

Investigating the Interlanguage Fossilization of English writing in Foreign Language Acquisition

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Abstract

Interlanguage fossilization represents a common phenomenon in Foreign/Second language acquisition. The current study attempted to investigate the students' writing compositions to reveal if interlanguage fossilization occurred or not. A diagnostic test has been used to collect the data. A sample of this study was chosen randomly from 20 EFL students of the sixth year preparatory schools in the academic year (2023-2024). The findings of this study displayed that two kinds of interlanguage fossilization are found and achieved by students. Morphological fossilization and syntactical fossilization. Morphological fossilization contained 85.63% and syntactical fossilization consisted of 14.37%. Low English proficiency led students' writing compositions to interlanguage fossilization. So, the students should be more a curate and active to develop their ability in learning English as a foreign language.

1. Introduction

Fossilization is a common phenomenon in foreign/second language acquisition, which was introduced by American linguist Selinker in 1972. Selinker and Lamendalla (1978:187) as cited in Benati and Angelovsk (2016: 42) defined it as "a permanent cession of IL learning before the learner has attained L2 norms at all levels of linguistic structure and all discourse domains in spite of the learner's ability". Han's definition of fossilization who takes into considerations the external appearance and innateness of the phenomena. Also, he mentions that fossilization displays that cognitive processes mechanisms that generate constantly stabilized interlanguage forms.

Fossilization is considered one of barriers that prohibit students from arriving at the target language and performing a higher level of proficiency. Many researchers have attempted to study this linguistic barrier and concentrated on examining photic fossilization. While another direction of researchers have tried to determine the main causes and the reasonable solutions (Management Association, 2022:955).

However, fossilization shows that the insistence of errors in a speech of student in spite of getting better in the area of language improvement (Light brown & Spada, 2006 as cited in Richards, 2015:276). It is defined it as "the continuity which results in the learner's interlanguage competence non-target-like" (Han, 2004: 29).

Meanwhile, fossilization is the process whereby the student makes a discontinuity of interlanguage learning, thus stopping interlanguage from improving. So, student is not able to differentiate from native and speakers of that language (Han, 2004:15). Besides, fossilization occurs when the students have convinced requirement for communication and integration in the second language community (Lightbow, 2000 as cited in Han and Odlin, 2006: 179). Lang and Yan (2019:161) added that fossilization in writing happens when the score barely modifies as the time of later revisions increases.

1.1. Problem of the Study

One of the issues that EFL students encounter when writing compositions, articles and other types of writing is interlanguage fossilization. Writing is difficult process that requires a lot of work to develop. and needs great efforts to form. Grammatical rules must be followed by the students when writing.

According to Richards (2015:267), a student's grammatical improvement of may occasionally show up a half to a particular level and repetition of both pronunciation and grammar errors that become a student's speech defining charactersyics (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006). Hyltemstam (1992:355) cites Yorio (1985:9) as saying that there are two types of issues with fossilization. Control failure is the term for the first. The same

pattern or expression can be used correctly in one context and incorrectly in another for a variety of reasons. This type of issue when a student's command of grammar fails them even though they may have mastered the rules. The second is referred to as competence versus control. It implies that fossilization, where the idea is linked to ongoing mistakes, should be regarded as a skill. The student's second system is continuously filled with incorrect structures. Furthermore, Horing (1987:37), one of the issue that raises from second language learner's fossilization is spelling pronunciation which also affects basic writing.

Given the complexity of the target language community, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint the exact causes of fossilization. Therefore, it should be noted that a problem is complicated to avoid using the verb "fossilized", some vagueness and the noun fossilization, which requires an identical danger (Lightbow, 2000) as cited in (Han and Odlin, 2006:5).

1.2. The Value of the Study

The current study is expected to be high worth in identifying interlanguage fossilization problems if they occur in writing English composition. It is very useful for EFL teachers m educators and curriculum designers.

