

## Language Transfer: An Interlanguage Strategy by Primary School English Learners in Miriga Mieru West Division, Meru County.

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**ABSTRACT:** English a second language for most people of the world, has increasingly become the international language for business and commerce Science and technology and International relations and diplomacy. In Kenya the importance of English as a medium of instruction goes way back to the colonial period. Even though English has been accorded a prestigious position of being the official language and language of instruction learners take time to learn it. The learners construct a personal linguistic system in the interim time which is different from the first language and also target language called interlanguage. This paper examines language transfer as an interlanguage strategy employed by primary school pupils in Miriga Mieru West Division, Meru County. The study employed descriptive survey method of research. The target population comprised of class five pupils. Standard five was targeted because they are in their second year in upper primary and being in their early years of acquiring English, the pupils use it more in their interaction with and in writing of essays. At this level English is also used as a medium of instruction and used in the learning of other subjects. Data was analyzed within the tenets of interlanguage theory. The study established that in the process of learning English pupils transferred linguistic structures from their first language which is Kiementi to English. The study recommends that English teachers should give clearer explanations of English grammar rules and second language learners should be guided in extensive reading as extensive reading exposes learners to correct grammatical structures. The study contributes to the scholarly, literature on interlanguage of second language English learners. The findings are also useful to the teachers, pupils and to curriculum developers of language in designing learning materials.

**KEY WORDS:** *Interlanguage, language transfer, linguistic structures, target language, first language.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Some of the rules in the interlanguage system may be the result of transfer from the learner's first language. Language transfer refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from one language to another language. The learner applies what he knows as a means of organizing the target language or second language data. The learner hypothesizes the target language rules by drawing on corresponding source language data and the previous knowledge comes in handy in tackling the task. Selinker (1972) suggested that the way in which this happens is that learners make interlingual identifications. In approaching the task of learning a second language, learners perceive certain units the same in their NL, IL and TL. Transfer is negative when there is proactive inhibition. On the other hand, transfer is positive when the first and second language habits are the same. Differences between the first and second language create learning difficulty which results in errors, while the similarities between the first and second language facilitate rapid and easy learning. Respondents used the strategy of language transfer as they learn English. The following are examples of language transfer categories used by the respondents.

#### **Phonological Language Transfer**

Phonologically, there are certain features specific to any individual language. Such features may not be found in another language, or even if they exist in another language, they may take new characteristics which again make them distinctive features in that particular language. Odlin (1990) is right in saying sounds in two languages often show different physical characteristics, including acoustic characteristics (for example; the pitch of a sound).

#### **Prenasalisation of plosives**

In Kiementi language, consonants are added to other consonants especially in borrowed words and also in spoken English. There is pre-nasalization of voiced consonants [b], [d], [g], [n] and [dz]. In traditional orthography these sounds are represented as [mb], [nd] and [ng]. Most of the insertions made in spoken English made by Kiementi

speakers which is a dialect of Kiimeru, are made so as to create a phonologically acceptable sound sequence in accordance to Kiimanti phonology as shown in the examples from the recorded narratives: In data presentation abbreviations LTS, P and CF have been used. LTS represent Language Transferred Structures, P represents Pupil and CF represents the Correct Form of the interlanguage structure.

### **LTS Number 1**

P. `\*Mblak suit.`

CF. `Black suit`

In Kiimanti the bilabial plosive [b] is preceded by a bilabial nasal [m]. The pupil added bilabial nasal [m] to precede bilabial plosive [b] the way they normally do in Kiimanti which resulted to the interlanguage structure \*mblack.

### **LTS Number 2**

P. `Thendriver was ngood.`

CF. `The driver was ngood`

The alveolar stop [d] is preceded by an alveolar nasal [n]. In the language transferred structure the respondent added alveolar nasal [n] to alveolar stop [d] so that the word driver was pronounced as \*ndriver. This prenasalisation is done so as to create a phonological acceptable sound sequence as transferred from Kiimanti phonology. Jana (2010) explains that many English words do not exist or transfer to other languages, so English language learners may lack the auditory acuity to hear these English sounds and have difficulty pronouncing them and this also applied to the respondents in this study.

