

## **Fossilization of Interlanguage and Pedagogical Implications for Business English Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

**In the process of learning a language, learners tend to produce a type of language that is different from both the mother tongue and the target language, which is called interlanguage. Fossilization is a concept central to interlanguage in SLA research and it plays such an important role in second language acquisition. Business English is a part of English for specific purposes. Business English has its distinct features and in the Business English learning process, fossilization phenomenon commonly exists. It is suggested that business English teachers should analyze the factors causing fossilization in the learners so as to improve their ability of Business English. In the paper, on the basis of the relative theories of interlanguage and fossilization phenomenon, the author tries to explore and analyze the nature and causing factors of fossilization and then point out the possible implications and strategies of Business English teaching and learning.**

### **Keywords**

**Fossilization, Interlanguage, Business English, Implications.**

### **1. Introduction**

Over the past 30 years or so, many researchers and linguists have made various careful studies on the phenomenon of fossilization which often happens in the second language acquisition (SLA) field. In the process of learning a language, learners tend to produce a type of language that is different from both the mother tongue and the target language, which is called interlanguage. They have achieved a lot of insights in the studies and contributed greatly to foreign language teaching and learning. Fossilization is a concept central to interlanguage in SLA research and it plays such an important role in second language acquisition that has been attracting more and more people's attention. As a result, scholars from home and abroad have manifested the common existence of fossilization from many perspectives such as phoneme, vocabulary and grammar, which offers great implications for the teaching and learning a second language. In order to improve China's foreign language teaching and learning and further promoting the international communication and multiple co-operations between China and the outside world, it is necessary to get a better understanding of SLA, especially, of fossilization.

### **2. Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.1 Definition of Interlanguage**

The idea of interlanguage is founded upon the assumption that an L2 learner, at any particular moment in his learning sequence, is using a language system which is neither the L1, nor the L2. It is a third language, with its own grammar, its own lexicon and so on. The rules used by the learner are to be found in neither his own mother tongue, nor in the Target Language. Interlanguage sees learners as constructing their own grammatical systems. These systems are learner-driven rather than teacher-driven. The learner progresses through employing a number of different strategies, some of which are based upon his/her L1, some of which are based upon his/her desire to communicate, and some of which may be rooted in the Universal Grammar. (Selinker, L & J. Lamendella 217)

## 2.2 Definition of Fossilization

Selinker remarks that perhaps a mere 5% of learners succeed in learning a second language, they can achieve native-speaker competence. That is, over 95% of L2 learners fail to reach the end of the interlanguage continuum. This is perhaps the most striking feature that distinguishes the second from the first language acquisition: children's grammar generally does not get stuck at an interim stage short of full L1 competence, whereas the grammar of second language learners typically do. Selinker suggests that there is a psychological mechanism that underlies the production of fossilized items, which he terms as 'fossilization. Later researchers try to define fossilization from different perspectives, thus the definitions of fossilization vary a great deal. But Selinker's original 1972 definition remains the most widely accepted one, which goes as follows:

"Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular native language will tend to keep in their interlanguage relative to a particular target language, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the target language." (Selinker 215)

## 2.3 Traits of fossilization

As to the traits of fossilization, four major features are suggested by the researchers, namely, repetitiveness of fossilization, permanency of fossilization, persistency of fossilization and fluency of fossilization. Until now, there are still no clear or unified standard to judge whether an error is fossilized or not. Maybe, we will meet with a lot of difficulties in identifying a fossilized error, but learning the characteristics of fossilization is quite essential.

## 3. Factors causing fossilization

### 3.1 Mother tongue transfer

Due to the interference of mother tongue most of the students have formed bad learning habits. They can not use the study strategy very well taken by people to solve some problems or achieve some targets. As for the English learners the learning strategy is a process of obtaining, saving, extracting and dealing the information. Learning strategy is also on of the reasons which lead to the fossilization. Using the learning strategy successfully can boost the ability of learning. Otherwise, it will cause fossilized. The false use of the learning strategy cause the English learners formed the bad habits in listening comprehension.

