Volume 2, Issue 12, December - 2024 **ISSN (E):** 2938-379X

ABOUT CURRENT PROBLEMS OF BILINGUALISM

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Abstract
This article explores bilingualism as a phenomenon of alternating language use and its influence on linguistic identity, with a focus on interference at phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and stylistic levels. Drawing on studies from various languages, it highlights how linguistic and cultural differences impact bilingual communication. The paper discusses natural and artificial bilingualism, common challenges in language transfer, and strategies to address linguistic interference in foreign language education. An interdisciplinary approach combining linguistic theory and pedagogical practices is proposed to foster authentic bilingual competence and enhance intercultural communication.

Keywords: Bilingualism, linguistic interference, natural bilingualism, artificial bilingualism, linguistic identity, foreign language education, intercultural communication.

Introduction

Introduction

Bilingualism, or the practical use of two or more languages, is a widely studied phenomenon with diverse interpretations and definitions. Scholars such as L. Bloomfield and U. Weinreich have debated the scope of bilingual competence, highlighting distinctions between native-like proficiency and functional bilingualism. This study examines how bilingualism influences linguistic identity, focusing on interference across phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and stylistic domains. The aim is to identify common challenges faced by bilinguals and propose strategies to minimize linguistic interference, thereby promoting authentic bilingual communication.

Literature Review

Theoretical perspectives on bilingualism vary, with Bloomfield emphasizing equal proficiency in two languages and Weinreich acknowledging differences in competence between native and foreign languages. Boileau's distinction between natural and artificial bilingualism provides a framework for understanding the sociolinguistic and educational dimensions of bilingualism. Research by Aleksandrova, Schuchardt, and others has identified phenomena such as language simplification, loss of native language proficiency, and de-automation of speech due to bilingual integration. These studies highlight the necessity of addressing linguistic interference through targeted pedagogical interventions

Methods and Methodology

The study employs a qualitative analysis of linguistic interference, drawing on examples from Russian and English to illustrate common challenges faced by bilingual speakers. Data were gathered from academic literature, teaching practices, and linguistic observations. The analysis focuses on:

Phonetic interference, such as sound substitution and intonation errors.

Lexical interference, including errors in prepositions, valency, and synonym usage.

Grammatical interference, such as incorrect tense usage and article omission.

Stylistic interference, emphasizing variations in etiquette formulas and dialogic repetition.

A multidisciplinary approach integrates linguistic theory and foreign language teaching methodologies to propose effective strategies for reducing interference

The main part

Bilingualism, or bilinguality, refers to the alternating practical use of two (or more) languages, with the extent and relationship between these languages being defined differently by various specialists and researchers. For instance, the American linguist L. Bloomfield argued that bilingualism implies equal proficiency in each language at the level of a native speaker [5]. According to this view, most residents of Canada, Switzerland, or regions of Belgium bordering France could be classified as bilinguals. Another perspective, expressed by U. Weinreich [16], suggests that linguistic competence in one's native language and knowledge of a foreign language may differ significantly.

The process of switching from one linguistic code to another—that is, transitioning between semiotic systems—undertaken by individuals mastering a new language, draws the attention of many psychologists, psycholinguists, and sociolinguists, as the causes of such a shift are typically extralinguistic. This phenomenon is also of interest to linguists and educators, particularly regarding the influence of learning a foreign language on behavior in one’s native language.

The French scholar A. Boileau classified bilingualism into two types: natural (unconscious) and artificial (conscious) [10]. The first type arises and exists due to regular natural contact between linguistically diverse populations living within the same territory. It involves the simultaneous ability to express thoughts, emotions, and other aspects in both languages. Natural bilingualism can be observed in many cities across our republic.

Artificial bilingualism emerges as a result of formal language learning. When beginning to acquire a foreign language, an individual already possesses native language skills, which they tend to transfer onto the new language. Foreign words, in this case, are often reproduced through internal translation. For example, encountering the English word *house* in a text, a native Russian learner associates it not with the object itself but with the Russian word *дом*. This type of interference also occurs, sometimes even more intensely, at the sentence level—both during translation from the foreign language to the native one and while constructing statements in the foreign language [5, 6, 7, 8].

