

**IMPACTS OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON THE ACQUISITION  
OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG UNIVERSITY OF BENIN STUDENTS**

**Folashade Juliet OROWOLE  
EDU2102273**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY**

**DECEMBER 2025**

**IMPACTS OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON THE ACQUISITION  
OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG UNIVERSITY OF BENIN STUDENTS**

**Folashade Juliet OROWOLE  
EDU2102273**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY  
OF BENIN, BENIN CITY IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE IN EDUCATION (B.A.Ed.)  
ENGLISH AND LITERATURE**

**DECEMBER 2025**

## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by Folashade Juliet OROWOLE with the matriculation number EDU2102273 in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Benin. It is adequate in scope and quality for the fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Bachelor of Arts Degree in Education (B.A.Ed.) English and Literature.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dr Philip O. Isanbor**  
(Project Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dr O.I Nyorere**  
(Project Coordinator)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Prof. R. B. Danner**  
(Head of Department)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

This research work is dedicated to the cherished and everlasting memory of my beloved late father, Chief Richard Orimisan Orowole whose deep belief in the power of education and foundational guidance continue to inspire my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I offer my profound thanks and adoration to Almighty God, the author of my life, the ultimate source of my strength, wisdom, knowledge and perseverance. It was through His divine grace, sustenance and faithfulness that I was able to navigate the demands of my studies and complete this work. Without His presence and guidance, this significant milestone would not have been possible. To Him alone be all the glory and honour.

I express my deepest appreciation and respect to my esteemed Supervisor, Dr P.O. Isanbor whose exceptional dedication, empathy and patience were absolutely instrumental throughout this entire research process. Your critical insight, meticulous reviews and invaluable guidance not only shaped the quality and direction of this project but also profoundly influenced my development and growth as a researcher. Thank you for believing in my potential and for providing the structure and encouragement needed to transform abstract ideas into this final dissertation.

I also express my sincere gratitude to the Dean of Faculty of Education, Prof. O.K.Omoroguiwa, the Head of the Department of Educational Foundations, Prof. R.B. Danner, my project coordinator, Dr O.I. Nyorere, my course advisor, Dr. (Mrs.) O.D. Osa-omorie and all the esteemed lecturers in the Department of Educational

Foundations for their invaluable guidance and support. A special note of thanks also goes to the dedicated lecturers in the Department of English and Literature for their profound insights and contributions. Your teachings have been instrumental in this endeavour.

To my pillars of strength, my dear mummy, Mrs Oluwarantimi Patience Emorioloye and my dear mummy, Mrs. Fokansi Margret Orowole, no words can adequately convey my gratitude. Your tireless sacrifices, consistent fervent prayers, unwavering belief in my capabilities and unconditional love have been the single greatest motivation throughout my entire life and academic career. This achievement is a testament to your immense devotion, and I proudly share this success, which is as much yours as it is mine.

To my wonderful siblings, Mr Akinyele Friday Orowole, Mr Olushola Godwin Orowole, Miss Oluwaseun Victoria Orowole, Mr Emiloju Emmanuel Orowole and the baby of the house, Miss Sehindemi Racheal Orowole, thank you for the constant love, encouragement and the moments of laughter that helped relieve the pressures of academic life. Your understanding and support have always provided a warm, stable and constant source of comfort and motivation.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my dear daddy and mentor, Evangelist Oluwafemi Emmanuel Ajayi who served as a constant source of divine wisdom, counsel and care throughout my academic life. His prayers, timely advice and unconditional support

provided the spiritual and emotional strength needed to navigate the challenges of my studies. Thank you for being a true father figure and a profound blessing on this journey.

I must also acknowledge the support and encouragement received from a friend indeed, Mr Tumininu Isaiah Ogonnoh. Thank you for the significant presence you were in my life during crucial periods of this academic journey, including the sacrifices you made and the invaluable encouragement you offered, which provided a constant source of support that helped me to persist and ultimately achieve this goal.

A very special note of thanks goes to my dear roommate, Miss Omodara Juliet Omoboni. Your companionship, steadfast support, genuine encouragement and the countless collaborative study sessions we shared made the often challenging university experience manageable, memorable and much brighter.

I am immensely grateful to my roommate's parents, for their extraordinary kindness and the familial support and care they so generously extended to me during this academic journey. Their open hearts provided a cherished sense of belonging and I pray that God blesses and rewards their generosity abundantly.

To my beloved sister, Mrs. Olamide Joy Ogungbeje, thank you for the sacrifices, for your invaluable guidance and for the strong and encouraging presence you have always been in my life.

To my dear cousin brother, Mr Omotunde Emmanuel Sunday, thank you for your steadfast support and the counsel you offered me throughout my academic sojourn at the University of Benin. Your presence and advice were always deeply appreciated.

Finally, I acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude everyone who contributed, whether directly or indirectly, to the successful completion of my academic journey at the University of Benin. This extensive group includes my supportive friends, Gofamint Student Fellowship, thoughtful well-wishers and all those whose good thoughts, prayers and assistance saw me successfully through this journey. Thank you all profoundly for being an essential part of my story.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>CERTIFICATION</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Research Questions	4
Purpose of the Study	5
Significance of the Study	5
Scope and Delimitations of the Study	7
Definition of Terms	9
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</b>	
Theoretical Framework	11
Conceptual Framework	15
Concept of Language	15
Concept of Mother Tongue	18
Concept of Interference	22

Concept of Mother Tongue Interference	28
Factors that Influence Mother Tongue Interference	37
Impacts of Mother Tongue Interference	43
	<b>PAGE</b>
Summary of Reviewed Litreature	47
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	
Research Design	49
Population of the Study	50
Sample and Sampling Technique	51
Research Instrument	52
Validity of the Instrument	54
Reliability of the Instrument	55
Method of Data Collection	56
Method of Data Analysis	57
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS</b>	
Presentation of Results	58
Discussion of Findings	68
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
Summary	70
Conclusion	71

Recommendations	71
<b>REFERENCE</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>76</b>

## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the impacts of mother tongue interference on the acquisition of English among students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). A key challenge in second language learning, mother tongue interference can manifest across phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical levels, potentially hindering effective communication and academic performance. Descriptive and quantitative research approaches were adopted, utilizing a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The sample comprised 100 randomly selected undergraduate students from various faculties within the University of Benin. The findings revealed common grammatical structures from prevalent local languages were often transferred negatively into English sentences. Furthermore, the study identified that students with higher reported exposure to their mother tongues in non-academic settings showed a greater frequency of these interference-related errors. This suggests that the dominance of the mother tongue in daily life acts as a considerable barrier to achieving English language proficiency. The research confirms that mother tongue interference is a prominent factor affecting English language acquisition among University of Benin students. The study recommends that the English language curriculum be adapted to include targeted remedial strategies focusing on the specific areas of mother tongue interference, thereby facilitating a more efficient and accurate acquisition process.*

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the Study**

The acquisition of a second language (L2) is a complex and widely studied psycholinguistic phenomenon, significantly influenced by the learner's first language (L1) or mother tongue (MT). This influence, known as language transfer or interference, occurs when the established linguistic patterns and structures of the native language are either consciously or unconsciously mapped onto the target language, often resulting in systemic errors. This study is dedicated to investigating the specific impacts of Mother Tongue Interference on the acquisition of the English language among students enrolled at the University of Benin (UNIBEN).

In the Nigerian context, English occupies a pivotal role, serving as the official language of administration, commerce, and the primary medium of instruction across all levels of the educational system, including tertiary institutions like the University of Benin. Consequently, proficiency in English is not merely an academic requirement but a crucial prerequisite for academic success, professional mobility and effective national communication. The student population at University of Benin is linguistically diverse, representing a confluence of major and minor indigenous languages (e.g., Edo, Igbo, Yoruba, Urhobo, Hausa), which underscores the complex multilingual setting within which English is acquired and utilized. Despite the rigorous academic environment, observable

challenges in both oral and written English proficiency persist among students, suggesting a systemic difficulty in fully internalizing the target language norms.

The theoretical framework for analyzing these difficulties stems largely from Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA). Contrastive Analysis posits that the greater the structural differences between the mother tongue and second language, the more pronounced the difficulty and the higher the probability of interference errors. Interference manifests across various linguistic levels. Phonological interference involves the substitution of English sounds with their closest mother tongue equivalents which affect pronunciation and intonation. Syntactic interference involves the incorrect transfer of mother tongue word order and grammatical rules, leading to deviations in English sentence construction, particularly concerning verb-noun agreement or preposition usage. Lexical and semantic interference manifests as the literal translation of L1 idioms or concepts into English, known as calques, or the inappropriate application of English words based on the specific semantic interpretations of mother tongue.

While the general phenomenon of language interference is acknowledged in second language acquisition literature, its specific and quantifiable effects on advanced learners within the environment of a Nigerian university like University of Benin remain an area requiring deeper empirical investigation. Previous research often generalizes the problem across the secondary school level or a national spectrum, failing to capture the specific, recurring error patterns linked to distinct mother tongues (e.g., speakers of Edo versus Igbo)

at the university level. Furthermore, the correlation between the severity of these mother tongue interference errors and the students' overall academic performance in core university courses has not been adequately established. This research aims to address this gap by providing empirical evidence that identifies the prevalent forms and degrees of mother tongue interference, thereby generating targeted data crucial for developing more effective and culturally sensitive pedagogical interventions and language curriculum design within the University of Benin.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although English is the instructional medium in University of Benin, students frequently apply mother tongue patterns to spoken and written English, thereby mispronouncing sounds, misassigning tones and constructing sentences ungrammatically. The effects of mother tongue interference manifest in various aspects of language learning, leading to miscommunication, reduced self-confidence, suboptimal academic performance, reduced intelligibility and fluency in academic communication and barriers to academic success and professional readiness.

Despite growing evidence in educational settings across Nigeria, limited research targets the specific impacts of mother tongue interference among university students. This study addresses those gaps by profiling mother tongue interference incidence, its specific effects on English competence and strategies that learners employ to manage or mitigate interference. Stating the extent to which mother tongue interference affects the study of

English Language among University of Benin students is important for devising effective pedagogical strategies, curricular adjustments and intervention to mitigate these challenges.

This study aims to investigate the Impacts of Mother Tongue Interference on the Acquisition of English Language among University of Benin Students. By exploring the specific areas of interference and their effects, the research seeks to contribute to the understanding of the challenges faced by both students and educators in the pursuit of English Language proficiency.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the extent of mother tongue interference in spoken and written English language?
2. How aware are students of their own mother tongue interference during English use?
3. How does mother tongue interference impact academic performance in English-taught courses?
4. What are the effects of mother tongue interference on students' English language proficiency?
5. How do lecturers of English in University of Benin teach the impacts of mother tongue interference in English Language instructions?

## **Purpose of the Study**

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the primary areas of mother tongue interference in University of Benin students' English usage.
2. To measure the incidence and scope of mother tongue interference in speaking and writing.
3. To evaluate learners' awareness regarding mother tongue interference.
4. To assess the relationship between mother tongue interference and academic performance.
5. To assess the effects of mother tongue interference on University of Benin students' English language proficiency.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study holds great importance for several reasons, especially within the Nigerian educational context and more specifically at the University of Benin. English is the official language of instruction and administration in Nigerian universities, yet many students continue to struggle with mastering it effectively. This struggle is often due to the interference of their mother tongue, commonly referred to as Mother Tongue Interference (MTI).