### 3.2 Cultural factor

Different countries have different culture background. Foreign countries are different from our own country in many aspects. So when students are learning a language, they are learning a culture too. Listeners have to interact what they hear with their background knowledge in listening comprehension. The more able they are to relate contextual and background knowledge to their linguistic knowledge, the more efficient comprehension they will achieve.

### 3.3 Emotional factor

The study motivations can be divided into two kinds: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. The motivation affects SLA. Those who possess the integrative motivation, which lasts longer than the instrumental one, usually grasp more chances of success in the process of SLA. While the fact is that more second language learners in our country possess the instrumental motivation. The study English by force or passively. Some wants to get a good job and some have to pass the exam.

### 3.4 Lack of acculturation

Some researchers claim that the cessation of acculturation into the target language has close relationship with the onset of interlanguage fossilization. (Brown 235) gives a definition of acculturation that is the process of becoming adapted to a new culture. Acculturation is determined by the degree of social and psychological distance between the learners and their target language culture.

We have seen that fossilization as a theoretical structure has been interpreted in a variety of different ways. Many researchers and scholars have endeavored to explain the variables of fossilization, and a number of different theories have been proposed. The Causes of Fossilization has been found to be explained in terms of the following variables, among them: mother tongue transfer, cultural factor, learning style factor and emotional factor.

#### **4. Pedagogical implications for Business English teaching**

##### **4.1 Avoiding Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue**

It has been discussed in the previous part that negative transfer of Chinese is one of the most important causal factors leading to the fossilization. Lots of students admitted the existence of fossilization in the English learning affected by their mother tongue. Students can avoid negative transfer of mother tongue resulting in lexical fossilization through some strategies, like attaching abundant quality lexical input of the target language, according to Corder. The best method is to go and live together with its speakers, however, that is not feasible for all L2 learners. The most effective solution to the negative transfer of mother tongue is to imitate a large amount of authentic expressions of the native language. Nuttall showed us another available way is to read extensively in the target language. Thus, teachers could provide the students with more original materials. Let the students obtain more established native linguistic expressions. That will help them reduce the influence of mother tongue on the learners' study.

##### **4.2 Reinforcing Learners' Awareness of Fossilized Lexical Errors**

Awareness of fossilized lexical errors is also important for L2 learners to overcome their lexical fossilization. To let the learners correct their lexical errors is to make progress and improve their vocabulary proficiency. There're still many students who do not aware their existence and deny their existence. Therefore, it is urgent to reinforce their awareness of lexical fossilized errors in their writing, because once the fossilized errors are established and stay in learners' mind for a long time, they will become difficult to be eradicated. English teachers should give students some knowledge of lexical fossilization and encourage them to fight against it. The teacher could list some of the common fossilized lexical errors learners usually committed, and ask them to collect them, pay more attention to them and go over the corrected items from time to time.

##### **4.3 Enhancing the Learners' Motivation**

From the analysis of the previous chapter, we have known that lack of motivation is one of the internal factors resulting in lexical fossilization, so students' motivation plays an important role in English acquisition. Ellis claimed that motivation and attitude are important factors which help to determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners. Gardner gives a definition of motivation to learn a second language as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity". Lots of classifications of motivation have been made in the past. In educational psychology, motivation is classified into integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is thought to be the students' positive attitude and the desire to learn the target language. Instrumental motivation is characterized by the underlying goal to gain the social or economic benefit. It has been found that few students are willing to write English compositions and read original words in English. That is possibly because they regard learning English as a necessity for achievement in examinations. Many researchers proved "integrative motivation" is not very common in China.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Fossilization has attracted much attention from lots of linguists and language teachers. Based on a literature review about theories and researches on fossilization, the author attempts to find out the implications for Business English Teaching and Learning. According to the author's analysis, there are four major factors leading to fossilization including mother tongue transfer, cultural factor, learning style factor and emotional factor. The analysis of the causal factors of fossilization provides

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the foundation for the proposal of defossilization measures for Business English teaching in the next chapter. The suggested measures for conquering fossilization are avoiding negative transfer of mother tongue, reinforcing learners' awareness of fossilized errors, and enhancing learners' motivation.

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