Linguistic transfer is legitimate and feasible when the linguistic subsystems of the languages are comparable. For instance, both Russian and English share the grammatical category of

number (singular and plural), parts of speech, and verb tenses such as present, past, and future. However, some linguistic phenomena and categories exist in one language but are absent in the other. For example, English features gerundive and infinitive constructions, perfect verb forms, articles, and continuous tenses, which are absent in Russian. Conversely, Russian has a more developed system of morphology, noun declensions, and agreement in sentence structure, which are less prominent in English. In cases of allomorphism, where analogous linguistic phenomena are lacking between the two language systems, unjustified transfer from the native language to the foreign one often occurs. This leads to linguistic interference, which, in a broad sense, includes what is commonly understood as an "accent." This phenomenon results from the improper imposition of one language onto another.

German scholar H. Schuchardt concluded that, over time, speech interaction between two linguistic communities, due to inherent challenges, often results in a diachronic simplification of both languages [16]. For instance, British scholars today perceive a serious threat to the idiomatic richness and diversity of the English language as it evolves into a standardized global medium for international communication.

To economize effort, bilinguals aim for symmetry or bilingual isomorphism. They maximize the use of linguistic phenomena common to both the native and foreign languages while ignoring differences. Russian speakers, for example, tend to choose familiar native linguistic patterns when constructing statements, often disregarding more idiomatic English structures. The table below illustrates examples from our own teaching practice and interactions with English speakers. In all cases, the speaker intuitively favors the familiar logic of Russian speech when choosing translation constructions, prioritizing cognitive efficiency. Three levels of proficiency in a foreign language are generally recognized: Elementary Level: The second language fulfills only an informational-communicative function. Intermediate Level: Expressive functions begin to manifest alongside communication. Advanced Level: Thought processes occur directly in the second language.

The advanced level is closest to natural bilingualism, as exemplified by figures like Vladimir Nabokov (English and Russian) or Oscar Wilde and Somerset Maugham (English and French). In the context of foreign language instruction at universities, learners typically remain at the elementary level. However, achieving the intermediate and advanced levels is more probable and efficient when learning occurs within the language's native-speaking community. Yet, this situation may pose a threat to one’s cultural identity and connection to their native society. The transformation of linguistic identity is a significant issue and a potential threat to self-identification, as discussed by sociolinguists, ethnolinguists, and cultural linguists [4].

It is widely believed that the most effective foreign language learning occurs during early childhood, particularly through immersion in a foreign-language environment, as is often the case with emigrant families or children adopted by families abroad. It is worth noting that integration processes yield not only positive results but also numerous negative consequences. For example, in N.Sh. Aleksandrova's book *"Native Language, Foreign Language, and Linguistic Phenomena Without Names,"* various studies on bilingualism conducted by scholars from different countries are analyzed [11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17]. Based on research involving multiple languages (e.g., Korean and French, German and Russian, Italian and German, Greek

and Russian, Persian and German), evidence of the simplification of both the first and second languages, as well as the frequent loss of the native language, is presented [1, pp. 88–100]. Such "language impoverishment" of the native language, observed during immersion in a new linguistic environment, affects not only school-aged children but also adults, manifesting as a form of "de-automation" of native oral and written speech [1, p. 93]. De-automation in this context refers to a lack of confidence in constructing phrases, choosing lexical forms, agreeing words, placing stress, and other linguistic elements.

In our view, combining two languages at an early age can significantly harm linguistic competence. Active acquisition of a new language is invariably accompanied by notable losses in the native language. In some cases, particularly when the native language is not maintained at home, children lose their ability to communicate in their native tongue. Sometimes, these changes are so irreversible that restoring the native language requires relearning it as if it were a foreign language.

The most favorable age for immersion in a new linguistic culture is considered to be 10–11 years, provided that active efforts are made to preserve the native language. When the second language is consciously acquired, adverse effects can often be avoided. However, another challenge arises—significant influence from the native language, known as linguistic interference [5].

An experienced educator can predict potential errors caused by interference and strive to achieve maximal authenticity in preserving the speaker's linguistic identity, whether in their native or foreign language. To successfully address these challenges, teachers need to be aware of the most common instances of interference, which occur at all linguistic levels [5].

I. Phonetic Interference

Phonetic interference is the most persistent issue and is almost impossible to fully overcome. Even with a solid understanding of grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation often reveal that the speaker is not a native. For example:

English speakers learning Russian: They typically struggle to devoice final consonants and have difficulty mastering Russian intonation, which tends to descend, contrasting with English intonation.

