

**Research proposal: Impact of Adult Second Language Learning on Native English
Speakers' Grammar**

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Area of Study

As a subject within the humanities, research within the topic area of English Studies can also relate to various other topics at the same time, especially other topics within the humanities. While the topic of this research proposal is in the general area of English Studies, it also falls into the category of Linguistics and bridges between these two topic areas. In fact, the project is specifically regarding the interrelation of the subjects of English and Linguistics, identifying the correlation between learning one and improving in the other. In addition, within both subjects, a subcategory that would be covered with this project is that of grammar as the project will examine the impact of learning other languages on an adult native English speaker's grammar and writing.

Previous Work

The connection between learning a second language (L2) and an individual's native language (L1) has been of considerable interest and research in recent years, though there have been various different approaches to this topic. For example, there are plenty of research articles regarding the fact a speaker's L1 affects L2 learning. In "Dominant language transfer in adult second language learners and heritage speakers," Montrul (2010) points this out as he begins his article, saying that "The effects of the native language on the acquisition of a second language...have been extensively documented in the second language (L2) literature over the years..." However, there have also been articles discussing the effects of L2 learning on an individual's L1. Much of this research, however, regarding the impact of L2 learning on L1 is primarily focused on children who are learning an L2 while still learning their L1 (Gildersleeve-Neumann,

et. al., 2009; Cho, et.al., 2016; Havy, et. al., 2016; Marini, et. al., 2019). There are a few articles regarding adult L2 learners and the impact on their L1, but often the studies these are based on, and even some of the studies involving children, are focused more specifically on the phonetic changes in the learner's L1 not the grammar (Chang, 2009; Cho, 2026; Havy, et. al., 2016; Kartushina, et. al. 2016; Woodley, 2011; Osborne, et. al. 2021).

A couple of articles discuss the impact of language transfer on grammar, but they are narrowly focused on various aspects of it. For example, Bordag, et. al. (2016) investigated the incidental acquisition of aspects of grammar during L2 learning, and came to the conclusion that L1 speakers are better at incidental acquisition of new grammar concepts than L2 learners. Other research into L2 learning's impact on L1 grammar often focuses on the difference between L2 learners and heritage speakers, highlighting the difference between L1 being a less commonly used language for the learner and the L2 being the dominant language of the individual (Romano, 2021; Bordag, et. al., 2022; Montrul, 2010).

There was one article I found that discussed the impact on the native language in adults taking writing classes in their second language learning, but it was focused specifically on the impacts of taking a writing class in the L2 language on the L1 grammar – as opposed to the impacts of learning the language in general on the L1 grammar – and it was regarding native Turkish speakers who were learning English – as opposed to native English speakers learning another language (Altmisdort, 2016). While some previous research hinted toward or leaned toward the topic of this proposal, none of the research I could find covered the impact that learning an L2 has on the L1

of a native English speaker. In concluding his article, Altmisdort (2016) even points out that “importance of considering the effects of L2 skills on L1 under which language transfer occurs.” And the article by Gildersleeve-Neumann, et. al. (2009) points out that additional research on the impacts of L2 on L1 is warranted.

Research Question

The question this study aims to answer is: Does learning a second language as an adult impacts a native English speaker’s grammar and writing? Somewhat like Altmisdort’s research article, the research for this question will be focused especially on the impacts of language learning on grammar and writing in adult native English speakers. The major differences are the focus on native English speakers as opposed to native Turkish speakers as well as the focus on individuals who are just learning the L2 not receiving a writing class in the L2. Naturally, there are several questions that would be included in the research of this project, but some of the focused questions could include the following questions. Do English speaking individuals who learn an L2 as an adult learn and improve in their grammar of their native English? Do the individuals understand the concepts of the grammar of their native language better after learning an L2? Do they write more grammatically correct after learning an L2? What areas of grammar and writing are improved by learning an L2? The following questions are additional questions that could follow after this study leading toward some additional research to be conducted on the topic. Is there a difference in impact based on the L2 being learned? Is English as a native language impacted differently by L2 learning than other languages?

Rationale for Investigating

Linguistics is an important field in the humanities and has a significant overlap with English studies. There are many things that could be learned from research in these fields, and as both the study of English and languages or linguistics require cognitive functions, research in these areas could even include some implications for cognitive research. This study will build on these concepts in understanding the impact of L2 learning on English speakers.