1.3. Aims of the Study

This study aims to investigating and determining if the interlanguage fossilization happened or not, and classifying types and identifying causes of interlanguage fossilization.

1.4. Limits of the Study

This study is limited to exploring interlanguage fossilization of sixth year students / scientific branch at the preparatory schools in Tikrit City, Salahdin governorate during the academic year (2023-2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Classification of Fossilization

There are several ways to divide interlanguage fossilization according to various criteria. According to Selinker's concept, fossilization can be classified into two main kinds in terms of form involving individual fossilization and group fossilization.

Individual fossilization has fundamentally two kinds such as error appearance, and language competence. Error appears fossilization means that it is a process of Correcting language errors that happen frequently. Language competence is called fossilization of vocabulary, syntactic Structures and pronunciation in interlanguage. Instance, this subtype refers to that repetition of the same errors occurred by learner, in the phonological, grammatical and lexical area although continuous corrections have been made.

Group fossilization occurs as individual fossilization becomes permeating in the whole society that sometimes creates a new dialect. Singapore English and Indian English repeat good examples of group fossilization (Widiastuti, 2017:19). Sharma (2005 as cited in Mentrul, 2023: 135) gives Indian English is a good example and that acts uncommon sociolinguistic challenge since non-native varieties of English cannot be simply that one of group under models of individual second language acquisition or under sociolinguistic models of native variation. He considers it as the hybrid case of English language as non-native variety in that statuses takes from its functional case as a second language.

2.2. Causes of Fossilization

Many factors Contribute to create fossilization. It is possible that fossilization is caused by mother tongue, imperfect teaching, lack of interest interference and the transfer of training (Buğu & Ögeyik, 2018: 257). The nature of fossilization has been soci-effective, neurobiological and cognitive causes. Fossilization creates specific chemical modifications in the human brain by producing electrical procedures which work against the neurocognitive processes of sounds and phonemes implicit second. Language perception and production (Shafaei, 2014 1378). In 1972, Selinker regards the question why most of second language students fail to acquire target language competence Ellis (2007) and Bley-Woman (1989, 2009) as cited in (Han,2014:47) displays it as "non- convergence property" of second language acquisition.

Besides, Liu Ruqing (2003) as cited in (Huang, 2022:478) believes that there are three causes that lead to fossilization such as cognitive perspectives, learning atmosphere and student's personal factors. As Niu Qiang (2009) as cited in (Ibid) also believes that Four factors transfer, teaching materials and the emotional factors, and interference of mother tongue. Because fossilization has considerable influence on Student's achievement, many causes of fossilization have been studied by the researchers in order to decrease or prevent fossilization in the student's interlanguage. The causes of fossilization have been hypothesized by Selinker in 1972 that five

processes, such as native language transfers, transfer of training, strategies of communication, strategies of learning and over generation of target language.

Language transfer means that if fossilization results from native language. Transfer of training shows that if fossilization appears from training transactions. Strategies of second language learning displays that if fossilization results from learning approaches by the students. Strategies of second language communication deals with if communicative approaches are used by the students cause fossilization. Finally, over generation of TL linguistic material refers to if fossilization is caused by over generation of Teaching language rules (MA, 2014:161).

According to Weidong (1999, 10-15) as cited in Chen and Zhao (2013, 18-19) mentions that most of errors resulted from emergence of fossilization. He also believes that the main reasons are that foreign language students that do not have the ability to acquire functions and forms in natural language contact. So, he depends his analysis on two major types as follows:

2.2.1. Internal Factors

- a. Learner's age: It means that a critical period is a very important aspect in the process of learning of language as foreign or second as students can be quickly and effectively acquire a foreign or second language. Whether a critical period disappears, the process of learning makes so much hard and leads to create fossilization.
- b. Learner's emotions: It shows that the role of emotional factors (interest, motivation, self-confidence anxiety and etc.) influence on students in the process of learning foreign language. If those emotional factors occur, interlanguage fossilization appears in the early level of learning foreign language.

