

## D3 Ediniminde D2 Aracılığının İncelenmesi: Türk Öğrencilerin Çeviri Uygulamaları Üzerine Bir Vaka Çalışması\*

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### Öz

Bu çalışma, Türk öğrencilerin ikinci dilleri (D2) olan İngilizcenin, üçüncü bir dili (D3-Çince) edinme süreçlerini nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Çapraz-dil etkileşimlerine odaklanarak, İngilizcenin Çince öğreniminde kolaylaştırıcı mı yoksa engelleyici bir faktör mü olduğunu araştırmaktadır. Başlangıç düzeyini belirlemek amacıyla yapılan pilot çalışma, Çince öğrenim gören Türk öğrencilerin %85'inin öncelikli olarak İngilizce kaynaklara başvurduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu bulgu temelinde, derinlemesine analiz için dört öğrenci odak grup olarak seçilmiştir. Nitel bir durum çalışması tasarımı kullanılarak, odak grup katılımcılarına D1 (Türkçe), D2 (İngilizce) ve D3 (Çince) arasındaki aktarım örüntülerini incelemek amacıyla çeviri ve yeniden çeviri görevleri uygulanmıştır. Katılımcıların performansları, hem nitel hem nicel verilerin toplanması amacıyla yapılan bireysel görüşmelerle de analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, D2'ye olan önceki maruziyetin D3 üretim performansı ile pozitif yönde ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. İlk yabancı dili olan İngilizceyi öğrenme aracı olarak kullanan öğrenciler, bu dili bilişsel ve dilsel bir destek niteliğinde faydalı bir araç olarak görme eğilimindedir. Bununla birlikte, tekrar eden çapraz-dilsel etkiler öngörülebilir hata örüntülerine de yol açmaktadır. Genel olarak bulgular, Türk öğrencilerin Çince öğrenirken D2 kaynaklarına bağımlılığının, güdüsel ve bağlamsal etkenler tarafından şekillendiğini ve bunun da D3 edinimi ile çeviri performanslarının hem niteliğini hem de derinliğini etkilediğini ortaya koymaktadır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler:

İkinci dil aracılığı, Üçüncü dil edinimi, Diller arası etkileşimi, Dil aktarımı

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## Exploring L2 Mediation in L3 Acquisition: A Case Study on Turkish Learners' Translation Practices \*

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### Abstract

This study investigates how Turkish learners' second language (L2), English, mediates their acquisition of a third language (L3), Chinese. Focusing on cross-linguistic interactions, it explores whether L2 functions as a facilitative or interfering factor in L3 learning. To establish a baseline, a pilot study revealed that 85% of Turkish students studying Chinese rely primarily on English-language resources. Based on this finding, four students were selected as a focus group for in-depth analysis. Employing a qualitative case study design, translation and retranslation tasks were used to examine transfer patterns among L1 (Turkish), L2 (English), and L3 (Chinese). Participants' performance was further analyzed through interviews to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Results show that prior exposure to L2 positively correlates with L3 production performance. Learners who use English being their first foreign language as a learning medium tend to see it as beneficial means in the form of cognitive and linguistic support system. However, recurrent cross-linguistic influences also give rise to predictable error patterns. Overall, the findings suggest that Turkish learners' dependence on L2 sources when learning Chinese is shaped by motivational and contextual factors, which, in turn, influence both the quality and depth of their L3 acquisition and translation performance.

### Keywords:

Second Language mediation, Third Language acquisition, cross-linguistic interactions, language transfer

\* Ethical Statement: \* It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

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## 1. Introduction

There are numerous reasons to investigate the linguistic behavior of multilingual individuals. Globally, it is estimated that bilingual and multilingual speakers now outnumber monolinguals (Hammarberg, 2001). Although many scholars of bilingualism support this assumption, empirical evidence confirming it remains limited (Cook, 2003; De Bot, 2002; Grosjean, 1982; Hakuta, 1986). Despite differing perspectives, it can be confidently asserted that every human possesses the cognitive potential to acquire more than one language. The number of individuals who communicate fluently in two or more languages continues to rise steadily.

