TRANSFER: CONSTRAINT, PROCESS, STRATEGY OR INERT OUTCOME?

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ABSTRACT

The present paper revises the four main approaches to the nature of language transfer: process, constraint, strategy and inert outcome. The analysis of these four perspectives pointed to the fact that they are not mutually exclusive. The study includes an experimental section consisting of a six-months tracking of a Spanish learner of English as a second language, whose results reveal a new perspective on this issue.

RESUMEN

Este artículo revisa los cuatro acercamientos principales a la naturaleza de la transferencia lingüística: proceso, impedimento, estrategia e *"inert outcome"*. El análisis de estas cuatro perspectivas indicó que no se trata de aspectos que se excluyan mutuamente. El estudio incluye una sección experimental, que consiste en el seguimiento de un aprendiz español de Inglés como segunda lengua durante un período de seis meses, cuyos resultados revelaron una nueva perspectiva sobre este asunto.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article fait une révision des quatre approches les plus importantes à la nature de la transférence linguistique: procès, empêchement, stratégie et *"inert outcome"*. L'analyse des quatre perspectives a montré qu'elles ne s'excluent pas mutuellement. L'étude comprend une section expérimentale qui consiste à suivre un étudiant espagnol d'anglais comme langue étrangère pendant une période de six mois, ce qui a dévoilé une nouvelle perspective sur cette matière.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Attempts at defining the nature of language transfer have always been a tough nut to crack. Considerable confusion has been caused by the difficulty of distinguishing the factors that interact with it or the manifestations it shows from the very phenomenon. In other words, its manifestations and constraints have been considered as the true nature of language transfer, a fact which didn't help much to shed light on the phenomenon itself. Contradiction in research findings, as Jarvis (2000) lucidly points out, may come from the fact that the role of previous language knowledge is not as irregular as it has been assumed, instead, the confusion may have its roots in the inconsistencies in empirical methodologies. Three factors can help in getting over the lack of methodological rigour:

1. a theory-neutral definition of L1 influence (or transfer) that would serve as a methodological heuristic for studies of this type,
2. a concise but exhaustive statement of the types of evidence that must be considered when presenting a case for or against L1 influence (cf. Ellis, 1985; Jarvis, 1998), and
3. a list of outside variables to be controlled in any rigorous investigation of transfer (Jarvis, 2000, p. 248).

Defining LT[1] without regard to its theory-related issues and concentrating solely on a methodological basis is a great achievement for obtaining a working tool with which to develop a solid methodology. That is, relating LT to the statistical occurrences in the IL which are closely related to parallel L1 occurrences is infallible; and probably the best definition that can be achieved from a methodological viewpoint:

> *L1 influence refers to any instance of learner data where a statistically significant correlation (or probability-based relation) is shown to exist between some feature of learners'IL performance and their L1 background* (Jarvis, 2000, p. 252).

While the correlation of items both in the IL and in the L1 undoubtedly shows LT occurs, does statistical correlation define it as such

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[1] The following abbreviations have been used: IL (Interlanguage), LT (Language Transfer), L1 (First Language), L2 (Second Language), NL (Native Language), SAO (Subject-Adjunct-Object), SOA (Subject-Object-Adjunct), SLA (Second Language Acquisition), TL (Target Language). The terms first language and native language have been used indistinctly, the same applies to the terms target language and second language.

or is it the mere evidence that transfer exists? Maybe we cannot just ignore theory.

In order to take a deep plunge into the nature of this phenomenon we should carefully analyse how it has been viewed so the present investigation is divided into two parts. The first section concentrates on the different outlooks: constraint, process, strategy and inert outcome. The experimental part of this paper consists of a six-month tracking of a Spanish learner of English as a second language; it analyses the nature of transfer in the adverbial placement examples produced by the subject.

2. TRANSFER AS A CONSTRAINT

This view implies that transfer acts as a constraint in the development of learners' language, leading them to non-target-like productions; broadly speaking, learners make hypotheses which are constrained by the use of L1 influence. As Odlin (2002) explains, a constraint is something that prevents a learner from being aware of similarities or from deciding that the similarity is real. Transfer as a constraint can be clearly exemplified in definitions such as:

> *What is currently viewed as evidence for the process of transfer is more appropriately viewed as evidence of a constraint on the learner's hypothesis testing process.It is both a facilitating and a limiting condition on the hypothesis testing process, but it is not in and of itself a process* (Schachter, 1983, p. 32).

