

## LANGUAGE TRANSFER AND PROBLEMS OF TEACHING BULGARIAN FOR SLAV STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** The text presents the problems of studying Bulgarian as a second language by Slavs with an emphasis on the specifics of foreign language teaching in a Slavic environment. The study presents a theoretical view of the language contacts, transfer and interference in the context of second language acquisition. We pay special attention to the issues of mutual linguistic influences and the genetic closeness between languages through the prism of their acquisition. The influence of the first language on the acquisition and later on the use of the second language can be positive, negative and even zero influence. The positive influence is manifested in the fact that the practical and theoretical knowledge of the first language, language habits and skills support the process of learning a new language and its use as a tool for communication. The positive transfer can be specified according to various criteria: e.g. can be divided into conscious and spontaneous, direct and transformed, etc. Negative influence is manifested at all language levels through the so-called negative transfer or interference – these are the errors that occur due to the influence of the first language on the second and which bear the signs of the first language. We also present opposite views that the linguistic transfer on the one hand can greatly facilitate the acquisition of a second Slavic language, but also the view that closeness between languages can lead to excessive linguistic interference.

**Keywords:** second language acquisition; Bulgarian as a second language; language transfer; empruntology

The history of the studies of the role of the first language in second language acquisition dates back to the 1960s when in the spirit of contrastive analysis it was considered that the first language exerted a predetermining influence over the acquisition of the next languages. The period of growth of behaviourism also affected the views on language acquisition – it was believed to be a kind of habit formation, and according to this understanding the prevailing opinion was that habits from the first language got in the way, obstructed the formation of habits for the second language, and last but not least it was claimed that the errors made

by the learners were some kind of a reflection of the structure of their mother tongue.

In the 1970s the opposite view of the role of the first language prevailed, i.e. that the first language had a minimal influence over the second language acquisition. However, error analysis indicated that many of those errors could not be explained with transfer from the mother tongue, and at the same time it called contrastive analysis into question as it could not predict the errors. Within the framework of these theories the concept of *metalanguage* developed – it was considered a specific transitional system appearing during the process of second language acquisition but at the same time different from the first language.

Since then the concept for the influence of the first language in a next language acquisition has expanded significantly, with linguists expressing various views regarding transfer – from the position of supporters of the „universal grammar“ principle to those studying the cognitive mechanisms by means of which transfer is realized. The scope of the scientific studies is not limited only to language structure but has also expanded to other cognitive and psychological spheres such as reading, writing, communication and metacognitive strategy, pragmatics. It has also been confirmed that the first language does not merely affect the next language acquisition but it also determines to some extent the cognitive processes used in second language processing and rationalization (Butler & Hakuta 2006, 130).

The influence of the first language over second language acquisition and usage can be realized in a positive or negative way, or there can even be a zero realization (Veselý 1985). According to J. Veselý the first language can be perceived „only negatively“ only in the case of completely structurally different languages (for example Czech and Chinese), but when learning a cognate language, the influence of the first one is always, at least to some extent, positive. As regards close cognate languages (such as the Slavic ones), the first language to a great extent facilitates the foreign language acquisition due to the rapid progress noticed by the learner himself/herself at the very earliest stage of learning. Linguistic studies underline the positive influence of the first language on these language combinations, and find in this very influence the reasons for the complexity of the grammar knowledge the learner can acquire.

The positive influence of the first language is precisely in the fact that the practical and theoretical knowledge from it facilitate the foreign language acquisition process and its usage as a communication instrument. The existence of common phenomena – identical or analogous – is manifested. The positive influence of being proficient in the first language and the possibility for transfer of knowledge, skills, or relations from it into the sphere of the studied language are denoted as the so-called *positive transfer* (Veselý 1985, 16). Sometimes we also come across the synonymous term *facilitation* (Butler & Hakuta 2006, 130).

This positive transfer can be specified on the basis of two typologies – by differentiating between *deliberate* and *spontaneous transfer*, and also between

*direct* and *transformed transfer* (Veselý 1985, 23 – 24). We define as deliberate the transfer managed consciously (by the teacher or by the educational material in the textbook). In pedagogical practice this is realized by means of focusing on a certain phenomena, its analogy or proximity to the first language. On the other hand, spontaneous transfer takes place subconsciously in the communication in the second language, for example when the learner while reading a text “guesses” the meaning of the words based on analogy with the first language. We observe direct transfer in the presence of completely coinciding phenomena (or for example in the presence of phenomena with insignificant differences), which is also applied in the framework of theoretical knowledge – for example the ability to identify the parts of speech, etc. In transformed transfer the language habits from the first language are somewhat modified. In this case at the same time negative transfer is also overcome. Positive transfer is realized mostly on three levels: 1) transfer of theoretical knowledge about the language; 2) transfer of skills and habits from the first language; 3) using the first language as a premise for positive transfer (using the first language to explain the studied phenomena in the new language and their comparison).