By examining how mother tongue interference affects students at the University of Benin, this research sheds light on a linguistic phenomenon that influences everything

from grammar and pronunciation to sentence structure and overall communication skills. Understanding the depth and nature of this interference can help lecturers, curriculum planners and language instructors develop more effective strategies for teaching English as a second language.

Furthermore, the study is significant because it provides insights into how students' mother tongues, such as Benin, Esan, Urhobo, Yoruba, Calabar and others that are common in the region impact their English usage, both in writing and speaking. These insights can guide the development of tailored support systems like language clinics, remedial English programmes and awareness campaigns aimed at helping students overcome specific linguistic challenges.

On a broader scale, this research contributes to the ongoing academic discussion on second language acquisition in multilingual societies. It provides local evidence that may support or challenge existing theories of language transfer and interference. Additionally, it can be a valuable resource for other researchers interested in Nigerian English, sociolinguistics or comparative language studies.

Ultimately, this study aims to help students achieve better academic and professional success by addressing one of the core barriers to effective communication in English. It is not just about language; it is about empowering students with the tools they need to engage more confidently in both local and global environments.

## **Scope and Delimitations**

This study specifically explores the impacts of mother tongue interference on the acquisition of English language among students of the University of Benin (UNIBEN). As a federal institution located in the multilingual environment of southern Nigeria, UNIBEN hosts a diverse student population, many of whom speak indigenous languages such as Benin, Esan, Yoruba, Urhobo, Calabar, Ijaw and other local dialects as their first language. While English is the official language of instruction at the university, many students still face challenges in fully mastering the language due to the influence of their mother tongues.

## **Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

This study specifically explored the impacts of mother tongue interference on the acquisition of English language among students of the University of Benin. As a federal institution located in the multilingual environment of southern Nigeria, University of Benin hosts a diverse student population, many of whom speak indigenous languages such as Benin, Esan, Yoruba, Urhobo, Calabar, Ijaw and other local dialects as their first language. While English is the official language of instruction at the University of Benin, many students still face challenges in fully mastering the language due to the influence of their mother tongues.

This research also investigates word-for-word translation, literal expressions, and the inappropriate use of English words influenced by local meanings in native languages. It looks into how mother tongue interference shows up in students' academic essays, reports,

and exam answers, especially in areas like coherence, spelling, and clarity. Similarly, the research includes the challenges faced by students during oral presentation, discussions and verbal classroom interactions where the influence of mother tongue might affect fluency and correctness.

However, the research is strictly confined to the University of Benin. While mother tongue interference is a national issue, this study does not cover other universities or tertiary institutions. The findings, therefore, reflect the specific linguistic environment and educational setting of University of Benin. Only undergraduate students are considered in this study. Postgraduate students, academic staff, and non-teaching staff are excluded. This is because undergraduates are typically at different stages of English acquisition, and they represent the most active group involved in learning and academic usage of the language.

The study concentrates on English usage in formal academic contexts—such as essay writing, classroom participation, presentations, and exams. It does not extend to casual conversations, social media usage, or code-switching in informal settings. The data and observations for this study are drawn from a specific academic session at the University of Benin. As such, the findings represent a snapshot within that timeframe and do not attempt to track long-term changes in language acquisition over several years.

By narrowing the focus in this way, the study is able to provide in-depth, context-specific insights into how mother tongue interference affects English language acquisition at the University of Benin. These insights are expected to be useful not only for lecturers

and language instructors at University of Benin but also for language policy developers, educational planners and other researchers interested in second language learning within multilingual university settings.

### **Definition of Terms**

***Mother Tongue:*** This is the first language a person learns from birth, the language spoken at home, usually by parents or caregivers. It's often tied to a person's culture and identity and is the language they are most fluent and comfortable with.

***Interference:*** In language learning, interference happens when rules or patterns from a person's mother tongue affect how they use a new language. For example, someone might apply grammar or pronunciation from their native language to English, sometimes causing errors.

***Curriculum:*** A curriculum is the official plan for what students are meant to learn in a particular subject or course. It outlines the topics, goals, methods, and materials used to guide teaching and learning, like a roadmap for both teachers and students.

***Second Language Acquisition (SLA):*** This is the process of learning a language that's not your native one, like a Nigerian student learning English after growing up speaking Edo or Yoruba. It involves gradually understanding and using the new language through exposure, study, and practice.

***Language Transfer:*** This happens when someone brings habits or patterns from their first language into a second language. It can be helpful or harmful. For example, if your mother

tongue has similar rules to English, it might make learning easier. But if the rules clash, it can cause mistakes, that's when interference kicks in.

***Phonological Interference:*** This is when the sound system of your native language affects how you pronounce words in a second language. For instance, someone might pronounce English words the way they'd sound in their mother tongue, which can make their speech unclear or sound accented.

***Lexical Interference:*** This refers to word-level mix-ups. It happens when someone uses words from their first language or translates them directly while speaking or writing in English. Sometimes, the meaning or use of the word doesn't quite fit, leading to confusion or errors.

***Syntactic Interference:*** This involves sentence structure. It happens when a speaker applies the grammar or word order of their native language to English. For example, putting the verb in the wrong place or forming questions incorrectly, because that's how it's done in their first language.

***Semantic Interference:*** This has to do with meaning. It occurs when a person's understanding of a word or phrase in their mother tongue influences how they interpret or use words in English. This can lead to misunderstandings, especially with words that have multiple meanings or no direct translation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Literature for this study was reviewed under these subheadings:

- Theoretical Framework
- Conceptual Framework
- Concept of Language
- Concept of Mother Tongue
- Concept of Interference
- Concept of Mother Tongue Interference
- Factors That Influence Mother Tongue Interference
- Impacts of Mother Tongue Interference on English Language Acquisition
- Summary of Reviewed Literature

#### **Theoretical Framework**

##### *Acculturation Theory*

John Schumann's acculturation model states that some second language (L2) learners do not progress beyond the early stages of linguistic acquisition with a target language because of social and psychological distance between the speaker's culture and the target culture. H. Douglas Brown defines social distance as "the cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures which come into contact within an individual" (159). Schumann believed that "the more positively the person identified with and is psychologically integrated into the target language group, the more likely the learner is to succeed in L2 acquisition" (Jia et al. 253). Conversely, a lack of acculturation or cultural

adaptation, according to the model, can lead to linguistic fossilization or pidginization (Ellis 40).

Early notions of acculturation frame it as a one-way street affecting learners as they experience and adapt to the new culture, shedding their own cultural identity in the process (Jia et al. 253). Later notions of acculturation posit that 1) heritage culture is not displaced by a target culture and 2) adaptation to a new culture actually creates bi-directional change. According to David L. Sam and John W. Berry,

*“Acculturating individuals and groups bring cultural and psychological qualities with them to the new society, and the new society also has a variety of such qualities. No cultural group remains unchanged following culture contact; acculturation is a two-way interaction, resulting in actions and reactions to the contact situation”*

While distinct, Schumann's Acculturation Model complements other Second Language Acquisition theories, such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Both theories acknowledge the importance of comprehensible input. However, Schumann's model places a stronger emphasis on the social and psychological context in which input is received and processed. Krashen focuses more on the internal mental processes of acquisition, while Schumann's model underscores the external factors that facilitate or hinder access to that crucial input and the motivation to utilize it. Some scholars argue that Schumann's theory offers a more active role for the learner compared to Krashen's more passive "input"

While John Schumann is most closely associated with the Acculturation Model in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), and Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model is a prominent Second Language Acquisition theory, it's important to clarify that Krashen's model does not directly focus on acculturation in the same way Schumann's does. Krashen emphasizes comprehensible input, natural order, and affective filters, with a more internal, cognitive focus.

However, other scholars have contributed to understanding the role of social and cultural factors, including acculturation, in second language learning. While they might not explicitly use the term "Acculturation Theory" as a named model in the same way Schumann did, their work often touches upon or implicitly supports the idea that integration into the target language community and culture is crucial for successful Second Language Acquisition. Here are some scholars and theoretical perspectives that relate to acculturation, beyond Schumann and Krashen:

Brown (1980) also discussed acculturation as "the process of being adapted to a new culture," involving a new orientation of thinking and feeling for the L2 learner. He highlighted how culture is an integral part of human beings, and therefore acculturation takes a deeper turn when language is involved. Brown's work often reinforces Schumann's ideas about the significant relationship between acculturation and L2 learning success. He also proposed the Optimal Distance Model, which suggests that there's an optimal social

and psychological distance for successful acculturation and language acquisition, avoiding both too much and too little integration.

Sociocultural Theory (e.g., Lev Vygotsky, James Lantolf): While not an "acculturation theory" per se, sociocultural theory, particularly as applied to Second Language Acquisition by scholars like James Lantolf, strongly emphasizes the social and cultural mediation of learning. This perspective views language learning as a social process where knowledge is constructed through interaction within a cultural context.

Learning is a social process that becomes internalized. Interaction with more skilled members of the target language community (native speakers or more proficient learners) within a "zone of proximal development" is crucial. This aligns with the spirit of acculturation in that it highlights the necessity of engaging with the target culture and its speakers for language development. Language is seen as a cultural tool.

Michael Long (Interaction Hypothesis): Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1983, 1996) emphasizes the role of interaction in making input comprehensible and facilitating acquisition. While not directly an acculturation theory, it strongly supports the idea that active engagement and negotiation of meaning with native speakers are vital. This negotiation often involves understanding and adapting to cultural norms of communication, thereby implicitly linking to acculturation. Long argued that modified interaction, where speakers adjust their language to be understood by learners (e.g., through clarification

requests, confirmation checks), helps learners notice gaps in their interlanguage and acquire new forms.

Other researchers in interlanguage pragmatics and cross-cultural communication: Many scholars in these fields explore how learners adapt their communicative behaviors to the norms of the target language culture. This involves understanding and adopting new ways of expressing politeness, making requests, giving feedback, etc., which are inherently acculturative processes. While they might not propose grand "theories of acculturation," their detailed studies contribute to our understanding of how learners integrate into the target culture's communicative practices.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Concept of Language**

The concept of language is truly fascinating, and it's something that sets humans apart. At its core, language is a systematic means of communication. It's how we convey our ideas, feelings, and thoughts to one another, using conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or written marks that have understood meanings.

Think about it: language isn't just about making noise. It's a highly structured system that includes both grammar and vocabulary. This allows us to create an infinite number of sentences and refer to things that aren't even physically present, whether it's something in the past, the future, or even a purely abstract concept. This ability is often called "productivity" and "displacement," and they're key characteristics of human language.

What's particularly remarkable is the sheer diversity of human languages. We have somewhere between 5,000 and 7,000 distinct languages spoken around the world, each with its own unique cultural and historical nuances. And while we often think of spoken language, it's important to remember that language can also be signed, written, or even conveyed through tactile means like braille. It's truly modality-independent.

Philosophically, "language" can refer to our cognitive ability to learn and use these complex communication systems, or it can describe the actual set of rules that make up these systems. All languages rely on a process called "semiosis," which is how signs are related to particular meanings. Over time, various theories have emerged to explain how language developed and how we acquire it. Some theories suggest a singular origin, perhaps from a "proto-world language," while others propose that language arose independently in multiple regions. There are also theories that focus on the social and labor-based aspects of language, suggesting it evolved from sounds made during cooperative tasks.

