
| BOOK REVIEW

Crosslinguistic Influence and Second Language Learning: Book Review

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| ABSTRACT

The book *Crosslinguistic Influence and Second Language Learning* by Kevin McManus talks about how a person's first language affects the learning and use of a second language. This book is related to applied linguistics because it helps teachers and researchers understand why learners sometimes transfer from their first language to the second language when they speak or write. The linguist explains how language influences performance in real-life situations. He shows that learning a second language is not only about understanding certain rules but also about how learners and speakers improve their use. The book connects with the theory that says research and teaching in a clear way make it very useful for students like me who are learning second language acquisition. The purpose of this review is to summarize the main idea of the book and share my opinion about its strengths and weaknesses and my understanding of this book. In this review, I will summarize the book chapter by chapter to give a practical review of all aspects of this book and scientific critiques.

| KEYWORDS

Crosslinguistic Influence; Second Language Learning; Book Review

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Introduction

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Summary of the Book

Scope and aims. McManus aims to clarify what "influence" means in practice and to demonstrate how prior language experience operates during online processing. The scope is deliberately compact: five chapters guide the reader from definitions and theory through empirical evidence to instructional implications, with an emphasis on concepts accessible to graduate students.

Chapter 1 (Introducing CLI). The opening chapter distinguishes offline knowledge (what learners can explain on tests) from online selection (what they actually deploy under processing pressure). CLI is presented as dynamic and bidirectional: first language(s) affect the L2, and entrenched L2 routines can reshape L1 behavior. Defining transfer as the activation and selection of familiar mappings helps explain why learners may perform well in untimed tasks but still omit target forms during spontaneous speech. The chapter also motivates a shift from error-counting to performance profiling under realistic conditions, arguing that timing and predictability are diagnostic of whether new mappings are truly integrated into use (McManus, 2021).

Chapter 2 (Theoretical models). Four frameworks are synthesized: The Unified Competition Model (cue validity and competition), associative-cognitive/usage-based views (knowledge as emergent from experience), processing-based constraints (what is learnable given real-time architectures), and inhibitory-control perspectives (selection among co-activated languages). McManus avoids choosing a “winner,” arguing instead that experience-sensitivity, processing constraints, and control jointly predict variability in CLI across individuals, structures, and contexts. This integrative stance aligns with Ellis’s (2006) account of selective attention and cue competition, which explains how learners’ previous linguistic experiences shape the salience and weighting of cues during L2 processing. Both sides focus on the idea that linguistic transfer is not just a mechanical process of L1 forms, but it is a specific recalibration process of CLI for attention and prediction during comprehension and production. And it is important that this connection makes crosslinguistic influence part of the moment-by-moment structure of language use. This means which cues are available, how strong their weight is based on previous experience, and how efficient the competing mappings are or how they are selected in specific task contexts. The evidence extends across morphology and syntax (such as tense mappings) and the lexicon. (McManus, 2021; Ellis, 2006).

Chapter 3 (experimental studies) includes examples such as words that are similar in form or borrowed, and phonology such as the persistence of first-language categories. A repeated result shows the presence of a gap between explicit knowledge and fast predictive use; the learner may have the representation in their mind but fails to choose it quickly enough during comprehension and production. This leads to designing instruction that does not rely only on presenting rules, but recalibrates the selection procedures through focused and meaningful practices. It also confirms, in the same way, the facilitation of processing after a period of instruction on the side of stability and variability, while entrenched conflicts remain resistant unless the practice specifically targets fast selection under conditions of reduced planning time. (McManus, 2021).

Chapter 4 (Instructed L2 learning) This instructional chapter talks about the strategic and time-limited use of the students’ first language in order to guide them and clarify the differences, then moving to the next stage which depends on the second language to reach automatization. Effective instructional designs include explanation, input enhancement, and guided output with immediate feedback. And when the first language aligns with the second one, teaching can benefit from the positive influence of the first language; but when there is a difference between the two languages, teaching must discover this conflict and provide repeated opportunities to choose the new structure within meaningful communication. McManus details how task conditions—such as compressed planning time, required prediction, or rapid cue recognition—nudge learners toward the target mapping without reverting to mere metalinguistic rehearsal (McManus, 2021).

Chapter 5 (Reflections and future work). The book calls for research on when CLI persists versus attenuates, for measures that capture the time course of processing (latency, prediction), for broader domains (e.g., pragmatics, discourse), and for closer links to bilingualism and cognitive neuroscience. The agenda prioritizes designs that track change in online behavior, not only end-point accuracy, thus aligning classroom innovation with metrics sensitive to selection and control (McManus, 2021).

