

## SPOKEN INTERACTION AND GRAMMATICAL GROWTH IN ADULT L2 ACQUISITION: A CASE OF INTERLANGUAGE EVOLUTION

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### ABSTRACT

*This research explores the development of interlanguage and sentence formation in an adult learner of a second language (L2) through naturally occurring spoken interactions. Grounded in (Selinker, 1972) theory of interlanguage and (Krashen, 1981) Input Hypothesis, the study investigates the learner's progression from dependence on first language (L1) structures toward an emerging syntactic awareness in English. Data were obtained from two recorded interview sessions and analyzed qualitatively to examine patterns in vocabulary use, sentence construction, and communicative strategies. The findings show a gradual transition from predominantly lexical expressions with frequent code-mixing to efforts at forming more grammatically structured utterances. Although the learner still demonstrated limited grammatical accuracy and produced shorter sentences under more demanding input conditions, signs of improvement were evident in the correct use of verb forms and reduced reliance on L1. These outcomes align with recent research by (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Ortega, 2013) and (Lightbown & Spada, 2020), which highlight the dynamic and non-linear nature of adult L2 acquisition. The study underscores the critical role of meaningful input, interactive dialogue, and cognitive engagement in fostering communicative competence.*

**Keywords:** Interlanguage; Sentence Construction; Second Language Acquisition; Adult Learner; Spoken Interaction; Code-Mixing

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi perkembangan interlanguage dan pembentukan kalimat pada seorang pembelajar dewasa bahasa kedua (L2) melalui interaksi lisan yang terjadi secara alami. Berlandaskan pada teori interlanguage dari (Selinker, 1972) dan Hipotesis Input dari (Krashen, 1981), studi ini menyelidiki perkembangan pembelajar dari ketergantungan pada struktur bahasa pertama (L1) menuju kesadaran sintaksis yang mulai muncul dalam bahasa Inggris. Data diperoleh dari dua sesi wawancara yang direkam dan dianalisis secara kualitatif untuk menelaah pola penggunaan kosakata, konstruksi kalimat, dan strategi komunikasi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan adanya transisi bertahap dari ekspresi yang didominasi unsur leksikal dengan pencampuran kode (code-mixing) yang sering terjadi, menuju upaya membentuk ujaran yang lebih terstruktur secara gramatikal. Meskipun pembelajar masih menunjukkan keterbatasan akurasi gramatikal dan menghasilkan kalimat yang lebih pendek dalam kondisi input yang lebih menuntut, tanda-tanda peningkatan terlihat pada penggunaan bentuk kata kerja yang benar dan berkurangnya ketergantungan pada L1. Hasil ini sejalan dengan penelitian terbaru oleh (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Ortega, 2013) dan (Lightbown & Spada, 2020), yang menyoroti sifat pemerolehan bahasa kedua pada orang dewasa yang dinamis dan tidak linear. Studi ini menegaskan peran penting input bermakna, dialog interaktif, dan keterlibatan kognitif dalam mendorong kompetensi komunikatif.

**Kata kunci:** Interlanguage; Konstruksi Kalimat; Pemerolehan Bahasa Kedua; Pembelajar Dewasa; Interaksi Lisan; Pencampuran Kode (Code-Mixing)

## Introduction

Language is universally recognized as an essential and influential means of human communication. It plays a pivotal role in enabling interactions, expressing emotions, fulfilling needs, and building social connections. Notes, the integral place of language in human daily life confirms its irreplaceable role in all facets of society (Harrag et al., 2024). Among the many forms of language, spoken language stands out as the most natural and frequently used. Unlike its written counterpart, spoken language is typically generated in the moment and shaped by immediate contexts, making it more fluid and responsive. Yet, this spontaneity does not eliminate the cognitive effort involved. Even the simplest utterances stem from mental activity, underscoring the deep link between language and thought (Hertrich et al., 2021). This complex interplay between language and thought has long intrigued scholars. While some view language primarily as a tool for transmitting information, others emphasize cognition as the foundation of communication. West, for example, questions the traditional notion of language as a mere channel of communication, drawing attention instead to the mental processes that inform how language is structured and understood.

In a similar vein, Dave (2007) advocates a broader perspective, suggesting that language serves not just for information exchange but also for dialogue, cooperation, and joint meaning-making. He argues that defining language as a simple sender-receiver system fails to capture its full complexity. From his point of view, language facilitates mutual dialogue, collaborative decision-making, and the fusion of individual ideas into shared understanding. These dimensions stress the importance of mental engagement in language use and hint that thought may, in fact, operate at a level beyond language itself. Such viewpoints invite deeper inquiry into how language is produced, especially when learning a second language. Constructing spoken sentences, in particular, requires more than grammatical knowledge—it calls for real-time cognitive engagement with linguistic structures. Grammar, in this context, functions as stored knowledge that must be mentally accessed and activated to generate meaningful utterances. For adult learners with limited exposure to the target language, this reliance on cognitive mechanisms becomes even more apparent. Despite their restricted linguistic input, many such learners still manage to engage in conversation, producing sentences that reveal both their developing language competence and their ability to interpret and respond meaningfully.