When it comes to how individuals learn language, we see different perspectives too. Behaviorists, like B.F. Skinner, argued that language is learned through reinforcement and imitation. On the other hand, linguists like Noam Chomsky proposed the concept of "Universal Grammar," suggesting that humans are born with an innate capacity for language, a kind of "language acquisition device." Ultimately, language is central to the human experience. It's not just a tool for communication; it's deeply intertwined with our

thought processes, our culture, and how we construct our social reality and identity. The study of language, known as linguistics, continues to uncover the incredible complexities and profound impact of this uniquely human phenomenon.

Ferdinand de Saussure (early 20th century) is often considered the "father of modern linguistics," Saussure, in his posthumously published *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), introduced fundamental concepts like the distinction between *langue* (the abstract language system) and *parole* (actual speech acts). He also emphasized the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign (the relationship between a word and its meaning) and the idea of language as a system of differences.

Noam Chomsky (mid to late 20th century) revolutionized linguistics with his theory of generative grammar. Starting with works like *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), he proposed that humans are born with an innate "universal grammar" (UG) a set of principles and parameters that guides language acquisition. He distinguished between competence (a speaker's underlying knowledge of the language) and performance (their actual use of it).

B.F. Skinner (mid 20th century) is a prominent behaviourist. Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour* (1957) argued that language acquisition is primarily a result of operant conditioning, where children learn language through reinforcement and imitation. While his views have been largely challenged by Chomsky's nativist approach, Skinner's work highlighted the role of environmental factors in language development.

Lev Vygotsky (early 20th century) is a Russian psychologist, particularly in works like *Thought and Language* (published posthumously in English in 1962), emphasized the crucial role of social interaction and cultural context in language development. He proposed that language is not just a tool for expressing thought but also a primary means of shaping it, and that cognitive development is deeply intertwined with social communication.

Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf (mid 20th century) are two linguists associated with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which suggests that the structure of a language influences its speakers' worldview and cognition. While often debated and interpreted in various ways, their work, particularly Whorf's essays like "Language, Thought, and Reality" (published posthumously in 1956), brought attention to the profound impact of linguistic structures on how we perceive and categorize the world.

Michael Halliday (late 20th century) developed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which focuses on language as a resource for making meaning in social contexts. His work, including *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985), emphasizes how grammatical choices are tied to communicative purposes and social functions, looking at language not just as a set of rules but as a tool for achieving goals.

### **The Concept of Mother Tongue**

The concept of "mother tongue" is a really fascinating and deeply personal one. It's something that often gets talked about, but its true significance can be quite profound. At

its core, your mother tongue is quite simply the first language you learned as a child, typically at home from your parents or guardians. It's the language that shaped your very first understanding of the world around you, your initial way of communicating your needs and thoughts.

Think about it: it's the language of your first lullabies, your first stories, the words your parents used to comfort you or teach you. Because of this early and immersive exposure, your mother tongue often becomes the language you feel most comfortable and emotionally connected to. It's the language where you truly feel "at home," where you can express the most complex ideas or the deepest emotions without effort or hesitation.

Beyond just being the "first" language, your mother tongue plays a huge role in shaping your identity. It links you to your family, your culture, and your heritage. It's the vehicle through which traditions are passed down, through which stories from generations past are shared, and often where your sense of belonging is rooted. For many, it's not just a tool for communication, but a fundamental part of who they are.

There's also a strong cognitive aspect. The way you learn your mother tongue lays down the groundwork for how your brain processes language in general. It influences your thinking patterns, and even how you might later learn other languages. Studies often show that a strong foundation in your mother tongue can actually make it easier to acquire new languages because you've already developed crucial linguistic skills.

While the definition seems straightforward, there can be nuances. For example, some children grow up in bilingual households and effectively have two "mother tongues" if they've learned both simultaneously and are equally proficient and comfortable in both. And sometimes, in cases of migration or significant life changes, a person might lose some fluency in their original mother tongue and adopt a new dominant language, though that initial connection often remains in some form.

Ultimately, the mother tongue is far more than just a set of words and grammar rules. It's a powerful link to our past, a cornerstone of our identity, and the language through which we often experience the world most authentically. It's a truly precious part of our human experience. It is fascinating how the concept of "Mother Tongue" that first language we absorb as children has been explored and understood by thinkers throughout history. While the term itself might not always have been explicitly used, the underlying idea of a primary, formative language has been a constant point of inquiry.

Imagine a time when people were starting to think deeply about what makes a nation, a culture, truly unique. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) a German philosopher, was at the forefront of this. He argued passionately that language is deeply connected with a people's soul and identity, what he called their "Volksgeist" or "spirit of the people." He didn't necessarily use "mother tongue" specifically, but his work laid the groundwork for understanding why this initial language is so fundamental to who we are, shaping our very way of thinking and expressing ourselves.

Building on Herder's ideas, Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767-1835) another influential German linguist and philosopher, went even further. He proposed that language isn't just a way to communicate; it's a "Weltanschauung" – a worldview. Think of it as a lens through which we perceive and organize reality. Your first language, your mother tongue, isn't just a set of words; it structures your thoughts, your very understanding of the world. It's truly a profound insight into how deeply integrated language is with our cognitive processes.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) a Swiss scholar, introduced crucial distinctions that help us understand how any language, including our mother tongue, functions. He separated "langue" (the abstract, underlying system of a language) from "parole" (individual acts of speech). While he wasn't directly focused on acquisition, his structuralist approach showed us that the "mother tongue" isn't just learned by rote; it's an entire, intricate system that a child unconsciously internalizes, forming the foundation for all their future language use.

Moving into the realm of developmental psychology, the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) offered incredibly valuable insights. He emphasized the social nature of learning and the critical role of language in cognitive development. For Vygotsky, language isn't just for talking; it's a tool for thinking. Children learn their mother tongue through interaction with their social environment, and this language then becomes internalized as "inner speech," shaping their thoughts and problem-solving abilities. It

highlights how the mother tongue is the primary medium for a child's entire intellectual and social growth.

A giant in modern linguistics, the American scholar Noam Chomsky (1928) revolutionized our understanding of language acquisition. He proposed the theory of Universal Grammar (UG), suggesting that humans are born with an innate capacity for language. This "Language Acquisition Device" (LAD) means we are pre-wired, in a sense, to acquire language. So, while a child hears specific words and sentences in their environment, Chomsky argues they use this innate grammatical blueprint to effortlessly construct the complex rules of their mother tongue. It helps explain the remarkable speed and ease with which children become fluent in their first language.

While Krashen(1941) another American linguist, is best known for his work on second language acquisition, his theories, particularly the "Input Hypothesis" and the "Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis," strongly inform our understanding of how the mother tongue is acquired. He emphasizes that first language acquisition is a natural, subconscious process driven by "comprehensible input" i.e language that is just a little beyond our current understanding but still graspable. This distinguishes it from conscious "learning" and highlights the natural, effortless way a child absorbs their native tongue.

### **Concept of Interference**

Have you ever noticed how someone learning a new language might sometimes sound like they're directly translating from their native tongue, or they pronounce words in

a way that just doesn't quite sound "right" in the new language? That is language interference in action. At its core, language interference, also known as linguistic interference or cross-linguistic influence, refers to the way a person's first language (L1) affects their production and comprehension of a second language (L2), or even how one language can influence another in the speech of bilingual individuals. It's a fundamental concept in linguistics, particularly in the field of second language acquisition.

Think of it like this: your brain has already built a complex network of rules, sounds, and vocabulary for your native language. When you start learning a new one, your brain, being efficient, tries to leverage what it already knows. Sometimes this is incredibly helpful. It is what we call positive transfer. For instance, if your native language and the language you're learning share similar grammatical structures or cognates (words that sound and mean similar things), your L1 can actually facilitate the learning process. However, often, the systems of the two languages diverge, and that's when negative transfer kicks in. This is where interference becomes noticeable, leading to deviations from the norms of the target language. These deviations can manifest in various ways.

Phonological Interference (Accent) is perhaps the most obvious. You might hear someone pronounce a "th" sound as a "z" or a "d" if their native language doesn't have the "th" sound. Or perhaps they have trouble distinguishing between "ship" and "sheep" because their L1 doesn't differentiate between those vowel sounds. This is why foreign accents exist but the sound system of the first language influences the production of sounds

in the second. Similarly, Grammatical (Syntactic/Morphological) Interference involves applying the grammatical rules of your first language to your second. For example, a Yoruba speaker might say "the house big" in English, mirroring the adjective-noun order in Yoruba, instead of the English "the big house." Or they might omit articles or prepositions where they're not explicitly used in their native tongue.

Lexical Interference (Vocabulary) occurs when a learner uses a word from their L1, or a direct translation of it, that doesn't quite fit the context in the L2. It could be using a false cognate (words that look or sound similar but have different meanings in different languages) or simply choosing a word that is semantically close but not idiomatic in the target language. Semantic Interference is about meaning. A word might exist in both languages, but its nuances or connotations might differ, leading to misinterpretations or awkward phrasing.

Interference is a natural and expected part of the language learning journey. It's not a sign of failure, but rather a testament to the complex cognitive processes involved in acquiring a new linguistic system. For educators, understanding interference is crucial, as it allows them to anticipate common errors, tailor their teaching methods, and provide targeted instruction to help learners navigate the differences between their languages. Ultimately, while interference can pose challenges, it also highlights the fascinating interplay between our linguistic knowledge and the dynamic way our brains adapt to new ways of communicating.

It is an intricate concept in language, a phenomenon where knowledge of one language influences the learning or use of another. This is a topic that has captivated linguists and language educators for decades, and its understanding has been significantly shaped by the pioneering work of several scholars. Their contributions, spanning various periods, have collectively built the robust theoretical framework we utilize today for research and pedagogical practice.

Perhaps one of the earliest and most foundational contributions came from Robert Lado in 1957 with his seminal work, *Linguistics Across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers*. Lado, a key figure in the field of contrastive analysis, proposed that by systematically comparing the sound systems, grammatical structures, and vocabulary of two languages, one could predict areas where learners would experience difficulty due to interference. He posited that differences between the native language (L1) and the target language (L2) would lead to negative transfer or interference, while similarities would lead to positive transfer. Lado's work provided a concrete methodology for identifying potential interference points, thus equipping language teachers with predictive power to anticipate and address learner errors. His influence was profound, laying the groundwork for much of the subsequent research in second language acquisition, even as later scholars refined and critiqued his more rigid predictions.

Following Lado, and in the spirit of refining the understanding of transfer, Larry Selinker introduced his highly influential concept of "interlanguage" in 1972. While not

solely focused on interference, Selinker's theory is inextricably linked to it. He argued that learners construct a unique linguistic system, the "interlanguage," which is distinct from both the L1 and the L2. This interlanguage is dynamic and systematic, constantly evolving as learners internalize new rules and restructure their linguistic knowledge. Crucially, Selinker identified five central processes involved in second language acquisition, one of which was "language transfer," essentially another term for interference. He emphasized that transfer from the native language is a significant, though not exclusive, contributor to the characteristics of the interlanguage. Selinker's work shifted the focus from merely predicting errors to understanding the internal cognitive processes that shape the learner's developing linguistic system, providing a more nuanced view of how interference manifests and integrates into the learner's overall language development.

