The Problem of the First Language Interference in English Writing by Russian Students

Sarmanbetova ULBOSSYN\textsuperscript{a} and Ying-Liang LIU\textsuperscript{b}

School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, Hubei, China

\textsuperscript{a}ainra485@hotmail.com, \textsuperscript{b}yliu@whut.edu.cn

Keywords: Argumentative essays; First language interference; Influence; Second language.

Abstract. This paper investigates the first language interference in argumentative essays written by Russian students. The study finds out the five types of native language interference and analyzed the influence of students’ first language on the second language. The findings of this present study were discussed.

Introduction

Writing is an important and helps students to express their ideas in written form. From writing it is easy to judge the students’ language level and writing can help to determine the errors interference. Interference is a phenomenon that leads to errors which associated with the transfer of similar phenomena in the structure of the native language to these phenomena occur inappropriate parts of different properties of the native and studied language \cite{1, 2}. Interference occurs when two languages have a variety of subjective and objective similarities in using the languages. Vinagratov claims that interference is the interaction of language systems in a bilingual environment, emerging or when a language contact, or when the individual assimilation of native language deviations from the norm and system of native language and interference is the influence of mother tongue in expression process \cite{3}.

Interference is a dynamic process. The degree of its manifestation depends on the stages of second language acquisition and the types of bilingualism: at the initial stage of studying the foreign language it manifests itself very strongly, though at all levels of language as means of mastering the target language, and language acquisition skills in this language it is gradually reduced and finally disappears \cite{4}.

The concept of interference as the interpenetration of elements of one language to another, leading to deviations from the norm is a linguistic basis and identifies the teaching strategy in the foreign language \cite{5}. According to Phuket and Bidin “More often, EFL learners are taught English skills through memorizing but not having the connection to the actual use of the language. “Most second language acquisition theories have agreed that language learners need to be massively exposed to the language before it can be acquired” \cite{6}. In order to discuss the writing process in language interference we need to find out the main reasons for the development writing skills.

The interference of the native language occurs when EFL speakers or writers apply the linguistic elements, structures or rules of their native language in the production of the target language. In other words, native language interference is derived from the learners’ use of previously learnt knowledge to succeed in learning a new language \cite{7}. On the contrary Vereshchagin argues that statement. He claims that learning new aspects of new language will be acquired through psychological aspects very quickly and only the previously learned material will be caused by learners’ beliefs that he/she knows the previous linguistic elements and rules of target language very well \cite{8}.

The transposition is specifically considerable in terms of learning related languages, because of the similarity of structure and typology to not impede the acquisition of the first and second non-native languages. However, transposition takes the role of a significant role in the study of unrelated languages. Consequently, the process of using the transposition can make greatly possible and increase the efficiency of the teaching process and learning foreign languages \cite{9, 10}.
Levitov points out that it is impossible commonly, why the person speaks some languages, but still denies the phenomenon of positive transfer. It was also emphasized by Gersonskaya and Fedorov that is due to the methodical use of positive influence of transposition of the native language. Because of that fact there are numerous common concepts and categories, similar phenomena which were being learned in the native language [11]. The purpose of this current study is to identify types of mother tongue interference. Moreover, to study the influence of the Russian language on their English writing skills.

Method

Data

Method of the study is the theoretical interpretation of the interference of the native language in contact with English language, traditionally descriptive study. Data was collected in an international university in Kazakhstan which means the students are more likely to be skillful bilinguals. There were 31 students of Russian language who studied at “Foreign language: two foreign languages” specialty. Students have been learning English for the 3rd year. The data collection was taking in English writing class during for 16 weeks. Students were required to write around 250 – 300 words. Data is collected from 7 essays; totally there were 215 essays.

Text Analysis

The data was analyzed the interference errors by counting and classifying into categories to find out where students made the interference errors. According to Alimov classification of interference, we used his classification in order to analyze the students’ texts [12].

Orthographical and Graphic Interference. Orthographical and graphic interference appears on the letter: shift in language learning the rules of writing words of another language. This gives rise to a spelling error on the graphic of an anomaly. In English language there are words whose orthography may cause great many problems, especially in the beginning level. There some counterparts in Russian language writing, especially for matching consonants. So, there are words that have a doubled consonant in the Russian language, and one consonant in English, then in graphic ‘з’ Russian letter in English ‘z’ letter:

Examples: Recomendation (recommendation), ofice (office), balerina (ballerina), agresia (agression), adres (address), realized (realized).