This growing trend in multilingualism has prompted significant educational adaptations. In Turkey, for example, the Ministry of National Education introduced Chinese as an elective course in high school curricula (MEB, 2004). Some private primary and secondary schools have followed suit, offering Chinese under the category of “Hobby Classes.” Consequently, there has also been a notable increase in the number of Turkish students pursuing undergraduate and graduate studies in China. Within this context, the present study seeks to examine the interplay and cross-linguistic interference between learners’ two foreign languages—English (L2), serving as both their first acquired foreign language and medium of learning, and Chinese (L3), their subsequent foreign language. The central aim is to identify and analyze the facilitating and inhibiting effects of L2–L3 interaction among native Turkish speakers, thereby providing a clearer understanding of the role of L2 as a mediating language in L3 acquisition.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Interference, Transfer, and Cross-Linguistic Influence (CLI)

The concept of language contact and cross-linguistic influence has deep historical roots. One of the earliest references appears in Homer’s *Odyssey*, where Odysseus describes the “mixed languages” of Crete—an early acknowledgment of multilingual interaction. In the ancient world, where multilingualism was widespread, traces of cross-linguistic influence can be found throughout a range of textual sources, including epitaphs, personal correspondence, legal and commercial records, and religious or literary writings (Adams, 2002). This suggests that the cognitive processes driving cross-linguistic influence are as old as multilingualism itself, a fact that any comprehensive theory of language contact must account for.

During the early twentieth century, the phenomenon was often framed negatively and referred to simply as transfer, largely due to the sociolinguistic context of migration and increasing language contact. Some linguists and psychologists viewed such interactions as a source of

mutual interference, and the term “interference” itself carried an unfavorable connotation (Epstein, 1915). However, with the shift in linguistic paradigms during the mid-1980s, researchers began questioning the appropriateness of the term transfer, arguing that it was overly tied to behaviorist theories of habit formation (Lado, 1957; Odlin, 1989; Osgood, 1953; Selinker, 1969). Together, these scholars catalyzed a critical re-evaluation of the field's foundational terms, paving the way for more neutral and theoretically flexible concepts like “cross-linguistic influence”.

As scholarly discussions evolved, attention turned from negative connotations to more nuanced understandings of language interaction. A particularly influential definition comes from Sharwood Smith (1986), who describes cross-linguistic influence as “the influence of the mother tongue on the learner’s performance in or development of a given target language; by extension, it also means the impact of any ‘other tongue’ known to the learner on that target language” (p. 198). This broader perspective paved the way for more comprehensive analyses of multilingual development.

A pioneering study reflecting this approach is Vildomec’s (1963) investigation into trilingualism, as cited in Williams and Hammarberg (1998). Examining the linguistic production of a large number of multilingual subjects, Vildomec observed that in early stages of third-language (L3) use, certain function words—such as prepositions, articles, and conjunctions—tended to originate from the learners’ second language rather than their first. He argued that this occurred even when the two languages involved were not phonetically or typologically similar, highlighting the cognitive dominance of the L2 in L3 processing.

Similarly, Dulay (1982) proposed two complementary frameworks for understanding cross-linguistic interaction. From a psychological perspective, it reflects the influence of established linguistic habits when new ones are being formed. From a sociolinguistic perspective, it denotes the dynamic exchanges that occur when speakers of different language communities come into contact. For instance, researchers focusing on Chinese as a foreign language frequently encounter such influence in learners’ spoken output. In contrast, written production—particularly in translation—tends to reveal fewer spontaneous instances of transfer, as learners have more opportunity to monitor and revise their output. This distinction justifies the use of written translation tasks in the present study as a means of eliciting more controlled and reliable data on cross-linguistic influence.

## 2.2 Types of Language Transfer

When second-language learners attempt to produce speech or writing in the target language, they often rely on structural patterns from their first language. When the grammatical systems of the two languages differ, this reliance frequently leads to systematic errors—an indication of first-language interference in second-language performance (Dechert, 1983). In the present study, the three languages in focus—Turkish (L1), English (L2), and Chinese (L3)—each exhibit distinct typological characteristics. Turkish, for example, follows a subject–object–verb (SOV) word order, whereas English is classified as a subject–verb–object (SVO) language. Chinese, however, has been the subject of long-standing debate due to its structural complexity. While it is generally categorized as an SVO language based on synchronic distribution patterns of verb–object constructions (Sun & Givón, 1985), Li and Thompson (1986) suggested that Chinese had been undergoing a typological shift from SVO toward SOV, influenced by the grammaticalization of serial verb constructions. This typological ambiguity often poses difficulties for Turkish learners, who may experience confusion when organizing word order in both written and spoken Chinese.