With the purpose of explaining the workings of transfer as a constraint, Schachter (1983) considers it necessary to clarify what the "hypothesis-testing" model consists of. Based on the field of psychology, hypothesis-testing claims that the learner formulates and tests behaviour; there is a universe of hypotheses with various domains and the learner has an inferencing behaviour, both inductive and deductive. When applied to SLA, it is concluded that learners formulate and test hypotheses in the process of learning. From the universe of hypotheses, the learner groups them together according to domains with some characteristics in common. In the next step a domain is chosen and the learner samples the hypotheses. Finally, hypotheses are tested against the input. According to Schachter, the learner may chose the wrong domain, leading to transfer or chose the right domain but the wrong hypothesis, resulting in transfer errors; however, if the student selects both the right

domain and hypothesis it leads to positive transfer. Relating this theory to the concept of transfer gives as a result the following definition:

> the set of constraints that one's previous knowledge imposes on the domains from which to select hypotheses about the new data one is attending to (Schachter, 1983, p. 39).

Two weaknesses emerge from this model to consider transfer as a constraint based on hypothesis testing. First of all, no explanation is given about how learners form hypotheses, therefore we do not know how the hypotheses selection process is carried out from the domains; secondly it is not clear whether learners use positive or negative evidence to test hypotheses. We cannot forget either that correction, ie., testing negative data against the input, does not directly enhance learning and positive evidence does not necessarily need to result in positive transfer, since transfer is selective and second language learning is not linear. Another question that emerges from this is whether target-like and non-target-like behaviour originate from the same cognitive mechanism; as Selinker and Han (1999) point out:

> We need to ask empirically if target-like behavior is subject to control of the same cognitive mechanism as non-target-like behavior, an issue that should not be prejudged (Selinker and Han, 1999, p. 6).

Selinker (1992) also considers the possibility of having a constraint view on transfer, as he explicitely mentions:

> One conclusion is that NL can serve a facilitative role in creating IL, especially where some property of NL and TL is perceived by the learner to match, this perception leading to interlingual identifications as discussed throughout the earlier chapters. One caveat is that there is evidence in the literature that, at least, in the lexical domain, learners may on occasion and apparently under probabilistic constraints, reject TL structures even if found in the NL. Another caveat is that all this presupposes a "process" view of transfer, but there is another alternative: a "constraint" view of transfer (1992, p. 209).

3. TRANSFER AS A STRATEGY

One of the most relevant positions in viewing transfer as a strategy used by the students is held by Newmark and Reibel (1968), who consider that the adult learner does not substitute what he knows in the NL for the TL; instead of this "to fill in his gaps of training he refers

for help to what he already knows" (1968, p. 160). What these authors qualify as "ignorance", since the learner cannot fill in the gaps of knowledge in the L2, implies a strategy view of transfer and this is the interesting point of the ignorance hypothesis. In an attempt to offer a solution to this lack of knowledge, Newmark and Reibel propose more and better training.

A more extended version of transfer as a strategy is held by Corder (1983). He distinguishes between "structural transfer", which is considered a learning process and "borrowing"; the latter is defined as as a communicative strategy, which Tarone (1977) and Kellerman (1977) call transfer. Yet, Corder considers that when the IL has no means to express something and the speaker resorts to his mother tongue, we cannot call it a case of transfer, since when the same speaker uses his mother tongue in other contexts he is not transferring anything. Borrowing is not simply a case of NL and TL relationship for two main reasons:

a) It should be the same in any pair of languages for all learners, however borrowing is variable.

b) The NL is not the only source of borrowing, learners can borrow from other interlanguages.

The connection between structural transfer and borrowing lies in the fact that:

> *persistent communicatively successful borrowing works backwards, as it were, and the successfully borrowed forms are eventually incorporated into the interlanguage grammar, both the correct and the incorrect. Thus, it is proposed that borrowing is the mechanism itself whereby structural transfer takes place* (1983, p. 28).

If we look at this relationship from the perspective that any development of SLA is the product of trying to communicate, as Hatch (1978) acknowledges, then maybe the learning process of structural transfer is a result of borrowing, which in its turn is a communication strategy. In other words, if borrowing items from the NL in the shape of a communication strategy is done successfully, the item is incorporated in the IL and we are talking about structural transfer, if not we are facing errors.