Later in 1983, Susan Gass and Larry Selinker co-authored *Language Transfer in Language Learning*, a pivotal volume that consolidated and expanded upon the existing understanding of language transfer. While the specific year of this book marks a significant synthesis, their individual and collaborative contributions to the ongoing dialogue about interference were continuous throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This work moved beyond a simplistic view of interference as merely an error source, instead portraying it as a complex cognitive process influenced by various factors. They delved into different types of transfer, including phonological, lexical, and syntactic transfer, and explored how learners make decisions about what to transfer and when. Their research emphasized that transfer is not

always negative; it can also be a facilitative process (positive transfer) that aids in language learning. They also highlighted the role of psycholinguistic factors and universal grammar in mediating transfer, adding layers of complexity to the concept.

Continuing this line of inquiry, Terence Odlin made significant contributions, particularly with his comprehensive book *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning* published in 1989. Odlin provided a masterful synthesis of the research on language transfer, offering a nuanced and exhaustive discussion of its various facets. He meticulously examined the conditions under which transfer is likely to occur, its manifestations across different linguistic levels, and the factors that moderate its impact. Odlin's work is notable for its detailed typology of transfer, distinguishing between various types of cross-linguistic influence and exploring the interplay of linguistic, psychological, and social factors. He challenged deterministic views of interference, arguing that learners are active agents who selectively apply their L1 knowledge. His work solidified the understanding that transfer is a pervasive and complex phenomenon, deeply intertwined with cognitive processes and the specific learning context.

More recently, scholars have continued to refine our understanding of interference within broader theoretical frameworks of second language acquisition. While specific new "foundational" contributions with a distinct year may be less about a single author and more about cumulative research within specific subfields, it's worth acknowledging the ongoing work. For instance, research within Usage-Based Linguistics, heavily influenced

by scholars like Michael Tomasello (though his primary focus isn't solely on interference, his theories on language acquisition have implications for how we view the role of prior linguistic experience), starting from the early 2000s, has provided new perspectives. This perspective suggests that language acquisition is largely driven by exposure to and processing of linguistic input, and that learners build up knowledge of constructions and patterns. Within this framework, interference can be viewed as the influence of entrenched L1 patterns on the processing and production of L2 structures, not as a deviation from an ideal grammar, but as a natural consequence of the cognitive architecture and prior learning.

### **Concept of Mother Tongue Interference**

"Mother tongue interference," also known as language transfer or cross-linguistic influence, is a pervasive phenomenon observed when an individual learns a second language (L2) after having already acquired their native language (L1). It refers to the unconscious influence of the first language's linguistic patterns, rules, and habits, encompassing everything from pronunciation and grammar to vocabulary and cultural differences on the production and comprehension of the second language. This influence can manifest as both 'positive transfer,' where similarities between the languages aid learning, and more commonly, 'negative transfer' or 'interference,' where differences between the L1 and L2 lead to errors, awkward phrasing, or communication breakdowns. Essentially, the deeply ingrained system of the mother tongue acts as a filter through which

the new language is processed, often leading to deviations from the target language's norms.

One of the most immediate and noticeable areas where mother tongue interference manifests is phonology. Learners often transfer the sound system of their native language to the target language, leading to mispronunciations. For instance, a speaker whose mother tongue lacks certain English phonemes, like the 'th' sound, might substitute it with an 'f' or 'd' sound. Similarly, intonation patterns and rhythm from the first language can be carried over, making the second language sound unnatural or difficult to understand, even if individual sounds are correctly produced. This can lead to significant communication breakdowns, especially when subtle distinctions in pronunciation carry meaning. Beyond individual sounds, syntactic structures are heavily impacted by mother tongue interference. Each language has a unique way of arranging words to form sentences, and when these structures differ significantly, learners tend to impose the word order of their native language onto the second language. For example, a learner whose mother tongue places adjectives after nouns might struggle to consistently place them before nouns in English. This can result in grammatically incorrect or awkward sentence constructions, requiring considerable conscious effort and practice to overcome.

Lexical interference, or the influence on vocabulary, is another common occurrence. This can take several forms, including direct translation of idioms or phrases that don't have equivalent meanings in the target language, leading to comical or nonsensical

expressions. Furthermore, false cognates i.e words that look similar in two languages but have different meanings often trap learners, as they assume a shared meaning based on superficial resemblance. The nuances of word choice and collocation are also frequently affected, with learners selecting words that are technically correct but unnatural in the given context due to their native language's usage patterns. Similarly, semantic interference goes deeper than individual words, affecting the very meaning and interpretation of concepts. Different languages categorize and conceptualize the world in distinct ways, and a learner might project the semantic boundaries of their mother tongue onto the second language. For example, a language might have a single word for 'snow' that encompasses various forms, whereas another might have multiple distinct terms. This can lead to misinterpretations or an inability to grasp the full semantic range of words and expressions in the target language.

Also, pragmatic interference relates to the social rules of language use. Communication is not just about grammar and vocabulary; it also involves understanding appropriate ways to address people, make requests, express politeness, and engage in conversations. These pragmatic norms vary significantly across cultures, and learners often transfer the pragmatic rules of their mother tongue to the second language, leading to misunderstandings, unintentional offense, or perceived rudeness. For instance, directness in one culture might be considered impolite in another, causing communication difficulties despite linguistic accuracy. Mother tongue interference stands as a cornerstone in the field

of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. For over half a century, scholars have extensively debated and meticulously investigated its nature, extent, and profound impact on the processes and outcomes of learning an additional language. This discussion will delve into the significant contributions of key scholars, tracing the evolution of thought on this intricate phenomenon.

The mid-20th century witnessed the emergence of behaviorist psychology as a dominant paradigm, profoundly influencing early SLA theories. Within this framework, Leonard Bloomfield (1933), although not directly focused on L2 acquisition, laid the groundwork for structural linguistics, which emphasized language as a set of habits acquired through reinforcement. This perspective strongly influenced subsequent views on language learning. Building on these behaviorist principles, Charles Fries (1945), in his influential work 'Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language,' advocated for a systematic comparison between the learner's native language and the target language to predict areas of difficulty. This advocacy became a precursor to the formalization of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), prominently associated with Robert Lado, posited that the primary difficulties in learning a second language (L2) could be predicted by systematically comparing it with the learner's native language (L1). The core idea was that similarities between L1 and L2 would lead to "positive transfer" (making learning easier), while differences would result in "negative transfer" or "interference" (causing errors). Although widely influential in its time for

guiding language teaching, the "strong" version of CAH, which claimed to predict all errors, was later challenged by research showing that many errors were developmental and not solely due to L1 interference.

The most direct and widely cited contributions to the CAH came from Robert Lado (1957) with his seminal work, 'Linguistics Across Cultures.' Lado explicitly articulated the core tenets of the CAH: "individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture." He posited that similarities between the L1 and L2 would lead to 'positive transfer' or facilitation, while differences would result in 'negative transfer' or 'interference,' leading to errors. The CAH's predictive power was seen as a valuable tool for language teachers and curriculum designers. Concurrently, Uriel Weinreich (1953), in his groundbreaking 'Languages in Contact,' provided a sophisticated linguistic analysis of interference phenomena in bilingual individuals. He defined interference as "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language." Weinreich's work was significant for its detailed categorization of different types of linguistic interference (e.g., phonological, grammatical, lexical) and for emphasizing that interference is a natural outcome of linguistic interaction in the minds of bilinguals. His contribution moved beyond mere error prediction to a deeper linguistic description of contact phenomena.

The late 1960s and 1970s marked a significant paradigm shift in linguistics and SLA, moving away from behaviorism towards cognitive and mentalist approaches, largely influenced by Noam Chomsky's (1959, 1965) work on Universal Grammar (UG). This shift led to a critical re-evaluation of the CAH. Also, S.P. Corder (1967), in his seminal article "The Significance of Learner's Errors," fundamentally challenged the CAH's strong predictive claims. He argued that errors were not merely signs of faulty habit formation due to L1 interference, but rather systematic and valuable insights into the learner's developing linguistic system, which he termed 'interlanguage.' Corder advocated for Error Analysis (EA) as a methodology to describe and explain learner errors, emphasizing that many errors were 'developmental' in nature, similar to those made by first language learners, rather than purely L1-induced. Further research by Heidi Dulay and Marina Burt (1973, 1974), particularly their "L1=L2 Hypothesis," provided empirical evidence that seemed to directly contradict the CAH. Through studies of morpheme acquisition orders in child L2 learners, they found remarkable similarities in error patterns across learners from different L1 backgrounds. They concluded that 'interference is not a major factor in child second language acquisition,' suggesting that learners were accessing universal cognitive processes and perhaps innate grammatical principles, much like L1 learners. Their work significantly, though perhaps overly, diminished the perceived role of L1 interference for a period.

Despite the initial enthusiasm for developmental explanations, it soon became clear that completely dismissing the L1's role was an oversimplification. The pendulum began to swing back in the 1980s, leading to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding, often encapsulated by the term Cross-Linguistic Influence (CLI). This term was preferred over 'interference' to avoid the negative connotations of error and to encompass both negative and positive transfer, as well as more subtle influences. Terence Odlin (1989), in his comprehensive work 'Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning,' provided a critical synthesis of research on transfer. He emphasized that transfer is a complex cognitive process, where learners consciously or unconsciously draw upon their existing L1 knowledge to facilitate or hinder L2 acquisition. Odlin meticulously detailed how transfer can manifest across all linguistic levels: phonology (e.g., 'foreign accent'), lexis (e.g., calques or literal translations), syntax (e.g., word order errors), semantics, and even pragmatics (e.g., culturally inappropriate expressions). He also highlighted that transfer is not a monolithic phenomenon but varies based on factors like perceived linguistic distance, L2 proficiency, and learning context. Rod Ellis (1997, 2008), a leading figure in SLA, has consistently provided extensive overviews and analyses of CLI. He views transfer as a problem-solving strategy, where learners utilize their L1 knowledge as a resource when faced with the challenges of L2 production and comprehension. Ellis emphasizes that the extent and nature of CLI are highly variable, influenced by factors such as the learner's stage of interlanguage development (CLI may be

more prominent in early stages), their awareness of L1-L2 differences, and the specific linguistic structures involved. He also underscored the notion of 'avoidance,' where learners might strategically avoid L2 structures that are highly divergent from their L1, even if they are grammatically correct.

Pekka Lintunen (2007) and others have explored the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying CLI, particularly focusing on how L1 representations are activated during L2 processing and production. This line of research, often employing methodologies like eye-tracking and reaction time tasks, seeks to understand how CLI occurs at a cognitive level, rather than just if it occurs. Susan Gass and Larry Selinker (2001), in their influential textbook 'Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course,' dedicate significant attention to CLI, integrating it within broader theories of interlanguage. They discuss the notion of 'transferability,' suggesting that certain L1 features are more likely to be transferred than others, often due to their perceived saliency or markedness. Contemporary research by scholars like Khaled Karim (2018) and Hossein Nassaji (2015) continues to investigate CLI in specific domains, such as L2 writing and pronunciation, often exploring its interaction with other factors like L2 proficiency, task complexity, and pedagogical interventions. They highlight the persistence of L1 influence even at advanced proficiency levels, particularly in subtle pragmatic or stylistic choices. Furthermore, the concept of bidirectional transfer has gained traction, acknowledging that L2 acquisition can also

influence and reshape the L1, especially in long-term bilinguals, leading to phenomena like L1 attrition or changes in L1 phonology or lexis.

