

The Language Transfer in English Learners' Reading Comprehension

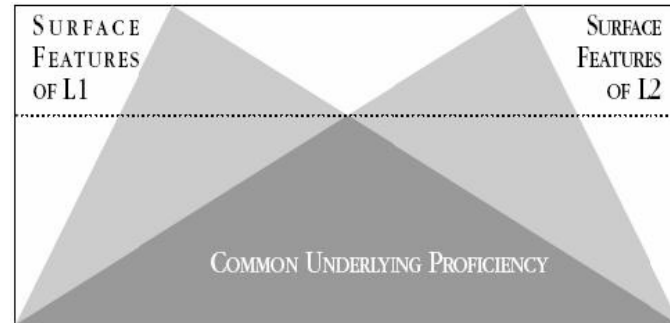
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Outline

- Theoretical framework and key concepts concerning Linguistic Transfer.
- A case study of Linguistic Transfer: Spanish to English.
- A case study of Linguistic Transfer: Cantonese to English.
- Our learning experience that is associated with Linguistic Transfer.
- Pedagogical implication.
- Discussion.

The Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis

- “The development of competence in a second language (L2) is partially a function of the type of competence already developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins” (Cummins 1979a p. 233)
- Interdependence and proficiency in both languages results from underlying cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins 1979b)



Further Insight

- Evaluation of 9 studies showing consistent transfer of linguistic skills.
(Cummins 1979 b)
- Factors that can influence transfer (1979b)
 - Similar/Dissimilar languages
 - Student Motivation
 - Student Background
- “Instruction through French (L1) is just as effective in promoting English proficiency as instruction through English. (Cummins 1980 p. 184)