Broadly defined, language transfer refers to the process through which speakers or writers apply knowledge from their first language (L1) when using a subsequent language (L2 or L3). Dulay (1982) characterizes interference as the automatic transfer—driven by habit—of surface structures from the L1 onto the target language. Similarly, Lott (1983) defines language transfer as “errors in the learner’s use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue,” while Ellis (1997) frames transfer as “the influence that the learner’s L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2.”

Positive transfer occurs when the structures of two languages are sufficiently similar to facilitate accurate and fluent production in the target language. For instance, Japanese and Chinese share numerous written features—most notably the use of Chinese characters (汉字 Hanzi / 漢字 Kanji)—which often enables Japanese learners to acquire Chinese script more efficiently. However, the identification of positive transfer can be challenging, as it reflects successful, often unconscious, application of previous linguistic knowledge.

Historically, the study of language transfer was dominated by the notion of negative transfer, emphasizing interference as a source of linguistic error. Early twentieth-century research, influenced by migration and prescriptive attitudes toward “pure” language use, often associated such interactions with linguistic deficiency. Over time, however, scholars began recognizing

that cross-linguistic influence could also serve as a communicative or cognitive strategy. Ellis (1997), among others, demonstrated that positive transfer frequently functions as a learning mechanism—allowing learners to draw upon prior linguistic knowledge to formulate hypotheses about the forms, structures, meanings, and grammatical patterns of a new language. Thus, rather than viewing transfer solely as interference, contemporary research conceptualizes it as a dynamic process that reflects both the learner’s prior linguistic repertoire and their ongoing efforts to construct new linguistic systems across multiple languages.

### 3. Methodology

The present study seeks to address the following research question:

*“How does knowledge of an L2 influence on L3 performance, as reflected in grammar, lexical choice, and word order during written translation?”*

To investigate this question, a two-stage methodological design was developed. In the first stage, participants completed a translation task to generate primary data. In the second stage, they undertook a retranslation task designed to validate the data and ensure both internal and external reliability. Given the multifaceted nature of cross-linguistic influence (CLI), data were collected from multiple perspectives: (1) the analysis of participants’ first translations, (2) the analysis of their second (re-)translations, and (3) post-task interviews capturing participants’ reflections and beliefs. These three complementary sources of evidence allowed for triangulation—each offering a distinct but interconnected view of the same linguistic phenomenon.

#### 3.1 Participants

To establish a baseline, 30 Turkish students pursuing postgraduate studies (Master’s or Ph.D.) in China were invited to complete a self-assessment questionnaire. This form gathered background information on participants’ language learning histories, including the duration and context of their exposure to both English (L2) and Chinese (L3). Since exposure to the target language environment was considered a critical variable, only candidates with sustained contact with Chinese were considered for the focus group.

Based on these criteria, four participants were selected for detailed analysis. Selection was guided by three factors: (1) length of study in both English and Chinese, (2) the primary medium of learning Chinese (whether through English or directly), and (3) educational background. Participant information is presented in *Table 1*.

*Table 1* Information of four participants

| Name          | Gender | Age | The duration of Study Chinese | The duration of Study English |
|---------------|--------|-----|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Participant A | Female | 33  | 14 years                      | 6 years                       |
| Participant B | Female | 32  | 14 years                      | 6 years                       |
| Participant C | Male   | 28  | 6 years                       | 10 years                      |
| Participant D | Male   | 35  | 5 years                       | 12 years                      |

### 3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through two rounds of written translation assignments and subsequent interviews. The source material was a 278-word Turkish short story comprising 28 sentences and seven idiomatic expressions, selected from the online story “*Hayatın Anlamı*” (*Meaning of Life*) (n.d.) illustrates the protagonist's journey to find purpose through simple, everyday encounters. This text was chosen because its moderate difficulty level made it easier to trace cross-linguistic transfer patterns across languages.