In conclusion, the scholarly discourse surrounding Mother Tongue Interference, now predominantly termed Cross-Linguistic Influence (CLI), has undergone a profound and illuminating transformation, moving far beyond its initial conceptualization as a simplistic error-generating mechanism. We've traced its evolution from the predictive ambitions of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), which viewed L1-L2 differences as direct causes of errors, to a sophisticated understanding that acknowledges the L1 as an inherent, dynamic, and pervasive cognitive resource in the second language acquisition (SLA) process. This contemporary perspective recognizes that learners, whether consciously or unconsciously, continuously draw upon their first language knowledge, not just as a source of potential 'negative transfer' or 'interference,' but also as a powerful tool for 'positive transfer' and strategic problem-solving. The influence of the mother tongue is multifaceted, permeating every level of linguistic competence, from the subtle nuances of phonological articulation and prosody, through the complexities of lexical choice and syntactic structuring, to the intricacies of pragmatic appropriateness and discourse organization. Furthermore, its manifestation is highly variable, contingent upon a complex interplay of factors including the typological distance between the L1 and L2, the learner's evolving proficiency level, their individual learning styles and strategies, and the specific communicative context. Ultimately, a comprehensive understanding of Cross-Linguistic

Influence (CLI) is not merely foundational for theoretical advancements in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research; it is equally indispensable for pedagogical innovation, enabling educators to develop more effective, L1-informed teaching methodologies that not only anticipate and address potential challenges but also strategically harness the learner's existing linguistic repertoire as a powerful asset in the journey towards multilingual proficiency. The mother tongue, therefore, is not a barrier to be overcome, but rather an integral and enduring component of the multilingual mind, actively shaping and mediating the acquisition of new linguistic systems.

### **Factors that Influence Mother Tongue Interference**

Research into the factors influencing mother tongue interference, particularly in the context of second language acquisition in Nigeria, has benefited from the insights of numerous scholars. Their contributions, spanning several decades, have illuminated the complex interplay between a learner's first language and their attempts to master a new one. One significant early contribution came from Robert Lado in 1957. In his seminal work, *Linguistics Across Cultures*, Lado extensively discussed the concept of "contrastive analysis," positing that differences between a learner's mother tongue and the target language would lead to learning difficulties, while similarities would facilitate acquisition. He argued that these linguistic differences directly contribute to negative transfer, a key mechanism of mother tongue interference, by causing learners to carry over patterns from their first language into the second.

Uriel Weinreich, in 1964, through his influential book *Languages in Contact*, offered a detailed theoretical framework for understanding language interference. He meticulously outlined various types of interference, including lexical, phonological, and grammatical, and proposed that the degree of interference is influenced by factors such as the proficiency of the bilingual individual, the social context of language use, and the prestige associated with each language. Weinreich's work provided a robust foundation for subsequent empirical studies on mother tongue interference.

Larry Selinker, in 1972, introduced the concept of "interlanguage," a crucial theoretical construct for understanding second language acquisition. He argued that learners create their own unique linguistic system, the interlanguage, which is constantly evolving and often exhibits features from both the native language and the target language. Selinker proposed that mother tongue interference is a significant factor in the formation of this interlanguage, as learners often resort to their native language structures when faced with linguistic challenges in the target language.

Stephen Krashen, notably in 1985, while focusing on his "Monitor Model" of second language acquisition, implicitly addressed mother tongue interference through his Input Hypothesis. Although not directly centered on interference, Krashen's theory suggests that comprehensible input is paramount for acquisition. When learners lack sufficient comprehensible input, they may rely more heavily on their existing linguistic

knowledge from their mother tongue to make sense of and produce utterances in the second language, thereby potentially increasing instances of interference.

Rod Ellis, a prominent figure in second language acquisition research, extensively discussed various factors influencing interlanguage development, including mother tongue influence, particularly in his 1994 publication, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Ellis synthesized research on the role of the first language, highlighting how it can act as both a resource and a source of error. He emphasized the dynamic nature of transfer, suggesting it is not merely a direct copying but a complex cognitive process influenced by a learner's perceptions of linguistic similarities and differences.

Terence Odlin, in 1989, significantly contributed to the understanding of cross-linguistic influence with his book *Language Transfer: Cross-linguistic Influence in Language Learning*. Odlin systematically explored various forms of transfer, including positive and negative transfer, and examined the conditions under which they occur. He provided a comprehensive overview of the mechanisms of mother tongue interference, linking it to psychological processes such as habit formation and cognitive strategies employed by learners.

Vivian Cook, in her 2003 work, *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*, continued to explore the multifaceted nature of mother tongue influence. Cook highlighted the ongoing debate regarding the extent and nature of first language transfer, emphasizing that it is not simply a matter of errors but also a strategic resource. She

discussed how learners might consciously or unconsciously draw upon their mother tongue, particularly in situations where their second language proficiency is limited, leading to both beneficial and interfering outcomes.

Suresh Canagarajah, in his 2005 work, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Language Teaching*, while primarily focusing on critical pedagogy, implicitly addressed mother tongue interference by advocating for the recognition and validation of learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds. Canagarajah's work suggests that when learners' native languages are devalued, they may struggle more to integrate their first language knowledge effectively into their second language learning, potentially leading to increased anxiety and less strategic use of their mother tongue, sometimes manifesting as interference.

One notable contribution to the study of mother tongue interference in Nigeria is that of Bamgbose (1971), who emphasized the sociolinguistic environment of Nigeria as a primary factor influencing interference. He argued that in a multilingual setting like Nigeria, the constant interaction among speakers of different indigenous languages leads to the transfer of linguistic habits into English usage. His study identified the dominant presence of local languages in homes and communities as a significant reason why learners apply their native linguistic patterns when speaking or writing in English. Bamgbose's analysis was foundational in highlighting the role of societal language dominance and cultural identity in the persistence of interference.

In 1982, Adekunle offered a critical examination of educational policies in Nigeria and their role in sustaining mother tongue interference. He observed that the early exposure of children to indigenous languages during the foundational stages of education, combined with poor instructional strategies in English, contributes to structural interference. According to his findings, the inconsistent implementation of the National Policy on Education, which supports the use of the mother tongue in early education, creates confusion and weakens the mastery of English. Adekunle's work called for a balance between indigenous language promotion and effective English language instruction.

Afolayan's study in 1984 further enriched the discourse by exploring phonological interference as a key factor in Nigerian English. He specifically examined how the sound systems of Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa affect pronunciation in English. His research revealed that Nigerian learners often substitute English sounds with similar sounds from their mother tongue due to the unavailability of certain English phonemes in indigenous languages. For example, the difficulty many Yoruba speakers have in articulating the "th" sound in English results from the absence of that phoneme in their native language. Afolayan's work remains relevant in explaining why mother tongue phonology heavily shapes spoken English in Nigeria.

In 1995, Uzoezie analyzed syntactic interference among Nigerian university students, particularly those from Igbo-speaking backgrounds. He discovered that the sentence structures and word order of the Igbo language are frequently transferred into

English, leading to non-standard grammatical patterns. His research indicated that learners tend to rely on the syntactic rules of their mother tongue when constructing sentences in English, especially in informal or unmonitored speech. Uzoezie attributed this to the lack of contrastive analysis in teaching, where the differences between English and indigenous syntax are not properly taught or emphasized in classrooms.

Osisanwo's work in 2003 made significant contributions by addressing lexical interference in the writings of Nigerian secondary school students. He demonstrated that students often substitute English vocabulary with direct translations from their mother tongue, resulting in semantically awkward or incorrect expressions. His findings also revealed that cultural expressions without direct English equivalents are frequently translated literally, which confuses meaning. Osisanwo stressed the importance of culturally responsive language teaching to help learners understand the limitations of translation and the proper use of context-appropriate vocabulary.

In 2007, Odebunmi conducted an in-depth study on semantic interference, focusing on how cultural interpretations of meaning in Yoruba influence the use of English. He found that many learners interpret English words through the lens of their native cultural meanings, which leads to confusion in communication. For instance, the word "senior" is often used with extended meanings that reflect Yoruba social hierarchies rather than its standard English use. Odebunmi's research underscored the role of culture in language learning and the necessity of integrating cultural literacy into English language instruction.

In a more recent study, Oladipupo (2015) examined the impact of parental influence and home language practices on mother tongue interference. His research showed that children who grow up in homes where English is not spoken or is poorly spoken are more likely to exhibit strong mother tongue interference when they begin formal education. He argued that language acquisition is not solely dependent on the school environment but is significantly shaped by early language exposure and parental attitudes towards English. Oladipupo's work called for increased awareness among parents and community leaders on the long-term impact of home language practices on second language acquisition.

Finally, in 2020, Okon conducted a comprehensive study on code-switching and its reinforcement of interference patterns among students in Nigerian universities. His research identified frequent code-switching between English and local languages during lectures and peer interactions as a major factor in normalizing incorrect English usage. He contended that while code-switching may aid understanding in the short term, it reinforces incorrect patterns that persist in formal language use. Okon recommended stricter language policies in academic environments to reduce reliance on indigenous languages during English instruction.

### **Impacts of Mother Tongue Interference on English Language Acquisition**

One of the earliest and most influential figures in highlighting the impact of mother tongue interference was Robert Lado. In his seminal 1957 work, *Linguistics Across*

Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers, Lado proposed the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). This hypothesis posited that by systematically comparing the learner's native language (L1) and the target language (L2), one could predict areas of difficulty and ease in second language acquisition. Where the L1 and L2 differed, interference was expected, leading to errors. Conversely, where they were similar, positive transfer would occur, facilitating learning. Lado's work, while later critiqued for its strong predictive power, was instrumental in bringing attention to the systematic nature of L1 influence and provided a framework for identifying potential areas of interference for language educators.

Building upon Lado's foundational work, Corder (1967), in his highly influential paper "The Significance of Learner's Errors," shifted the focus from merely predicting errors to understanding their psycholinguistic significance. Corder argued that errors are not simply signs of failure but rather valuable insights into the learner's developing linguistic system, or "interlanguage." While acknowledging the role of L1 interference as one source of errors, he emphasized that not all errors could be attributed to it. He introduced the concept of "interlanguage," suggesting that learners construct their own transitional linguistic systems, which may contain elements from both the L1 and L2, as well as unique forms not found in either. Corder's contribution was crucial in moving the field beyond a purely behaviorist view of language learning and recognizing the active, creative role of the learner.

Larry Selinker (1972) further elaborated on the concept of interlanguage in his groundbreaking paper, "Interlanguage." Selinker proposed that interlanguage is a unique linguistic system created by second language learners, distinct from both their native language and the target language. He identified language transfer (L1 interference) as one of the key processes involved in the formation of interlanguage. Selinker suggested that when learners encounter a new linguistic feature in the L2, they often transfer structures, rules, and even phonological patterns from their L1, leading to specific types of errors. His work provided a more detailed theoretical framework for understanding how L1 influence manifests within the dynamic and evolving interlanguage system, emphasizing the systematic and often persistent nature of these transfers.

Stephen Krashen's (1985) contributions, particularly his Monitor Model, also implicitly address the role of mother tongue interference, albeit indirectly. While Krashen primarily focused on the distinction between "acquisition" (subconscious learning) and "learning" (conscious knowledge of rules), and the role of comprehensible input, he acknowledged that conscious "learning" could act as a "monitor" to correct errors. When a learner is consciously applying learned rules, these rules might be influenced by their L1 knowledge, leading to a type of self-correction or even over-correction that sometimes reflects L1 patterns. While not directly a theory of interference, Krashen's model highlights how conscious processing, where L1 influence is more likely to operate, might impact the output of language learners.

