# Exploring the Multilingual Mastery of Chinese Native Speakers from the Perspective of Language Transfer Theory ——Take English and German as examples

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*Abstract:* Considering that the majority of Chinese language learners today have a certain level of proficiency in English, it is significant to conduct the research to explore the multilingual mastery of Chinese native speakers in the context of English as a second language. This paper explores the effect of native-based language competence on multilingual learners of Chinese by means of a summative scale questionnaire. This paper also explores the concrete language transfer of English as a source language through interviews and a specific analysis of compositions offered by six Chinese-English-German trilingual learners. The final conclusion is that when a native Chinese speaker learns a third language, the source language for language transfer will not be limited to Chinese. English as L2 has an impact on the learning and the use of vocabulary and grammar in L3, as well as on L3 writing, which both facilitates and hinders the learning and the use of L3. The influence of L2 on L3 is the most obvious at the intermediate level of L3 and learners with an advanced level of L3 are rarely affected by English. When L3 is an Indo-European language, it is more likely to be influenced by L2 English than by L1 Chinese.

*Keywords:* language transfer, linguistic competence, third language acquisition

## 1. Introduction

Since English language acquisition plays a very important role in the education of Chinese children and adolescents, many Chinese trilingual learners already have a certain level of English proficiency when acquiring a third language. According to some preliminary findings, native Chinese speakers learn a foreign language by drawing on the language competence developed during the acquisition of their native language and are also influenced by positive or negative transfer between different languages. In this paper, the first foreign language one acquired is defined as the second language and abbreviated to L2, meanwhile, the second foreign language is defined as the third language and abbreviated to L3.

Several scholars have argued that higher levels of L2 have a more pronounced effect on the third language acquisition of learners. Factors such as language distance and the L3 level of the learners may also be important factors affecting language transfer. In addition, the language ability of learners, which is acquired gradually in the process of acquiring their native language, also has an impact on their foreign language learning level.

However, when focusing on the multilingual mastery of native Chinese speakers, most studies of native language transfer have focused on the analysis of transfer in concrete verbal or written expressions, which may ignore the impact of the native language on the overall language competence of learners. In addition, studies on the effect of low to intermediate levels of L2 on L3 acquisition (TLA) is still relatively inadequate. Therefore, this paper focuses on exploring the multilingual mastery competence of native Chinese speakers under the theory of language transfer, and mainly focuses on analyzing the influence of the native language competence of learners and inter-foreign language transfer on foreign language acquisition. When these aspects are considered together, many relevant questions emerge that are worthy of study: How does a low to intermediate level of English as an L2 affect the multilingual acquisition of native Chinese speakers? In what cases does English as an L2 help native Chinese speakers acquire other languages, and in what cases does it become a hindrance? Is the L3 acquisition of native Chinese speakers more influenced by L2 (English) or by their native language (Chinese)?

The discussion of these issues is useful for native Chinese students acquiring one or more foreign languages as L3. In addition, it can help language educators to adjust the details of their teaching methods in order to better assist learners. This paper attempts to analyze compositions of trilingual learners with different levels of English specifically to suggest how low to intermediate levels of English as an L2 affect the L3 acquisition of native Chinese speakers.

## 2.    Literature Review

The term linguistic competence was first used in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, which is written by Noam Chomsky in 1965. Chomsky made a fundamental distinction between competence and performance. According to the terms of Chomsky, "competence" is the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language and "performance" is the actual use of language in concrete situations. Therefore, performance can not be a direct reflection of competence in most practical cases [1]. From the perspective of this distinction, he supported the conception of Humboldtian, which considered underlying competence as a system of generative processes [2]. The definition from Chomsky of the term linguistic competence placed more emphasis on the unconscious knowledge of grammar that gives the speaker the ability to use and understand a language, which can be considered to be closely related to his Universal Grammar Theory. Dell described linguistic competence as concerned with the tacit knowledge of language structure, which can be seen as a disapproval of Chomsky's idealized notion of pure linguistic competence [3]. Hymes argues that the lack of consideration of socio-cultural factors in the notion is somewhat limiting. Therefore, the term communicative competence was proposed to alter Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence into a broader and more genuine concept of competence [4].