In the first translation task (administered on July 11, 2019), participants were instructed to translate the Turkish story first into English (L2) and then into Chinese (L3). This task provided insight into how L2 mediates the transition from L1 to L3. Participants were allowed to use any available resources, including dictionaries, to ensure that any consistent occurrences of transfer could not be attributed merely to a lack of lexical knowledge.

In the second translation task (conducted on February 21, 2020), participants were asked to retranslate the same Turkish story directly into Chinese, with all English-related (L2) elements removed from the task instructions and source material. This design aimed to isolate the effect of L2 mediation and reveal potential differences in performance when the L2 factor was eliminated. The resulting data were analyzed for various manifestations of CLI—including L1 influence, L2 initiative, and forward, reverse, positive, or negative transfer—across grammar, word choice, and word order dimensions.

### 3.3 Interviews

After completing both translation stages, each participant participated in a semi-structured interview. The interviews explored individual perceptions of how and why CLI occurred,

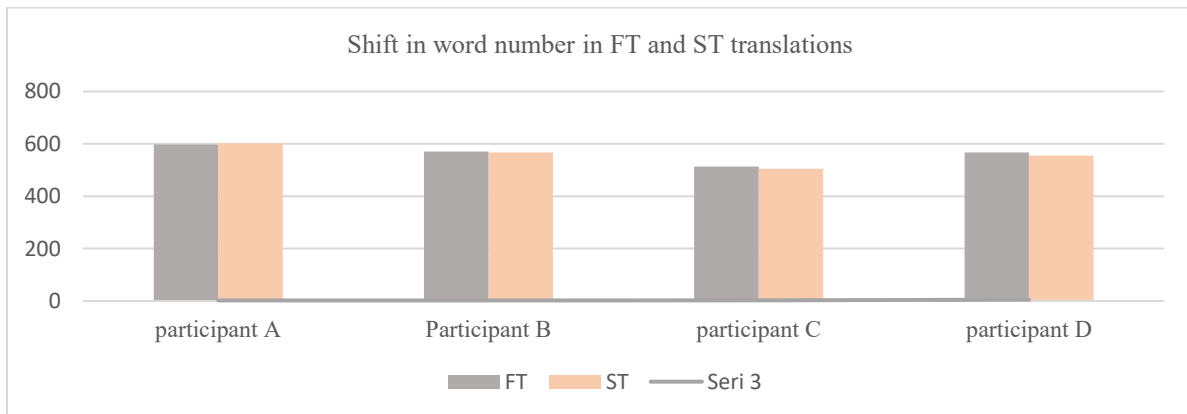


changes observed between the two translation rounds, and possible reasons for errors or shifts in performance. Each interview was tailored to the participant's individual translation data, allowing for detailed discussion of specific instances of transfer. Participants were also invited to share their perspectives on how cross-linguistic interactions could be better addressed or utilized as pedagogical tools in L3 learning. This triangulated design—combining translation, retranslation, and reflective interviews—enabled a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which L2 knowledge influences L3 acquisition, providing both qualitative and quantitative insights into the dynamics of multilingual language processing among Turkish learners.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

This section presents the similarities and differences observed in all participants' retranslation tasks. It aims to summarize the effects of retranslation on word choice, word order, and grammatical structures between the first (FT) and second (ST) translation attempts. The following figures and tables provide detailed comparisons and are discussed with individual participant insights.

*Graphic 1 - Shift in word number in FT and ST translations*



As previously stated, the source text contained 278 Turkish words. When comparing the FT and ST Chinese translations, a slightly higher word count was observed in the first translations. A general tendency among participants was a reduction in word count once they were exposed solely to the L1 text, with the total number of words ranging between 550 and 600. To better understand how excluding L2 (English) in the second translation affected performance, *Table 2* outlines examples of lexical, syntactic, and grammatical modifications observed across participants.

