

**HAKAN RINGBOM:  
CROSS-LINGUISTIC SIMILARITY  
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
LEARNING (SECOND  
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION)  
MULTILINGUAL MATTERS  
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The first chapter of the book emphasizes the fact that knowledge in the first language, or other known languages will be useful for learning a new language. Stressing the need to expand research in the area of Error Analysis, Ringbom calls for observation of ways in which cross-linguistic similarities may positively influence target language comprehension, learning, and production.

Chapter 2 highlights the different forms or pattern relations that a known language and the target language may have (whether they have any similarities, contrasts, or zero correspondences). It is suggested that learners seek out these relations to accelerate the learning process. Where a near zero relationship is found in unrelated languages, classroom pedagogy may be enhanced by clearly providing the learner structural similarities.

In Chapter 3, Ringbom introduces research in comprehending an unfamiliar language, in particular the comprehension of neighboring Scandinavian languages, which has led to research such as the EuroCom Project to facilitate intercomprehension between languages in Europe.

One wonders if a similar project in Asia would further stimulate cross-linguistic comprehension studies between the major Asian languages and dialects.

According to Ringbom, language comprehension relies on three types of information: linguistic and other communicative input, prior linguistic and word knowledge, and linguistic and situational knowledge. The L2 learner relies more on context and extra-linguistic background, and processing when compensating for difficulties in word recognition.

In Chapter 4, the link between comprehension and written or oral production is explored. What is evident is that some comprehension is necessary prior to written or oral production and that research into L2 learning problems are actually more closely related to production mechanisms. For example, in reading comprehension, declarative knowledge of vocabulary can take a learner a long way. It may develop rapidly and suddenly, whereas the development of procedural knowledge requires a great deal of time and practice.

In Chapter 5, transfer studies are discussed, restating the point that the field has mostly covered procedural error analysis, whereas the processes prior to written production have only been studied marginally. In addition, positive and negative language transfer between Finnish and Swedish is introduced.

Chapter 6 then compares tests of Finnish and Swedish speakers studying English in Finland. An overview of the levels of transfer, including items, procedural, and overall transfer, are described in Chapter 7.

Throughout Chapter 8, the concern is with the transfer from L1 to L2 phonologic, pragmatic, grammatical, and lexical production. Some interesting examples Ringbom puts forward include the assertion that cross-linguistic similarity or cross-linguistic difference may cause more difficulties for the learner, and that perception (not comprehension) is of essential

importance. Therefore, classical conditioning may outweigh discovery techniques. Also for researchers, instructors, and students in the Japanese context, foreign loanwords provide a variety of challenges in terms of how to effectively develop strategies to store vocabulary.

Chapters 9,10 and 11 present some practical suggestions for effective linguistic teaching. They elaborate cognitive and metacognitive strategies that are determined and scaffolded according to the learning objective, be it for comprehension or for production. This is related to the stage of learning, requiring easier tasks at the lower levels, moving to higher levels requiring strategies that stimulate the expansion or deepening of previously acquired knowledge. Finally, Ringbom emphasizes that more research is necessary to learn more about learning to inform instructors, and to improve the efficacy of teaching.

Chapter 12 provides additional guidance as to what research is still needed. In particular, Ringbom discusses research on the processes involved in the activation of procedural knowledge from receptive competence.

This book explores the importance of cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning. Similarities can be perceived in the form of simplified one-to-one relationships or merely assumed. The book outlines the different roles of L1 transfer on comprehension and on production, and on close and distant target languages