This study explores the spoken language development of an adult beginner in second language acquisition. It aims to understand how the learner formulates spoken sentences in everyday interactions, and how cognitive processes, environmental factors, and communicative intent converge in shaping their language output. The research seeks to identify the patterns of sentence construction used by the learner and assess how these patterns reflect the learner's

evolving language skills. It also investigates the situational elements that influence the learner's choices in structuring their speech.

The research is expected to yield valuable insights. Firstly, it intends to identify the sentence types frequently used by adult beginners, which could inform more effective language teaching practices and curriculum design. Secondly, it aims to evaluate the learner's proficiency in sentence construction, pinpointing both their strengths and areas needing support. Thirdly, the study will examine internal cognitive factors (such as mental strategies and prior linguistic knowledge) as well as external influences (like social interaction and context) that support adult learners in producing clear and relevant spoken language. To ensure a focused approach, the study has several limitations. The data is based on conversations surrounding everyday yet socially meaningful themes, particularly the participant's morning routines and professional life. Moreover, due to time limitations, only one adult beginner is examined. While this restricts the broader applicability of the results, it enables a detailed analysis of the cognitive-linguistic processes involved in second language production.

In conclusion, this study provides an in-depth look at how adult beginners generate spoken language in real-world interactions, emphasizing the critical role of cognition in shaping speech. By examining the intersection of grammatical knowledge, cognitive effort, and communicative function, the research enhances our understanding of how second language learners develop spoken fluency and structure their sentences in the early stages of language acquisition.

## **METHOD**

This research utilized a qualitative descriptive design with a case study approach, aiming to investigate and analyze the linguistic characteristics present in the spoken output of an adult beginner learning English. The use of a qualitative method was well-suited to capture the nuanced, context-specific aspects of spontaneous spoken language (Creswell, 2014). A case study approach was chosen due to the study's focus on a single individual over a short duration, enabling a thorough exploration of the learner's interlanguage progression (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2018). The subject was a 26-year-old male, a recent graduate from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at a university in Makassar. As a self-identified English beginner, he had recently started learning the language to meet TOEFL requirements for further academic pursuits. His proficiency level corresponded to the Early Production Stage, as described by (Krashen, 1982), marked by limited vocabulary, frequent use of code-mixing, and dependence on memorized phrases.

Data collection was conducted through audio-recorded conversational interviews. The researcher engaged the participant in informal discussions around topics such as daily activities

and professional life, aiming to elicit naturally occurring language use (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The interviews were carried out over a two-week period in March 2012, consisting of two main sessions. The resulting recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis. The analytical process involved several key stages: first, identifying interlanguage indicators such as code-mixing, influence from the first language (L1), and patterns of transitional grammar, based on (Selinker, 1972) theory; second, classifying sentence forms by analyzing syntactic components such as subject-predicate structure, sentence-final intonation, word order, and distinguishable utterance units; third, interpreting these elements through the lens of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, especially Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) and developmental stage models outlined by Lightbown and Spada (2020); and lastly, comparing two specific excerpts (Extract 1 and Extract 2) to observe the participant's linguistic development over time. This methodological framework offered a detailed and holistic understanding of how sentence construction and interlanguage evolve in an adult second language learner operating in authentic communicative contexts.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **FINDINGS**

This study was conducted with a single respondent. The participant was a 26-year-old male who had just completed his undergraduate studies in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at a university in Makassar. With a plan to continue his education, he recognized the importance of English proficiency, particularly for passing the TOEFL exam. Despite his age, he began learning English as a complete beginner with very limited vocabulary. The data collection involved two recorded interviews, one each week, which were then transcribed and analyzed in detail.

#### **Extract 1: Respondent's Job**

This extract captures a casual morning conversation between the researcher and the respondent. Key observations from the transcript include:

- 1. Use of Code Mixing:** The respondent often mixed Indonesian with English, indicating his early production stage of second language acquisition. Examples include:
  - a. "Happy today is... hari ini?"
  - b. "Book... itu kan buku yah?"
  - c. "Bring? Apa yah bring?"
  - d. "Meet in dosen"
- 2. One- or Two-Word Responses:** Many of the respondent's turns were minimal and repetitive, such as:

- a. “Yes!”
- b. “Happy, happy, happy”
- c. “Drink...drink...”
- d. “Bring, bring.”

**3. Simple Sentence Attempts:** Despite limited grammar knowledge, the respondent attempted sentence construction. Some examples:

- a. “I go to campus.”
- b. “My bring books.” (*incorrect due to improper subject pronoun usage*)

**4. Analysis of Sentence Features:** Based on Fleming’s (2006) characteristics of sentence structure—presence of clause, final intonation, standard word order, and isolatability—the following findings were made:

- a. Only a few utterances contained proper subject-predicate structures (e.g., “I go to campus.”).
- b. Several responses lacked final intonation or standard word order (e.g., “My bring books”) All identified sentences were simple and isolatable due to their brevity and lack of subordinate clauses.

**5. Types of Sentences Identified:**

- a. **Pro-sentences:** “Yes!” (as an affirmation of “Today is my birthday.”)
- b. **Simple sentences:** “I go to campus...”