### **Epenthesis**

In phonology, epenthesis is the insertion of an extra sound into a word. In phonology epenthesis means the addition of one or more sounds to a word. Epenthesis arises for a variety of reasons; the phonotactics of a given language may discourage vowels in hiatus or consonant clusters, and a consonant or a vowel may be added to make pronunciation easier. Epenthesis may be represented in writing or be a feature only of the spoken language. Kiimanti-a dialect of Kiimeru language has an open syllable structure. Some English words which have a consonant cluster undergo the process of epenthesis where a vowel is inserted to break the consonant cluster so as to conform to the Kiimanti syllable structure. Due to this mother tongue influence, the respondents produced the following words:

### **LTS Number 3**

My aunt found a good \*partiner.

Instead of partner,

This phonological effect is an indication of the influence of Kiimanti as the learners' first language in the learning of English language. The syllable structure of Kiimanti permits only the CV sequence and in speech the speaker breaks down the CC clusters in English words by inserting a vowel between the two consonants. This according to interlanguage is for the ease of articulation as shown in the example \*partiner instead of partner.

### **Consonant Substitution**

When a person whose L1 is Kiimanti is speaking in English, there are errors in the pronunciation of some English consonants and also substitution of these consonants to conform to consonant sounds in Kiimanti. The main area of difficulty was in the wrong pronunciation of the post-alveolar approximant sound and the alveolar lateral sound [l][r]. The respondents substituted sound [l] with [r], due to mother tongue influence. At other times they substituted the [r] with [l] and hence produced the following structures as shown below.

### **LTS Number 4**

There were \*barrons everywhere

Instead of balloons

### **LTS Number 5**

I saw a frower girl

Instead of flower girl,

Respondents produced such structures due to influence from Kiimanti language and phonemic differences between Kiimanti and English. The use of /l/ and /r/ interchangeably is as a result of lack of differentiation between the two sounds in Kiimanti. In their study Nguyen and Brouha (1998) say that consonant substitution or consonant deletion strategies are a subset of consonant cluster reduction strategies. The respondents are not accustomed to positioning their mouths in the way the English sounds requires.

### **Literal Translation**

In literal translation, the learners literally translate a word, a compound word, an idiom, or a structure from L1 into English. Respondents literally translated Kiimanti language into English. For example in the following sentences we have the following words literally translated:

**LTS Number 6**

P.\*`Mother and father of the wedding.'

This was literally translated from Kiimenti;  
This in English is supposed to be `the best couple`.

**LTS Number 7**

P.\*`My uncle saw good wife.

This was also literally translated from Kiimenti;

In English it's supposed to be `my uncle found a good wife` which was literally translated from Kiimenti. This use of literal translation in the learner's interlanguage proves hypothesis formation to be part of interlanguage improvement.

The following are more directly translated examples from the respondents narratives.

**LTS Number 8**

I heard very hungry (instead of)

I felt very hungry

**LTS Number 9**

The cups came and guests were served (instead of)

The cups were brought and guests were served

**Language Transfer through Simplification**

Simplification is any reduction resulting in a linguistic structure simpler than what is considered TL norm (Odlin, 1990). The learners use of a reduced system is due to either cognitive limitations or the use of various learning and communication strategies which lead to omission, or misordering of linguistic elements. The following is an example of a simplified structure by the respondents.

**LTS Number 10**

P\* Wedding was very good.

CF. The wedding was very good

**Language Transfer Through Reduplication**

Reduplication is a common morphological phenomenon in Bantu languages. It is usually used to indicate frequency or intensity of the action signaled by the unreduplicated verb stem. The respondents under study used reduplication in their narration to show the frequency of various actions like in the following examples;

P\* We went and went

P\* We danced and danced

This reduplication resulted to production of the language transferred structures above.

**II. CONCLUSION**

The study established that learners used the strategy of language transfer in their study of English. From the analysis done it can be concluded that there are language transferred structures from Kiimenti to English by the respondents namely; Phonological Language transfer prenasalization of plosives epenthesis consonant substitution literal translation and language transfer through reduplication. Arising from the findings and conclusion this study recommends that English teachers should give clearer explanations of English grammar rules so that the students can apply these rules correctly both orally and in writing. Second language learners should be guided in extensive reading as it exposes learners to correct grammatical structures and use of these structures in specific contexts and situations.

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