Table 2 Types of changes in FT and ST Translations

| FT        | ST         | Type of change        |
|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| 那         | 就          | Grammar               |
| 想         | 愿意         | Word choice           |
| 汤匙        | 茶匙, 茶勺, 勺子 | Word choice           |
| 够满足       | 不够         | Word order + choice   |
| 相信        | 觉得         | Word choice           |
| 几乎        | 当          | Grammar               |
| 那些山       | 那边的山       | Grammar               |
| 经过        | 过了         | Grammar               |
| 考试        | 测试, 实验     | Word choice           |
| 吃了一惊      | 惊讶         | Word choice           |
| 回到        | 又出去        | Grammar               |
| 或者        | 要么...要么/或者 | Grammar + word order  |
| 生命        | 生活         | Word choice           |
| 在过去       | 曾几何时       | Grammar               |
| 还不够       | 不满意        | Grammar               |
| 放弃时       | 失去希望时      | Grammar + word choice |
| 应该        | 需要         | Word choice           |
| 散步        | 逛逛         | Word choice           |
| 没落下了      | 没漏掉        | Grammar               |
| 再去拿着勺子逛贴吧 | 再去一遍       | Grammar + word order  |
| 回到        | 走出         | grammar               |
| 目光        | 观点         | Word choice           |
| 眼中        | 睛里         | Word choice           |
| 古代的时候     | 很久以前       | Grammar + word choice |
| 时间也没有停    | 过得飞快       | Grammar + word choice |
| 圣人        | 智者, 明智     | Word choice           |
| 游览        | 回到         | Grammar + word choice |
| 时间流逝      | 流逝的时间      | Grammar               |

According to repeated measures analysis, the words were categorized into three primary change types: word choice, word order, and grammar (including cases where categories overlapped).

Each participant's performance was then examined through individual interviews to explore their reasoning and beliefs regarding these shifts.

### Participant A

The table below displays selected examples from Participant A's FT and ST translations, correlating linguistic variations with her stated translation beliefs.

*Table 3* Examples of correlations from participant A's belief and transfer patterns

| L1                      | L2                  | FT    | ST    |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|
| bir                     | the                 | 一个    | 一位    |
| eski zamanların birinde | once upon a time    | 很久以前  | 过去时   |
| aradığın cevabı         | the answer you need | 需的    | 正在录找  |
| -----                   | -----               | ----- | 这一点   |
| ya - yada               | or                  | 或者    | 要么-或者 |
| neredeyse               | almost              | 差不多   | 几乎    |
| için                    | so                  | 因为    | 所以    |
| tutarlı                 | consistent          | 始终如一  | 连贯    |
| ilk                     | right away          | 第一时间  | 立即    |

The results indicate that Participant A's lexical and structural adjustments were consistent with her metalinguistic awareness. This finding aligns with Bouvy (2000), who observed that multilingual learners tend to evaluate synonym transferability based on markedness and lexical norms. Participant A's reliance on intra-linguistic comparison between L2 and L3 (e.g., 差不多 vs. 几乎) illustrates this evaluative process.

### Participant B

*Table 4* Examples of correlations from participant B's belief and transfer patterns

| L1             | L2                            | FT     | ST    |
|----------------|-------------------------------|--------|-------|
| bir            | a                             | 一个     | 一位    |
| Takmış kafayı  | wonder                        | 特别好奇   | 非常想知道 |
| Aradığın yanıt | the answer you're looking for | 正在录找答案 | 最好的答案 |
| -----          | -----                         | -----  | 这一点   |
| ya - yada      | or                            | 或者     | 要么-或者 |
| İlk            | immediately                   | 第一时间就  | 一看就   |
| için           | so                            | 因为     | 因此    |

|                     |                  |       |      |
|---------------------|------------------|-------|------|
| Gökyüzündeki kuşlar | Birds in the sky | 天空中的鸟 | 空中飞鸟 |
|---------------------|------------------|-------|------|

The data obtained from Participant B also demonstrated coherence between her performance and self-reported strategies. Her results reflect Neuser's (2017) findings that learners apply markedness principles to L3 acquisition. Notably, she sometimes selected the first acceptable equivalent available (e.g., 这一点) rather than conducting a full cross-linguistic search, showing pragmatic but partial lexical transfer.