Russian speakers learning English: Conversely, they tend to devoice final voiced consonants, fail to maintain vowel length, and struggle with sounds absent in Russian (e.g., *w*, *th*, *ng*, *ir*, *er*), diphthongs, and other features.

Such issues are commonly discussed in studies dedicated to these problems. Recognizing and addressing these linguistic challenges is essential for educators and researchers aiming to improve bilingual education and preserve linguistic diversity.

II. Lexical Interference

At the lexical level, English speakers face difficulties with:

Prepositions that do not align with their English counterparts in similar phrases (e.g., *ждать для...*, "to wait for" vs. "to wait to").

Verbs with aspectual prefixes (e.g., *отъехать*, *подъехать*, *уехать*, *выехать*, *заехать*, *съехать*, *наехать*), which are challenging to grasp.

Seemingly identical synonyms often confused in usage (e.g., using *тоже* instead of *также*: *Тоже мы хотели бы увидеть новый образец*).

Additionally, English speakers struggle to distinguish certain Russian adjectives with complex morphology or evaluative suffixes, leading to errors such as *консерваторский* instead of *консервативный* or *журналистический* instead of *журналистский*.

Both Russians and English speakers commonly make lexical errors involving valency, or incorrect word combinations. For instance:

In English, *do* and *make* both translate to *делать* in Russian, leading to typical errors in their usage. Fixed expressions such as *to make a mistake*, *to make a face*, or *to make a mess* require *make* rather than *do*. Conversely, expressions like *to do the job*, *to do one's hair*, *to do one's duty*, or *to do one's best* require *do* rather than *make*.

Similarly, while *убеждать* can correspond to either *convince* or *persuade* in English, only *confirmed bachelor* is the correct translation for *убежденный холостяк*.

There are also distinctions in the internal semantic structure of seemingly similar words. For example, Russian speakers often confuse *learn* and *teach*, as both are translated as *учить*. In English, however, *learn* means *to study*, while *teach* means *to instruct*. These lexical traps frequently challenge learners at every turn.

Semantic Distortions under Native Language Influence

Under the influence of native language analogies, learners often distort the meaning of foreign words. For instance:

In English, *science* exclusively refers to natural sciences, while *humanities* refers to social sciences and arts. Russian speakers, however, tend to conflate these terms and use *science* for both, as the Russian term *наука* encompasses all branches of knowledge.

Similar distortions occur with words such as:

barracks (means military barracks, not makeshift shelters or *бараки*).

salute (means greeting, not fireworks or *салют*).

minister (primarily refers to a clergyman, not a government official in its first meaning).

These lexical challenges illustrate the pervasive influence of native language structures and semantics, which must be actively addressed in foreign language instruction to minimize errors and foster authentic linguistic competence.

Stylistic Inadequacy

Stylistic inadequacy often arises from an overuse of slang, which foreign learners are advised to use with great caution. Slang evolves rapidly, and its connotations are typically clear only to native speakers, often eluding the awareness of non-native speakers. For instance:

The slang term *joint* was used to mean "a dwelling" until the mid-20th century but has since acquired the meaning of "a marijuana cigarette" or "a joint."

Similarly, the expression *broad*, which in the 1930s–1950s referred to "an attractive girl or woman," has undergone semantic shifts and now carries distinctly negative connotations.

Such transformations are common and often go undocumented in dictionaries, remaining part of oral speech alone. As a result, indiscriminate use of slang can, at best, lead to misunderstandings and confusion for the listener, and at worst, create awkward or inappropriate situations.

This highlights the importance of teaching learners to be discerning in their use of colloquial expressions and to prioritize a formal register, particularly in contexts where stylistic precision is essential.

Common Cases of Lexical Interference: "Pidginization" of Language

One widespread form of lexical interference is the so-called "pidginization" of a language—unjustified borrowing of lexical units from other languages into the native one. While borrowing is an inevitable aspect of any language's evolution and is often necessary for naming new phenomena, it can sometimes be excessive.

Certain borrowed terms have become well-integrated due to a lack of viable native alternatives, such as *имиджмейкер* (image-maker), *Интернет* (Internet), *пиар* (PR), and newer terms like *айпад* (iPad), *смартфон* (smartphone), *флэшмоб* (flash mob), and *блоггер* (blogger). For many of these, Russian has no equivalents, making their adoption unavoidable.

