hand, happens when the L2 differs from the L1 in syntax, morphology, phonology, or pragmatics, leading to errors, confusion, or frustration.

Contrastive analysis is a theoretical and methodological approach that aims to compare and contrast the linguistic features of L1 and L2 to identify potential sources of difficulty or facilitate learning. It originated from behaviorism and structuralism, which emphasized the importance of habit formation and stimulus-response conditioning in language acquisition. Thus, early applications of contrastive analysis in language teaching focused on drilling learners with grammatical patterns, avoiding errors, and correcting mistakes based on L1 interference. However, such a view has been criticized for oversimplifying the complex nature of language transfer and neglecting other factors that affect L2 learning, such as individual differences, input exposure, motivation, and communicative needs. Today, most scholars acknowledge that language transfer is a dynamic and multifaceted process that involves not only L1-L2 transfer but also L2-L1 transfer and L2-L2 transfer, especially in multilingual contexts. They also use the term cross-linguistic influence (CLI) to describe the bidirectional and interactive nature of language transfer, which can be positive, negative, or neutral depending on various factors, such as the degree of similarity, the level of proficiency, the degree of transferability, and the type of task or discourse. CLI research has revealed many interesting phenomena, such as transfer effects from third languages, transfer effects in bilingual and heritage speakers, transfer effects in different modalities (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening), and transfer effects on higher-level skills (e.g., critical thinking, creativity, identity). Therefore, a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of language transfer is essential for designing effective and inclusive language teaching and learning practices that respect and leverage learners' linguistic and cultural diversity.

In the field of L2 acquisition, the study of errors has played a significant role in understanding the learning process. Corder (1992) advocated a shift of emphasis from teaching to the study of learning and learners' developing systems, influenced by the shift from the behaviorist view of language to the rationalistic view. Unlike Cohen (1994), Error Analysis assumes that errors are not necessarily undesirable, but rather systematic, and can function as devices that learners use to acquire the target language. Success in the learning process often comes through making mistakes and profiting from the environment's feedback, and while errors may occur repeatedly without being recognized by learners, they are recognized by teachers and researchers. The classification of errors helps researchers to infer strategies that second language learners adopt to understand second language acquisition processes.

According to Corder (1992), the importance of errors can be summarized in three main points. Firstly, they provide valuable information to teachers about the learner's progress and what remains for them to learn. Secondly, errors provide evidence for researchers about how language is learned and what strategies or procedures learners employ in discovering the language. Thirdly, errors are indispensable to the learner themselves as they serve as a device for learning.

In investigating the sources of errors, error analysts have suggested two types of transfer: "interlingual transfer," which includes the transfer of forms and structures from the learner's mother tongue or another learned language, and "intralingual transfer," which can be either positive or negative within the target language itself. Researchers have argued that the early stages of learning a target language are characterized by interlingual transfer, but as proficiency develops, learners tend to manifest more intralingual transfer (Brown, 2000).

However, Error Analysis has been criticized for its overreliance on errors and the exclusion of other important information. To obtain a full picture of a learner's linguistic behavior, there should be a consideration of both errors and non-errors (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Brown (2000) cautioned teachers against giving too much attention to learners' errors, as it may result in neglecting the reinforcement of correct utterances that enable free communication.

Moreover, Error Analysis has been criticized for overemphasizing production (speaking and writing) over comprehension (reading and listening), despite both being equally important in understanding SLA processes (Brown, 2000; Gass & Selinker, 2008). Additionally, error analysis fails to account for the strategy of avoidance, assuming the absence of difficulty in areas where learners avoid using particular forms and structures due to a lack of L2 knowledge or L1 transfer (Brown, 1992). Furthermore, there is no mention of how teachers can benefit from such information in the classroom, nor how errors are dealt with (Burt, 1957).

While Error Analysis has contributed to the understanding of second language acquisition processes, it is important to recognize its limitations and not to overemphasize the role of errors in language learning.

Selinker (1992) introduced the term "interlanguage" to describe the learners' linguistic system, which is neither the native language nor the target language. This term replaces the earlier labels of "approximative system" and "idiosyncratic system" given by Nemser and Corder respectively (as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 215). The interlanguage concept emphasizes that learners are not simply producing faulty structures due to the influence of their L1; they are active and creative language users who construct their systems in meaningful contexts (Brown, 2000).