The ambiguity is this conception lies in the fact that although Corder talks about the process of "transfer", he doesn't actually prove that this is different from "borrowing", which he considers as a communication strategy. As a result it is not clearly established whether we are talking about a process *and* a strategy or just one of them and if so, which one, the process or the strategy.

That same year, Meisel (1983) viewed transfer as "one strategy available to the L2 acquirer". It is one more strategy among others available to the learner, such as simplification.

In order to understand Meisel's view we need to be familiar with the second language acquisition model this author proposed. According to him, the L2 possesses what he calls a "developmental dimension" (1983, p. 12); it is composed of different acquisitional phases common to all learners no matter what their L1 is. In addition to this, learners also show "learner-type specific dimensions" (1983, p. 13). The individual variations learners have, such as the different use they make of strategies characterize this dimension; external and internal factors can affect the variations.

Some conclusions can be drawn from this model: a requisite for transfer to occur is that what is transferred must be "psychologically real" (1983, p. 14), for example, underlying and surface structures. Another issue points to the fact that transfer strategies are not used by all learners. Those who use them may vary in their use, depending, for instance, on the learning phase they are going through.

Transfer is used as a strategy to discover the L2 structure and to help in communicative performance. The only limit to it is set by cognitive principles.

In the present applied linguistics panorama, Manchón (2001) explains the consideration of transfer as a strategy in terms of the development of research in SLA:

> La reintepretación del concepto de transferencia como 'estrategia' es consecuencia del cambio de rumbo que se produjo en el seno de la investigación sobre el aprendizaje de lenguas: de centrarse en la investigación o producto mismo del aprendizaje se pasó al estudio de los mecanismos y procesos cognitivos subyacentes a dichos productos. (Manchón, 2001, p. 48).

We can distinguish a product and a process level in the use of the L1 as a strategy in writing; at a product level it helps in organising ideas and in content issues; at a process level, it can create additional linguistic problems, which tend to disappear as the learner improves the knowledge of the L2.

In writing, the L1 is used as a strategy in retrospective operations, to solve problems in the process of formulation, to summarise, paraphrase, etc., in the subprocess of revision and as a monitor to the whole writing process.

As for oral production, when the learner is trying to communicate in the L2, he/she can resort to communication strategies, some of which are based on the L1, such as code-switching, foreignizing or literal translations.

4. TRANSFER AS A PROCESS

Considering transfer as a cognitive issue (Wode, 1986) has led some researchers to view it as a process. The notion of "interlingual identification" is essential to this view. Interlingual identifications are defined as equivalence relations which happen when learners identify linguistic items as the same in different language systems, as stated by Weinreich (1953). Whether something in the native language and in the target language are similar according to the learner's view depends on the learner's judgements. This is connected to Kellerman's (1977) notion of psychotypology, ie., the distance between languages as perceived by the learner; a student's psychotypology is not fixed, it evolves as progress is made in the L2.

Making interlingual identifications implies that learners have a common psycholinguistic reference frame to perceive similarities between languages.

Kohn (1986) considers transfer as a 'learning process' and a 'production process':

> Transfer as a process is part of the learner's interlanguage behaviour, which includes not only the creative transformation of input data into interlanguage knowledge, but also the use to which the learner puts this knowledge in an attempt to produce meaningful and/or correct output [...] According to the proposed distinction between knowledge and the use of knowledge in output, transfer can assume one of the two shapes: it can be a learning process or a production process (Kohn, 1986, p. 22).

As a learning process, transfer acts in the input, selecting and structuring it while the interlanguage is developed. As a production process, it is related to the use that is made of acquired knowledge. It also affects the problem-solving abilities of the learner when reacting to possible processing problems in the interlanguage.

Among the criticisms raised against transfer as a process, we can mention Meisel's (1983). Since transfer can be interpreted as a mental activity, a careful study must be made because "different processes may lead to similar or identical surface level results" (Meisel, 1983, p. 14).

Therefore we can attribute to transfer certain products in the L2, which in fact may be due to other factors. For example, the omission of subject pronouns in Spanish, Italian or Portuguese can be considered a case of transfer, but if learners with different first languages also omit them, then another explanation is needed. This shows that the analysis cannot be restricted to surface structure.