### Participant C

*Table 5* Examples of correlations from participant C's belief and transfer patterns

| L1                    | L2                   | FT    | ST    |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|
| bir                   | the                  | 一个    | 一位    |
| bulduğu               | Found                | 找得到   | 找到的   |
| Tekrar bahçeye çıkmış | went to garden again | 走去    | 回到    |
| biri                  | One of the           | 中的一个  | 之一    |
| ya - yada             | or                   | 或者    | 要么-或者 |
| İlk                   | immediately          | 第一时间就 | 一看就   |
| için                  | so                   | 因为    | 因此    |
| Sağlık kurumları      | Medical institutions | 医疗机构  | 卫生机构  |
| hep                   | always               | 总是    | 一直    |
| olmak                 | become               | 当     | 是     |

The data obtained from Participant C revealed a balanced pattern of positive and negative transfer, depending on the linguistic category. He demonstrated a higher reliance on L2 knowledge compared to Participants A and B, which occasionally resulted in negative transfer (e.g., 总是 vs. 一直). Nonetheless, his overall pattern corresponded with his self-reported translation habits, confirming that partial acquisition influenced certain lexical or grammatical deviations.

### Participant D

*Table 6* Examples of correlations from participant D's belief and transfer patterns

| L1                      | L2                  | FT    | ST   |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------|------|
| bir                     | a                   | 一个    | 一位   |
| eski zamanların birinde | once upon a time    | 很久以前  | 过去时  |
| aradığın cevabı         | the answer you need | 需要的答案 | 正在寻找 |

|           |             |      |       |
|-----------|-------------|------|-------|
| bilge     | wise man    | 圣人   | 明智/智者 |
| ya - yada | or          | 或者   | 要么-或者 |
| neredeyse | almost      | 差不多  | 几乎    |
| için      | so          | 所以   | 所以    |
| ne        | which       | 哪    | 什么    |
| ilk       | right away  | 第一时间 | 立即    |
| dedi      | said        | 说    | 告诉    |
| dolaşmak  | take a tour | 游览   | 回到    |

Participant D showed the most consistent use of L2 as a mediating language in both FT and ST translations. However, this occasionally caused lexical inconsistency (e.g., 圣人 → 明智 → 智者). This pattern supports Ellis's (2006) concept of learners as "intuitive statisticians," unconsciously detecting linguistic regularities (Mirman et al., 2008; Newport & Aslin, 2004). Participant D's metalinguistic reflection also confirmed his tendency to rely on L2 grammar as a structural guide for L3 production.

### Error Distribution and Linguistic Category

An analysis of the relationship between error proportions and linguistic categories revealed key patterns, detailed in *Table 7*.

*Table 7.* Correlation Statistics for Proportion of Errors by Linguistic Category (L1–L3)

| Language            |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Linguistic category | L1   |      | L2   |      | L3   |      |
|                     | M    | SD   | M    | SD   | M    | SD   |
| Word choice         | 0.14 | 0.32 | 0.04 | 0.24 | 0.04 | 0.19 |
| Word order          | 0.32 | 0.41 | .28  | 0.60 | 0.13 | 0.39 |
| Grammar structure   | 1.16 | 1.01 | 0.54 | 0.77 | 0.41 | 0.70 |

The results showed that across languages, grammatical structure produced the highest error rates, while word choice exhibited the fewest. In all three language groups, grammar errors significantly outnumbered lexical or syntactic ones. This pattern indicates that structural transfer remains the most challenging aspect of multilingual translation. Participant-level findings reinforce this conclusion.

Participant A: L2 exposure had a mostly neutral effect on L3 translation, though L2 interference occasionally influenced word choice.

Participant B: Demonstrated strong translation performance but showed L2-driven interference, particularly in ST.