In addition, with languages reaching across the globe, the importance of knowing more than one language is becoming more apparent. Many people in the world learn multiple languages, but English speakers (specifically Americans) are less inclined to learn other languages as they seem to have less need to do so with English having become essentially a global language. However, there are known benefits to learning another language. Kurinski, et. al., (2011) and Fox, et. al. (2019) pointed out several benefits to learning another language, including cognitive, health, occupational, academic, and more. This study aims to identify some additional impacts of learning an L2. If learning an L2 can improve an English-speaking adult's abilities within their own native language, it is another incentive for learning an L2.

Also, focusing this research specifically on the impact on the grammar of English L1 speakers when they learn an L2, will help to identify if learning other languages is beneficial to English native speakers in a way that is differentiated from the typical discussions of the importance of learning another language in general. And it may help identify areas that on instruction that could be improved, including the importance of foreign language instruction, as Josefova (2018) highlights in his article, improving

language programs that exist as Altmisdort (2016) pointed out, as well as different specific areas of English instruction that could be done better.

Data Collection and Analysis

In researching this topic, there are a few specific items to pay attention to including whether or not there is a change in the participants' grammar or writing skill, what specific aspects of grammar are impacted (i.e., structure, pronoun use, number, punctuation, etc.), and other variables that would impact the results (i.e., size of the study or number of participants, additional English training occurring during the evaluated time period, previous exposure to other languages, etc.). Each of these would need to be measured to the best extent feasible. I think this type of quantifiable study would be appropriate and possible, given the time and resources to conduct it. This could be done with a comparison study design.

First, a group of individuals would need to be identified whose native language is English but are going to learn a second language. I propose requesting participants from colleges and universities across the nation who are freshmen native English speakers, planning to study a language. In order to understand how one's native language has been impacted by learning another language, analyzing the participants' natural use of their native language, both oral and written, before and after learning the second language could provide some incredible insight into these impacts and what aspects of the native language are impacted.

To identify their baseline knowledge of English grammar, the individuals who agree to participate would be asked to complete a grammar test and written essay in addition to a recorded interview as they start classes and then again as they graduate.

Throughout their language studies the individuals would participate in check-in testing at the end of each school year. These check-ins will help identify in the research when certain changes may occur. To safeguard the ethics of the study, all the data received (the written tests, essays, and interview recordings) would be evaluated consistently by being collected and sent to a single location for review and evaluation. In addition, each student will have been given a participant identification number to use in lieu of their name, to ensure that no bias would influence the evaluation based on the individual's name. In the series of tests that participants would complete at the beginning of the study, they would identify various background and demographic information that could be beneficial in identifying some of the variables that might impact the results. This background and demographic data will be kept separate from the essay, written test, and recorded interview to ensure it does not add any bias to the evaluation of the grammar. The data will only be available to connect to the individual's grammar evaluation after the participants' evaluation is complete.

In addition, participants would write a short essay, take a written test about English grammar, and participate in a recorded interview on an unrelated topic. Participants will not be given a grade or any answers regarding their grammar skill based on these tests. The essay and written test would be evaluated by taking note of what types and quantities of grammatical errors are being made. The interview will be a one-on-one recorded conversation with a standard set of open-ended questions and similarly evaluated for grammar use. The essay, written test, and interview will all be the same at the end of the study as at the beginning of the study. This will ensure that the

test itself is not a factor in apparent changes in the participants' grammar and writing skills.

Broader Significance

English is a very difficult language. Even native English speakers have difficulty with the grammar and rules, especially with all the exceptions to the rules. If there are any extra tools that can assist native English speakers with improving even in their native language or to help identify factors that impact the learning of English grammar, it would be important to identify those tools and factors. This will not only help native English speakers in everyday use of their own native language, but as English speakers learn and understand the rules of grammar and follow them, non-native speakers who are learning those rules will have an easier time trying to understand the language than if they are taught rules that even native speakers don't follow.

As the research will likely show, English-speaking adults who learn an L2 can improve their understanding and use of grammar in their native language. While there are many justifications for encouraging adults learning another language, some of them are more societal, such as communicating with people who have not learned English, etc. Some may argue that they don't see the need to learn an L2. However, this study indicates that there is also a personal benefit to learning another language. Adults in the workforce are often required to speak and write professionally, but if the individual struggled with English grammar, it may be difficult for them to do so. If learning another language can help with the individual's English grammar and writing, it adds additional value to learning another language.

In addition, like Altmisdort's study (2016), this study could lead to a better understanding of aspects of English grammar that could be taught better in schools both to native English speakers and to learners of English as a Second Language. First, the study could identify some specific aspects of grammar that are consistently a problem for the participants as they start the study. Then as the study concludes, the improvements that students make in their grammar through the duration of the study could indicate areas of grammar that need to be taught differently. The implications of this study can be far reaching in both realms of English Studies and Linguistics.

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