However, when equivalents do exist, there is often an unrecognized competition between lexical items for survival. Native synonyms sometimes quietly fade away, as seen with the abbreviation *ЭВМ* (электронно-вычислительная машина), which has been largely replaced by *компьютер* (computer) and is on the brink of becoming an archaism. In some cases, resistance is futile, as languages regulate the assimilation or rejection of foreign words naturally. For example, the borrowed term *live journal* has been increasingly replaced in modern usage by the Russian equivalent *живой журнал* (ЖЖ).

The Problem of Linguistic Clutter

At the same time, the language is being inundated with unnecessary borrowings such as *пуш-ап эффект* (push-up effect), *перформанс* (performance), *промоушн* (promotion), *интродуктивный* (introductive), *блокбастер* (blockbuster), *вау* (wow), *упс* (oops), and others. Many of these words replace existing and perfectly adequate native terms, contributing to linguistic clutter.

The Role of Educators

While it is impossible to fully control a language or eliminate undesirable words, foreign language teachers can play a key role in fostering students' literacy in both the foreign language being studied and their native language. By emphasizing mindful and precise use of language, educators can help learners develop a deeper awareness of linguistic nuances and the appropriateness of their choices in both contexts.

III. Grammatical Interference

The grammatical system of a language is typically more logical than its phonetic, lexical, or stylistic aspects. Clear rules often govern grammar, making it relatively easier to learn compared to other linguistic domains.

However, interference from native language models often occurs at the grammatical level, especially when linguistic phenomena do not align. For instance:

English speakers learning Russian tend to overuse auxiliary verbs and complex analytical forms where they are unnecessary in Russian (e.g., *я буду идти*, *я буду говорить*). They also find case forms of nouns, personal verb conjugations, and agreement in gender, number, and case challenging due to the absence or mismatch of these categories in English.

Russian speakers learning English consistently prefer the Past Indefinite tense over the Present Perfect to express past events. They also avoid using continuous forms such as Present Continuous, Present Perfect Continuous, and complex constructions like the Absolute Participle Construction or Verbal Complexes. Furthermore, they struggle with articles, which are absent in Russian grammar.

Common Grammatical mistakes

Many errors stem from the mechanical transfer of structures from the native language to the foreign language or from false analogies within the foreign language. Examples include:

Translating *знания* as *knowledges* (incorrect pluralization).

Misinterpreting *деньги* as *money are* (incorrect plural agreement).

Translating *советы* as *advices* (incorrect countable usage).

Incorrect agreement based on a "false" plural form, such as *the news are* instead of the correct singular *the news is*.

These challenges highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing grammatical interference to ensure accurate and fluent use of the target language.

IV. Stylistic Errors

Stylistic errors—such as confusion of word meanings, connotations in context, set expressions, and etiquette formulas—are among the most frequent and difficult to eliminate.

When comparing the selection of linguistic means in Russian and English for specific communicative purposes, one can observe the unique characteristics of national stylistics, which significantly influence the linguistic identity of the speaker.

Stylistic Differences in Russian and English Speech

These differences are especially evident in dialogue, which includes various communicative sentence types: questions, answers, and imperatives. The greatest variety is found in information-seeking questions and quasi-questions (e.g., questions that are advice, encouragement, or confirmation).

Information-Seeking Questions

In most cases, information-seeking questions in Russian are more direct and less variable than in English. For example:

Russian: *Не скажете (не знаете), который час?*

English: *Could you tell me the time, please? / Would you know the time? / Do you happen to know what time it is? / What's the time?*

English questions of this type often employ what V.G. Gak terms **"conversational proxemics"**—maintaining a psychological distance between speakers [3, p. 13]. English speakers frequently avoid direct interrogative forms to reduce pressure on the interlocutor. For instance, when asking for directions to a bus stop or a bank, common English phrases include:

I'm looking for a bus stop.

I wonder if there's a bank nearby.

This communicative strategy gives the listener the option to engage or not, preserving their autonomy.

Etiquette in Giving Advice

Etiquette formulas for giving advice in English are also more varied and tolerant. In addition to assertive advice, such as *Тебе необходимо сменить обстановку* (*You need a change of scenery*), which is often accompanied by subjective modal expressions (*по-моему, я считаю, на мой взгляд, мне кажется* / *to my mind, I think, in my opinion, it seems to me*), English speakers more frequently opt for advice phrased as a question, for example:

Do (don't) you think a change would do you good?