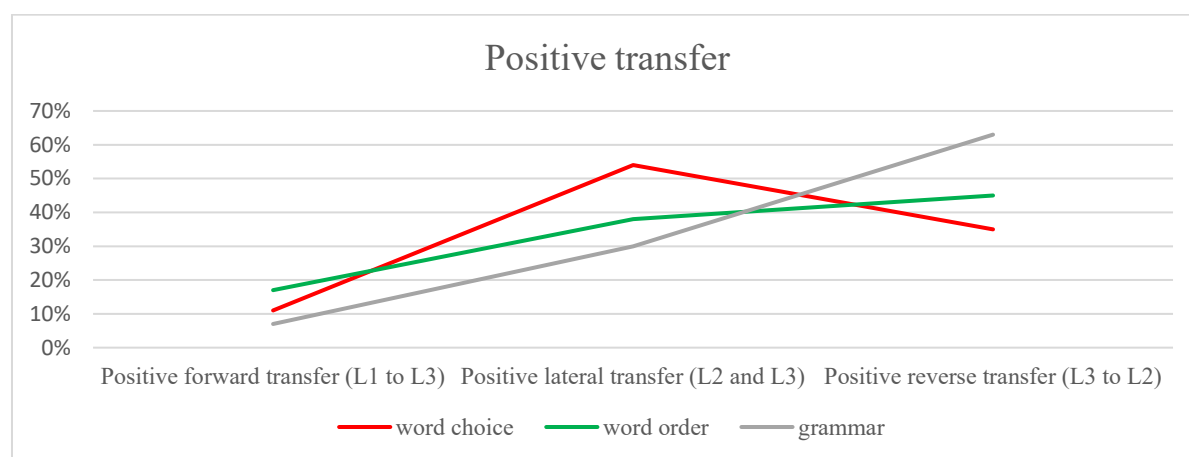
Participant C: Showed an almost equal balance of positive and negative transfer from L2, depending on the task.

Participant D: Displayed the highest positive transfer from L2, especially in grammatical patterns.

### Positive Transfer Patterns

The analysis of positive transfer patterns revealed a clear influence of the three factors, as visualized in *Graphic 2*.

*Graphic 2* Proportion of positive transfer types and the three factors

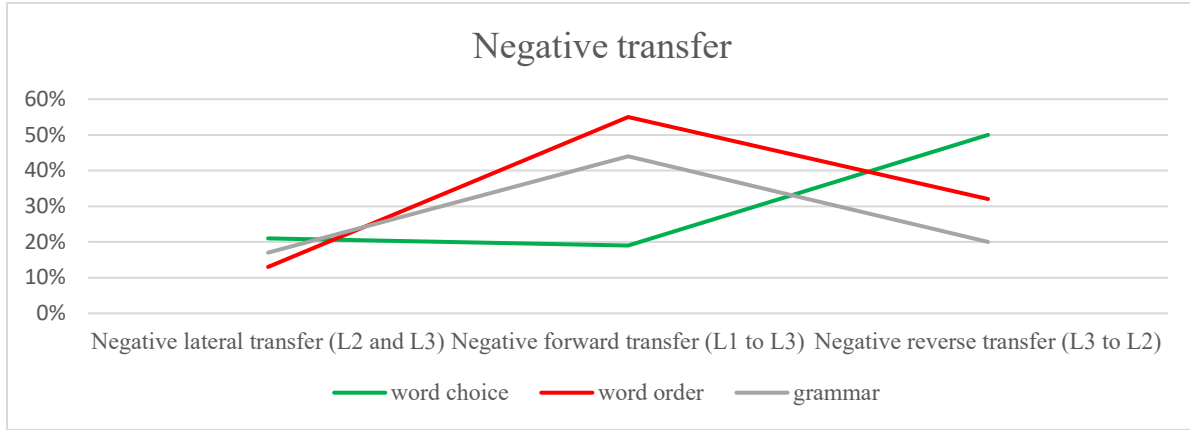


Positive transfer primarily occurred from L2 to L3, particularly in grammatical structures (52 instances), followed by word order (33) and word choice (25). These results correspond with Forsyth (2014), who observed similar L2–L3 grammatical transfer in bilingual Italian–German learners of English. Despite the typological distance between the target languages, the dominant learning language (L2) served as the main source of facilitative transfer. These findings support González’s (2012) claim that structural divergence increases learning difficulty, yet also reveal that learners strategically rely on L2 similarities before L1 analogies when L2 is the instructional medium. Word choice results further confirm Vazquez’s (1991) argument that similarity does not necessarily equate to ease of acquisition, as transfer outcomes depend on individual learner strategies.