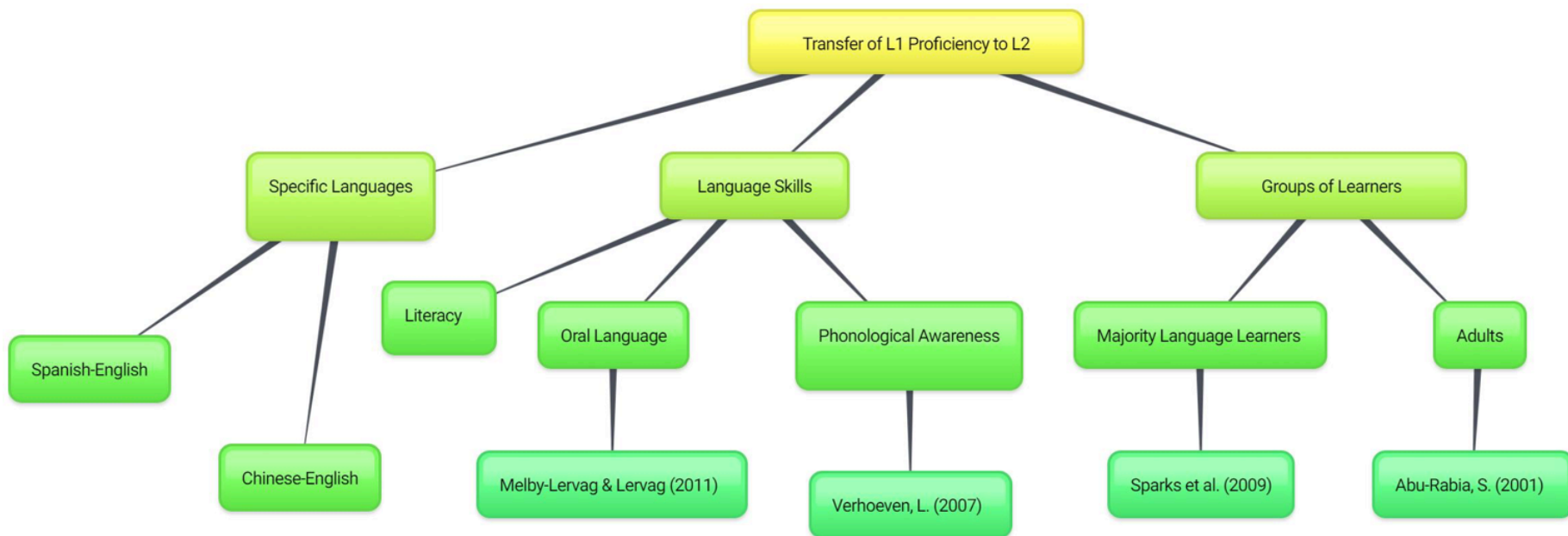
Critiques-Sociolinguistics

- “Sociolinguistic factors may play a much more important role than the ‘tip of the iceberg’ status accorded them in Cummins' formulation.” (Troike 1984 p. 51)
- L1 proficiency is not enough to explain the gap that many bilingual students have. L1 proficiencies should be viewed as intervening effects instead of causal factors. (Genesee 1984)

Additional Research

- Verhoeven (1994):
 - Wanted to search for empirical evidence of linguistic interdependence
 - Attempted to control for the social factors that others claimed Cummins neglected and wanted to demonstrate a causal link
 - Looked at Turkish-Dutch Bilingual Students in a variety of linguistic factors
- Results
 - Transfer of lexicon and syntax were quite limited
 - Pragmatic, phonological, and literacy skills showed positive evidence supporting interdependence
 - Literacy was shown to transfer both ways

Varying Directions



Language Family

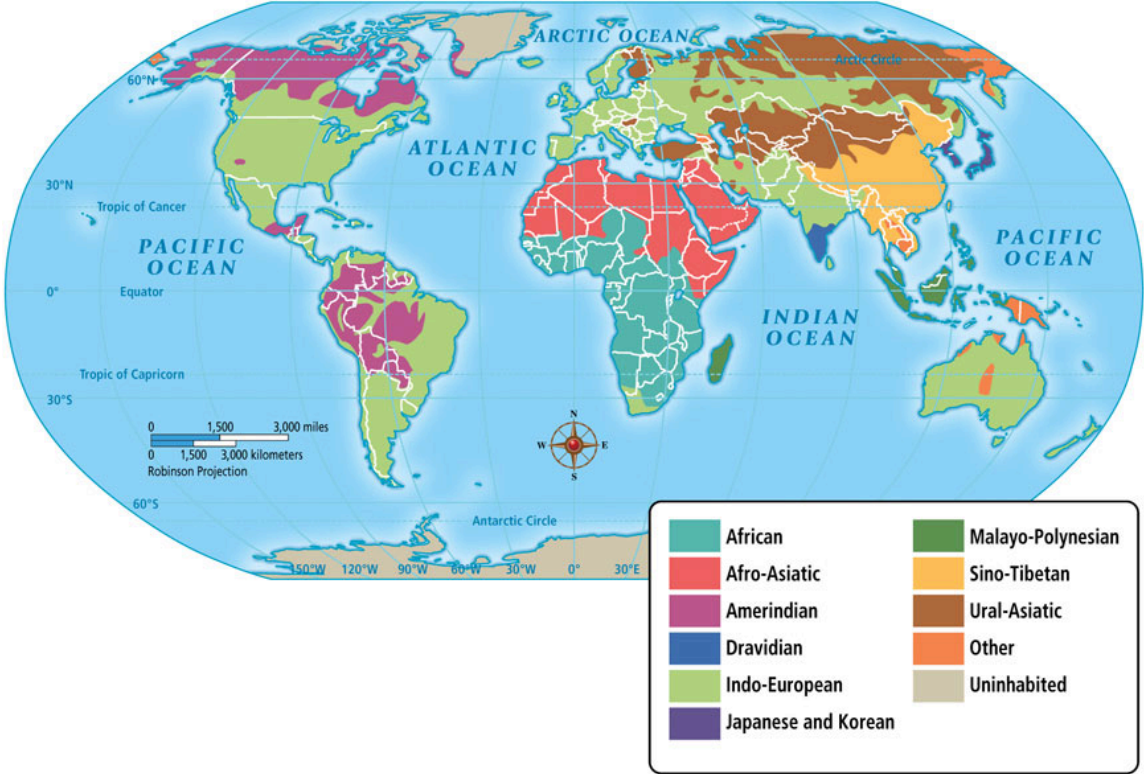
A language family is a set of languages deriving from a common ancestor or "parent." Languages with a significant number of common features in phonology, morphology and syntax are said to belong to the same language family.