## **Extract 2: Morning Activities**

This conversation took place at night but revolved around the respondent’s morning routine. Notable patterns include:

**1. Continued Code Mixing and Interlanguage:**

- a. Expressions like “fine fine” are direct transfers from Indonesian (“baik-baik”).
- b. The respondent used present and participle forms inconsistently (e.g., “watching TV and film”).

**2. Attempts at Sentence Construction:**

- a. Example: “My activity eee... washing...” is grammatically flawed due to improper verb usage; the respondent misunderstood the role of gerunds and auxiliaries.

**3. Grammar Transfer from L1 to L2:**

The respondent’s struggle with auxiliary verbs (e.g., omitting “is” or “am”) highlights the influence of his first language, which lacks such constructions.

**4. Progress in Vocabulary and Structure:**

Compared to the first extract, the respondent used fewer mixed-language expressions and showed some awareness of grammatical forms, albeit inconsistently.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of both extracts demonstrates a steady evolution in the participant's interlanguage—a temporary linguistic system combining features of both the first (L1) and second language (L2), as originally described by (Selinker, 1972). In the initial extract, interlanguage patterns were most noticeable at the lexical level, marked by frequent code-mixing, direct L1-to-L2 translation, and strong dependence on Bahasa Indonesia grammatical structures. This aligns with early signs of interlanguage fossilization, a stage where learners tend to transfer L1 rules and vocabulary due to limited L2 input or insufficient time for language processing (Han, 2013).

In contrast, the second extract showed a decline in the number of fully formed grammatical sentences, yet it also revealed increased syntactic sensitivity—such as more accurate word arrangement and better verb usage. This reduction in complete utterances might suggest the learner's struggle to internalize more advanced grammar rules, potentially leading to cognitive strain (Ortega, 2013; Swain & Hinkel, 2005). Sweller's (1988). Cognitive Load Theory supports this interpretation, noting that limited working memory capacity can hinder real-time language production when learners face complex input.

These developmental patterns align with (Krashen, 1981) Input Hypothesis, especially the *i+1* concept, which states that language acquisition is most effective when learners are exposed to slightly more advanced input than their current level. The learner's use of repetition and clarification strategies (e.g., repeating or confirming words like “bring” and “meet”) demonstrates active attempts to process and internalize unfamiliar vocabulary and grammatical forms. This kind of interaction, described in (Long, 1996). Interaction Hypothesis, plays a vital role in supporting interlanguage growth through meaning negotiation.

The learner's use of isolated verbs such as “washing,” “teaching,” and “watching” also reflects a key aspect of early-stage communicative competence. As Canale & Swa (1980) suggest, communicative competence involves more than just grammatical accuracy; it also includes the ability to express meaning effectively with limited linguistic tools. This is consistent with Ellis and Shintani's (2014) view that meaning-driven output, even when fragmented, supports the proceduralization of language knowledge over time.

Recent research reinforces these findings. For instance, Sadeghi and Nourinezhad (2020) observed similar tendencies among Iranian adult EFL learners, who initially relied on L1-based structures and limited vocabulary but later showed improvements in syntactic complexity through sustained practice. Similarly, Putra and Santosa (2022) found that Indonesian adult learners often produced short, verb-centered utterances in early stages but developed better grammar control through continued conversation. Zarei and Jalali (2023) further emphasize that

interlanguage development is not linear and is greatly influenced by affective variables like anxiety, motivation, and willingness to communicate. In the present case, the learner's persistence in interacting despite limited proficiency suggests a low affective filter, a factor (Krashen, 1982) viewed as essential for successful language acquisition. Although traces of fossilization and L1 influence remained, the reduced frequency of code-mixing and the learner's attempts at more grammatically accurate constructions (e.g., proper subject-verb word order) in the second extract suggest a shift from the Early Production Stage to the Speech Emergence Stage, as outlined in (Brown, 2007) framework of second language development. This shift indicates that the learner's interlanguage is becoming increasingly systematic and closer to the target language.

## CONCLUSION

This research explored how an adult beginner learner of English constructs sentences in authentic conversational contexts, with a particular focus on the progression of interlanguage and syntactic development over time. Analysis of two distinct extracts revealed a gradual yet discernible advancement in the participant's interlanguage, transitioning from strong dependence on first language (L1) vocabulary and structures toward emerging sensitivity to English syntax and grammatical patterns. The results indicate that the learner was operating within the Early Production Stage, as defined by (Krashen, 1981) Input Hypothesis, while also showing signs of advancement toward the Speech Emergence Stage. Although the subject's ability to produce fully grammatical sentences remained limited, there was increasing evidence of communicative competence through the use of verbs, repetition strategies, and a noticeable decrease in code-mixing. These patterns reflect the transitional and evolving nature of interlanguage as theorized by (Selinker, 1972) emphasizing its dynamic role in second language development. The study supports prior research by (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Ortega, 2013), which highlights the non-linear nature of adult second language acquisition and the influence of cognitive factors, input quality, and interaction frequency. While the participant's progress was modest, the shift from isolated word use to more structured sentence forms signals meaningful growth in both linguistic ability and cognitive engagement in the L2 learning process.

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