Critical Evaluation

Relevance to Applied Linguistics

The book is clearly relevant to applied linguistics: it covers cognitive theories of learning and control to practical implications for instruction, a strand too often missing in purely theoretical debates about transfer. By drawing on online processing, it allows teachers to see the solution to a familiar paradox—students can give a rule but cannot use it in spontaneous conversation—and provides designs which solve the selection bottleneck in real time. For graduate scholars, the continuity from processing constructs to classroom variables is an actionable model for small-scale experimental instruction (McManus, 2021).

Strengths

1. Integrative architecture. Theory → evidence → pedagogy flow is logical and sequential. Each chapter lays the groundwork for the next and brings a tight narrative arc that is well suited to master’s-level seminars. Organization also allows for easy assignment of stand-alone chapters for point-by-point discussion without loss of continuity of argument (McManus, 2021).

2. Processing focus. The continued emphasis on online selection accounts for the tendency of traditional measures (untimed accuracy) to overestimate communicative control. The focus on latency, predictability, and rapid deployment redefines proficiency as the ability to select a mapping rapidly enough for interactional timing (McManus, 2021).

3. Actionable pedagogy. The teaching chapter avoids extremes (ban the L1 vs. over-reliance on it) and instead makes contrastive insight plus automatization functional through dose and timing. The recommendations are implementable—contrastive explanation at point of need, input enhancement, tightly focused output, immediate feedback, and staged timing constraints—so that teachers can pilot them with low levels of instrumentation (McManus, 2021).

4. Clarity of exposition. Expository clarity. McManus uses accurate terms and provides orienting signposts. Writing is clear without sacrificing technical specificity. Central concepts are explained at their initial appearance, and the argument returns again and again to the offline/online to anchor interpretation (McManus, 2021).

Weaknesses / Gaps

1. Limitations of scope. Pragmatics and discourse are treated comparatively superficially. Considering more attention is being paid to pragmatic transfer and interactional competence, a cursory survey or annotated guide would have fuller treatment. Even two pages of illustrative cases (e.g., request strategies, turn-taking) would allow readers to remove the selection-and-use approach from grammar and lexis (McManus, 2021).

2. Depth of method. While the book adequately explains empirical trends, it rarely stops on measurement (e.g., choosing association measures, time-course data modeling). A brief appendix on metrics and design trade-offs would allow readers to reproduce studies. Guidance on small-N classroom analytics (simple latency logging, contrasts within-subjects) would be especially useful for practitioner-researchers (McManus, 2021).

3. Range of learner background. The book occasionally speaks in terms of "learners" in general. CLI has been found to interface with L1 typology and literacy/education profiles; more overt management of L1-by-structure effects would make generalizability clearer. A table relating common L1→L2 contrasts to likely selection conflicts would increase the diagnostic utility of the book (McManus, 2021).

Comparison with Other Works

In relation to Ortega (2009), a highly cited overview of second language acquisition, McManus gives a more detailed attention and process-proximal account of CLI. While Ortega gives a broad-brush picture of SLA (phases of development, individual differences, pedagogic considerations) and situates transfer as just one of many topics, McManus anchors analytical attention on real time selection and its pedagogic consequences. For graduate classes, Ortega can set the macro-patterns of SLA, while McManus contributes the micro-mechanical perspective for seeing how past experience is marshaled (or extracted) at the point of use. Read together, Ortega offers scope; McManus offers a tight, actionable summary that can be tested in classroom research (Ortega, 2009; McManus, 2021).

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Conclusion

As a master's student in Applied Linguistics, I found *Crosslinguistic Influence and Second Language Learning* both clarifying and challenging. It clarifies that instruction must target **selection**, not just **representation**: it is insufficient to merely "cover" a structure; learners need high-dose, meaning-bearing practice with compressed planning time to strengthen anticipatory use. It challenges traditional classroom routines by encouraging contrastive explanation combined with timed, feedback-rich cycles. In my own practice, I plan to integrate brief L1-supported contrastive segments with (a) timed dictogloss and quick retrieval tasks, (b) prediction-before-reveal listening, and (c) micro-tasks that track response latency as a classroom-feasible proxy for online change. These designs align with the linguist's focus on real-time selection, and with the perspective of second language acquisition that shows how linguistic ability emerges from experience and specific constraints. The book, in general, presents a

brief and convincing view of understanding linguistic transfer as a momentary selection process among linguistic mappings activated at the same time. The educational and complete characteristics of the book make it a valuable source for graduate students and for teacher development. I recommend this book for graduate students as essential reading in second language acquisition courses or applied linguistics, and for teacher-researchers who are looking for a brief and coherent presentation that encourages the use of processing-sensitive measures.

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