2.2.2. External Factors

- a. Strategies of second language learning: the strategies of Foreign or second learning display that they basically involve the learning and administration method are used by students as well as all types of activities of using language. Various learning strategies maybe chosen various language students. The incorrect and ineffective learning can cause fossilization as the successful learning strategies lead to interlanguage approach the target language.
- b. Strategies of second Language communication: language is an instrument of communicating among human beings. Selinker refers to strategies of second language communication in 1972. They include a set of activities such as (word coinage, paragraph, avoidance, und borrowing). These skills are used by students in communication. Students are inclined to put off some complex rules to get their expressions simple rules and fast. Therefore, fossilization can be produced.
- c. Lack of learning opportunity: It shows that language students do not have enough chances for receiving of contacting language input. In the meaning, the lack of using language can cause fossilization.
- d. The role of EFL teacher: the role of teacher in the classroom is very essential in teaching foreign language. If teacher is not able to teach some native linguistic forms, his /her learners are possible to create fossilization. On the other side. linguistic tests are very fundamental process for evaluating competence of learner second / foreign language. So, the efficient test and correct make learner acquire foreign language. Besides, oriented test can weaken competence of learner's foreign language and lead to fossilization.

2.3. Interlanguage

In the area of second language acquisition, interlanguage has been considered a new language approach which was improved in 1969. Any language from the sight of this new direction has been comprehended as a powerful world with its own characteristics, structure, syntax and lexis.

The interlanguage approach or theory has been introduced by Selinker between 1969 and 1972 that the first systematic trial to express the second language learning process from a nativist view point. Inter language is defined as "a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target language" (Brown: 2007:225 as cited in Alenzi, 2022:24). In other words, it means transitive language that second students may face as learning the second language.

Besides, Selinker (1972:214) as cited in Du (2016:21) displays that "the existence of a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of the norm. This linguistic system, it is called "interlanguage" (IL)".

3. Method

3.1. Population and Sample

The population of the present study is EFL sixth year preparatory students/ Scientific branch at preparatory schools in Tikrit city/ Salahin governorate during the academic year (2024). It was limited to the sample contained twenty students (male). A diagnostic test has been used as a main instrument to analyze the data and perform the aims of this study. Two students were excluded from the main population because the pre-test has been carried on them. The total number of the present study is twenty students who acts 90% of the main population.

3.2. Constructing the Diagnostic Tests

Osterlind (1998:19) defines it as “an examination of mental attribute is a unit of measurement with a stimulus and a perspective from answering”. The construction of test consists of two tests for male students. Each test has two topics which are taken from the current textbook for the identified sixth year class preparatory. Also, each test has topics that entitled “*Cigarette Advertising Should Be Illegal*” and “*Studying English in Britain*”.

3.3. Face Validity

It is defined as “If it appears to be measured what it claims to measure” (Kline, 1993:18) Badgett and Christmann (2009:118) added that face validity is at least accurate measurement of validity, the subjective decision that concentrates on if a test appears to cover the content that was taught and is being measured.

Face validity represents a fundamental role in checking the tools that are adopted to achieve functions of writing research. Therefore, the tests are exposed to the specialists in linguistic and methodology. Several changes have been made and taken into considerations according to their points of views.

3.4. Reliability

Kline (1993:7) defines it as “stability over time, the second to internal consistency”. Kilee and Moore (2014:166) mention that “degree to which test scores are consistent”. The degree to which test corrects are free from measurement error and involves the presumed consistency, stability and repeatability of corrects for a given individual. The test and retest have been adopted to obtain the reliability.

The first two test of twenty sixth year preparatory students (male) have been carried on 4th March and 5th March 2024. The second two tests have been carried on 18th March and 19th March 2024. The space time between two applications were two weeks. Pearson Correlation Coefficient had been adopted to gain information. The result was 0.86.

