



Relationship Between Proficiency and Interference in Second Language

B.P. Abhishek^{a, *}



^a Centre of Speech-Language Sciences, AIISH, Mysuru, Karnataka 570006, India.

* Corresponding author Ph: +91 8073534767 ; Email: abhishekbp@aiishmysore.in / abhiraajaradhya@gmail.com

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Abstract: Bilingualism is viewed as alternative use of two languages in day-to-day context. Earlier views of bilingualism assumed the bilinguals to have equal proficiency in L1 as well as L2, while the recent views in bilingualism suggests that a bilingual can have competence to any degree in his/her second language. The competence factor is also called proficiency. In individuals who have limited proficiency, the domain language is believed to exert interference on the weaker language. Interference can be of two main types lexical interference and grammatical interference. Lexical interference is manifested through borrowing, while grammatical determined through incorrect subject-verb agreement and incorrect usage of PNG markers. The study aimed at determining the relationship between interference and proficiency levels on conversation, narration and picture description tasks. 40 participants were considered for the study, LEAP Q was administered on these participants and they were divided into high and low proficient speakers based on rating on LEAP Q. The results suggested that the interference was more for low proficiency group in regard to both grammatical as well as lexical interference. The amount of interference did not vary much with respect to the three different linguistic tasks.

Keywords: Bilinguals, Proficiency, Interference.

About the Author



Dr. Abhishek currently works as Assistant Professor at the Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Centre of Speech Language Sciences at AIISH Mysore. He was formerly working as Associate Professor & Research Coordinator at the Nitte Institute of Speech and Hearing, an institute under Nitte Deemed to be University and at All India Institute of Speech and Hearing Mysore as Lecturer in Speech Sciences. He has several research publications under his credit. His area of interest includes Language processing and language disorders in adults.

1. Introduction

Bilingualism is defined as the ability to use two or more languages. Earlier it was assumed that a person should have the equal competences in both the languages known. This notion has changed over time. The competence in the second language may vary with each individual from a basic proficiency level to native like proficiency. Bilingualism offers advantages to an individual as he/she will have the flexibility to switch over the two languages and express the concept in both the languages.

Language processing in bilingualism is an issue under debate as the number of lexicons possessed by a bilingual is still under discussion. Some proponents believe the bilinguals will have a single lexicon governing the access in both the languages, while others opine that there are two separate lexicons to represent each language known to a bilingual. Current research in this direction favors the shared representation view. The lexical access of bilinguals also has drawn considerable amount of interest, it is believed that there is an interlocutor which identifies the language in use and suppress the lexical nodes of the language not under use and activate nodes of language

being used. Due to shared representations or due to interruption in the functioning of interlocutor or low proficiency of one language in relationship to the other interference arises.

Interference refers to the interruption offered by a language to either the competence or the performance based aspects of the other language. Usually when a bilingual is a dominant bilingual (having more proficiency in one language) compared to the other language interference arises. Interference can be at three levels (a) Grammatical interference occurs when the first language interferes with the second language in aspects such as word order, use of determinants, pronouns etc. (b) Lexical interference occurs when there is borrowing of words from the other language and the sounds used have phonological properties of the other language. (c) Phonological interference is the third type and it arises when the accent, stress pattern, rhythm pattern of one language influences the other language.

The nature of borrowing words from other language and its resultant can be understood by carrying out a detailed linguistic analysis of a language. This analysis would reveal inputs on the finally accepted usage and details on how it is expressed in one language, usually the dominant one, or as whole new word which has influence of both the languages. So bilingual interference can induce changes in both the languages and sometimes may create a new system that functions between the two languages and this new system can have a high relevance, due to successful integration, resulting in disappearing of originally contributed languages in that area.

Many studies have been carried out on interference. Researchers have compared the extent of interference in adults and children Ellis (1997) carried out a study on 108 participants in the age range of 8-18 years to determine the influence on L2. He reported influence of L1 over L2. Obler (1978) carried out a study on 35 adult speakers of English and French and 28 speakers of English and German, she claimed that the extent of lexical interference was more in languages which were similar compared to languages which were dissimilar. Beardsmore (1982) studied 168 bilingual participants, the age of these participants ranged from 20- 30 years. He carried out a detailed study to document the difficulties in these second language learners in terms of phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L2 in relationship to L1. The findings of the study showed that grammar of L1 had a greater impact on L2 compared to other domains considered for the study.

Ecke and Herwig (2001) studied multilingual adult participants and reported that the multilingual participants tend to depend on linguistic information from both native as well as non-native languages that are linguistically similar as well as dissimilar languages showing that interference is just not confined to similar languages, dissimilar languages can also have an impact, the extent of interference is dependent on proficiency Poulisse and Bongaerts, 1994 studied bilingual speech production in relationship to L1 in terms of the usage of content and function words in L2 and borrowing of words. The researchers reported the usage of content words and functional words in L1, while in L2 the participants used more content words only. The borrowing of words was more in L2

The researchers have studied the interference on comprehension and expression domains. They have studied about the three different types of interferences in both children as well as adults (Ecke & Herwig, 2001; Cabaruan & Cue, 2019; Durlík, Szewczyk, Muszyński & Wodniecka, 2016; Wang, Zhou, Huang & Yang, 2018). However, it is believed that phonological interference is very subjective and easily not recognizable, owing to this fact there are more studies on lexical and grammatical interference. It is a well-established fact that proficiency and language interference are related to each other but the relationship between these two terms as to whether they are linear or not is unclear and has to be studied.