Communicative competence places greater emphasis on the competence to use language appropriately in specific sociocultural and communicative situations than pure grammatical knowledge. According to the categorization, communicative competence can be divided into four parts: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence [5]. The specific meanings of these four concrete competencies are as follows:

(1) Grammatical competence, which refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct discourse and utterances based on knowledge of phonology, vocabulary, and syntax. Grammatical competence includes communicative contexts, topics, and functions, and it is related to the language learner's ability to deal with communicative contexts in different sociolinguistic contexts. In addition, it also includes the speaker's ability to understand and create different speech acts in different communicative contexts.

(2) Sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the ability to produce discourse with appropriate sociolinguistic meaning based on knowledge of the social applications of the language.

(3) Discourse competence, which refers to the ability to use coherent and complete discourse, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and is based on knowledge of rhetoric such as style and genre.

(4) Strategic competence, which refers to the ability to use appropriate strategies to solve communicative problems, such as avoiding contradictions, explaining, or asking the other party to repeat, clarifying facts, reducing the speed of speech, etc. This competence includes the speaker's effective use of strategies to compensate for their deficiencies in communication caused by various constraints through the use of verbal or non-verbal resources.

According to Terence Odlin's interpretation, language transfer is "the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired (and perhaps imperfectly acquired)"[6]. Language transfer is also called cross-linguistic influence. As scholars continue to conduct research related to language transfer, the transfer has been given a new definition: Transfer is a universal, multidirectional, and variable cognitive phenomenon that has its roots in conceptual development throughout the process of language socialization [7].

In the 1970s, Kellerman made an important contribution to the theory of transfer by considering transfer as a strategy by which learners may transfer their native language to a second language if they are not sufficiently proficient in the second language in the process of communicating or acquiring the second language and feel that the native language has some similarity to the target language [8]. Kellerman emphasizes that learners' perception of the distance between languages largely determines the occurrence of transfer and that the greater the perceived difference between the native language and the target language, the less likely it is that native language interference will occur [9].

Most of the current research in the field of multilingual acquisition under language transfer theory uses methods that compare subjects' specific discourse. For example, Cenoz examined the effect of language distance on lexical activation in trilingual acquisition [10]. The subjects were 18 Spanish-Basque-English trilingual students who were asked to complete two storytelling tasks based on pictures. According to the findings of Cenoz, Spanish and English are of similar linguistic types and both belong to the Indo-European family, while Basque is not, which is an important factor that may cause language transfer error [11]. In Williams and Hammarberg's analysis of an English-German-Swedish trilingual speaker's corpus of spoken Swedish output, they suggest that the native language plays a predominantly instrumental role in trilingual output, while the second language plays a predominantly default supplier role, providing the material for trilingual word construction [12]. In terms of exploring the multilingual mastery of native Chinese speakers, scholars such as ZHU Lixia have conducted studies on language transfer between Chinese, English, and Japanese. They conclude that a higher percentage of notional words than function words are transferred, and a higher percentage of native language transfer than second language transfer [13]. In addition, learners' subjective perception of interlanguage similarity is one of the important factors affecting language transfer. MAO Cui and CHEN Yujuan conducted a survey of students who mastered both Chinese, English, and Korean. They found that the differences in learners' accuracy in understanding reflexive pronouns were not due to differences in L2 level by surveying students [14]. ZENG Li et al. conducted a study of Uyghur students who speak English as a third language [15]. Their findings support the view of Bardel & Falk, Falk & Bardel, and Puig-Mayenco et al [16] [17] [18]. that since L3 and L2 grammars are both declarative memory processing and L1 grammars are procedural memory processing, L2 hinders the transfer of L1 in L3 acquisition, and only L2 knowledge can be freely transferred to the L3 learning process.

This paper adopts an experimental design similar to ZHU's, using English and German as examples, and tries to investigate the multilingual mastery of Chinese native speakers from the

perspective of language transfer theory.

## 3.    Methods

This paper uses an empirical research approach to develop the study. Therefore, two sets of data were collected to investigate the effects of language competence shaped by native language and language transfer between different foreign languages on foreign language learning by native Chinese speakers.

In the section investigating the effects of language competence shaped by native language, a summative scale questionnaire was designed and distributed to social media platforms to fill out. 94 responses were collected for this summative scale questionnaire. The main group of people who fill out the questionnaire is college students and the respondents come from all over China. This summative scale questionnaire first contains some basic information about the respondent, such as the age of the respondent, and first and second foreign language. Then there are seven questions intended to demonstrate whether and to what extent foreign language acquisition of the respondents is influenced by their language competence (five questions for those without a second foreign language).