Theoretical knowledge from the first language is also used well in learning a foreign language (especially in our case – learning close cognate languages from the Slavic language family). We have in mind the knowledge of the basic linguistic concepts (for example noun, grammatical gender, conjugation, etc.) and the grammatical abstraction, but in theoretical knowledge also some differences have to be kept in mind, and negative transfer has to be overcome.

Undoubtedly, the first language also has a negative influence over the learning of a second language, and seriously obstructs its acquisition. Precisely this negative influence is the reason for some typical errors, and to some extent it “holds back” the process of acquisition of each next (close cognate) language, be it second or third. It is manifested at all language levels with the same strength, and in subordinate bilingualism by means of negative transfer (the so-called interference). Errors, which we claim are due to the negative influence of the first language over the acquired second close cognate language, and which carry the marks of the first language, can be seen as an indication that the learner is to some extent „researching“, „testing“ the system of the new language; and this type of errors can be considered as evidence for the specific language learning strategies. This in turn reflects the degree of second language acquisition in the framework of the entire continual process; according to some linguists there is even a dynamic continuum of an intermediate language before the second language acquisition (Corder 1981, 12).

The issues of second language influence over the first one are also interesting, with the various linguistic concepts on the topic also talking about positive, negative and zero influence.

As regards the definition of the concept of *transfer* we shall refer to the definition of Czech linguist František Čermák who says that transfer is a negative

or a positive effect, a transfer of structure from one language (mostly the native, the first) into the production in another language (Čermák 2011, 326). The contemporary understanding of language transfer in linguistics is even broader – it covers not only the mutual influence of the separate language systems, but also the language acquisition methods and the experience in their learning. From a linguistic perspective transfer is studied at all language levels – at the level of speech acts, at paralinguistic level, and from the point of view of the general theory of communication (Janíková 2014, 38 – 39).

In linguistics the general usage of the concept of *transfer* prevails, denoting both the positive and the negative influences.

Negative transfer applies both to the so-called external form of the language (transfer of the manner of sound articulation, stress, intonation, etc.), and to the internal form (transfer of the semantic and the formal structure of the words, collocations, transfer of idiomaticity from the first language into the second, etc.).

Another term used in linguistics what concerns the mutual influences in second language acquisition, is *interference*.

It was the Polish linguist J. Kurylowicz who first mentioned the penetration of language elements in the scope of his interest in interference. Until that moment definitions were only limited to mutual or unilateral influence of the languages but they did not contain the element of penetration of one system into another. The subsequent concepts characterized interference both as penetration of elements from the foreign language into the first one, and as mutual penetration of elements from two (or more) languages (Vašek 1991, 67 – 68).

In the 1970s various definitions of interference appeared. Among these we will mention J. Juhász who described interference as a deviation from the linguistic norm brought about by the influence of other linguistic phenomena and at the same time the process, which caused the deviation (Juhász 1970, 8). The subsequent definitions of interference in essence did not differ from the above given ones, for example J. Veselý defined as interference the penetration of elements from one language into another during permanent mutual contacts of two language systems (Veselý 1985, 28 – 29). The above given definition of interference is particularly apparent in borrowing words, we can even talk about processes of integration and language convergence.

B. Lekova defined interference an interaction or a change in linguistic structures and structural elements. It appears to be a deviation from linguistic norms in spoken and written language (Lekova 2010, 320). Interference also implies restructuring of models, resulting from the introduction of foreign elements in all structured areas of the language, for example most of the phonetic system, morphology and syntax, and some areas of lexis.

We find *explicit interference* in the cases when the norm has obviously been violated, which is manifested by the easy and quick detection of the respective error. Errors resulting from transfer of language habits from the first language into the

second occur both in spoken and in written speech, and therefore we talk about a complex violation, generally speaking, of the speech norms.

In the case of *implicit interference* we do not see direct production of errors as individuals consciously avoids using more complex grammatical or lexical phenomena. They use their speech mostly those language facts which are common to both languages, i.e. they purposefully and deliberately choose analogous means. In such cases the speech becomes simpler and poorer and loses to a large extent its expressive and idiomatic aspect (Veselý 1985, 32). We see this type of interference when grammatical forms and lexical units have no equivalent in the first language (Lekova 2010, 321). Such a division (into real and potential interference) is also made by P. Ilieva-Baltova (Ilieva-Baltova 1991, 24)

The relations between positive and negative transfers/interference cannot be indicated exactly as this is a dynamic variable depending on many impulses of different nature. Some linguists stick to the opinion that in the beginning stage of learning a foreign language close to the first one positive transfer prevails, but in the later stages of learning the first language obstructs the second language acquisition to a sufficiently high level, with the sphere of idiomaticity for example being one the problematic spheres (Veselý 1985, 37–41).

J. Veselý supports the thesis that the closer the languages the stronger the interference – both its positive and negative effects (Veselý 1985, 38). Acquiring a genetically close language has indisputable advantages but the question arises whether interference effects obstruct close cognate language acquisition to a greater degree than the acquisition of a less close language.