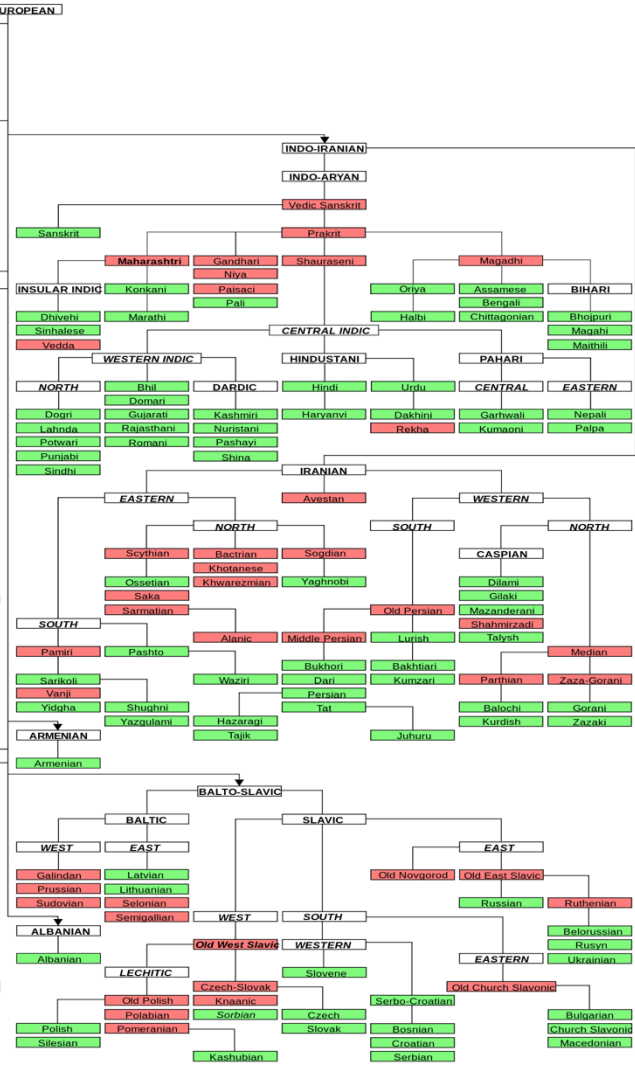
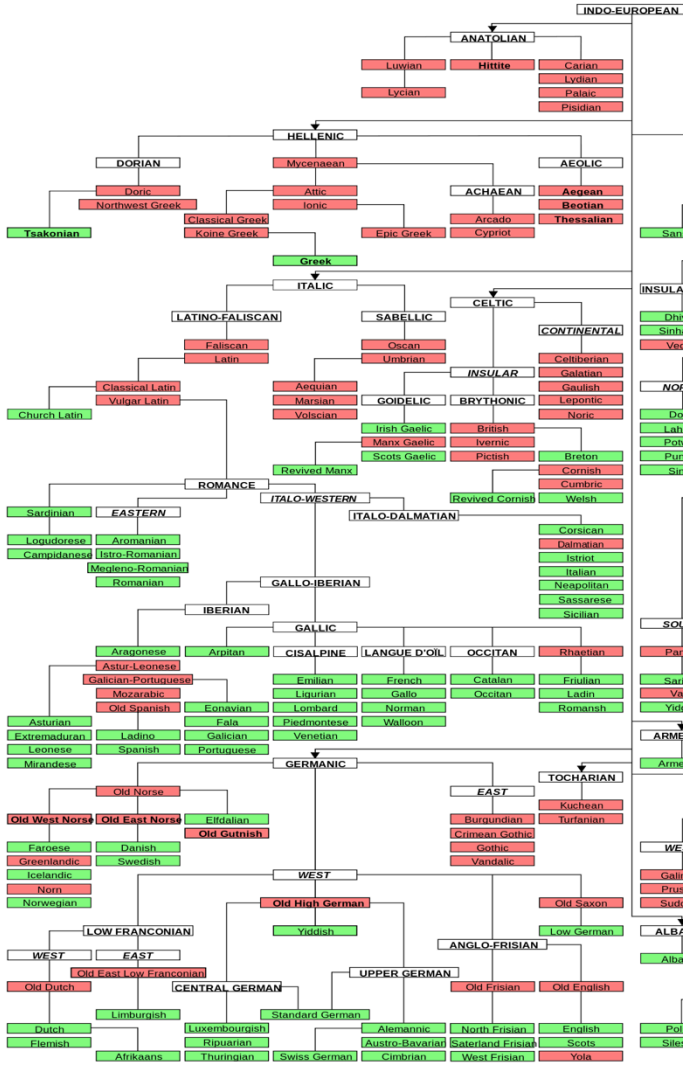
Subdivisions of a language family are called "branches."