### 3.1.    Classification

In the section investigating the effects of language transfer between different foreign languages, six students of different language levels were interviewed and provided their compositions for analysis. All of these six subjects possess the language capabilities of Chinese (L1) and English (L2), and their L3 is German. These six subjects are divided into three groups, who are labeled as beginner, intermediate and advanced learners according to their L3 knowledge. Each group has two subjects, one is intermediate in English, and the other is advanced in English.

The classification of German levels is based on the GeR (Der Gemeinsame europäische Referenzrahmen für Sprachen) and the Chinese PGG (Prüfung für das Germanistik-Grundstudium) and PGH (Prüfung für das Germanistik-Hauptstudium) examinations, i.e., the GeR A1 and A2 are for beginners, B1 and B2 are for intermediates and C1 and C2 are for advanced leaners. Students who have passed the PGG examinations are classified as intermediate and those who have passed the PGH examinations are classified as advanced. The classification of English proficiency levels is based on the College English Test Band 6 (CET-6), which is a universal English examination among Chinese university students, and IELTS scores, i.e., students who obtained a score of 600 or above in the CET-6 exam or an IELTS score of or greater than 7 belong to the advanced level, and the rest belongs to the intermediate level. As the subjects are all university students who are native Chinese speakers, there are no beginners in English.

Table 1: The classification of the subjects with L3 German.

| English | German | Beginner | Intermediate | Advanced |
|-----------------|----------|--------------|----------|
| Lower level | IG1 | IG3 | IG5 |
| Higher level | IG2 | IG4 | IG6 |

First, the six subjects were interviewed about their learning pattern of L3. The interviews focus on their subjective feelings and thoughts when they are learning L3. The total procedure of the interviews is recorded and transcribed. Then, the inner thoughts of the L3 learners are analyzed based on the interview transcripts. Finally, the German writing exercises of these six subjects are collected and their lexical and grammatical errors and characteristics are analyzed from the perspective of L3 learning.

## 3.2. Subjects

IG1 has only studied German for one month and has not yet passed the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4), so he is a beginner in both German and English. IG2 has an IELTS score of 8 and has studied German to B1 level, but has not continued to study or use German for two years and has been in the Netherlands for the last two years and is now learning Dutch, therefore his current level of German is a beginner and his level of English is advanced. IG3 is an architecture student who has had one year to concentrate on German and has not continued to study or use English in general. He passed the CET-6 exam but did not score 600, so his level in German and English is intermediate. IG4 is a junior German major who spent the first semester of her junior year on a short-term exchange program in Germany. She has a B2 level of German and has achieved a CET-6 score of more than 600, so her German is intermediate and her English is advanced. IG5 is a graduate in German major who has passed the PGH exam and has not achieved a CET-6 score of 600, so his German is advanced and his English is intermediate. IG5 has recently worked in Uganda and uses English frequently. IG6 is a graduate in German major. She has passed PGH and has an IELTS score of 7, so she has an advanced level in both German and English.

## 4. Data Presentation

The questionnaires sent out received a total of 94 responses, of which 1 response was considered invalid due to errors in completion. Therefore, there were a total of 93 valid questionnaires. The first part of the summative scale questionnaire collected basic information about the respondents, including their age, and their first and second foreign languages. According to the valid responses received, the number of respondents under the age of 18 was 9, the number of those between the ages of 19 and 25 was 81, and the number of those older than 25 was 3. It can be seen that the data collected by this questionnaire are mainly from the undergraduate group. All 93 respondents' second language, which is also their first foreign language, is English, and 47 of them had acquired a third language (i.e. a second foreign language). Of these 47 subjects, 21 had German as their third language, 10 had French, 14 had Japanese, 1 had Spanish and 1 had Korean.

The second part of the scale contains the following 7 questions with options from 1 to 5 being "Not at all", "Not quite", "Somewhat", "Quite", "Completely":

1. When you write in a foreign language, you refer to the strategies and techniques used when writing in Chinese.

2. When you communicate in a foreign language, you tend to use more appropriate wording in a particular context according to the conventions of Chinese communication. (e.g., choosing topics, responding to compliments, etc.)

3. When you communicate in a foreign language, you tend to follow the strategies used in Chinese communication settings in case of sociolinguistic or discourse complications. (e.g., using avoidance tactics, reference resources, paraphrasing, using requests for repetition, clarification, or slower speech, etc.)

4. In the process of learning a foreign language, you take the initiative to learn about the communicative habits in these languages and take care to use them in practice as much as possible.