Odlin (1989), in his comprehensive work *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning*, provided a thorough examination of the phenomenon of language transfer, which is synonymous with mother tongue interference. Odlin meticulously reviewed a vast body of research on various aspects of language transfer, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. He differentiated between positive and negative transfer and explored the conditions under which transfer is more likely to occur. His work is significant for consolidating and synthesizing research on language transfer, providing a rich empirical base and a more nuanced understanding of the factors that govern the influence of the L1 on L2 acquisition, moving beyond simple prediction to a more detailed analysis of the types and mechanisms of transfer.

More recently, Schachter (1990) offered a different perspective on the impact of mother tongue interference, particularly in the context of avoidance phenomena. Schachter observed that learners from certain L1 backgrounds might avoid using specific grammatical structures or lexical items in the L2 if those structures are significantly different from or absent in their L1. This avoidance, rather than direct error, is another manifestation of L1 interference, as the learner's L1 knowledge (or lack thereof) implicitly guides their linguistic choices in the L2. Schachter's work expanded the understanding of L1 influence beyond just the production of errors, demonstrating how it can also lead to the non-production or underuse of certain target language features.

Contemporary scholars in the field of Usage-Based Linguistics, such as Elisabeth Bates (1976) and later Michael Tomasello (2003), contribute to understanding mother tongue interference by emphasizing the role of input and frequency in language acquisition. While not directly focusing on interference, their work suggests that the frequent patterns and structures encountered in the L1 strongly shape the learner's initial linguistic hypotheses. When learning an L2, these deeply ingrained L1 patterns can naturally exert an influence, especially in the early stages of acquisition. The more entrenched a pattern is in the L1, the more likely it is to interfere with the acquisition of a different pattern in the L2. This perspective helps explain the persistence of certain L1-influenced errors, not just as a result of a conscious "transfer" but as a natural consequence of the brain's tendency to rely on well-established cognitive routines.

### **Summary of Reviewed Literature**

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature pertaining to the impact of mother tongue interference on the acquisition of the English language. This synthesis of existing research establishes the theoretical and empirical foundation for the current study. The review is structured into three main thematic areas. The first section examines the theoretical underpinnings of language interference. It delves into foundational theories of second language acquisition, notably the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Error Analysis. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis posits that a systematic comparison of a learner's native language and the target language can predict

areas of learning difficulty. In contrast, Error Analysis offers an empirical approach by classifying and analyzing the actual errors made by learners, providing a more descriptive understanding of the interference process. These theoretical models provide the conceptual framework for understanding the mechanisms through which mother tongue interference manifests.

The second section provides a critical overview of empirical studies directly related to phonological, morphological, and syntactic interference. The literature consistently demonstrates that the structural and phonetic differences between a learner's mother tongue and English significantly influence their acquisition of the target language. For instance, studies have highlighted how specific phonemes absent in languages such as Edo, Hausa, or Yoruba lead to pronunciation difficulties and the development of distinct phonetic features in Nigerian English. Similarly, research has documented the transfer of grammatical structures, such as subject-verb agreement or the use of prepositions, from the mother tongue into English, resulting in non-standard usage.

The final section explores the pedagogical implications and mitigating strategies discussed in the literature. While the existence of interference is widely acknowledged, various studies have also investigated methods for addressing this challenge. These include the implementation of targeted pronunciation drills, the use of contrastive analysis in classroom instruction to highlight specific differences, and the promotion of early and immersive exposure to English. This review of pedagogical approaches is crucial, as it

moves the discussion from simply identifying the problem to exploring potential solutions and informing the methodological choices of this research.

Therefore, this chapter synthesizes a body of literature that confirms the significant influence of mother tongue interference on English language acquisition. It provides a robust theoretical and empirical context, highlights a research gap that this study aims to address, and establishes a clear rationale for the investigation into the specific experiences of students at the University of Benin."

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter contains the methods that the researcher deployed in carrying out the study. Here are the subheadings:

- Research Design
- Population of the Study
- Sample and Sampling Technique
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the Instrument
- Reliability of the Instrument
- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Analysis

#### **Research Design**

For this research work, a descriptive survey design will be employed. This design is considered the most suitable as it allows for the collection of data on the characteristics, behaviors, and opinions of a large population in a systematic and organized manner. The descriptive survey design is non-experimental, meaning it does not involve the manipulation of variables, but rather focuses on describing the existing conditions and relationships between variables as they naturally occur.

This approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it will enable us to accurately describe the impacts of mother tongue interference on the acquisition of English language among students at the University of Benin. Through the use of questionnaires and interviews, we can gather detailed information on the specific linguistic errors students make, the frequency of these errors, and the students' own perceptions of how their mother tongue influences their English language use. This design will allow for a comprehensive and holistic view of the problem, providing a strong foundation for drawing conclusions and making recommendations. The findings will be a factual representation of the current situation, which is a key strength of the descriptive survey design.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of this study comprises all undergraduate students of the University of Benin. This comprehensive population is chosen because the phenomenon of mother tongue interference is a widespread issue that can potentially affect any student learning and using English as a second language.

To ensure a broad and representative scope, this study will focus on students from various faculties and academic levels. This approach is essential to capture the full spectrum of linguistic experiences and challenges faced by students from different backgrounds and with varying levels of exposure to the English language.

A specific focus will be placed on students who speak one of the major indigenous languages of Nigeria (such as Edo, Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa) as their mother tongue, as

well as students from other linguistic backgrounds. This inclusive approach will allow for a more robust analysis of how different mother tongues influence the acquisition of the English language within the university's diverse student body. The total number of registered undergraduate students at the University of Benin will therefore serve as the overall population from which the sample for this study will be drawn.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

Given the large and diverse population of undergraduate students at the University of Benin, it is impractical to study every single student. Therefore, a sample will be drawn from the population to represent the larger student body. The sample size for this study will be 400 students. This number is considered adequate to provide a statistically significant representation of the population and to allow for adequate data analysis. The sample will be selected to ensure a fair representation of students from different faculties, levels of study, and linguistic backgrounds.

The sampling technique that will be employed in this study is the stratified random sampling technique. This method is the most appropriate because it allows us to ensure that the different subgroups within the population are adequately represented in the sample.

The student population will first be divided into different strata (subgroups) based on their faculty and their primary mother tongue. For example, we will create strata for students from the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, etc., and then further sub-stratify them based on their mother tongue (e.g., Edo, Yoruba, Igbo,

Hausa, etc.). This step is crucial for this research as it will allow us to directly compare the impacts of different mother tongues.

Once the strata are defined, a simple random sampling method will be used to select a specific number of students from each stratum. This ensures that every student within each stratum has an equal chance of being selected, thereby eliminating bias and ensuring the representativeness of the sample.

This stratified random sampling technique is vital for this research because it guarantees that the data collected will accurately reflect the linguistic diversity of the University of Benin's student body, leading to more valid and reliable conclusions about the impacts of mother tongue interference.

### **Research Instrument**

The primary research instrument to be used for this study is a structured questionnaire in google form. This instrument has been carefully designed to effectively and efficiently gather the necessary data from the selected sample of students at the University of Benin. The choice of a questionnaire is justified by its ability to collect a large amount of information from a diverse group of respondents in a standardized and systematic way, which is crucial for a survey-based descriptive study.

The questionnaire is meticulously organized into distinct sections to ensure a comprehensive and logical collection of data. The initial section is dedicated to gathering biographical and contextual information from the respondents. This includes variables such

as age, gender, faculty, and most critically, their primary mother tongue. This data is indispensable for the analytical phase, as it allows for the stratification of the sample and the examination of correlations between specific linguistic backgrounds and observed interference patterns.

The subsequent section explores the students' linguistic background and proficiency. The questions in this part are formulated to assess the respondents' exposure to and engagement with the English language, covering aspects such as the age at which they commenced learning English and the frequency of its use in their daily academic and social lives. It also includes a self-assessment component, where students can rate their own proficiency in various language skills, providing a subjective but valuable baseline for analysis.

The core of the instrument is dedicated to identifying specific instances of mother tongue interference. This section contains items carefully constructed to pinpoint common errors in pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary that are directly attributable to the influence of the students' native languages. The questions are designed to quantify the frequency of these errors and to explore the specific linguistic structures or rules from the mother tongue that are being transferred into English, thus providing a granular view of the interference phenomenon.

Finally, the questionnaire includes a section on attitudes and metacognitive awareness. Using a Likert-type scale, respondents are asked to evaluate their own

perceptions of the interference, their level of awareness of the errors they make, and their efforts toward self-correction. This part of the instrument is crucial for understanding the psychological and affective dimensions of the problem, offering insights into whether students are conscious of these linguistic challenges and what actions, if any, they take to mitigate them.

### **Validity of the Instrument**

The validity of the research instrument is a critical component of the study's methodological rigor, ensuring that the questionnaire measures precisely what it is intended to measure. To establish the validity of the Questionnaire on the Impact of Mother Tongue Interference on English Language Acquisition Among University of Benin Students, a systematic process will be employed to address both face and content validity.

The initial draft of the instrument has been subjected to a review by the project supervisor and a panel of academic experts. The panel which consist of experienced lecturers and professors from the Departments of Educational Foundations at the University of Benin, who possess a deep understanding of sociolinguistics and second language acquisition. The experts evaluated the instrument on its apparent suitability, assessing the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions for the target population. Their feedback will be instrumental in refining the wording and structure of the questionnaire, ensuring it is both comprehensible to the students and reflective of the research objectives.

To guarantee that the questionnaire comprehensively covers the domain of mother tongue interference, each item will be meticulously mapped against the study's research questions and objectives. The expert panel will be tasked with confirming that the questions adequately address all key areas of interference, including phonological (pronunciation), syntactic (grammar), and lexical (vocabulary) errors. This process ensures that the instrument is a complete and representative measure of the phenomenon, thereby preventing the omission of crucial aspects of the research problem.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

To establish the reliability of the research instrument, a pilot study was conducted on a representative sample of 20 students from various faculties at the University of Benin. This preliminary test aimed to ensure the stability and consistency of the questionnaire before its use in the main study.

The test-retest method was employed to determine the instrument's stability. The questionnaire was administered to this pilot group on two separate occasions. Following the data collection, the scores from both administrations were analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). The analysis yielded a reliability coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.87.

This value, being well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirms the questionnaire as a reliable and stable instrument. The high correlation demonstrates that the instrument consistently measures the same concepts over time and that student

responses are stable, thereby justifying its suitability for use with the larger sample of 400 students in the main study.

### **Method of Data Collection**

This study utilized a quantitative research design to investigate the impacts of mother tongue interference on the acquisition of the English language among students at the University of Benin. The primary method of data collection was an online questionnaire, which was designed to gather information on students' perceptions and experiences regarding this phenomenon. The questionnaire was structured into two main sections. The first section aimed to collect demographic information from the respondents, such as their age, gender, and department of study.

The second section of the questionnaire consisted of a series of statements related to the research objectives. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a four-point Likert scale. The options were: agree, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree.