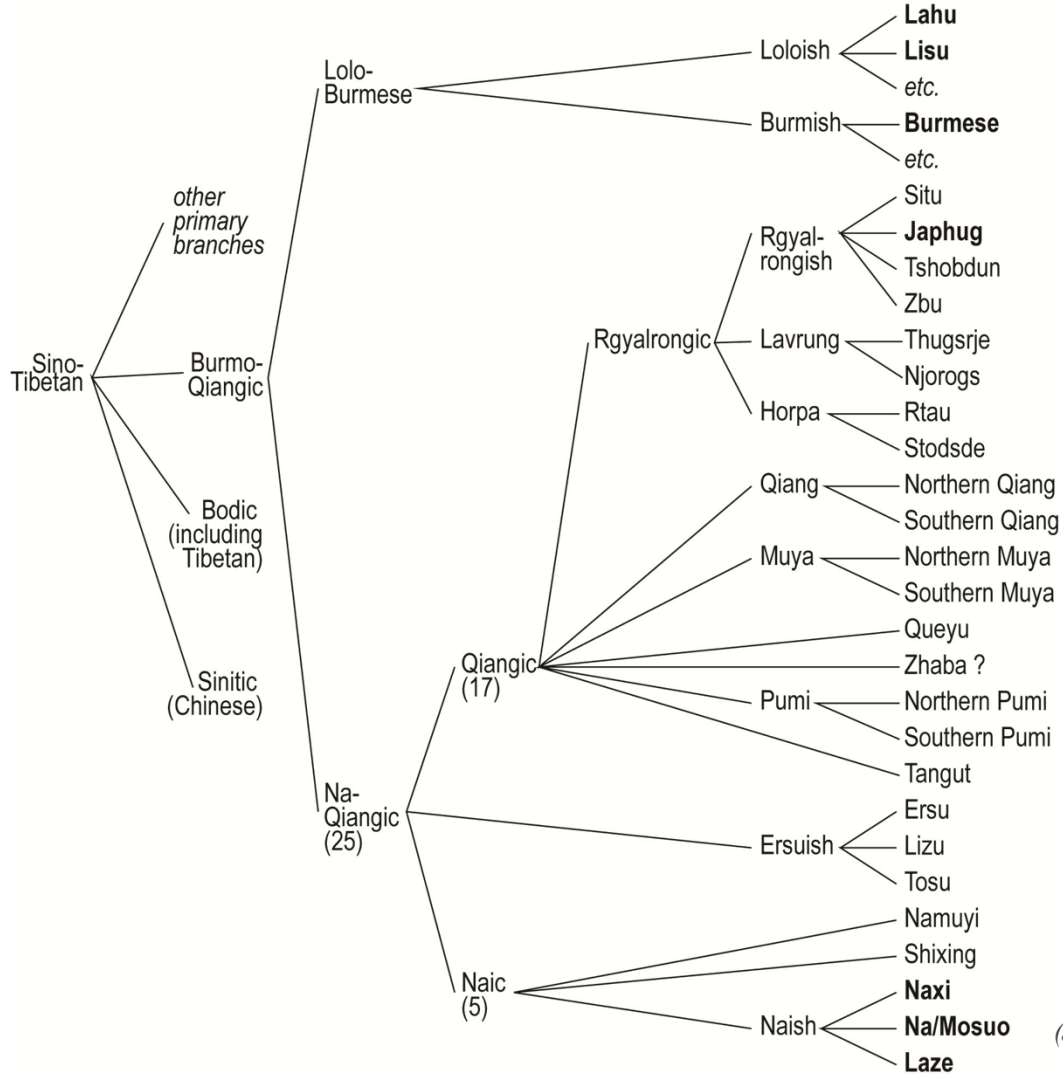
(Nordquist, 2017)

