

## A Cross Linguistic Analysis of Fossilization in Lunyala-Kiswahili Learners as they Acquire English Language in Navakholo Subcountry, Kakamega Country

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### *Abstract*

This paper examines fossilization processes in Lunyala-Kiswahili learners as they acquire English language. The paper applies inter-language theory as initiated by Selinker (1972). The existence of first language in the mind of a second language learner makes it impossible to use L2 in a fully monolingual mode. Most research on cross linguistic influences only consider the influence of the mother tongue on second language acquisition, without taking into account the learner's knowledge of other languages. The design for the current study is descriptive survey design. The target population for this paper is 54 primary schools with 210 teachers who teach English. This paper attempts to fill the gap in the existing body of knowledge with regard to how the acquisition of Lunyala as a first language and Kiswahili influence the acquisition L2. The findings of the study show that Lunyala/Kiswahili language has both positive and negative transfer at the level of syntax, phonology and lexical terms. The study also found that linguistic factors play an integral part in language transfer. The study recommends that the government should fully implement the teaching of mother tongue which has a positive impact to the learning of second language.

**Key words:** Cross-linguistic influence, fossilization processes, Inter-language, Lunyala language, Kiswahili language.

### **1. Introduction**

The term cross-linguistic influence (CLI) refers to the influence of one language upon another most typically in cases of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Different researchers use different terms to refer the concept CLI. Lado (1957) refers to CLI as language transfer while Selinker, (1972) and Kellerman (1983) refer to CLI as language mixing. Ringbom (1987) on the other hand refers to it as linguistic interference. The current paper refers to the term CLI as the influence or rather the role that First Language (FL, L1) plays in the acquisition of Second Language (SL L2). Therefore, the terms language transfer and CLI are used interchangeably. SLA on the other hand is the process of learning any language after the first language whether it is the second, third or fourth language (Krashen and Terrel, 1983).

CLI is prone to occur where there is language contact. Language contact occurs when two or more languages or varieties interact. Kenya generally is a multilingual society with over 42 indigenous languages with English and Kiswahili as state-recognized official languages (Ogechi, 2005). The languages spoken by multilinguals and bilinguals influence each other in various ways. This occurs during the increased social interactions such as through marriages, business, ceremonies, education among others (Mesthrie, 2000). Mesthrie, (2000) posits that, in such circumstances, some communities are able to maintain their languages, others might experience language shift, language mixing, language borrowing and there might even be emergence of new languages. English is used for official purposes and international communication, while Kiswahili is the national language and is used in the country by people from different ethnic groups to communicate.

Kakamega County is a multilingual society where three languages are spoken; Lunyala, Kiswahili and English language. Lunyala language is a dialect of the Luhya language. It is an African language of the Bantu subgroup. Lunyala, is spoken by the Abanyala of Navakholo sub-county, Kakamega County, Western region of Kenya. Lunyala is also spoken by native speakers who have migrated to other parts of Kenya. Generally, Bantu languages are known to be highly agglutinative in terms of morphology as manifested in the verb. Lunyala dialect being a Bantu language is highly agglutinative. For instance, the nominal element can function like a complete sentence, e.g. *Mbe* 'give me.' Kiswahili, on the other hand, is also a Bantu language and the first language of the Swahili people. Swahili language contains some Arabic features, e.g. vocabulary. Research shows that three-fourth of the Kenyan population have a working competence in Kiswahili language (Ogechi, 2005). Therefore, one can assume that the majority of Kenyans can communicate in Kiswahili to a large extent. In terms of Grammar, Swahili is an agglutinative language, i.e., grammatical functions are expressed by adding prefixes and suffixes to roots.