3.5. The Pilot of the Study

The pilot of the study provides a chance for procedures researchers to examine their methods and procedures for the collected data. Richards and Hallberg (2015:128) defines it as “a small-scale test of the methods and procedures to be used on a large-scale if the pilot study demonstrates that methods and procedures can work”.

The pilot of this study has been managed in which two sixth class male students preparatory were selected randomly from various preparatory school in Tikrit city for the pilot study. However, they have been excluded from the main sample.

3.6. Scoring the Tests

It is probably true to say that the construction of the tests for measuring the performances of the students in writing English composition is difficult job. Two tests have been used to measure according to Wysocka’s model. Each test is given twenty marks and has one question. Each question is given twenty marks, and 100 words are wanted to write.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the current study are to achieve aims of this study that are formulated. The percentage and frequency have been adopted to calculate each item of the test.

4.1. Results

Two kinds of interlanguage have been found and classified according to the student s' writing compositions with appropriate correction. Morphological and syntactical fossilization that are commonly performed by students' writing. The results as follows:

4.1.1. Morphological Fossilization

The students frequently committed errors in morphology. morphological fossilization consists of omission of verb, commission of preposition, articles commission of pronoun and spelling, for example, the omission of verb in these sentences: Smokers must *smoking habit, You should *attendance early. These examples act the two kinds of verb that are found in this study. In the first example, the students write nouns without verbs. In the second, the student writes a noun in place of verb. Example: I *play mobile phone.

In this study, in appropriate choice of verb. The above example refers to the general embarrassment of verb usage and the influence of first language. This sentence indicates that the usage of the Arabic verb. verb 'Play' usage in Iraq is used to explain doing something for enjoyment in examples as a verb with a more accurate meaning would be used in English language. The percentage of omission of verb is (8.074%). It has been identified as: fossilizing.

About omission of preposition examples: We can see many smokers *Within roads, you should listen English lesson; while these examples display that there are many causes may be had. The first example reflects that the students remember 'in' preposition but couldn't differentiate between two prepositions 'in' and 'within' in the usage prepositions. Also, it may be used 'within' preposition and forgotten 'in'. In the second example, omission of preposition 'to'. It shows that the students may believe that sentences will be more complicated and shorter when they do not omit prepositions. However, the percentage of omission of prepositions (24.844%). This result has been recorded as fossilization.

The omission of articles represents third aspect and a common error among Iraqi students while equivalent to articles is not found in Arabic language. For example, They give *negative message, You can see *amazing place, The above examples indicate that omissions relating to a common noun and a proper name. This kind of error could be listed as first language transfer. Besides, it does not reflect a grammatical structure in Arabic, but it reflects a grammatical rule in English language. Another example: We begin to study English on the* Sunday, They went to the* Mousal. These examples show that this kind of error involving addition of articles although the omission of articles is familiar with Iraqi students' interlanguage. Also, Overgeneralization of article is a common error. Iraqi students sometimes use the definite articles with names of places as mentioned in the second example. The percentage of articles is 10.560%. This result has been considered as fossilization.

Omission of pronoun 'it' according to the examples: *assists us to learn, smokers buy* from shops, as Iraqi Students are used to show an object or event that has been cited before. They believed that no need to mention and repeat the same event or object in their writing compositions.

Besides, it can be seen this kind of error that Iraqi students often omit the object in writing English composition. First language transfer is that in Iraqi students' expressions. The percentage of omission of pronoun contains (1.035%) which was identified as fossilized.

Spelling is one of the essential elements of orthography. Iraqi students believe that the words are written as they are spoken. The examples: *wich means which/ plae* means play reveal that the influence of Arabic language characteristic. Leung (2009: 144) mentions that first language can lead to fossilization if first language does not correspond with foreign language characteristics.