5. TRANSFER AS AN INERT OUTCOME

A common conceptual system underlying both the L1 and the IL lies at the basis of considering transfer as an inert outcome; in Jarvis's words:

> *Inert, here means nonreactive and nondynamic. According to this view, L-1 based conceptual influence can take place even when the learner has not made any overt comparisons or interlingual identifications between L1 and l2 forms and features* (Jarvis, 2000, p. 299).

This shared world of concepts was already present in Slobin (1993) when he considered the extraction of perceptually salient grammatical elements by children and by adults. Children seemed to "map them onto the most salient *contextually-determined* contexts" (1993, p. 242), however adults mapped them onto the source language semantic or pragmatic concept, which was generally determined by context. The fact that the learner's native language and the system the learner develops are connected by conceptual representations is also indicated in Kellerman's (1995) *transfer to nowhere*, which he proposed as complementary to Andersen's (1983) *transfer to somewhere*. Kellerman states that the L1 way of thinking can predispose the learner to L1 conceptualization transfer.

This undoubtely addresses the issue of linguistic relativity; how language affects thinking has recently been analysed by Pavlenko (1999). This author concentrates on the changes from monolingualism to bilingualism and has determined that L1 speakers can make changes in the L1 conceptual system due to L2 influence.

In summary, if we have a closer look at these four definitions, we can observe that they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the nature of language transfer is that of a process, but learners can resort to the "strategy" of transfer in order to apply the process of transfer based on interlingual identifications, which is what the learners consider as "common" to both languages, the role of constraints being that of filters,

considering that a constraint is a prediction that something is not going to happen. The process can thus be filtered by certain constraints or it can be applied via the use of a strategy.

In the following investigation I have attempted to analyse the nature of transfer taking as a basis the learning of English as a second language and Spanish as the native language.

6. METHOD

For this piece of research, I chose a longitudinal case study so as to observe the language produced by the subject at different points in time. Information is given on internal factors as well as on the linguistic background of the subject. The type of data analysis applied was interlanguage analysis because for the purpose of the study, his IL had to be analysed not only as an independent system but also related to his native language and the target language the learner was aiming at; this way, in the examples produced four aspects were considered: the IL form, the literal translation of the IL form, the hypothesized target language form and the hypothesized native language form.

The language topic selected to analyse the nature of transfer was adverbial placement since it has been a long debated issue in English, whereas few studies deal with Spanish-English interlanguage word order in this issue.

6.1. Subject

The subject in this study is a 15 year-old boy who was born in Galicia. His native language is Spanish and he has been learning English for more than five years. He has taken other English courses apart from the High School one. This student practises English out of the classroom context and he has never been to an English speaking country. As for the motivational factor, he shows an integrative point of view, he likes English because "me gustan los idiomas". With regard to his knowledge of other languages, he has studied Galician and Latin.

6.2. Materials and procedure

Two different research materials were used: two guided interviews based on two questionnaires dealing with adverbial placement and a

talk by the subject. All the experiments were carried out both in English and Spanish, in order to have a sample of the subject's IL and NL. The data were collected every three months; the first experiment took place in October, the second in January and the third in April. An SPSS/PC+ statistical analysis was applied to all the examples collected. The experiments were divided as follows:

a) First experiment

This first experiment consists of an interview; it is divided into two sections. In the first section five questions were introduced to analyse the position of frequency adjuncts and the subject had to answer the questions using one of these adjuncts: never, sometimes, often, usually and always; the questions were the following:

1. What time do you get up?
2. Do you go to the disco at the weekends?
3. Do you read the newspaper?
4. Do you go to church on Sunday?
5. Are you hungry?

The second section aims at eliciting time, place and manner adjuncts, as well as the placement of object + adjunct. The subject was asked in this order:

1. What language do you speak at home?
2. Which film did you see last week?
3. Does your father drive carefully in Lugo?
4. Does it rain heavily in Galicia?
5. Did you speak English fluently in your English class last year?

The experiment was conducted out of the classroom times and it took about 15 minutes. The subject was asked to answer the questionnaire first in his native language and then in English so as to make him feel confident during the first experiment.

b) Second experiment

A brief talk by the subject constitutes the second experiment; its purpose was to obtain oral data that were not produced in the context of a guided interview. The subject was asked to talk for five minutes about himself, his daily routine and about life in Spain or in the local area where he lived. He talked first in English and then in his native

language, which was done on purpose so as to obtain a reverse order from the first experiment where the speaker was asked to use his native language first. Ten minutes before the talk he was given some guidelines to help him organize his oral presentation and to avoid silent periods. It consisted of the following points:

a) Place where he lived.
b) Knowledge of languages.
c) Things he liked.
d) Habits he had.
e) What Spanish people do on holidays.
f) What Spanish people like.