5. You learn your first foreign language with the help of Chinese.

6. You learn a second foreign language with the help of Chinese.

7. You learn a second foreign language with the help of your first language. (If the respondent does not have a second foreign language, questions 6 and 7 will not be displayed in the questionnaire.)

Table 2: The percentage of respondents' options for each question.

| Question| Options | Not at all | Not quite | Somewhat | Quite | Completely |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3(3.23%) | 11(11.83%) | 30(32.26%) | 30(32.26%) | 19(20.43%) |
| 2 | 3(3.23%) | 10(10.75%) | 27(29.03%) | 38(40.86%) | 15(16.13%) |
| 3 | 3(3.23%) | 8(8.6%) | 19(20.43%) | 49(52.69%) | 14(15.05%) |
| 4 | 4(4.3%) | 6(6.45%) | 25(26.88%) | 36(38.71%) | 22(23.66%) |
| 5 | 4(4.3%) | 6(6.45%) | 16(17.2%) | 29(31.18%) | 38(40.86%) |

Table 3: The percentage of options of respondents with an L3 for questions 6 and 7.

| Question| Options | Not at all | Not quite | Somewhat | Quite | Completely |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 2(4.26%) | 8(17.02%) | 7(14.89%) | 16(34.04%) | 14(29.79%) |
| 7 | 1(2.13%) | 5(10.64%) | 8(17.02%) | 20(42.55%) | 13(27.66%) |

Table 2 and Table 3 clearly show the percentage of respondents' options. It can be seen that 40.86% of the respondents chose "Completely" in the first question, 32.26% of the respondents chose "somewhat" and "Quite" in the second question, 40.86% chose "Quite" in the third question, 52.69% chose "Quite" in the fourth question, and 38.71% chose "Quite" in the fifth question. For the sixth question, which was shown only to those with a third language, 34.04% of the subjects chose "Quite" and 42.55% of the subjects chose "Quite" for the seventh question. In general, according to the statistics of the first five questions, the option "more in line" was chosen most frequently, reaching 39.14%.

Table 4 shows the frequency of errors in the compositions of German learners at different levels. These errors are classified according to the different parts of speech. This table shows that the six respondents had the highest average error rate in the use of verbs, with a misuse rate of 7.42%. This is followed by a high rate of misuse of auxiliary verbs, at 6.06%. The percentage of misuse of adjective or adverb is the smallest, with only 2.52%.

Table 4: The frequency of errors in the compositions of learners at different levels.

| | Noun | Verb | Auxiliary Verb | Adjective /Adverb | Conjunction | Preposition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IG1 | 0/27 (0%) | 3/66 (4.55%) | 0/0 (0%) | 0/0 (0%) | 0/1 (0%) | 0/5 (0%) |
| IG2 | 1/17 (5.88%) | 1/13 (7.69%) | 0/8 (0%) | 1/5 (20%) | 0/2 (0%) | 1/1 (100%) |
| IG3 | 6/38 (15.79%) | 4/23 (17.39%) | 1/8 (12.5%) | 0/17 (0%) | 1/12 (8.33%) | 0/11 (0%) |
| IG4 | 2/41 (4.88%) | 2/27 (7.41%) | 0/4 (0%) | 2/33 (6.06%) | 1/23 (4.35%) | 1/23 (4.35%) |
| IG5 | 1/14 (7.14%) | 3/9 (33.33%) | 1/1 (100%) | 0/13 (0%) | 1/8 (12.5%) | 0/4 (0%) |
| IG6 | 0/59 (0%) | 0/37 (0%) | 0/12 (0%) | 0/51 (0%) | 0/22 (0%) | 0/24 (0%) |
| Total | 10/196 (5.1%) | 13/175 (7.42%) | 2/33 (6.06%) | 3/119 (2.52%) | 3/68 (4.41%) | 2/68 (2.94%) |

Table 5: Percentage of language transfer mistakes in the total number of errors.