These stylistic nuances illustrate the more indirect and flexible communicative norms of English, which often contrast with the straightforward and less variable nature of Russian speech in similar contexts. Recognizing and adapting to these stylistic differences is essential for achieving fluency and cultural appropriateness in a foreign language.

Stylistic Features of Imperative Expressions

The mentioned tendencies become even more apparent in the use of imperatives. In English, except in specific registers such as administrative or military contexts or extreme situations, communicative tolerance is a hallmark of standard norms of interaction.

To achieve this, English employs a wide range of constructions that reflect openness to dialogue and recognition of the interlocutor's right to make independent choices. These include:

Why don't you…

How about…

What would you say to…

What do you think of…

Wouldn't it be a good idea to…

These forms soften the imperative tone, transforming commands into suggestions or invitations for discussion, thus fostering a more cooperative and respectful interaction style.

Such linguistic strategies exemplify the importance of politeness and flexibility in English communication, contrasting with more direct approaches in some other languages. Mastery of

these forms is essential for achieving cultural and stylistic appropriateness in English-speaking contexts.

B Stylistic Features of Requests, Advice, and Imperatives in Russian

In Russian, requests, advice, and imperatives tend to have a more categorical tone. While constructions resembling those listed in English (*Why don't you…*, *How about…*, etc.) occasionally appear as advice, they are rarely used as imperatives.

Speech Stereotypes as Indicators of National Stylistics

An important marker of a language's national stylistics is the use of speech stereotypes. In English, repetition plays a particularly significant role in speech patterns, both in questions and responses. According to R. Jakobson, these repetitions serve a phatic function—establishing and maintaining contact in communication. Alongside interjections and etiquette formulas, repetitions are part of the speech stereotypes that, while semantically "empty," are essential for the communicative process. V.A. Vinogradov describes them as a manifestation of language within culture, forming an integral part of the basic concepts of national culture [1, p. 18].

Repetition in English Dialogue

Unlike Russian dialogue, English conversation is unthinkable without repetitions, which occur in questions, affirmations, and responses. These include:

Echo questions or responses:

I arrived yesterday. – Did you?

It was midnight. – Was it?

Tag questions:

You called him back, didn't you?

I'm your mother, aren't I?

Direct answers to questions in English are almost always accompanied by a tautological repetition:

Yes, I did.

No, I didn't.

This repetition, while largely decorative in terms of information, is a hallmark of "authentic" English dialogue. Russian speakers learning English often overlook these "excesses," as they are not typical of Russian communicative stylistics. For example, a concise "да" (yes) or "нет" (no) is considered polite in Russian, but in English, such brevity can come across as abrupt or "unfriendly."

The Role of Repetition in English

The active use of repetition in English contributes to the dynamic qualities of speech, particularly:

Appellative dynamics: Continuous engagement of the listener by the speaker.

Interactive signaling: Indicating the listener's participation in the communication act.

These stylistic elements are key to understanding and mastering the norms of English dialogue, highlighting the cultural and communicative contrasts between English and Russian speech styles.

In general, the national stylistics of English speech, compared to Russian, is characterized by:
Greater variability in etiquette formulas that maintain psychological distance and avoid direct pressure on the interlocutor.
Tolerance in communication.
Appellative dynamics, continuously engaging the listener.
Consultative tone, inviting collaboration.
Interactivity, signaling active participation in the communication process.
In contrast, Russian speech demonstrates:
Directness and straightforwardness.
A high degree of categoricalness.
Imperative tendencies.
These differences must be taken into account when teaching a foreign language to achieve a high degree of authenticity in bilingual speech, minimizing the disruptions caused by linguistic interference.
Addressing these challenges requires combining advancements in linguistic theory with innovations in foreign language teaching methodology. Such an integrative and interdisciplinary approach creates a robust platform for developing bilingual linguistic competence, essential for successful interlingual and intercultural communication.

Conclusion

The national stylistics of English and Russian differ significantly, with English characterized by greater variability, tolerance, and interactive engagement, while Russian tends toward directness and categoricalness. These stylistic contrasts, along with interference at phonetic, lexical, and grammatical levels, pose challenges for bilingual speakers. Addressing these issues requires an integrative approach that combines linguistic insights with pedagogical strategies. By fostering bilingual competence, educators can enhance intercultural communication and minimize the disruptions caused by linguistic interference, contributing to the development of authentic bilingual identity.

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