English language, on the other hand, is analytical. Analytical language is the language in which the predicative line is expressed with the help of conjunctions, prepositions and word order. Therefore, the three languages under study belong to different language typologies. While Lunyala and Kiswahili are agglutinative, English is an analytical language. Research in CLI show that SLA is affected by linguistic or typological distances between the languages involved (Bild & Swain, 1989). Typologically similar languages enhance the acquisition of L2. However, when there is divergence between the native and the non-native language, CLI can occur in the form of errors, overproduction, underproduction and miscomprehension (Odlin, 1989). The current paper aims to establish how CLI is manifested in Lunyala-Kiswahili-English Language. Therefore, this study goes a step further to explore the influence of both native (Lunyala) and nonnative (Kiswahili) knowledge impacts on the acquisition of a new language (English).

## 2. Inter-language Theory

The term inter-language (IL) was first defined by Larry Selinker (1972). Selinker developed this term with the aim of identifying the linguistic aspects of the psychology of Second Language Learning (SLL). Selinker following Lenneberg (1967) hypothesizes, a "latent psychological

structure" as in the brain which is activated when one tries to learn L2 after having acquired "meanings" in L1. That is, an L2 learner produces utterances which are neither identical to L1 nor L2. Rather, an L2 learner uses a new form of language which he calls IL. Therefore, IL is a language produced by second language learners and foreign language learners who are in the process of learning L2.

Selinker notes that L2 learners develop inter-language by the system of rules; that is properties and rules of L1 and properties and rules of L2. IL rules can be manifested in various ways. First, the rules may be, altered, deleted and added. Selinker also focuses on the fossilization process. Selinker believes that aspects of IL are manifested through fossilization processes. Fossilization is a stage during SLL. Fossilization are those features that are absent from the speech of learners under normal conditions but tend to reappear in their performances when they are forced to deal with difficult material, when either anxious or in an extremely relaxed state (Selinker 1972: 215). Thus, fossilization occurs when certain mistakes seem to be impossible to correct. This language behavior is seen as regression since it represents the learner's transitional competence.

Fossilization occurs due to frequent use, reinforcement of communication process and lack of correction. Selinker identifies five fossilization process steps which are; overgeneralization, transfer of training, language transfer, strategies of SLL and strategies of SL communication. According to (Ellis, 2000) overgeneralization is the use of existing L2 knowledge by extending it to new IL forms. It happens when people or learners apply a grammatical rule across all members of a grammatical class without making the appropriate exceptions. Thus, overgeneralization occurs when learners make their own rules of language. The learner extends the application of rules. For example:

She *goed* to school.  
She went to school.  
He *rided* a motorcar.  
He rode a motorcar.  
I *sawed* him yesterday  
I saw him yesterday.

The false analogies shown in the above sentences show those learners are deriving knowledge from previous knowledge. However, this phenomenon always occurs unconsciously and thus without timely instruction and correction, the errors will stay for as long as it can do. The second process is transfer of training as discussed by (Graham, 2004). It is fossilization of incorrect language forms as a result of initial learning process on the performance of later activities. This kind of fossilization is also due to certain features found in the instruction when the learner is taught SL.

The third process is language transfer. In this case the use of L2 result mainly from L1 and the difference between L1 and l2 is the reason for occurrence of errors. Language transfer can be either positive or negative. Positive transfer refers to that the similarities shared by the L1 and L2 that help SLA. In contrast, negative transfer refers to the differences between L1 and L2 that interfere with what the learner has already learned. Thus, they are prohibitive since the difference between L1 and the L2 is the reason for the occurrence of errors. Consequently, negative transfer of L1 rules lead to fossilization.

The forth fossilization process is strategies of SLL. Learning strategies refer to the overall strategies and the explicit methods the learner adopts in the process of SLL, and the former is more likely to cause fossilization of language competence (Sims, 1989). This kind of fossilization is due to some approaches to learning of L2 material adopted by the learner. Fossilization may be manifested through simplification of phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical features. Aspects of psycholinguistic and socio-cultural factors may also be manifested. The last process is strategies of SL communication. Ellis (2000) noted that, the cognitive component of procedural knowledge is composed of the various mental processes involved in both internalizing and automatizing new L2 knowledge. It occurs when communication is taking place. The concern here is on fluency rather than accuracy in communication. The learner tries to simplify the L2 rules. The fossilization process was applied in the analysis of cognitive processes used by Lunyala-Kiswahili speakers in the acquisition of English language.