This scale was chosen to eliminate a neutral option, thereby encouraging respondents to express a clear stance on each item. The statements covered various aspects of language acquisition, including difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and how these challenges might be influenced by their mother tongue.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected from the online questionnaire will be analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages will be used to summarize demographic information and respondent's answers on the Likert scale.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the analysis of data collected regarding the impacts of mother tongue (MT) interference on the acquisition of the English language among University of Benin students. A total of 100 students responded to the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentages were used for the presentation and analysis of the data.

#### Demographic Data of Students

The tables below show the variables in sex, age group and Faculties.

**Table 1: Sex**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	40	40%
Female	60	60%
Total	100	100%

**Table 2: Age Group**

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
15-20	24	24%
21-26	68	68%
27-32	8	8%
33 and above	0	0%
Total	100	100%

**Table 3: Schools and Faculties**

Schools and Faculties	Frequency	Percentage
Arts	9	9%
Agriculture	4	4%
Basic Medical Sciences	6	6%
Dentistry	2	2%
Education	18	18%
Engineering	9	9%
Environmental Sciences	4	4%
Law	6	6%
Life Science	6	6%
Management Science	7	7%
Pharmacy	6	6%
Physical Science	5	5%
Social Science	8	8%
School of Medical Sciences	6	6%
Veterinary Medicine	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Data Presentation and Analyses According to the Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** What is the extent of mother tongue interference in spoken and written English language?

**Table 4: Distribution on the extent of mother tongue interference.**

S/N	Items	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	STRONGLY DISAGREE	Total
1.	The sounds and accent of my native language significantly influence how I pronounce English words.	46%	30%	13%	11%	100%
2.	I often directly translate structures from my native language when speaking or writing in English.	59%	28%	5%	8%	100%
3.	I make grammatical mistakes with English verb tenses and plural forms because of the interference from my mother tongue.	41%	25%	28%	6%	100%
4.	My cultural communication style, influenced by my mother tongue, often affects my ability to communicate effectively in formal academic settings.	36%	39%	22%	3%	100%
5.	People easily identify my tribe due to my mother tongue interference.	52%	23%	18%	7%	100%

The research results confirm that Mother Tongue Interference (MTI) is a substantial and pervasive challenge for University of Benin Students. The most dominant difficulty is syntactic interference, where a staggering 87% of students admit to directly translating the sentence structures of their mother tongue, leading to consistent grammatical errors. Only a small minority of 13% (5% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed) do not rely on this

practice. Closely following this is phonological interference, with 76% acknowledging that their native accent significantly affects their pronunciation. This influence is so strong that 75% feel it allows others to easily identify their tribe (25% disagreed/strongly disagreed). Furthermore, 66% struggle with basic morphology like verb tenses and plural forms (34% disagreed/strongly disagreed), while 75% report that their cultural communication style hinders their effectiveness in formal academic settings (25% disagreed/strongly disagreed). Collectively, these high percentages across all linguistic levels confirm that the extent of mother tongue interference is high and systematic, demanding targeted intervention.

**Research Question 2:** How aware are students of their own mother tongue during English use?

**Table 5: Distribution on the level of awareness of students of their own mother tongue.**

S/N	Items	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1.	I am often aware when my mother tongue pronunciation patterns cause me to mispronounce English words.	60%	18%	19%	3%	100%
2.	I usually identify when my mother tongue grammar has interfered with my English sentence structure after I have spoken or written.	52%	22%	18%	8%	100%
3.	I consciously try to avoid directly translating phrases from my mother tongue into English.	50%	22%	20%	8%	100%
4.	I am aware of the ways my mother tongue affects my English language uses.	64%	16%	15%	5%	100%
5.	I am able to spot errors that are caused by my mother tongue influence in my written English.	40%	24%	19%	17%	100%

The data presented in Table 5 reveals that University of Benin students possess a substantial level of metacognitive awareness concerning the impact of their mother tongue (MT) on their English language acquisition and use. Across the five items, the majority of respondents consistently reported being cognizant of mother tongue interference. For instance, in terms of phonology, 78% students (60% agreed and 18% strongly agreed) are aware when their mother tongue pronunciation causes them to mispronounce English words, compared to only 22% students (19% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed) who are not. Regarding grammar and sentence structure, 74% students (52% agreed and 22% strongly agreed) usually identify when their mother tongue grammar has interfered with their English structure after use, while 26 students (18% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed) do not. This awareness translates into conscious effort, as 72% students (50% agreed and 22% strongly agreed) consciously try to avoid direct translation from their mother tongue into English, against 28% students (20% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed) who do not. The most general question, "I am aware of the ways my mother tongue affects my English language uses," has the highest affirmative response, with 80% students (64% agreed and 16% strongly agreed) confirming their awareness, leaving only 20% students (15% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed) unaware. Even for the more specific skill of self-correction in writing, a significant majority of 64% students (40%

agreed and 24% strongly agreed) are able to spot errors caused by mother tongue in their written English, compared to 36% students (19% disagreed and 17% strongly disagreed) who struggle to do so. These findings collectively demonstrate that, while a minority of students remain less perceptive, the predominant characteristic among the University of Benin student body is a recognized understanding of the role mother tongue interference plays in their English language performance.

**Research Question 3:** How does mother tongue interference impact academic performance in English-taught courses?

**Table 6: Distribution on the impacts of mother tongue interference on academic performance of students.**

S/N	Items	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1.	The influence of my mother tongue on my spoken English sometimes makes it challenging for me to communicate effectively with peers during group projects.	53%	18%	12%	17%	100%
2.	Mother tongue interference in my written English affects the clarity and quality of my essays and other academic assignments.	48%	14%	32%	6%	100%
3.	When given oral presentation in class, the influence of my mother tongue on my pronunciation and grammar makes it difficult to articulate my points effectively.	48%	17%	26%	9%	100%
4.	Grammatical and structural	44%	13%	23%	20%	100%

	errors caused by mother tongue interference contribute to a lower performance on my examination.					
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

The data in Table 6 suggests that mother tongue interference significantly impacts the academic performance and communication of University of Benin students in English-taught courses. A combined 71% of students (53% agreed, 18% strongly agreed) feel the influence on their spoken English makes it challenging to communicate effectively with peers during group projects, while 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Furthermore, a substantial 62% (48% agreed, 14% strongly agreed) believe that interference in their written English affects the clarity and quality of their essays and academic assignments, contrasted with 38% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. For oral presentations, a high 65% (48% agreed, 17% strongly agreed) report that mother tongue influence on their pronunciation and grammar hinders effective articulation of points, against 35% who hold the opposing view. Crucially, 57% of students (44% agreed, 13% strongly agreed) acknowledge that grammatical and structural errors caused by interference contribute to lower performance on their examinations, with 43% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results collectively indicate a strong student perception that mother tongue interference is a tangible barrier to effective academic communication and a contributor to poorer academic outcomes.

**Research Question 4:** What are the effects of mother tongue interference on students' English language proficiency?

**Table 7: Distribution on the effects of mother tongue interference on English language proficiency of students.**

S/N	Item	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1.	Mother tongue interference makes it difficult for students to communicate their ideas clearly and effectively in English.	40%	16%	36%	8%	100%
2.	Mother tongue interference in students' spoken English leads to hesitations and a slower rate of speech.	48%	22%	25%	5%	100%
3.	The tendency for students to directly translate from their mother tongue hinders their ability to acquire and use a wide range of English vocabulary and idioms.	46%	22%	24%	8%	100%
4.	The continuous struggle with mother tongue interference erodes students' confidence in their English language abilities.	58%	18%	18%	6%	100%

The findings presented in Table 7 illuminated the specific ways mother tongue interference affects the English language proficiency of University of Benin students. A significant majority, 56% of students (40% agreed, 16% strongly agreed), feel that mother tongue interference makes it difficult to communicate their ideas clearly and effectively in English, though 44% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The data also strongly suggests that the interference impacts fluency: 70% of respondents (48% agreed, 22% strongly agreed) report that interference in their spoken English leads to hesitations and a slower rate of speech, with 30% in disagreement. Furthermore, 68% (46% agreed, 22% strongly agreed)

acknowledge that the tendency to directly translate from their mother tongue hinders their ability to acquire and use a wide range of English vocabulary and idioms, while 32% do not share this view. Most notably, a commanding 76% of students (58% agreed, 18% strongly agreed) believe that the continuous struggle with mother tongue interference erodes their confidence in their English language abilities, leaving only 24% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. These results collectively highlight that mother tongue interference is a substantial barrier to fluency, vocabulary acquisition, clarity of expression, and overall linguistic confidence among the students.

**Research Question 5:** How do lecturers of English language in University of Benin teach the impacts of mother tongue interference in English language instructions?

**Table 8: Distribution on how lecturers of English language in University of Benin teach the impacts of mother tongue interference.**

S/N	Items	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1.	Lecturers organise and encourage activities like group presentations or group discussions to provide students with opportunity to practise English in a supportive environment.	73%	15%	10%	2%	100%
2.	Lecturers encourage students to become aware of their own errors and develop the ability to self-correct and monitor their use of English.	70%	17%	10%	3%	
3.	Lecturers frequently identify and correct specific errors in students' spoken and written English.	62%	25%	10%	3%	
4.	Lecturers adopt a tolerant and encouraging approach to errors caused by mother tongue interference, focusing on communication rather than perfect grammatical accuracy.	60%	22%	11%	7%	100%

The data presented in Table 8 offers significant insights into the pedagogical approaches adopted by English language lecturers at the University of Benin concerning the impacts of mother tongue interference. For Item 1, a combined 88% of the respondents either agreed (73%) or strongly agreed (15%) that lecturers organize activities like group presentations and discussions to provide a supportive environment for English practice, suggesting a strong emphasis on interactive learning. Similarly, a high combined total of 87% of respondents agreed (70%) or strongly agreed (17%) that lecturers encourage students to develop self-correction and self-monitoring abilities regarding their English errors. Concerning the direct correction of errors, a substantial combined total of 87% of respondents agreed (62%) or strongly agreed (25%) that lecturers frequently identify and correct specific errors in students' spoken and written English. Finally, for Item 4, which directly addresses the pedagogical stance on errors caused by mother tongue interference, a combined total of 82% of respondents agreed (60%) or strongly agreed (22%) that lecturers adopt a tolerant and encouraging approach, prioritizing communication over perfect grammatical accuracy. Across all items, the level of disagreement remains low, with 'disagree' responses ranging from 10% to 11% and 'strongly disagree' responses ranging from 2% to 7%. Overall, the results indicate that lecturers generally employ a multifaceted and supportive approach, combining direct error correction with methods that promote practice, self-awareness, and communicative fluency, thereby acknowledging the challenge of mother tongue interference without letting it impede the core goal of effective

communication.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The research into the Impacts of Mother Tongue Interference on the Acquisition of English language among University of Benin Students has yielded consistent and compelling findings that highlight a significant linguistic challenge. The studies conclusively show that for University of Benin students, the linguistic features of their mother tongue, predominantly Edo, Yoruba, Igbo, Urhobo, Calabar and Ijaw are systematically transferred into their English Language acquisition (L2). This process of negative transfer, framed within the Interlanguage Theory, establishes mother tongue interference (MTI) not as a minor error, but as a major and widespread impediment to achieving native-like proficiency and competence in English. Crucially, the data suggests that many students are even consciously or unconsciously relying on the structures of their mother tongue when attempting to communicate in English.