Need - There is dearth of literature on the relationship between language proficiency and interference hence studies determining the relationship unveiling the relationship between the two parameters has to be carried out. Language interference may vary as a function of tasks being used; the present study also considers this. Kannada-English bilingual condition though common, may be different from the bilingual context in Western context hence the results of western studies cannot be generalized

Aim- To study lexical and grammatical interference in low and high proficient bilingual speakers on conversation, narration and picture description tasks.



2. Method

2.1 Bilingual proficiency estimation was the first step

It was carried by employing self-rating on Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (Ramya & Goswami, 2009). Only the speaking proficiency was taken into consideration to rate high and low proficiency. LEAP Q uses 4 point rating. Rating of 0 and 1 was decided to be low and 2 and 3 was regarded to be high. Total of 20 high proficient (10 males and 10 females) and 20 low proficient speakers (10 male and 10 female speakers) in the age range of 18-25 years were enrolled for the study. The testing was carried out English (L2), the order of testing was counterbalanced to counteract practice effect.

2.2 Procedure

The participants were asked to perform three tasks. In the first tasks they were asked to answer 10 questions by using sentences as much as possible. In the second task, they were asked to narrate about school and college life. The final task was picture description task. Picnic picture of Western Aphasia Battery was used (Ravikumar, Vijayashree & Shyamala, 2001). The samples were recorded and the data was transcribed. The data was analyzed for grammatical interference in terms of subject-verb disagreement, incorrect use of PNG markers and incorrect subject verb order while the number of borrowed words reflected lexical interference.

3. Results

The results were analyzed in terms of proficiency of speakers (high versus low) tasks considered (picture description, narration and conversation task) and the amount of interference (lexical versus grammatical interference). For the low proficiency group, the lexical interference values in terms of percentage were 22%, 19% and 20% for conversation, picture description and narration tasks respectively. For high proficiency group, the lexical interference values in percentage were 7%, 10% and 12%. (Figure 1). The grammatical interference was determined through incorrect usage of PNG markers and in correct subject verb agreement. The combined values for the three tasks were 46%, 49% and 58% for the low proficiency group. While the combined values for the same three tasks were 9%, 12% and 12%. for the high proficiency group (Figure 2).

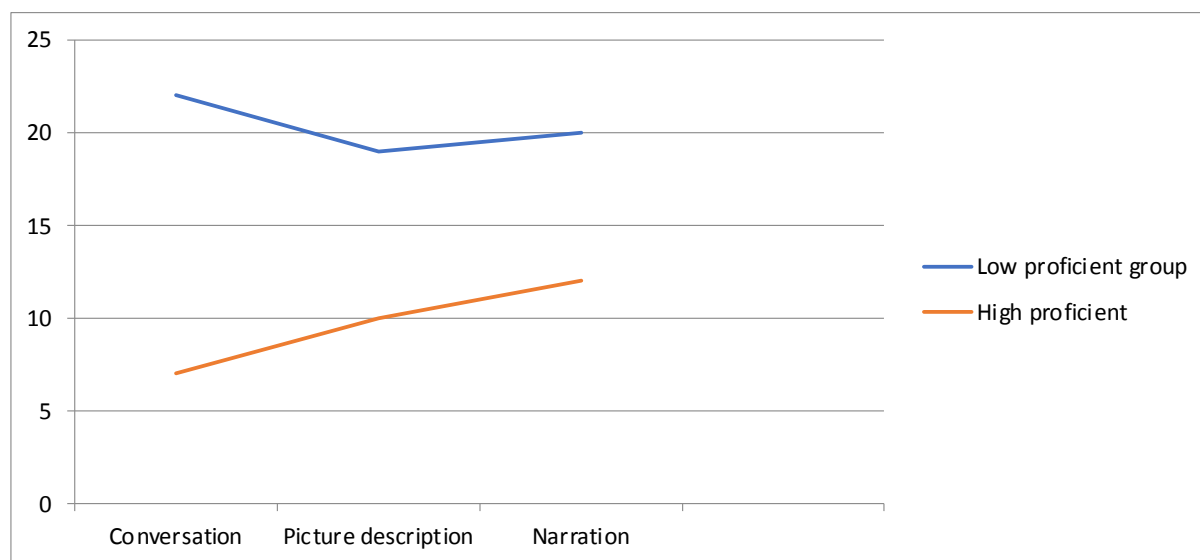


Figure 1 Lexical Interference in Low proficient and high proficient speakers (in percentage).