### 3. Research Methodology

The design for the current study was descriptive survey design. Descriptive studies have an important role in educational research; they increase our knowledge about what happens in schools (Creswell, 2003; 2014). The study area (Navakholo Division) was suitable for the study since the dominant language for the inhabitants is *Olunyala*. Navakholo division is cosmopolitan; therefore, children are likely to be influenced by other languages such as Kiswahili. The research used a multistage sampling technique that entails proportionate sampling in two or more stages from groups within the target population. Schools were put on stratus based on rural and urban, public and private. Random sampling was employed to select 10 schools with equal representation-two private and two public with two urban and two rural schools in each category. The study used three data collection instruments namely tests, participant observation and interviews. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i) How does fossilization reflect itself in Lunyala-Kiswahili speakers as they acquire English language in Navakholo subcounty; Kakamega County?
- ii) What are the ways of improving the teaching of English language to Lunyala-Kiswahili speakers in Navakholo Sub-county in Kakamega County?

### 4. Results and Discussions

#### 4.1 Fossilization processes in Lunyala-Kiswahili speakers as they acquire English language

Selinker and Lamendella (1978) redefined fossilization as a permanent cessation of L2 learning before the learner has attained SL norms at all levels of linguistic structure and in all discourse domains in spite of the learner's positive ability, opportunity, and motivation to learn and acculturate into target society. In other words, learners turn linguistic features that are correct in their first language into permanent errors in the way they speak and write the new language. In the data collected fossilization was reflected at the following linguistic levels: Phonological, morphological and syntactic as discussed below.

#### 4.1.1 Phonological fossilization

Phonological fossilization occurs due to the difference of phonology of L1 and L2. Phonological fossilization refers to the repetition of phonological errors which result from the incorrect acquisition of pronunciation of L2, usually affected by L1 as shown in table 1 below:

**Table 1: Phonological fossilization in consonants**

S/NO	Sound transferred from Lunyala to English	Example of mispronunciation	Correct word	Part of speech
1	/g/	gar	Car	N
2	/t/	'toor' 'tog'	Door, Dog	N
3	/b/	Baber	Paper	N
4	/k/	Coat	Goats	N
5	/p/	Papy	Baby	N

The most enduring and prominent phenomenon in spoken Lunyala is sounds transfer. The researchers found that L2 learners' pronunciation is deeply influenced by their L1. So the function of L1 transfer plays a very important role in SLA of sounds. The table above shows learners voicing sounds by interchanging voiceless sounds with voiced sounds and devoicing voiceless sounds due to the influence of the phonological system of L1. Phonological fossilization was also depicted in the use of vowels as shown in table 2 below:

**Table 2: Phonological fossilization in vowels**

S/NO	Sound transferred from Lunyala to English	Example of mispronunciation	Correct pronunciation	Part of speech
1	/ei/ eg paper.	Pepa	/ peɪpə/	N
2	/ɜ:/ (term)	' <i>tamu</i> '	/tɜ:m/	N
3	/æ/ (cat)	Cut (kɪt)	/kæt/	V
4	/əʊ/ (Modem)	mondemu	/'məʊ.dem/	N
5	/ɔ:/ (hall)	Hali	[ hɔ:l ]	N

The above data shows how L1 phonology is negatively transferred to L2. The teachers reported that the mispronunciation in vowels is due to the lack of awareness and the lack of exposure to the vowels by both teachers and learners. Loan words in L1 from L2 also contributed to deviation of sounds from the codified forms. The above data also shows that lack of proper guidance from teachers as leading to phonological fossilization. The teachers in the interview noted that little prominence is given to pronunciation in the syllabus they cover. Thus learners fail to see the differences between L1 and L2 sounds. The input in L2 above shows that some sounds in L1 prevent the acquisition of L2 accurately. The teachers also noted the exposure to 5 vowel sounds (a, e, i, o, u) also contributed to mispronunciation of words.

