

Interlanguage Development in a Language Learner

Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Write a note on interlanguage development in a language learner.

Interlanguage is a concept introduced by linguist Larry Selinker in 1972 in the study of second language acquisition. It refers to the unique, evolving linguistic system learners create when acquiring a new language. This system is distinct from both the learner's native language (L1) and the target language (L2). Interlanguage comprises elements from both languages and includes unique features that arise during the learning process.

Dynamic and Evolving Nature: Interlanguage is not static; it changes as the learner gains more exposure to the target language. Initially, learners may rely heavily on their native language, using familiar structures and vocabulary. Over time, as they receive more input and practice in the target language, their interlanguage becomes more complex and accurate. This ongoing development reflects the learner's gradual progress towards proficiency in the L2.

Influence of the Native Language (L1): The native language plays a significant role in shaping interlanguage. Learners often transfer linguistic elements from their L1 to the L2. This transfer can result in errors, such as using incorrect word order or grammar rules from the native language. For example, a Bengali speaker learning English might say, "She very beautiful" instead of "She is very beautiful" because Bengali does not use the verb "to be" in the same way.

Developmental Errors: Besides transfer errors, learners make developmental errors unrelated to their native language. These errors are part of the natural process of acquiring a new language. For instance, English learners might overgeneralize grammatical rules, saying "goed" instead of "went" because they apply the regular past tense rule to an irregular verb. Such errors are similar to those made by children learning their first language and indicate that the learner is internalizing the rules of the target language, even if they are not yet applying them correctly.

Fossilization: Fossilization occurs when incorrect language forms become fixed and resistant to change. This can happen for various reasons, such as lack of sufficient corrective feedback, limited opportunities for practice, or the learner's comfort with their current level of proficiency. Fossilization is a common phenomenon in interlanguage development and represents a

challenge for both learners and teachers.

Variability: Interlanguage can vary depending on the context in which the learner uses the target language. Factors such as the formality of the situation, the presence of native speakers, and the learner's emotional state can influence their language use. For example, learners might speak more accurately in a classroom where they are focused and receive immediate feedback but make more errors in casual conversations with friends.

Interlanguage development is a complex and dynamic process that reflects the learner's journey towards mastering a new language. The native language influences it. This also involves developmental errors and can be affected by fossilization and variability. Understanding interlanguage helps teachers and learners recognize that errors are a natural part of language acquisition. By overcoming the challenges of interlanguage, learners can gain excellent proficiency in their target language.