Further independent sample T test was carried out to see if there was any significant difference between the groups with respect to the interference levels (lexical and grammatical interference on all three tasks combined) and the t values obtained for lexical interference and for grammatical interference were 3.02 and 3.11 respectively. The corresponding p values showed that the difference two groups were significant. Thus there was a significant difference between the low and high proficient groups on lexical interference as well as grammatical interference.

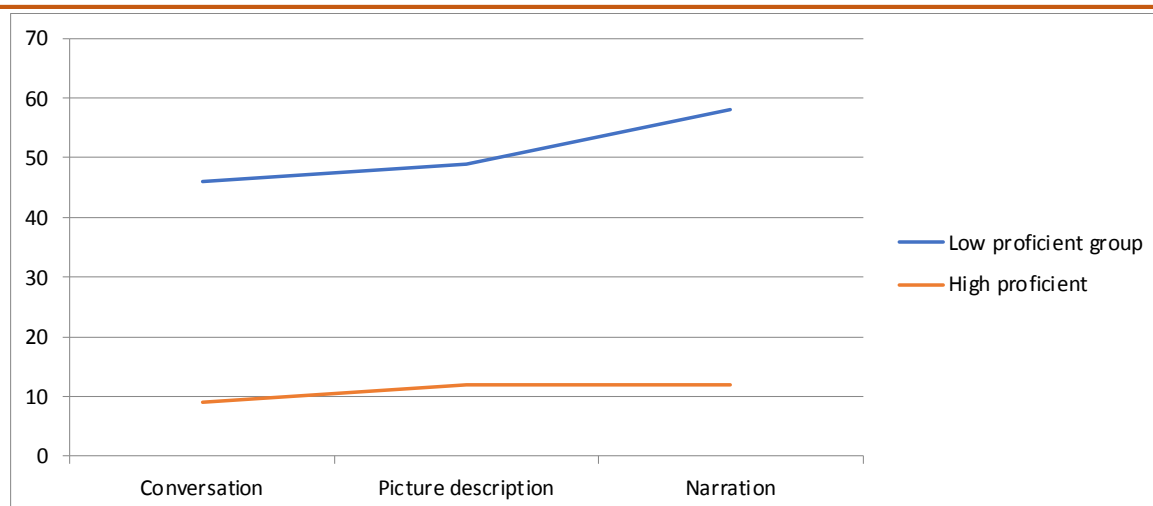


Figure 2 Lexical Interference in Low proficient and high proficient speakers (in percentage).

4. Discussion

The results showed that the interference was more in low proficiency group compared to high proficiency group. The interference level was more for low proficient group and less for the high proficiency group, this notion strengthens the traditional notion that higher the proficiency, lower the interference and vice versa. For both the groups grammatical interference was more than lexical interference. Lexical interference and grammatical interference were more on narration tasks followed by picture description and conversation. This can be attributed to the phrase length. Phrase length was more for narration task hence the interference may also have been more. The finding of the study was in consonance with the findings of Ellis (1997) who reported interference in the second language in young speakers. Ellis's study considered participants from 8-18 years while the current study considered participants from 18-30 years. The direction of interference was noted in this study and it was reported that first language caused more interference to second language. This was in lines with the findings of the current study, however the difference was that the proficiency factor was not accounted in this study and the participants of the current study were divided into high and low proficient and the interference was estimated as a function of proficiency. The finding of the current study was also in consonance with the findings of Beardsmore's study of 1982. The proficiency levels were not estimated in this study also. However, this study accounted for type of interference in regard to the domains of phonology, vocabulary and grammar. The factor of proficiency was taken into consideration in the study carried out by Ecke and Herwig (2001). These researchers opined that the extent of interference is dependent on proficiency which hold good for the current study as the low proficiency group in the current study also exhibited more of interference. The current study considered the effect of proficiency on interference in the expression domain similar to the findings of Ecke & Herwig, 2001; Cabaruan & Cue, 2019; Durlík, Szewczyk, Muszyński & Wodniecka, 2016; Wang, Zhou, Huang & Yang, 2018. The study can be extended on younger (<18 years) and older participants (>30 years). More number of participants can be considered to generalize the findings of the current study.

5. Conclusions

The study aimed at determining the relationship between interference and proficiency levels on conversation, narration and picture description tasks. 40 participants were considered for the study and based LEAP Q ratings, participants were divided into high and low proficient speakers. Lexical interference was determined through the usage of borrowed words and grammatical inference was determined through incorrect subject-verb agreement and incorrect usage of PNG markers. The lexical interference value for the three tasks was more for low proficient group compared to the high proficient group while the grammatical interference value was also more for low proficient group showing that this group had more interference compared to the high proficient group. Further the statistic (independent sample T test) also showed that there was significant difference between the groups. Thus it can be inferred that the proficiency levels would have a direct bearing on the interference levels; lower the proficiency, greater would be the interference.



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Does this article screened for similarity?

Yes.

Conflict of interest

The Author has no conflicts of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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