The Effects of Interlingual, Intralingual, and Dual Transfer on Fossilization*

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Chung, Younghan. “The Effects of Interlingual, Intralingual, and Dual Transfer on Fossilization.” Modern Studies in English Language & Literature 54.1 (2010): 339–365. A frequently cited source of error among L2 learners is language transfer, i.e. transfer from one’s native language (NL)—interlingual transfer—or from one’s target language (TL)—intralingual transfer. Sometimes, learners draw an analogy from their NL and TL at the same time, which can be termed “dual transfer.” This paper tries to (1) investigate the validity of Brown’s suggestion that with the progress in language learning, intralingual transfer, rather than interlingual transfer, becomes more prevalent, (2) examine whether the Multiple Effects Principle that multiple sources of an error are more likely to cause fossilization holds good, and (3) find out which of interlingual, intralingual, and dual transfer is the strongest contributor to fossilization. After testing some middle school, high school, and university students, the present study examined the changes in the proportion of the three types of transfer. The results generally support Brown’s suggestion and the Multiple Effects Principle, and it turns out that dual transfer is the strongest factor leading to fossilization. (Seoul Women’s University)

Key words: interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, dual transfer, fossilization, the Multiple Effects Principle

1. INTRODUCTION

Most learners of a foreign language fail to reach a native-like

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competence level. Their foreign language system contains many errors. Some of them are soon corrected; others become very difficult to correct. There has been much debate over the sources of errors and their effects. One of the most frequently cited sources of error is language transfer,\(^1\) "the use of the first language (or other languages known) in a second language context" (Gass and Selinker, 2001). According to Connor (1996: 13), analyses of intermediate language systems in learners’ actual performance suggest that the influence of language transfer on the acquisition of the target language is quite complex.

When language learners face a problem in their communication, they rely on various communication strategies such as avoidance, circumlocution, approximation, word coinage, literal translation, code-switching, etc. (Brown, 2000). However, one of the most useful strategies is analogy. When language learners face uncertainty, they tend to draw an analogy from their existing linguistic knowledge—whether it is based on one’s native language (NL) or target language (TL)—and transfer it to their language use. The former is interlingual transfer, and the latter is intralingual transfer.

Brown (2000: 224) cited research suggesting that "the early stages of language learning are characterized by a predominance of interference (interlingual transfer), but once learners have begun to acquire parts of a new system, more and more intralingual transfer—generalization within the target language—is manifested." This paper tested Brown’s suggestion by examining the relative effects of interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer among Korean middle school, high school, and university students who are learning English.

Sometimes, they may draw an analogy from their NL and TL at the

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\(^1\) Instead of "language transfer," Kellerman (1984: 102) proposed the term "cross-linguistic influence." Since transfer is a more generally accepted term in the literature, this paper will use the term transfer.