#### 4.1.2 Morphological fossilization

Morphological fossilization occurs due to differences in typological differences between languages. For instance, English has got a variety of changes in morphology and therefore has various grammatical morphemes however Lunyala and Kiswahili are agglutinative languages. Morphological fossilization was reflected in inflectional morpheme and article as shown in the below:

##### Example 1

I *\*goed* to town yesterday.

##### Example 2

We *\*wented* there.

##### Example 3

She *\*lended* me her bicycle.

The example above shows cases of morphological fossilization where L2 learners think that all verbs have the morpheme -ed to show tense.

From the data collected another aspect that showed morphological fossilization was inflectional morpheme –s in third person as shown in the data below:

She *\*make food*.

Mary *\*sing* every morning.

#### 4.1.3 Syntactic fossilization

Syntactic fossilization occurs due to different syntactic rules that languages have. English has present tense and past tense in general that can be further divided into sixteen categories but however Kiswahili and Lunyala have a different system. English has morphemes that also mark past participle tense unlike Kiswahili and Lunyala. These differences may give rise to fossilization as shown in the data below:

**Example 1**

He had *\*goed* to the market yesterday.

**Example 2**

I wondered what Rose *\*does doing now*.

**Example 3**

The next day she *\*camed* with her parents to school

The study established that linguistic factors such as language distance between L1 and L2 are a contributing factor to the learning of English language by Lunyala-Kiswahili language. In the data collected it was reflected that the structure of Lunyala language was similar to Kiswahili and English hence enhancing the learning the learning of L2. In this case, positive transfer out showed the negative transfer where cases of direct transfer were reflected. Thus, we conclude that language distance can affect a language positively or negatively. For instance, syntactic transfer contained syntax structure, such as word order, negative sentence, interrogative and relative clause and so on. Syntactic transfer was both positive and negative as shown in the data below:

**Example 1**

S+ V + SC

My father was a teacher. (English)

*Baba yangu alikuwa mwalimu. (Kiswahili)*

*Tata wanje yali mwalimu (Lunyala).*

**Example 2**

S+ V + (adverbial)

They work hard. (English)

*Batiya butinyu. (Lunyala)*

*Wanafanya Kazi kwa bidii . (Kiswahili)*

**Example 3**

S+V+ O +C

Our teacher taught us how to study English

*Mwibali wefwe ahuwekesie husoma Lusungu. (Lunyala)*

***Mwalimu wetu alitufunza Kusoma Kizungu. (Kiswahili)***

The structures above are basic in English language and the study found that they matched L1 and L2 structures hence they facilitated the learning of L2. Through interview schedules, the teachers noted that where the structure of Lunyala, Kiswahili and English was same, it was easy to teach the syntactic structure. Example 1 to 3 show cases of similarities between L1 and L2. Lunyala and Kiswahili are agglutinative languages where morphemes were used to show the grammatical categories such as tense, number and person. There were instances where the structure of L1 and L2 had differences in terms of structure thus making the learning of L2 difficult. The data collected reflected cases of direct translation as shown in the examples below:

**Example 1:**

As soon as I was leaving the house *my mum beat me a phone. (English)*

**ie my mum rang me**

*Mama wanje yahupie isimu (Lunyala)*

*Mama yangu alinipigia Simu. (Kiswahili)*

**Example 2:**

The previous night *we had slept hungry. (English)* **We didn't have dinner**

*Hukone injala (Lunyala)*

*Tulilala njaa (Kiswahili)*

**Example 3:**

The people of our village *have hunger. (English)*

*Avandu voo olusoma bali ne injaala (Lunyala)*

**4.2 Ways of improving on the teaching of English language to Lunyala and Kiswahili speakers in Navakholo Sub-county in Kakamega County****4.2.1: Linguistic environment**

Linguistic environment is a crucial factor that shapes the development of language in the early stages of life. The teachers noted that Parents and other primary caregivers have an influence on children's L2 in the early years. The study found that maternal variants have more chance of being transmitted, due to the mother's central role in the education of children. The parents' attitudes, goals, and behaviours influence children's developing language skills, language socialization, perceptions of the value of L1, and maintenance of L1. Moreover, the study found the input patterns shape the children's use of language. The variety of language parents choose, give children important cues on accepted and preferred language choice. Learners whose parents

could communicate in English to them reflected less negative transfer as compared to children whose parents were illiterate. Home environment was considered as an important factor in development of cognition. The teachers noted the family should provide inputs for children to learn language. Teachers on the other hand should provide learners with resources they can manipulate. Following these points' teachers noted they provided learners with resources they could touch hence helping them to build their vocabulary and more so others noted to have embraced technology in the teaching of English.

