

THE PROBLEM OF INTERFERENCE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING LANGUAGES

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Abstract:

Applied linguistics has influenced or may influence in the future the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. The observations in applied linguistics may help us to improve the methods of language teaching. The observation that can be done is by contrasting native language and target language. By contrasting the two languages we can find the similarities and differences. One kind of contrastive analysis is language interference. It is most commonly discussed in the context of English language learning and teaching, but it can occur in any situation when someone does not have a native-level command of a language, as when translating into a second language.

Key terms: Interference, Positive and negative transfer; Inter-language and intra-language; Explicit and implicit (according to form); Proactive interference; Retroactive interference.

Introduction

Most issues of language teaching are the objects of study in most sciences, including comparative linguistics (CL). As we know CL is concerned with typology of two or more languages, different questions concerning language contacts, and in its turn includes the issues of bilingualism, multilingualism, interference, convergence and others. When comparing and contrasting languages, CL identifies particular characteristics of the language. And these peculiarities of languages discovered by typology can serve as helpful material for introducing students to any language which was previously unfamiliar. It is especially essential when quite different and unknown structures of language are taught.

Thus, CL has close links with Methodology in terms of language interference. It (interference) will always occur in any situation where someone hasn't mastered a second language.

The problem of interference first was introduced by German psychologist John A. Bergstrom in 1892. Later other German psychologists George Elias Muller, Karl Dallenbach (1924) continued working in this field from psycholinguistic viewpoint.

From a linguistic viewpoint interference is an interaction or a change in linguistic structures and structural elements. It appears to be a deviation from linguistic norms in the spoken and written language. Languages with more similar structures (English and French) are more susceptible to mutual interference than languages with fewer similar features (English and Japanese) [Ройзенцвейг, 1975, Makey, 1965].

Interference is applying the distinctive features of the native language on the target foreign language, as defined by professor J. Buranov [1983]. The mother tongue of a learner, which he

speaks from his childhood, is bound to influence the system of the foreign language being learned. In this respect inter-language analogy plays a great role.

The study of interference is connected with comparative study of systems of two or more languages revealing phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical peculiarities. It is also concerned with the question of whether native language should participate in foreign language teaching or not.

From theoretical perspective, the study of interference is connected with revealing isomorphism and allomorphy. From the practical perspective, such study can help to analyze the mistakes that appear as a result of influence of mother tongue systems on the parallel systems of foreign language.

Defining the role and place of native language in teaching a foreign language is more of importance. The fact that foreign language teaching is built on the basis of native language can have positive and negative influence in the learning process. That's why the following types of interference can be outlined:

- Positive and negative transfer;
- Inter-language and intra-language;
- Explicit and implicit (according to form);
- Proactive interference;
- Retroactive interference.

Positive transfer: When the relevant unit or structure of both languages are the same, the process of interference can result in correct language production called *positive transfer* – “correct” meaning in line with most native speakers’ notions of acceptability. In this type of influence skills and knowledge of native language can serve as the main things for analogy. Students can compare the similar sounds and imitate them, contrast the meanings of words using mother tongue lexicon. Structural models of their native language can help the learners to build the same models in the foreign language. So, positive transfers such that knowing one language can aid in developing skills for a second language.

Such results can have a large effect. Generally speaking, the more similar the two languages are, the more the learner is aware of the relation between them, the more positive transfer will occur. For example, an Anglophone learner of German may correctly guess an item of German vocabulary from its English counterpart, but word order and collocation are likelier to differ, as will connotations. Such an approach has the disadvantage of making the learner more subject to the influence of “false friends”.