For the data analysis, the talk was divided into examples which in most cases correspond to the different sentences he produced.

c) Third experiment

This interview aims at eliciting the same type of adjuncts that were analysed in the two previous experiments; its purpose is to observe the progress in adverbial placement after some months of instruction. A questionnaire containing 30 questions was administered out of his classroom times. Adverbials were asked in two separate questions instead of in a single sequence; since the subject was only told to answer in complete sentences I did not want him to provide replies with exactly the same words as he was asked. An exhaustive list of the thirty questions is not relevant; suffice it to say that the examples were divided into sequences such as: Do you like the cinema? Very much?, Do you listen to the music? Sometimes?

6.3. Results

6.3.1. First experiment

Language transfer resulted in 11.1% target-like sentences and 44.4% non-target-like sentences; therefore this subject applies his NL rules to most of the examples he produced. Time adjuncts are placed both in initial and end position in the same proportion; the subject places frequency adjuncts in the TL position, there is only one example where he hesitates:

1. *Yes I always... I am always hungry.*

Language transfer does not seem to be at work with regard to this kind of adjuncts; the subject knows the TL rules, in fact he is about to place the adjunct "always" before the verb overgeneralizing the TL rule, however he immediately applies the TL placement. Transfer is constrained by instruction.

The combination of object and adjunct shows NL transfer of choice; the subject is transferring the abstract organizing principle that TL adverbials can be placed before or after the object as they do in his NL, resulting in examples such as:

2. *At home I always speak with my family Spanish.*
3. *Last week I saw to the cinema a Mel Gibson's film "Braveheart".*

No constraint acts as filter, therefore the process is applied resorting to the strategy of using the NL, as is shown in the same examples collected in the NL of the subject. In the first sentence the NL word order is exactly the same both in the NL and in the IL. In the second example the subject omits the place adjunct but the time adjunct is placed in initial position, just as he did in the IL sentence:

4. *Yo hablo siempre en casa el castellano.*
5. *¿La semana pasada? Pues la semana pasada vi "Braveheart".*

6.3.2. Second experiment

In the second experiment the subject produced the following talk:

Well I live in Galicia, in RN street on the 23 on the left third. And... in my city, where I live, Lugo is in the north of my country, Spain. I speak a... two languages very well and also I speak a little or quite little English. And I like very much the football and also other sports and I often to the cinema because I like very much the cinema's world and... when I have breakfast I... drink only milk and the Spanish, the people of Spanish go on holiday normally to the beach or also to the country... Also the people Spanish go in summer to the beach, at the Christmas where the people are in their homes with their family and the Easter, well my family is at home and the rest of the Spanish... well I think also they are in their houses too and these people on Sunday... go to the... go to eat to a restaurant. On Saturday they go to the cinema for example and they go to the cinema in the night. And finally I like... very, very things for example I like very much the sport, I like the computers and the videogames and I like very, very, very much the cinema.

It can be noticed that the subject tends to follow the native-like placement relying on his own perception of similarity between both lan-

guages, resorting to the process and applying the strategy of similarity to the L1, such as:

6. *and also I speak little or quite little English.*

The same applies to the following example where the occurrence of an intensifier adjunct between the verb and the object shows that the learner perceives that the NL choice between SOA and SAO is the same as the TL one, creating an interlingual identification which leads him to apply the process of transfer:

7. *I like very much the football and also other sports.*

The use of interlingual identifications can also be observed in this example:

8. *I often to the cinema because I like very much the cinema's world.*

In this example the subject also produces an empty category, omiting the verb which seems to be performance-related because in the rest of the sentences he does not produce this empty category; moreover, the subject's perception of the similarity between both languages, ie., his psychotypology leads him to the production of parallel structures in both languages. The common reference he uses is also present in:

9. *The people of Spanish go on holiday normally to the beach or also to the country.*

This structure is the result of applying the abstract organizing principle that adverbials can take the same position as in the NL; furthermore, the overuse of the adjective in a context where it does not apply also shows that he is following the IL principles.