#### **4.2.2: Training transfer**

Another factor that may hinder positive transfer of L1 to L2 is Training transfer. That is the lack of formal instruction in English. This has led to idiosyncratic languages among learners. The absence of formal instruction leads to fossilization. Incorrect teaching method can prevent successful second language learning in the sense that the use of inadequate teaching methodologies has also been suggested as an explanation for the occurrence of fossilization. Thus, Education stake holders should polish their speeches because they are also role models in English learning environment.

#### **4.2.3: Motivation**

The data collected also showed that motivation is an important factor in L2 learning. Language learning motivation means the motivation to learn (and acquire) L2. The teachers agreed that pupils' perceptions towards English language were a factor affecting acquisition of the language. Moreover, in an interview schedule; teachers reported that motivation was an integral part in the achievement of learning of English as a second language. Teachers reported that learners who had interest to learn English language acquired it faster than those that did not. Teachers through interviews reported that when it comes to teaching language through visual aids the pupils were highly motivated. Therefore, motivation is very important since it energized the learners. Teachers reported that the setting of language class and availability of learning material also played an important role in enhancing the learning and acquisition of English. In the data collected the study further established that availability of the teaching/learning resources materials was a factor affecting the acquisition of English. The teachers also reported that through observation the learners who had interest or curiosity had a strong desire for L2 learning.

#### **4.2.4. Teaching Strategies**

Teaching strategies are techniques used by teachers to teach pupils language. The data collected shows that teaching methods in English was also a factor that contributed to the language acquisition, as indicated by the majority (66.7%) who agreed to the statement. The data shows that when language teachers provide appropriate and effective learning experiences for the pupils in their classrooms this enhanced learning and acquisition of second language. When language teaching strategies are effective learners make faster progress and they rarely transfer L1 negatively. The strategies a language teacher uses have a big impact on language learning. The study established that the methods used to teach English were also responsible for the rate of acquisition of English, as indicated by the majority (38.9%) who strongly agreed and (27.8% who agreed.

#### 4.2.5 Curriculum

The curriculum and School policies were also considered as factors affecting the language acquisition, as indicated by the majority (38.9%) of the respondents, who agreed, as compared to (22.2%) who disagreed strongly. Teachers noted that another factor that promoted the acquisition of language learning was the curriculum that was appropriate for their needs. Teachers emphasize on the need to learn English language as stated in the curriculum and this later affects the interests of children to learn English language. Moreover, English language has been given institutional support in Media and schools and learners relate to it in every context. The children are therefore excited to learn English language since they see meaningful connections to their lives that enhance their interest to learn it.

#### 5.0: Conclusion

This study is an attempt to examine fossilization processes in Lunyala-Kiswahili learners as they acquire English language in Navakholo subcounty; Kakamega county. The study found significant correlations between Lunyala-Kiswahili and English language across three fossilization processes; phonological, morphological, and syntactic processes. The study also investigated the ways of enhancing the teaching of L2 in Navakholo subcounty. The study found that all sociolinguistic factors enhance the acquisition of L2 language. The study found there are various factors that can promote the teaching of English language ranging from linguistic environment to curriculum development. Learners produced greater cross-linguistic transfer between Lunyala, Kiswahili and English reflecting syntactic and phonological awareness. The study concludes that L1 plays an important role in the acquisition of L2. Therefore, the researchers recommend that the government should fully implement the teaching of L1 which has a positive impact to the learning of second language.

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