Selinker (1992) views transfer as a cognitive process that occurs as learners form their interlanguage. He proposes that L1 knowledge serves as an input to this process, rather than simply causing interference. Ellis (1997) identifies two cognitive constraints that affect L1 transfer: learners' perception of what is transferable and their level of development (p. 53). Learners distinguish between basic, transferable forms and structures and those that are unique to their L1 and non-transferable. They use their L1 knowledge to aid their L2 learning at a certain level of proficiency when they perceive it to be helpful. Thus, L1 transfer is not the initial stage of the L2 learning process, nor is it a matter of substituting L1 rules with L2 rules. Instead, learners build their L2 knowledge based on their existing knowledge and selectively transfer elements that facilitate their learning process.

In recent years, with the emergence of the communicative approach in language teaching and learning, transfer has been viewed not as a source of error, but rather as a language learning strategy (LLS) or communication strategy that can help learners overcome communication difficulties and achieve their communicative goals.

5.2.   Transfer as a Language Learning Strategy

Before delving into the concept of Transfer as a LLS, it's important to clarify what a LLS and a communication strategy are.

The word 'strategy' has its roots in the Greek word 'strategia,' which means "the steps or actions generals take for the purpose of winning a war" (Oxford, 1990, p. 362). When the term was introduced to the field of education, it took on a new meaning that was first described by Rubin as "techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (p. 43). More definitions comes between 1980s and 1990s, but what characterizes each is the link with the authors' interests - either in psycholinguistics or in pedagogy (Macaro, 2001).

Learning strategies involve thoughts, emotions and behaviours, facilitating acquisition, understanding, or later transfer of new knowledge and skills. All this makes LLS cognitive, behavioral, and emotional at the same time. This view is supported by other researchers who suggest that LLS can be all of these since they are aids to learning. The LLS concept is best defined by listing strategy characteristics outlined by Oxford (1990):

- LLS contributes the main aim of communicative competence.
- LLS allows individuals to become more self-directed.
- LLS expands the role of the instructor.
- LLS are problem oriented.
- LLS are specific actions taken by the individual to tackle learning problems, not general approaches.
- LLS involves more than cognitive aspects; including social and metacognitive aspects.
- LLS support learning both directly and indirectly. Directly, by using the new language itself, and indirectly, by using other tools that contribute to learning powerfully, such as planning and evaluating.

- LLS are not always observable. They can be observable, like taking notes, but the majority are unobservable because they are mental activities or because they are used outside class in informal situations.
- Mostly researchers agree that LLS are conscious, but their use can be automatic, meaning that learners are able to identify what they do or think.
- LLS can be taught. They are subject to change, and learners can be taught why, when, how to use, and how to transfer LLS to new situations to maximize the learning experience for both successful and unsuccessful learners, inside and outside of class.
- LLS are flexible, not predictable

In recent years, there has been an emerging interest in language learning strategies (LLS) and their role in language acquisition. In particular, there has been a focus on the distinction between normal and strategic language learning behaviors. Dörnyei (2005) argues that efforts alone are not enough to distinguish between these behaviors, as they can be used for both hard and focused learning as well as for strategic purposes. Thus, appropriateness and helpfulness in achieving learning goals are key features of strategic behavior, according to Riding and Rayner (as quoted in Dörnyei, 2005).

Rubin (1975) has established that LLS differentiates successful language learners from those who struggle. These strategies are essential for achieving success in various learning tasks, promoting learner autonomy and self-directedness, and transferring responsibility from teachers to learners.

It is important to distinguish between LLS and communication strategies, which are used by learners to overcome communication difficulties caused by inadequate linguistic knowledge (Ellis, 1997). Gass and Selinker (2008) have described communication strategies as having three components: problematicity, consciousness, and intentionality. On the other hand, LLS is aimed at achieving learning goals and includes both direct and indirect strategies, such as memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

Transfer, which involves applying knowledge from one language to another in order to understand or produce expressions in the target language, is classified as a cognitive strategy. According to Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of LLS, transfer belongs to the cognitive strategy subclass of analyzing and reasoning. Its use can facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge in the target language, making it an important strategy for language learners.

While there is some difficulty in distinguishing between LLS and communication strategies, the distinction remains useful for understanding the different ways in which learners use strategies to achieve their learning goals. In the context of formal language learning contexts, where teachers' feedback is present, transfer is more likely to be seen as an LLS

In the Algerian context, learners transfer their knowledge rooted in Arabic like it is the case in the following examples:

Ø I study in the university   (the use of the preposition 'in' instead of 'at')

Ø A : Would you like to see a film?

B : Excuse me, I have some work to do. (The use of the expression 'excuse me' in an attempt to be polite is not appropriate, it is a routine transfer from the mother tongue)

But, in other cases, learners' transferred knowledge is rooted in French

Ø Can I assist the course? (the use of 'assist ' instead of 'attend')

Ø I am late because of the circulation   (the use of 'circulation' instead of 'traffic jam')

Transfer can be applied in both speaking and writing, as well as in comprehension. For instance, an English speaker learning French would recognize that the expression 'bon weekend' means 'have a good weekend' thanks to their knowledge of their mother tongue. Algerian learners can easily understand words such as 'table,' 'blue,' and 'computer' due to French or dialect transfer, where some French words have become part of the Algerian dialect.