## Negative Transfer Patterns

Following the analysis of errors, the patterns of negative transfer were examined. As shown in *Graphic 3*, the proportion of negative transfer types varied significantly across the three factors.

*Graphic 3* Proportion of negative transfer types and the three factors



Negative transfer was most frequent in grammar (38 instances), followed by word order (32) and word choice (24). High L1-to-L3 transfer rates in word order suggest that L1 retains a dominant position in the multilingual lexicon, consistent with Neuser (2017). Participants tended to revert to L1 syntactic patterns when L2 was visually or cognitively inaccessible. This reinforces Bardel and Falk's (2012) conclusion that formally learned L2 and L3 share cognitive processing features that L1 does not. The relatively lower rate of negative transfer in word choice supports the idea that advanced learners develop more flexible lexical strategies (Neuser, 2017). Participant B's ST data exemplify this tendency, showing improved independence from L2 mediation through increased creative expression in L3 writing.

Overall, the results demonstrate that L2 functions as a primary source of positive transfer in L3 translation, particularly in grammatical and structural domains, L1 influence remains strongest in word order, often causing negative transfer and written translation tasks reveal more conscious, strategic transfer patterns than oral production. These findings indicate that in multilingual learners, L2 serves as both a linguistic and cognitive bridge to L3, even when typological distances are large. Consequently, this study supports the growing consensus that cross-linguistic influence is dynamic and multifaceted—driven not only by linguistic proximity but also by cognitive, experiential, and instructional factors.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

The findings from the first and second translation tasks, combined with participant interviews, indicate that prior exposure to L2 significantly affects L3 production, particularly in word

choice. Even brief contact with a single L2 lexical item appeared to “unlock” cognitive pathways for L3 processing, influencing both writing and reading performance. These observations support Bardel and Falk’s (2012) assertion that L2 status plays a critical role when L2 and L3 share structural similarities, considering factors such as age of onset, learning context, metalinguistic knowledge, strategy use, and learner awareness.

The results also demonstrate that participants’ grammatical performance was impacted when L2 exposure was removed, leading to more cautious and less creative L1-to-L3 production. This aligns with Ecke’s (2001) argument that the similarity in representation and processing routes between two or more L2s results in stronger mutual influence than the qualitatively distinct L1 routes. Interestingly, the study revealed that participants sometimes exhibited greater lexical productivity when L2 exposure was removed, as exemplified by Participant B’s ST translation from L1 to L3. This highlights a noteworthy dynamic: more proficient L3 writers tended to experience increased negative transfer from L2, while less proficient L3 learners benefited more from positive transfer, underscoring the interaction between language proficiency and transfer direction.

These findings contribute to the broader understanding of multilingual cognition. As Odlin and Yu (2016) suggest, research on language transfer offers “unique perspectives on human cognition,” with the ultimate aim of explaining how languages interact in the multilingual mind (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008, p. 11). By evaluating the Turkish learners of Chinese, this study illuminates how the source language for transfer can be predicted and how L2 functions as a cognitive and linguistic intermediary in L3 production. The study also emphasizes the complexity of the multilingual mental lexicon. Language choice and transfer patterns are dynamic, context-dependent, and shaped by interactions between word choice, word order, and grammatical knowledge. Notably, this research adopts an exploratory approach to L2–L3 transfer, rather than focusing solely on L1 influence, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of positive and negative transfer in multilingual learners.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of considering learners’ beliefs and perspectives. Academic learners with prolonged language study experience develop reflective insights into their own transfer processes. Their metalinguistic awareness provides valuable qualitative data, complementing quantitative analyses, and offering a richer understanding of how multilingual minds organize and access multiple languages. Listening to highly educated learners’ narratives represents a pragmatic and underutilized approach for studying multilingual cognition, bridging the gap between theoretical predictions and real-world language processing.



In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that exposure to L2 as the learning language for L3 plays a facilitative role in multilingual language production. L2 serves not only as a cognitive scaffold for L3 but also influences learners' choices in lexical, syntactic, and grammatical domains. This insight has both theoretical and pedagogical implications: it advances the understanding of multilingual lexicon organization and highlights the potential of leveraging L2 strategically in L3 instruction.

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