



THE IMPACT OF EARLY SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING ON THE NATIVE LANGUAGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract *This article investigates how early second language (L2) learning influences the development and use of the native language (L1), comparing English-speaking and Uzbek-speaking learners. Drawing on contrastive linguistics and SLA theories such as the Critical Period Hypothesis, transfer theory, and interdependence hypothesis, the study analyzes linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural outcomes. Data were collected through comparative classroom observations, language proficiency tests, and interviews with young learners aged 6–10 in bilingual settings. Findings reveal that while early exposure to an L2 promotes metalinguistic awareness and accelerates cognitive flexibility, it also leads to observable L1 attrition in vocabulary range, syntax complexity, and code-switching frequency—especially in Uzbek children immersed in English. Conversely, English-speaking children learning Uzbek displayed slower acquisition rates, yet their L1 remained largely unaffected due to the global dominance of English. These results highlight asymmetrical impacts of early bilingualism shaped by sociolinguistic context.*

Keywords: *Second Language Acquisition (SLA), contrastive linguistics, bilingualism, language transfer, native language attrition, early L2 learning.*

Introduction

The interaction between a learner's first language (L1) and second language (L2) has long been central in SLA research. Early bilingualism offers cognitive advantages but may also impact the stability of the native language. Studies on English and minority languages often report lexical borrowing, code-switching, and partial L1 attrition (Pavlenko, 2000; Montrul, 2008).

For Uzbek, a Turkic language with rich agglutinative morphology, early English exposure has become increasingly common due to global education policies. Contrastive linguistic studies highlight potential challenges: Uzbek's suffix-based morphology differs significantly from English's analytic structure, creating fertile ground for transfer errors and developmental overlaps. Meanwhile, English learners of Uzbek encounter complex vowel harmony and case-marking systems absent in English.

This study aims to examine how early L2 learning in English and Uzbek affects children's L1 development. It asks:

1. Does early English exposure cause measurable attrition in Uzbek children's L1?
2. Does early Uzbek learning affect English children's L1 stability?
3. How do structural differences between English and Uzbek shape L1-L2 interaction?

Methods

Participants

- **Group A (Uzbek children):** 30 students (ages 6–10) attending English immersion programs in Tashkent.
- **Group B (English children):** 30 students (ages 6–10) in heritage Uzbek classes in London.

Instruments

- **Proficiency tests** in both L1 and L2 (vocabulary, grammar, narrative tasks).
- **Classroom observations** of language use, code-switching, and politeness formulas.
- **Semi-structured interviews** with teachers and parents.

Analytical Framework

- **Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH):** identifying structural differences between Uzbek and English.
- **Transfer Theory:** analyzing positive and negative transfers.

- **Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis:** examining how skills in one language affect the other.
- **Attrition Studies:** measuring reduction in L1 competence.

Results

1. Uzbek children learning English

Strong gains in English vocabulary and oral fluency.

Evidence of L1 attrition: reduced use of Uzbek honorifics, simplified morphology, and increased code-switching (e.g., *kitobni buy* instead of *kitobni ol* “take the book”). Parents noted children preferred English media and gradually lost expressive range in Uzbek.

2. English children learning Uzbek

Slow uptake of Uzbek morphology and case system, with high error rates.

Minimal impact on English proficiency; L1 literacy remained stable.

Use of formulaic Uzbek politeness phrases (*iltimos, rahmat*) without full integration into natural discourse.

3. Contrastive findings

Syntax: Uzbek's SOV order led Uzbek learners to produce English with misplaced adverbs (*I tea drink always*).

Morphology: English learners struggled with agglutinative suffix stacking (e.g., *kitoblaringizdan* “from your books”).

Pragmatics: Politeness formulas more resistant to attrition in Uzbek, but frequently calqued into English.

Discussion

The study shows that sociolinguistic context plays a decisive role in the L1 impact of early bilingualism. Uzbek children learning English experienced noticeable L1 weakening due to English prestige, media dominance, and reduced home use. By contrast, English-speaking children learning Uzbek encountered structural difficulty but maintained L1 stability due to English's global dominance and strong institutional reinforcement.

From a theoretical perspective:

Critical Period Hypothesis is supported: children acquired near-native pronunciation in L2 but showed L1 vulnerability when exposed intensively to English.

Transfer Theory explains observed interference, especially Uzbek-to-English word order transfer and English-to-Uzbek morphological reduction.

Interdependence Hypothesis is partly confirmed: cognitive and metalinguistic gains were observed, but they did not prevent L1 attrition when sociocultural reinforcement was weak.

Conclusion

Early L2 learning produces both benefits and risks. While children gain flexibility and enhanced language awareness, minority L1s such as Uzbek are vulnerable to attrition under English influence. Educational policies should promote balanced bilingualism by ensuring continued development of the native language alongside L2 instruction. This includes bilingual curricula, parental involvement, and cultural reinforcement.

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