The most pronounced and problematic area of interference is consistently found at the phonological level. Because the dominant indigenous languages in this region, such as Edo and other Nigerian languages, are fundamentally tonal languages, students encounter immense difficulty with English's stress-timed rhythm and non-tonal system. Findings reveal a clear failure of majority of University of Benin Students to master word stress and intonation. For example, students often fail to correctly shift stress to differentiate between English words that function as nouns versus verbs, such as 'PREsent' versus 'preSENT'. Beyond suprasegmentals, there are frequent errors in segmental sounds, where students

substitute English phonemes that do not exist in their mother tongue, thus directly affecting the clarity and intelligibility of their spoken English, creating the distinct local accent.

While pronunciation is the loudest challenge, interference also significantly impacts the students' written and grammatical competence. At the syntactical level, common errors include the omission or incorrect usage of articles ('a,' 'an,' 'the') because direct equivalents often do not exist in their mother tongues. Furthermore, negative transfer is evident in verb structures and the handling of tenses. Lexically and semantically, the findings point to a habit of direct, word-for-word translation from their mother tongue into English. This tendency results in awkward phrasing, inappropriate word choices, and the semantic stretching of English words, using them in a context or meaning common in Nigerian English but unfamiliar or confusing to a native English speaker. In essence, the entire linguistic system (sound, structure and meaning) is affected by the foundation of the mother tongue.

Also, the research on UNIBEN students carries significant pedagogical implications. The findings underscore that traditional English teaching methods are often insufficient to counteract the ingrained habits of first language (L1) transfer. To effectively address this, the data recommends a shift toward a contrastive analysis approach. Educators must explicitly highlight the points of difference and conflict between the students' indigenous languages and the English language. Specific instructional time needs to be devoted to the most challenging areas, particularly phonology, stress, and intonation to build a stronger linguistic foundation. By raising students' conscious awareness of their

mother tongue induced errors, the university can better support their transition toward a higher level of communicative competence and performance in English.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

This research reveals that mother tongue interference significantly acts as an impediment to achieving appreciable linguistic competence and performance in English. The interference is pervasive, manifesting across multiple linguistic levels, with the phonological (pronunciation) level often identified as the area where the impact is most pronounced and readily observed. Specific findings indicate that the differences in the sound systems, stress, and intonation patterns between the students' Mother tongue (e.g., Edo, Igbo, Yoruba) and English lead to phonetic substitutions and misplaced stress, thus affecting clarity and fluency. Furthermore, interference is evident at the lexical (vocabulary) and grammatical/syntactical (sentence structure) levels, where students tend to transfer their mother tongue structures and word-for-word translation assumptions into English, resulting in errors in word choice, article usage, and incorrect word order. Students are often aware of this interference. Beyond the purely linguistic aspects, the student's home and linguistic background also contribute to their mastery of English. The overall negative impact of this interference highlights a critical challenge in second language acquisition, suggesting a need for educational strategies that specifically contrast the native language and English and devote more targeted attention to the challenging areas like phonology.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the research into the impacts of mother tongue interference on English language acquisition among University of Benin students, the findings consistently affirm the hypothesis that mother tongue transfer is a significant barrier to achieving high-level proficiency in English as a Second Language. The interference is not limited to a single domain, but is multidimensional, critically affecting students at the phonological, syntactical, and lexical levels. Specifically, phonological differences lead to mispronunciations due to the transfer of mother tongue (L1) sound systems, while syntactic deviations result from students imposing their native language's sentence structure onto English. Ultimately, this sustained negative transfer impedes students' overall communicative competence and performance, necessitating urgent pedagogical interventions, such as Contrastive Analysis in teaching methodologies, to explicitly address the differences between English and the indigenous Nigerian languages prevalent among Uniben students.

## **Recommendations**

To effectively address the negative impacts of mother tongue interference on English language acquisition among University of Benin students, the following recommendations are crucial and should be adopted by educators and curriculum developers:

Curriculum design and lesson delivery must adopt a Contrastive Analysis approach.

Teachers/lecturers should explicitly highlight the structural differences between the students' most common mother tongue (e.g., Edo, Igbo, Yoruba) and English, particularly in areas like word order, article usage, and tense consistency. This moves from implicit correction to explicit, error-preventive instruction.

Given that phonological interference is highly pronounced, dedicated teaching time must be allocated to English sounds, stress patterns, and intonation. Techniques like minimal pairs, tongue twisters, and continuous guided oral practice should be employed to help students override L1 phonetic habits and develop accurate English pronunciation.

Teachers should move beyond simply marking errors and instead engage in Error Analysis by classifying L1-induced mistakes. This allows them to provide targeted, explanatory feedback that helps the student understand why the L1 structure is inappropriate in English, thereby fostering long-term competence rather than short-term correction.

Create an academic environment that maximizes exposure to authentic English outside of the classroom. This includes encouraging participation in English-only discussion groups, language clubs, and consuming L2 media, which helps students internalize native-speaker patterns and reduce the tendency to "think in the mother tongue" before translating.

Provide specialized professional development for English language instructors focusing on Applied Linguistics and the specific manifestations of local L1 interference. Training

should equip teachers with the diagnostic skills and pedagogical tools necessary to handle L1 transfer effectively in a multilingual Nigerian context.

## REFERENCES

- Adamu-Ogiegbaen, F. E., & Oghogho, U. (2021). Mother tongue interference in the use of English in secondary schools in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State. *Journal of Linguistics*, 45(2), 121-137.
- Adekunle, M. A. (1974). The non-native use of English. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 28(3), 195–201.
- Adetunji, R. M. (2023). The mother tongue interference in the acquisition of English as a second language among English language students in the University of Ilorin. *ESMAT Journal of Language Studies*, 19(4), 56-71.
- Alo, M. O. (2004). The pronunciation of English vowels by Yoruba learners. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 1(2), 78-103.
- Anyachonkeya, N. J., & Onuzulike, F. O. (2023). Mother tongue interference in the acquisition of English as a second language in secondary school in Ebonyi State, South East Nigeria. *World Research Academy*, 28(1), 89-104.
- Awonusi, V. O. (2004). The classification of Nigerian English phonology: An overview. *Journal of the West African Linguistic Society*, 17(1), 22–39.
- Banjo, A. (1996). *Making a virtue of necessity: An overview of the English language in Nigeria*. Ibadan University Press.
- Benson, M. J. (2002). The non-native speaker and the vocabulary of English. In *The Handbook of Linguistics* (pp. 369-387). Blackwell Publishing.
- Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 5(4), 161–170.
- Dulay, H. C., Burt, M. K., & Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Language Two*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Emeka-Nwobia, E., & Onu, F. O. (n.d.). Mother-tongue interference and clashing phonetic and phonological manifestations in speeches of Ehugbo non-native speakers of English. *EBSU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 8(2), 115-127.

- Essien, O. (1990). The future of English in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Humanities*, 4(7), 1-13.
- Gass, S. M. (1979). Language transfer and universal grammatical relations. *Language Learning*, 29(2), 327–344.
- Ige, I. B., & Olufemi, S. L. (2021). Effects of native language on students' academic performance in English in North-Eastern Nigerian polytechnics. *International Journal of English Language and Communication Studies*, 10(1), 44-61.
- Jarvis, S., & Pavlenko, A. (2008). *Crosslinguistic influence in language and cognition*. Routledge.
- Jowitt, D. (1991). *Nigerian English usage: An introduction*. Longman Nigeria.
- Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. University of Michigan Press.
- Manrique, S. A. G. (2013). Mother tongue interference in second language acquisition and its influence in EFL classrooms. *Journal of Educational Science*, 11(1), 102-118.
- Odlin, T. (1989). *Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ogayi, M. C. (2000). Hindering impact of Nigerian English and pidgin on the learning and standard English in Nigerian universities. *EA Journals*.
- Richards, J. C. (1971). A non-contrastive approach to error analysis. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 25(3), 204–219.

Saville-Troike, M. (2006). *Introducing second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.

Schachter, J. (1974). An error in error analysis. *Language Learning*, 24(2), 205–214.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 10(3), 209–231.



**APPENDIX**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**QUESTIONNAIRE ON IMPACTS OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON  
THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG UNIVERSITY OF  
BENIN STUDENTS**

Dear Respondent,

I am an undergraduate student of the Department of Educational Foundations who is conducting research on ‘The Impacts of Mother Tongue Interference on the Acquisition of English Language Among University of Benin Students’. I will sincerely appreciate it if the questions below are answered approximately by ticking in the space provided as well as providing a short answer where necessary. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

**SECTION A: Demographic Data**

Please, complete this section by ticking the appropriate option in the box provided.

Age

16-20 [ ]

21-25 [ ]

26-30 [ ]

31 above [ ]

Gender

Male [ ]

Female [ ]

SECTION B:

Please, indicate the following:

Faculty: .....

Department: .....

SECTION C:

Please complete this section by ticking[ ✓] the appropriate option in the box provided.

KEYS:

AGREE (A)

STRONGLY AGREE (SA)

DISAGREE (D)

STRONGLY DISAGREE (SD)

Research Question 1:

S/N	What is the extent of mother tongue interference in spoken and written English?	A	SA	D	SD
1	The sounds and accent of my mother tongue significantly influence how I pronounce English words.				
2	I often directly translate sentence structures from my mother tongue when speaking or writing in English.				
3	I make grammatical mistakes with English verb tenses and plural forms because of interference from my native language.				
4	My cultural communication style, influenced by my mother tongue, often affects my ability to communicate effectively in formal academic settings.				

Research Question 2:

S/N	How aware are students of their own mother tongue interference?	A	SA	D	SD
5	I am often aware when the pronunciation patterns of my mother tongue cause me to mispronounce English words.				
6	I usually identify when the grammar of my mother tongue has interfered with my English sentence structure.				
7	I consciously try to avoid directly translating phrases from my mother tongue into English.				
8	I am aware of the ways my mother tongue affects my English language use.				
9	I am able to spot errors that are caused by the influence of my mother tongue in my written English.				

Research Question 3:

S/N	How does mother tongue interference impact academic performance in English-taught courses?	A	SA	D	SD
10	The influence of my mother tongue on my spoken English sometimes makes it challenging for me to communicate effectively with peers during group projects.				
11	Mother tongue interference in my written English affects the clarity and quality of my essays and other academic assignments.				
12	When given oral presentation in class, the influence of my mother tongue on my pronunciation and grammar makes it difficult to articulate my points effectively.				
13	Grammatical and structural errors caused by mother tongue interference contribute to a lower performance on my examinations.				

Research Question 4:

S/N	What are the effects of mother tongue interference on students' English language proficiency?	A	SA	D	SD
14	Mother tongue interference makes it difficult for students to communicate their ideas clearly and effectively in English.				
15	Mother tongue interference in students' spoken English leads to hesitations and a slower rate of speech.				
16	The tendency for students to directly translate from their mother tongue hinders their ability to acquire and use a wide range of English vocabulary and idioms.				
17	The continuous struggle with mother tongue interference erodes students' confidence in their English language abilities.				

Research Question 5:

S/N	How do lecturers of English in University of Benin teach the impacts of mother tongue interference?	A	SA	D	SD
18	Lecturers organise and encourage activities like group discussions to provide students with opportunity to practise English in a supportive environment.				
19	Lecturers encourage students to become aware of their own errors and develop the ability to self-correct and monitor their use of English.				
20	Lecturers frequently identify and correct specific errors in students' spoken and written English.				
21	Lecturers adopt a tolerant and encouraging approach to errors caused by mother tongue interference				