|  | Noun | Verb | Auxiliary Verb | Adjective/ Adverb | Conjunction | Preposition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| IG1 | 0/0(0%) | 0/3(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/0(0%) |
| IG2 | 0/1(0%) | 0/1(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/1(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/1(0%) |
| IG3 | 3/6(50%) | 0/4(0%) | 0/1(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 1/1(100%) | 0/0(0%) |
| IG4 | 0/2(0%) | 0/2(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 1/2(50%) | 0/1(0%) | 0/0(0%) |
| IG5 | 1/1(100%) | 3/3(100%) | 1/1(100%) | 0/0(0%) | 1/1(100%) | 1/1(100%) |
| IG6 | 0/0(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/0(0%) | 0/0(0%) |
| Total | 4/10 (40%) | 3/13 (16.67%) | 1/2 (50%) | 1/3 (33.3%) | 2/3 (66.67%) | 1/2 (50%) |

Table 5 shows the percentage of language transfer mistakes in the total number of errors. According to this table, errors caused by language transfer account for a large percentage of the overall number of errors. Of these errors, all three conjunctive-type errors made by the six subjects were caused by language transfer. The percentage of conjunction errors caused by language transfer is also high, at 66.67%. It can be roughly seen from the data that subjects with lower English proficiency are more susceptible to English language transfer.

## 5. Analysis

The questions in the scale questionnaire are closely related to communicative competence in language competence and are intended to investigate the relationship between the native language and the respondents' sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. The investigation of grammatical competence will be carried out in the part of the analysis of the German composition of native Chinese speakers, who take English as L2. The first question investigated the respondents' discourse competence, which refers to the ability to use coherent and complete discourse, from the perspective of writing. The second question was intended to investigate the effect of native language competence on respondents' sociolinguistic competence in multilingual acquisition. The third question was mainly intended to investigate the respondents' strategic competence. The results of the statistics clearly show that in the process of learning L2 (a first foreign language), the linguistic competence of the native language has a clear influence on the discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence of the target language of the learner. The percentages of subjects who chose "Quite" or "Completely" in questions 1 to 3 were 52.69%, 56.99%, and 67.74%, respectively, and it is clear from these data that more than half of the subjects think that their native language competence has a relatively large impact in the process of learning a foreign language, whether it is sociolinguistic, discourse or strategic competence.

In addition, 72.04% of the subjects chose "Quite" or "Completely" in the fifth question. In the sixth question, 63.83% of the subjects with a second foreign language chose "Quite" or "Completely", while in the seventh question, 70.21% of respondents chose "Quite" or "Completely".

According to further analysis of the data, the number of subjects who chose "Quite" in the question "You learn a second foreign language with the help of your first language" was 20, of whom 13 take German as L3, 4 take French, and 3 take Japanese. And the number of subjects who chose "Completely" was 13, of whom 4 take German as L3, 5 take French, and 4 take Japanese. This shows that native Chinese speakers who take English as L2 are more likely to learn L3 with the help of L2 when the target language is German. Learning with the help of a second language is

also reflected in the form of language transfer in concrete oral expressions or written texts. However, according to Cenoz's analysis of the corpus of Spanish, Basque, and English trilingual speakers, the influence of language transfer from the native language (Spanish) to the L3 (English) is more pronounced, Among them, in which the fact that English and Spanish belong to the same language family is seen as an important factor influencing language transfer. According to a survey conducted by Zhu Lixia on trilingual learners who mastered Chinese (L1) and English (L2) and Japanese (L3), the native language has a higher rate of transfer than the second language. But Chinese and Japanese do not belong to the same language family. These findings differ from those reflected by the statistics in the scale questionnaire. There are two possible reasons for this discrepancy: 1. The questionnaire filled out by the subjects according to their own subjective judgment does not match the facts. 2. Differences between language families have a greater impact on language transfer than whether the source language is a first or second language. In order to further verify whether there was a discrepancy between the subjective judgments of the subjects and the actual situation, the compositions of six trilingual speakers of different levels of Chinese, English, and German were collected and analyzed. Meanwhile, these six students were interviewed for the survey.

According to the interviews with the six subjects (IG1-IG6), in terms of vocabulary, beginners always find it difficult to memorize the gender of German words compared to English, which has no lexical gender. German has a large number of words that are similar to English and these words facilitate the acquisition of L3. However, learners are likely to feel confused by the homograph of these two languages. In terms of grammar, many subjects indicated that German grammatical structures are more fixed, while English is relatively casual. For beginners, they have difficulty with the more fixed sentence structures in German. Both IG1 and IG2 mentioned that they sometimes followed English syntactic conventions to make incorrect German sentences. In addition, several subjects with a high level of German language proficiency mentioned that German as L3 of high-level German learners will in turn influence their English. Both IG4 and IG6 indicate that the transfer from the third to the second language occurs more often in the context of sentence construction. They will follow the rules of verb position in German when making English expressions. However, after she has been in an English-speaking environment for a while, she will naturally move to use more authentic English expressions. IG4 also says that writing English in a more hurried state makes it easy to be influenced by German, such as writing the consonant combination "sh", which makes the /ʃ/ sound in English, as the consonant combination "sch" in German, or writing the verb "is" in English as the verb "ist" in German.