The transfer of the mother tongue can also extend to the use of expressions without translation or adding word endings from the new language onto words from the mother tongue. Oxford (1990) referred to this type of transfer as "switching to the mother tongue" and classified it as a compensation strategy, which is a strategy that enables learners to overcome communication problems in either comprehension or production by using their new language. These difficulties mainly result from limitations in knowledge, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. Compensation strategies are divided into two main subclasses: guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing, the latter of which includes the "switching to the mother tongue" strategy. Good language learners use this strategy to make progress towards proficiency in speaking.

L1 transfer can also lead to an avoidance strategy, where learners avoid using a target form or structure that doesn't exist in their mother tongue, resulting in fewer errors. Japanese learners of English are an example of this; they make fewer errors than Arabic learners when using relative clauses, not because they are more competent, but because they avoid using relative clauses that do not exist in their mother tongue. This is a communication strategy that is used in both speaking and writing to make learners feel more secure (Ellis, 1997). Avoidance may include

phonological avoidance (difficult sounds), lexical avoidance (words the learner is unsure of), syntactic avoidance (structures that are not well mastered), and topic avoidance (Brown, 2000).

Although transfer is a LLS and/or communication strategy, it does not always lead to correctness. It may lead to the use of structures and forms that do not exist in the target language, or the overuse of certain forms, such as the expression of regret when Chinese speakers apologize in English. This feature is not limited to the use of transfer, but it is observed with other communication strategies, such as coining words and circumlocution. Nonetheless, these mistakes are normal because they represent a part of the learners' developing interlanguage. Brown (2000) suggests four stages of language development based on learners' errors (p. 227- 228):

1- The stage of *random errors* (or pre systematic), it is a stage of experimentation and inaccurate guessing where learners make several errors in a short period of time.

2- The *emergent stage*, learners at this stage start internalizing some rules, even if these rules are not correct, without being able to correct their errors when pointed out by others. The avoidance strategy is frequent at this stage as shown in the following example between the teacher and the learner.

L: (getting late) Can I assist the course?

T: Do you want to assist?!

L: Yes, please.

T: You mean to come in and attend the course?

L: Yes.

T: Ok, come in.

L: (at the end of the session) Thanks for allowing me to assist the course.

3-The *systematic stage*; it is a stage where learners develop rules that approximate the target system, even if some of them are not well formed, with the ability to correct errors when pointed out.

e.g. A : That old building is full of mice.

B: Mouse?

A: oh, no, I mean full of mice.

4-The *stabilization stage* (post systematic stage); few errors occur at this stage, and learners can correct them without others' feedback.

While it is important to note that these stages do not provide a comprehensive overview of learners' overall language proficiency as they are primarily based on error production and do not account for positive reinforcement of correct utterances, they do offer valuable insights into how learners use and eventually eliminate errors. It can be argued that learners initially use both correct and incorrect forms, but over time, they gradually approximate the target language system and eliminate the use of incorrect forms.

5.3. Transfer: A Learning Strategy with Potential for Error

Transfer is no longer viewed as a mere interference or initial phase of learning a target language. Instead, it is recognized as a cognitive process and learning strategy used by learners on their path to achieving native-like proficiency. However, the use of transfer as an LLS and/or communication strategy may lead to errors and fossilization. Thus, teachers require guidelines to help learners avoid misuse, overuse, and fossilization. To clarify the role of affective and cognitive feedback, two main points are discussed: (1) the importance of affective and cognitive feedback in language learning, and (2) Burt's distinction between global and local errors.

5.4. Affective and Cognitive Feedback

Vigil and Oller (cited in Brown, 2000) argue that information transmitted between learners and interlocutors can be either affective (facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice) or cognitive (sounds, phrases, structures, discourse). Two types of feedback can be realized: affective and cognitive feedback, each of which can be positive, neutral, or negative.