Morphological Interference. Morphological interference appears in morphemes level and speech of part. For example:

Example 1: Except this story which was inspired to get interest to (in) drawing.
Example 2: I want to be good in (at) English.
Example 3: I got to my village to visit my grandma often.
Example 4: I was a very happy to know that he can help me and give me many advices (advice).
Example 5: I'd like a translator to be.

Lexical Interference. Lexical interference is the interference of the vocabulary of one language system to another, which usually leads to literalism. Under lexical interference understand the convergence of the lexical units of the same or different languages, primarily hynonym of a synonym, but deriving from it a semantic use, and leads to an involuntary the violation of linguistic norms. Examples from students’ lexical errors:

Example 1: I don’t have enough time to go to the gym, make (do) exercise every morning.
Example 2: I shoud to refuse (give up) from my bad habits.
Example 3: I began to think over what I wanted to do all my life and make (decided) that I wanted to become a writer.

Syntactic Interference. Syntactic interference interpreted as deviations from patterns in compatibility feature of syntactic units and contravention of word order. So, English words say and tell both approximately corresponding to the Russian say, but tell necessarily requires an indirect complement, whereas say can take indirect object only by means of a preposition:
Example 1: I told him how to do it (I told how to do him)
Example 2: I saw him come.
Example 3: There are double negative words in Russian language and students made the mistakes, for example:
Example 4: I did not dreamt to study two foreign languages.
Example 5: No one was not in the corridor.
Therefore, the order of words in a sentence the English language is more important than the order of words in a sentence of the Russian language.

**Stylistic Interference.** Stylistic interference – the influence a style from one language into another (native language to target language). For example:
Example 1: He wrote a lot of books. First of all he worked as a metallurg (metallurgy engineer).
Example 2: Once he (was) hunted (ing) animal, the he brought (he shot it and gave) the meat of this animal to orphan’s house.
Example 3: I can say what (that) I am a happy.

**Research Results and Discussion**

Based on the findings above, it can be said that Russian students have five types of first language interference in their writing. This analysis presents the error numbers of first language interference from the first drafts until the seventh draft in students’ writing. The error numbers and the error percentage were analyzed from 215 writing essays. It is elaborated in Table 1.

**Table 1. The Percentage of Error Types in First Language Interference.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Number of errors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthographical and graphic interference</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphological interference</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical interference</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic interference</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stylistic interference</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s consider the evaluation of error types in first language interference by Russian students’ argumentative writing.

![Figure 1. The Error Types of Interference by Russian Students.](image)

As we can see students made more errors in stylistic interference. Then morphological interference is in second place with 26.6% errors. Thirdly, syntactic interference is 17.2% of errors.
Furthermore, 14.6% error was made in lexical interference. Students made less error in orthographical and graphic interference compared with other types of mother tongue interference.

The results of this study demonstrated that Russian students have first language interference in their second language writing. The aim of this study was to unravel the first language interference in students’ argumentative writing and significantly determine the interference errors in Russian students’ writing. From the above findings, we can conclude that students are not familiar with norms of English language. Even though they are students of 3rd year English majors, they were not able to recognize the transfer of their first language while writing English essays. Maybe Russian students don’t have a change to know or study English language norms concretely from sociocultural perspective and linguistic varieties. As we can see from above results, students have five types of first language interference. Students faced with five types of first language interference, because of some linguistic similarities of using in English and Russian languages, then because of the loanwords too. It occurs when the words used less by analogy with the known synonym (Russian). When replacing the stylistic synonyms and changing the style statements. In English, the juxtaposition of the present and future time neutralize in one of the types of conditional clauses, and currently acts as general, not elapsed time. However, Russian students inclined to use the future tense in conditional clauses referring to the future: if I will go to travel, instead of normal if I go to travel. And misunderstanding of the background vocabulary, carrier language and culture, and it can bring to the transfer of concepts from one language into the other concepts.

**Conclusion**

In the article we tried to reveal all the linguistic aspects of the first language interference and checking the results of their knowledge gained within one semester. In conclusion, Russian learners of English had faced with cross-language interference, especially stylistic, morphologic, syntactic, lexical and phonetic. Among them, the stylistic interference caused a great many errors in students’ writing. The results of the research can be developed as teaching material for the FL teachers on defining and overcoming the first language interference problems.

**Acknowledgement**

This research was financially supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant No: 195217006 and 195217008) and Hubei Provincial Department of Education Social Science Research Fund (Grant No: 17G015).

**References**