Combining Tables 4 and 5 reveals that although the percentage which shows the frequency of conjunction errors made by the six subjects was not high, a large percentage of these conjunction errors were influenced by language transfer. In contrast, although learners made a higher percentage of verb errors, a relatively small percentage of verb errors were caused by language transfer. The misused conjunctions are mainly those connecting subordinate clauses, which means that learners are influenced by English language transfer in the use of subordinate clauses. For example, in the composition of IG3, an attributive clause is used incorrectly where an adverbial clause should be used, which is influenced by English. Furthermore, comparing the statistics of the intermediate (IG3 and IG4) and advanced (IG5 and IG6) German groups, it can be seen that IG4 makes fewer language transfer errors than IG3 and IG6 makes fewer language transfer errors than IG5, which may suggest that it is likely that the higher the level of English, the fewer language transfer errors are made when writing in German.

In the collected compositions, German learners at the intermediate level are more clearly influenced by the transfer of English. Here are some examples from the compositions of IG3 and IG5. In German, all initial letters of nouns need to be capitalized. But in IG3's composition, some nouns without capitalized initials, which is considered influenced by English. In addition, there are also

some syntactic language transfer phenomena. For instance, in the composition of IG3, she creates the sentence "In Lanzhou, das ist wichtig für ein Kleinkind einen Kurs zu besuchen." The correct form should be "In Lanzhou ist es wichtig für ein Kleinkind einen Kurs zu besuchen." The English equivalent of IG3's sentence is "In Lanzhou, it is important for a young child to attend classes." IG3 used "das ist wichtig für", which is similar to "it is important for" in English. The use of commas to separate the locative case and "it is important for" are both typical English usage and are not used in German.

Similarly, in the composition of IG5 shows the sentence " Egal was die Welt gibt ihm, Schlechtes oder Schönes, er akzeptiert gerne alles", which should be "Egal was die Welt ihm gibt, Schlechtes oder Schönes, akzeptiert er gerne alles." In this example of IG5, the verb is misplaced. The English equivalent of IG3's sentence is "No matter what the world gives him, bad or good, he accepts it all with pleasure." In German, the verb of the subordinate clause is placed at the end of the clause. And when the subordinate clause comes first, the verb of the main clause should be placed first. But in this sentence of IG5, the verbs are positioned according to the rules of English.

Therefore, these examples depict the impact of English transfer on German learners in terms of word usage, syntax, and grammar. Combining our statistics, it is obvious that native Chinese speakers with relatively low levels of English are more likely to be influenced by English in the L3 acquisition process. And the transfer of English is more obvious for intermediate learners of German and less so for beginners and advanced learners of German.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the data and analysis in this paper and the conclusions of previous studies, the following conclusions were drawn. The linguistic competence of the native language has an impact on the foreign language competence of learners in the process of multilingual acquisition. The native language is also the basis for the development of linguistic competence and is an important tool to assist learners in learning a foreign language. Therefore, when native Chinese speakers rely on Chinese to learn English as a second language, they are inevitably affected by language transfer. When a native Chinese speaker learns a third language, the source language for language transfer will not be limited to Chinese. English as L2 has an impact on the learning and the use of vocabulary and grammar in L3, as well as on L3 writing, which both facilitates and hinders the learning and the use of L3. The influence of L2 on L3 is the most obvious at the intermediate level of L3 and learners with an advanced level of L3 are rarely affected by English. When L3 is an Indo-European language, it is more likely to be influenced by L2 English than by L1 Chinese. Considering the common view that L1 acquisition is under the control of universal grammar and L2 acquisition is less controlled by universal grammar, this paper suggests that the similarity between languages may have a greater impact on second language acquisition than universal grammar.

However, this paper still has some shortcomings. Due to the limited sample and the length of the analyzed discourse, the influence of other variables and the presence of randomness cannot be excluded, so the data results can only roughly reflect the relevant facts. Future research can further collect more corpora and data to further verify the effects of native-based linguistic competence and the differences between language families on the multilingual acquisition by native Chinese speakers.

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