According to this model, affective affirmation is vital for meaningful communication to take place and continue. Negative affective feedback would lead learners to abandon their message, and no cognitive feedback would occur. Positive affective feedback would encourage continuing communication, allowing for cognitive feedback. Neutral or negative cognitive feedback would prompt learners to restate and reformulate their message. However, positive affective and cognitive feedback would reinforce the generated form or structure, which, if incorrect in the target system, could result in fossilization.
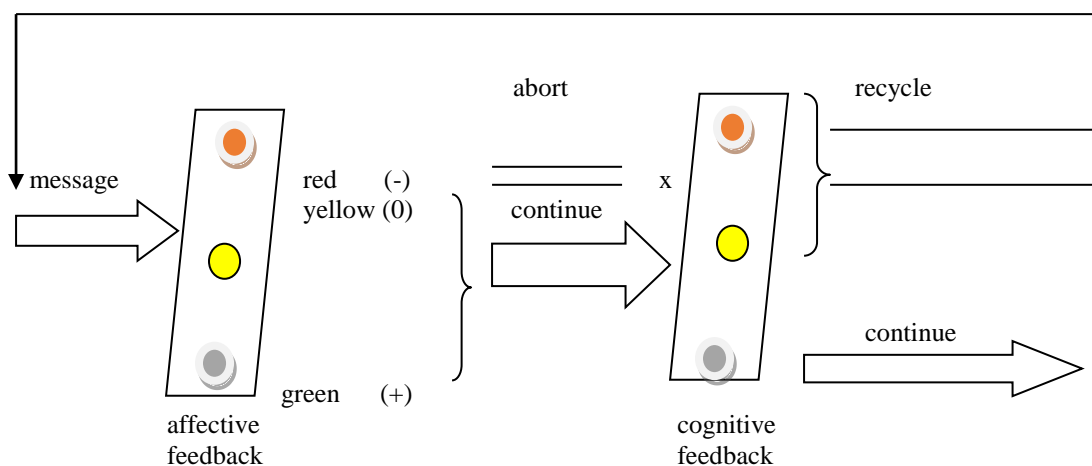
Affective and cognitive feedback (Brown, 2000, p. 236)

Teachers' feedback on learners' use of transfer can be explained using this model. If teachers or classmates provide negative affective feedback (e.g., "stop! This is not English"), communication is disrupted. However, if positive affective feedback is given, followed by neutral or negative cognitive feedback (e.g. "I value what you're saying, but I can't understand"), the learner continues to speak, making adjustments to their message to improve comprehensibility. The third case involves positive affective and cognitive feedback (e.g. "ok, I understand") when transfer leads to the correct use of the target language. However, such behavior with incorrect forms can lead to transfer misuse, overuse, and fossilization.

This information can help teachers identify situations where they should intervene to control learners' use of the transfer strategy. However, teachers should also be aware that too much correction in response to negative cognitive feedback can hinder communication and cause frustration, loss of confidence, and a perception that language learning is difficult or impossible. Therefore, using Burt's distinction between global and local errors is necessary.

5.5. Global and Local Errors

In language learning, errors can vary in their impact on communication. Burt (1975) distinguishes between two types of errors: global and local. Global errors hinder communication by affecting overall sentence organization and can cause misunderstanding, while local errors are limited to single factor or parts in a sentence and rarely affect communication. Examples of global errors include incorrect word order, missing or misplaced sentence connectors and cues, and overgeneralization, while local errors include mistakes in inflection, auxiliaries, and prepositions.

Teachers play a crucial role in providing feedback and correcting learners' errors. However, excessive correction can lead to loss of confidence and embarrassment for learners. Therefore, Burt (1975) suggests that teachers should prioritize correcting global errors to enhance learners' communicative ability. Selective correction of errors not only facilitates more meaningful communication but also builds learners' confidence, which can help them correct local errors in the future.

6. Conclusion

This paper has provided a comprehensive overview of learners' transfer as a language learning and communication strategy. It has highlighted that transfer is no longer considered an obstacle, but rather a helpful tool for learners to improve their L2 system, overcome communication obstacles, and become more self-assured, self-reliant, and autonomous. The role of teachers in this process is crucial, as they can provide guidance and feedback to their students to ensure that they use transfer effectively. However, teachers need to understand that the use of transfer varies from one learner to another and that the feedback they provide should be both effective and cognitive. Teachers should be mindful of providing appropriate cognitive feedback that is not overly negative, while still ensuring that students do not fossilize or lose meaning. By recognizing the importance of transfer as a learning and communication strategy and adopting appropriate teaching and feedback methods, teachers can help their students become proficient in using this strategy, thereby improving their overall language proficiency and communicative competence.

6.1. Further Recommendations

The study provides new horizions in the domain of transfer strategies and error analysis for contrastive analysis research. Pakistan is a glaring example because it is a multilingual country with several regional languages, including Urdu, Punjabi, Saraiki, Sindhi, and Pashto, among others. There are six major and fifty eight minor languages (Rahman, 2004). However, English is a second language in Pakistan . Future research can be conducted to identify effective transfer strategies for teaching English as a second languages (ESL), promoting bilingualism, and enhancing language proficiency acoss different languages in Pakistan.

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