

Abstract

Linguistic Transfer is a concept derived from universal language view that emphasized on similarities between languages. Recent research shown support for it and a range of evidence can be found among bilingual studies, but variations existed among those studies in terms of the constructs concerned, design and analysis. This study investigated whether there are transfer of subject-verb agreement (SVA), a kind of morphological grammatical knowledge, from L2 (English) to L3 (two hypothetical languages) among Hong Kong bilinguals and effect of English proficiency on L3 acquisition. Twenty four local adult students were recruited to participate in an-hour of experiment involving one learning session and testing session. Two hypothetical languages, with one following (LB) and another violating (LA) the English rules of SVA, were learnt and tested with assistance of dictionary and a learning program. Results showed that participants performed significantly better in LB than LA, giving support to linguistic transfer and empirically showing that linguistic distance played a role in linguistic transfer. Also, English proficiency was correlated with the performance of two hypothetical languages. No significant correlation was found, except a moderate correlation between performance of LB and English proficiency with marginal significance, indicating impact of linguistic distance on transfer. Further investigation on this issue is needed to generalize the results.