The above words of spelling errors that cause the students to be fossilized spellers lie in addition or omission some letters in writing words. The percentage of spelling is (55.487%). It has been recorded as fossilized. All of these errors are illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 1. Morphological Fossilization

Item	Category	No. of Fossilized errors	Percentage
1.	Omission of verb	39	8.074
2.	Omission of preposition	120	24.844
3.	Articles	51	10.519
4.	Omission of pronoun 'it'	5	1.035

Item	Category	No. of Fossilized errors	Percentage
5.	Spelling	268	55.487
	Total	483	100

4.1.2. Syntax

The syntactical proficiency has been investigated by three categories. Relative clauses, direct and indirect speech and passive voice construction. The syntactical errors are produced by students' writing compositions. At first, relative clauses for example: English lesson *learn....., Smokers * smokes..... The syntactical proficiency was investigated by identifying students' rate of correctly constructed embedded sentences. Relative clauses which form relatively complex structures. So, need totally developed semantic skills in production. It can be found that the students omitted relative clauses 'who' and 'which' as it can be Omitted. The percentage of relative clauses is (37.037%), which determines as fossilized.

Then direct and indirect speech, for example: We ask smokers to leave.....Another complex structure with which the students have been displayed very limited familiarity was indirect / direct speech. It has been noticed that the students used direct speech. more than indirect speech in their writing. Maybe, the students feel that the use of direct speech structure is easier than Indirect speech construction and avoid changes in the grammatical rules. The percentage of products indirect and speech obtains (18.519%). It has been recorded as fossilized. Lack of confidence in using the passive voice and also face a problem. As in this example: Some English lessons *teach* online.....Students may not differentiate between active and passive voice. The percentage of passive voice is (44.44%). It was found to have fossilized. So, all the previous errors rates are clarified in the Table 2.

Table 2. Syntactical Fossilization

Item	Category	No. of Fossilized Errors	Percentage
1.	Relative Clause	30	37.037
2.	Direct and Indirect Speech	15	18.519
3.	Passive Voice	36	44.444
	Total	81	100

4.2. Discussion

From Table (1), findings are displayed in this study. It can be found that fossilized errors constructed on three main elements namely: kind, number and percentage of errors have been made by the students. The percentages of fossilized errors were made by sixth year preparatory students in writing English compositions. It can be found two kinds of interlanguage fossilization in writing achievement of the students included morphological and syntactical fossilization involves fossilization morphological fossilization involves omission of verb, omission of preposition article, omission of pronoun 'it' and spelling. Omission verb is 39 (8.074%), omission of preposition is 120 (24.844%), articles obtain 51(10.5604%), Omission of pronoun 'it' is 5(1.035%) and spelling is 268 (55.487%). Syntactical fossilization consists of relative clause is 30 (37.037%), direct and indirect speech is 15 (18.519%) and passive voice obtains 36 (44.44%).

The rate of interlanguage fossilization in morphological structure is 483 (85.63%) and syntactical structure is 81(14.37%). The total number of both structures are 564 errors. Spelling category is the highest rate and represents the main source of fossilization errors for Iraqi students of English language on any Category (55.48%) morphological and syntactical structures. As the lowest rate is (1.035%) in omission of pronoun 'it' in morphological structure. This indicates that morphological errors commonly occurred than syntactical errors. Majority of the students are not able to apply their morphological knowledge as they write their English compositions.

4.3. Recommendations:

- a. Teacher should consternate on feed back
- b. Teacher should create a new and suitable environment for teaching
- c. Teacher should give a treatment of his/her students who often commit errors in writing

5. Conclusion

Based on the research results, there are two kinds of Interlanguage fossilization that are commonly performed by students' writing compositions are morphological fossilization and syntactical fossilization. Morphological fossilization involves (85.63%) as syntactical fossilization includes (14.37%). morphological fossilization is more commonly performed by students. The students committed interlanguage fossilization in their writing English compositions because many causes such as bad instructions, inappropriate methods of

teaching, lack of feedback, carelessness of teachers, carelessness of students, some students depend on memorization compositions instead of expressions by themselves and unsuitable environment for teaching.

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The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The author declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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