The similarity the learner establishes between both languages is clearly noticed if we observe the talk he produced in his native language:

Bien, pues yo vivo en Galicia, en la calle RN en el número 23, tercero izquierda. Y bueno, mi ciudad, Lugo está situada al norte de la península, al norte de España y sólo soy capaz de hablar perfectamente, bastante bien, dos lenguas y más o menos o un poquito, pues también hablo inglés lo básico. El fútbol pues me gusta... bastante y todo lo relacionado con el fútbol; ir al cine, voy bastante a menudo porque tengo gran pasión por el mundo del cine en general. Sobre lo que yo desayuno, pues no soy muy comedor, así que por la mañana suelo tomar un vaso

de leche y nada más y listo y ya me voy. Y respecto a dónde van los españoles de vacaciones, pues suelen ir a la playa. España tiene buenas costas y también muchos españoles prefieren quedarse en el interior o ir al campo. Los españoles... pues en verano, como es lógico, suelen ir casi siempre a la playa aunque ahora esté menos de moda y lo de las Pascuas lo más es que uno esté en su casa igual que por Navidad con su familia. Durante el fin de semana, pues el Domingo la gente suele ir a comer, normalmente pues a un restaurante, fuera de casa. Los Sábados ir por la noche al cine lo más general y respecto a lo que a mí me gusta, pues me gustan un montón de cosas. Me gusta mucho el deporte, me gusta muchísimo todo lo relacionado con el mundo de los ordenadores, de los videojuegos y las películas. Y eso es todo.

As can be seen, the combination SAO and SOA is used in the NL as it is in the IL. More time adjuncts are produced in initial placement, the same tendency that can be observed in the IL; as for place adjuncts they tend to occur in final position. If we compare both talks, it is quite obvious that the subject creates interlingual identifications which enable him to apply the process of transfer resorting to the strategy of creating parallel structures.

6.3.3. Third experiment

In the third experiment the learner approaches the TL word order producing more SOA sentences:

10. *Yes, I watch TV very often.*
11. *Yes I like the cinema very much.*
12. *I go to the cinema on Saturday.*

However, he still shows a tendency to SAO word order:

13. *Yes, I like very much Galician.*
14. *I like very much music.*

The combination of both a target-like and a non-target-like word order indicate that the learner is still in a period of optionality of placement based on the transfer of choice from his L1, although he is approaching the L2 word order. If we observe the proportion of non-target-like sentences due to transfer in the three data collections, we can observe that the smallest number of non-target-like examples is found in the third data collection: non-target-like sentences due to language transfer occur in 44.4% of cases in the first data collection, 53.3% in the second and 20% in the third.

Both the first and the third data collections were interviews based on a questionnaire, while the second consisted of a talk with no questions as a basis. The context of an experiment where the subject was not asked specific questions has favoured the occurrence of transfer, therefore we can conclude that context can act as a constraint. As pointed out above, in the third data collection, less examples of non-target-like sentences were produced, since this is a longitudinal study. The final data collection took place after six months of instruction in English as a second language, the subject has advanced in his knowledge of the L2; according to this, level also constrains the use of transfer, that is, the more the learner knows the less he tranfers.

The analysis seems to indicate that the learner uses transfer as a process, based on the interlingual identifications he makes between the NL and the IL, such as for example the SOA-SAO optionality of placement though the student can apply this process via the strategy of creating parallel structures; in this case study, the process is filtered by context and level, which act as constraints.

7. CONCLUSION

What lies at the basis of these four approaches can be summarised in simple terms: the process view of transfer implies the creation of interlingual identifications on the part of the learner between the L1 and the L2, which Weinreich (1953) pointed out in the heyday of contrastive analysis. The constraint perspective assumes that the kind of hypotheses learners make are compelled by transfer. The strategy viewpoint denies both the process and constraint view, believing that L1 influence is a strategy learners use to fill in gaps of knowledge in the target language, while the most recent trend proposes that transfer results as an inert outcome of a common conceptual system underlying the L1 and the IL. This paper proposes that these views are not mutually exclusive and though transfer is a process based on interlingual identifications, learners can resort to it as a strategy, while constraints act as filters. It is necessary to mention that although the results obtained in this investigation provide evidence in this direction, the case study is limited to a six-month tracking of a single subject. More research covering longer periods of time and learners with different learning experiences is needed in order to solve this complex and abrupt issue, which has attracted considerable attention in the field of second language acquisition.

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