

The Role of L(-1) Transfer in Target Language Acquisition

SCOTT CAMERON TODD

University of Hawaii at Manoa

The influence of learners' L1s on their acquisition of L2s has been studied ad nauseam by proponents of nearly every branch of SLA theory. It has been erroneously considered to be the first-acquired and hence "root" language of learners, an assumption that flies in the face of currently accepted San Francisco science. Little evidence has been presented to suggest that the language a person learned in infancy is at the core of language patterning, a fact that has plagued Universal Grammar scholars. This is because almost no systematic research has been done on languages learned prior to L1. The focus of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of Past Life Regression (PLR), and the influence of L(negatives) on target language production and competence.

Past Life Regression (PLR) has been unjustly and dangerously ignored in language acquisition research. Since such highly regarded public leaders as Shirley Maclaine and Dionne Warwick have lectured on the value of past life research, the field has gained scientific approval in certain parts of California and elsewhere (Farce, 1989). This area of study holds major consequences for such theories as Universal Grammar and fossilized forms, as it challenges the notion of whence these concepts are created in the first place.

The notion of L1 as that source of fundamental language transfer has been uncritically accepted, even though 1) an increasing body of evidence indicates that languages learned in previous lives may be used to explain certain patterns of transfer and language usage (Satolong, 1492).

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Accounting for the effect of previous native languages has been imperative in certain studies. Larceny-Fry'em (1990) was able to demonstrate that one of her Finnish-speaking student's seemingly inexplicable repetition of "Keep that snake away from me" during dictation tasks was due to his having been Cleopatra

in a previous life. It also helped to explain why the subject always wrote in hieroglyphics.

Understanding of classroom behavior has increased as a result of reconsidering studies in PLR. A student who fossilizes at a very early level may in fact be transferring language learned during the Neanderthal period (Lightweight, 1951). Or, those teachers who have suspected their students of being cave people could be right.

Acquisition order of syntactic features can be traced directly to functional elements of past-life regression. Grogg (1999, in press) showed that learning English negation almost always makes people revert back to the Spanish Inquisition, hence explaining pre-verbal negation (as in Spanish) followed by unanalyzed, "Don't, Don't."

METHODOLOGY

We examined two subjects from which, in good SLA research fashion, we intend to generalize to the entire human population.

The subjects were drawn, we eventually learned, from a wide variety of previous genders, ages, and language groups, including (as L1s) Japanese and Japanese, (as L(-1)s) Swahili and Dutch, (as L(-2)s) Urdu and an obscure dialect of upper Mongolia, (as L(-?)s), Gaelic and Irish, seagull and manatee, etc.

The unsuspecting Japanese subjects were told they were going to a Club Med retreat where they would learn relaxation exercises. Instead, when they arrived at the base camp¹, the two were put in a trance by a certified hypnotherapist who specialized in past life regression. Then we tried to pry the students' attention away from reliving Teutonic wars and Arabian harems long enough for them to describe the color of the boy's jacket in a Bilingual Syntax Measure picture.

Other language tasks followed, including task-based language lessons, essays followed by analysis of written complexity and errors, and subjecting students to taped interviews, error correction, and finally, ridicule.

Our hypotheses:

- 1) *That languages learned in past lives will interfere with the development of second languages.*
- 2) *All variability can be explained if the right combination of previously lived social factors are considered.*

¹ Special difficulties had to be considered in this experiment, especially in finding a camp far enough from populated areas, in order to isolate primal screaming.

3) *Cultural aspects of language learning are increasingly difficult to account for, the more cultures a person is shown to have.*

4) *Use of the style continuum will vary considerably depending on what style the speaker is using.*

5) *The Japanese are still basically really terrible English speakers.*

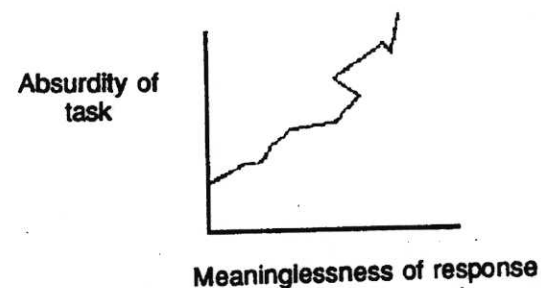
THE DATA

From a quantitative point of view, we easily demonstrated that functional transfer of such prior-held norms as smiting Philistines, bartering for jawbones, and pleading for clemency all caused massive shifts in structural competence along the style continuum. Our qualitative analysis of the data is that we sure heard some wacky stories over the course of the afternoon.

Though transcription of certain ancient languages proved difficult, translation sometimes impossible, and analysis of transfer certainly unscientific, certain methodological observations are summarized in the obligatory chart, below.

As can clearly be seen (Chart Y-?), as the tasks asked of students became more sociologically distant from their frame of reference, so their ability to make grammaticality judgments declined.

CHART Y-?



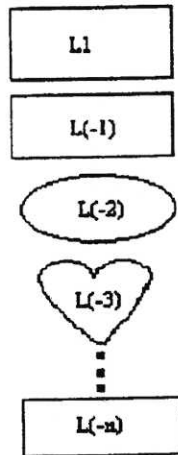
At any given point on the chart, we choose to call the inclination of the line by the name, "Data Ridiculousness Angle" (DRA).

Error analysis demonstrated beyond any CAH doubt that learners transferred the systematic grammars of the languages freshest in their minds to the target language. More importantly to the study of ESL among those living on this planet, was the

realization that some transfer was noticed across past lives, as though fossilized forms had been maintained from one incarnation to the next. A hierarchy is theorized, in which transfer can come from PLR languages lower on the scale to those higher on the scale, but not vice-versa (Chart K9).

Variability, it was demonstrated, is never "free," but always systematic. Its systematicity has sometimes been difficult to explain in previous studies because the learners' L(negative)s were unknown.

CHART K-9



DISCUSSION

The fortunate element of PLR theory is that it contains something for almost every linguistic theorist. Those who once touted the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis find vindication for their painstakingly researched but ludicrous collection of volumes comparing languages. Though all right-thinking language researchers know how absurd it is to claim that the strategies of a native language could have anything to do with acquiring a target language, contrastive analysts have recently asserted that the comparison needed to go back farther: in some cases, several

centuries (Shaw-drun, 1994).

Universal Grammar proponents are finding that the fundamental construction of language-encoding in the brain is from ancient languages now no longer with us--languages that, no doubt, carried all the elements that UG specialists unsuccessfully try to inflict on modern humans (Chomsky, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, et. al.). It is in a study of the past that they will find that they have been right all along, and anyone who dares challenge their theory need only pick up the most readily available copy of pre-historic Euphratic grammar.

In terms of UG transfer, it seems likely that the grammar with which you were born, is the one with which you died. Though it is postulated that it is the most recent death language that causes the most interference (my friend Bob, 1966), the relationship is unclear because lives are apparently not necessarily lived consecutively through linear time (Witchhazel, 1650). This will no doubt be the subject of future research. Perhaps millennia in the future.



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