Negative transfer occurs when speakers and writers transfer items and structures that are not the same in both languages within the theory of contrastive analysis (the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities), the greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative transfer can be expected. In negative transfer, usually, some very different aspects of mother tongue are applied in the target language and usually are inappropriate. As a result of negative transfers from the native language to the second one, so called hybrid languages emerge. For example, because of strong negative transfers from local languages special types of languages appeared: Pidgin English



(East China and Japan); Beach-La-Mar English (on the coasts of Pacific Ocean); Koro English (in Africa); Black English (Language of American Negroes); Indian English and some others. Interference of native language can be divided into the following types:

- Phonetic (pronunciation) [Рабинович, 1970];
- Phonological (intonation) [Рабинович, 1970];
- Grammatical [Ройзенцвейг, 1963, Уман, 1964];
- Lexical [Кунин, 1973, Паскаль, 1972].
- Semantic [Семчинский, 1973].

There are some examples of interference. Examples of interference of Turkic languages into English can be seen in the absence or misuse of articles when speaking English:

English: *Give me the book lying on the table.*

Uzbek: *Менга стол устидаги китобни бер.*

The reason is that the use of article to express the definiteness is not typical in Uzbek. Uzbek learners of English find it difficult to conform to the rules of article + Noun. Sometimes students omit the use of personal pronouns before verbs, because it is possible to use verbs alone in Uzbek, because verbs carry grammatical meaning of person:

Uzbek: *Келдим.*

English: *I came.*

Sometimes students may say “came” instead of “I came”.

Relatively free word order in most Turkic languages and Uzbek is the reason for the majority of students violating strict word order rules in the English language.

English: SVO: *I ate an apple*

Uzbek: SVO: *Мен едим олмани.*

SOV: *Мен олмани едим.*

VSO: *Едим мен олмани.*

OSV: *Олмани мен едим.*

Transfer may be of two types: **conscious** and **unconscious**.

Consciously, learners or unskilled translators may sometimes guess when producing speech or text in a second language because they haven't learned or have forgotten its proper usage.

Unconsciously, they may not realize that the structures and internal rules of the languages in question are different. Such users could also be aware of both structures and internal rules, yet be insufficiently skilled to put them into practice, and consequently often fall back on their first language,

Inter-language interference is more common than intra-language interference in which because of comparing two languages, mistakes occur or learning process is helped. The most common mistakes occur in inter-language interference. In this case mistakes appear because of the negative transfer of habits from the native language (sometimes from the first foreign language that it supposed to be in very good command) to the second language.

Intra-language interference occurs when learners make mistakes under the influence of the already acquired language knowledge and established habits in the foreign language.

According to the form interference may be of two types: explicit and implicit.



Explicit form. Interference is explicit in cases when learners make mistakes in oral and written foreign language expressions transferring language habits from the native to the foreign language and thus they ignore the norms of foreign speech. Explicit interference can be seen in phonology or writing, when students ignore phonological aspects of foreign language when speaking and thus speak unnaturally and without expression.

Implicit form. Implicit interference occurs when student can find equivalents of lexical items and grammatical forms in the foreign language. With implicit interference learners do not make mistakes because they avoid using grammatical and lexical difficulties constructing phrases without them. In this way there are no mistakes but the speech becomes simpler and poorer. In this way it loses its expressive and idiomatic aspect.

Proactive interference is the “forgetting of information due to interference from the traces of events or learning that occurred prior to the materials to be remembered.” Proactive interference occurs when, in any given context, past memories inhibit an individual’s full potential to retain new memories. It has been hypothesized that forgetting working memories would be non-existent if not for proactive interference.

Retroactive interference is a phenomenon that occurs when newly learned information interferes with and impedes the recall of previously learned information. Retroactive interference is a result of decreased recall of the primary studied functions due to the learning and recall of succeeding functions. Retroactive interference is a classic paradigm that was first officially termed by Muller. These memory research pioneers demonstrated that filling the retention interval (defined as the amount of time that occurs between the initial learning stage and the memory recall stage) with tasks and material caused significant interference effects with the primary learned items.

If compared to proactive interference, studies show that Retroactive interference can have larger effects because of the fact that there is not only competition involved, but also unlearning.

As a conclusion we can say that

- Interference depends on typological proximity and distinction;
- Cause errors in negative transfer;
- Helps language learning in positive transfer;
- Occurs mostly in initial stages of language learning;
- Offers implications for teaching and for the issues of mother tongue use in foreign language teaching.

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