Language Family

World Language Families Today







(Jacques & Michaud, 2011)

Language Family

English - Phonographic

Spanish - Phonographic

Cantonese - Ideographic

Case Study

The relationship “between initial levels of English oral language proficiency and Spanish reading comprehension and growth in English reading comprehension” (Carlo et al, 2014)

Spanish-speaking English language learners in English-only literacy instruction, an early-exit bilingual program, or a late-exit bilingual program

Third to fifth grade

Participants: 102 Spanish-speaking students

Case Study

Common foundational skills

Quantitative research

Data collecting points: beginning of third grade, end of third grade,
end of fourth grade, and end of fifth grade.

Case Study

Data: English oral language proficiency, English word reading, Spanish reading comprehension data were collected at the beginning of third grade
English reading comprehension data were collected across all four stages

Findings: “students in the bilingually instructed groups who started out high in Spanish reading comprehension grew faster in English reading comprehension. Initial level of Spanish reading comprehension was not a significant predictor of growth in English passage comprehension for the English-only group”

(Carlo et al, 2014)

Cross-language transfer of syntactic skills and reading comprehension among young Cantonese-english bilingual students

What are syntactic skills?

Recognition of and ability to manipulate the grammatical structure of sentences in a language.

E.g. word order pattern / morphosyntactic (grammaticality)

Research aims

Between Chinese (Cantonese) and English (two typologically distant languages):

Whether L1 (Chinese) syntactic skills would predict / facilitate reading comprehension in L2 (English)

Theoretical support

Also Cummins's famous Linguistic Interdependence Hypotheses / Dual Iceberg Hypothesis

Participants and Methodology

1st and 3rd graders in Hong Kong who are bilingual, although English is taught mostly in an EFL context)

Measures in both Chinese and English:

Vocabulary (oral receptive vocabulary)

Word order (basic word order pattern correction task)

Morphosyntax (correct task--detect and repair sentences)

Word reading

Sentence comprehension

Findings

1. Syntactic skills, as measured by word order and morphosyntactic tasks, are significantly associated with reading comprehension in each language.
2. L1 syntactic skills predicted L2 reading comprehension (variables like age, oral language proficiency are controlled)
3. Word order skill appears to be more transfer-ready/ transferrable than morphosyntactic skill
4. It makes good sense to evoke L1 syntactic knowledge and map it into L2 corresponding structures to enhance L2 reading comprehension.

Study Across Languages

- Pasquarella et al. (2015) looked at transfer of word reading accuracy and word reading fluency in differing languages
 - Participants were a mix of 2nd grade Spanish-English bilinguals and Chinese-English bilinguals
 - Transfer of word-reading accuracy was only evident in Spanish-English bilinguals
 - Transfer of word-reading fluency was found in both groups.
- Implications
 - Differing writing systems influence word reading accuracy. Certain L1 may need assistance in developing decoding strategies in L2 reading.
 - Word reading fluency could be used to help teachers identify students who may face difficulties when learning L2.

Personal Experience

Tianyi: Origin and morphology of Mandarin and English

David: Literacy and low-level learners

Wei: Grammar learning and teaching between Chinese and English

Teaching for Transfer

Cummins (2005):

Is a rigid separation of language beneficial?

Strategies that can develop language awareness and aid transfer

Student attitudes in bilingual contexts

Discussion

Have you used your L1 repertoire to help you learn a L2? If so, how and what examples?

Did your L1 teachers explicitly teach syntactic knowledge like grammar rules?

How has student's L1 abilities influenced past teaching experiences?

What does this say about the role of native and non-native teachers in ESL/EFL classrooms?

How should school's approach learners with low proficiency in L1? What challenges arise?

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