According to some researchers interference effects in the acquisition of genetically close languages are a strong negative factor as many phenomena are similar but not identical, and many of the phenomena coincide only partially (Šourková – Zajíčková 1968, 8). The authors also note that in the learning process for example the fact that some phenomena are very close does not mean we don't need to pay attention to them.

The difficulties in the acquisition of a genetically close language can also be explained using the relationship between interference and differentiation – the more similar the phenomena the more difficult the differentiation as the cerebral cortex has to make an even more precise and more detailed analysis. Interference between cognate languages is further intensified due to the fact that a double differentiation process takes place – bonds / links / connections / връзки are created for the phenomena, which are similar not only in the two languages but also within the studied language itself. Making a double differentiation – between phenomena within one system and between phenomena belonging to two systems can lead to certain difficulties in the learning process.

The problems learners of a close cognate language face have certain peculiarities resulting from the systemic and lexical proximity, and these peculiarities have to be taken into consideration. To illustrate these specific difficulties we can use a research

of Czech students learning Russian. The analysis of their errors found that internal interference (the insufficient ability to distinguish between different forms within the acquired language) was registered much more often than initially presumed – i.e. a hypothesis exists that this type of interference is manifested significantly precisely during close cognate language acquisition, because the ability to distinguish such forms has been weakened due to the existence of similar forms in the first language. The research also found a large share of mixed-type interference (combining morphemes from the first and from the foreign language, and narrowing/expanding their usage). Mixed-type interference was also to be a significant source of errors exactly during the acquisition of a genetically close language (Šourková – Zajíčková 1968, 136).

However, the hypothesis that interference is manifested more strongly in the case of genetically close languages is disputable, because when learning more distant languages we can also expect larger difficulties, and therefore larger interference effects – if some phenomena are too difficult for the learner then he/she will logically turn to the structures of the first language (Bhela 1999, 23).

The linguistic and psychological situation we observe in the study of Bulgarian by Slavs is characterized by the following specifics: students are at the beginning of learning a new, unknown to them language system, which has many common features and is close to their native language. They are challenged to master a new language system, but also to focus deliberately with much greater intensity than learning another language on the similarities and differences between the first, mother tongue, and the new language. The mutual influences between L1 (first, mother tongue) and L2 and L3 (second, respectively and next learned language) have a multi-layered and complex realization in the observed process of the second language acquisition, and at all language levels – at phonetic, orthographic, grammatical, lexical, semantic and stylistic. Especially when teaching vocabulary, it is important to offer a complex method, different from citing only traditional dictionary definitions. Such approach is proposed by D. Vesselinov in the construction of the lexicon of dictionaries: „In addition to comprehensive registration of different interpretations of the meanings of lexical items of foreign origin in terms of their structure and content, information on the functioning of individual lexical units in speech and their role in building a nationally marked linguistic picture of the world is included“. (Vesselinov 2016, 3). Very important for didactic practice is the principle of empruntology, which D. Vesselinov applies to the transfer of lexical items from one language to another, but could be successfully applied in the process of foreign language learning, namely „transfers from one language system to another as a long-cultural process of interaction of different conceptospheres“ (Vesselinov 2019, 392). In the process of foreign language teaching teachers do not only teach vocabulary, they must keep in mind the principles of empruntology, which studies „foreign words, linguistic and cultural constants and the processes of linguistic migration of elements, words, expressions or linguistic and cultural stereotypes from one language to another and,



in a broader sense, from one linguistic and cultural space to another” (Vesselinov 2019, 393). Comparative and confrontational analysis play an even greater role in teaching Bulgarian to Slavs, in order to emphasize the differences between Bulgarian and other closely related languages, which may be a prerequisite for the possible errors, deformations, the arising from language contacts in the psycholinguistic situation we observe.

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## **ЕЗИКОВИЯТ ТРАНСФЕР И ПРОБЛЕМИТЕ НА ПРЕПОДАВАНЕТО НА БЪЛГАРСКИ НА СТУДЕНТИ СЛАВЯНИ**

**Резюме.** Текстът представя проблемите на изучаването на българския като втори език от славяни с акцент върху спецификата на чуждоезиковото обучение в славянска среда. Изследването е по същество теоретичен поглед върху езиковите контакти, трансфера и интерференцията в контекста на усвояването на втори език. Обръщаме специално внимание на въпросите за взаимните езикови влияния и родствената близост между езиците през призмата на тяхното усвояване. Влиянието на първия език върху усвояването и по-късно върху използването на втория език може да бъде положително, отрицателно и дори нулево влияние. Положителното влияние се проявява във факта, че практическите и теоретичните познания по първия език, езиковите навици и умения подпомагат процеса на изучаване на нов език и използването му като средство за комуникация. Положителният трансфер може да бъде определен според различни критерии: напр. могат да бъдат разделени на съзнателни и спонтанни, преки и трансформирани и т.н. Отрицателното влияние се проявява на всички езикови нива чрез т. нар. негативен трансфер или интерференция – това са грешките, които възникват поради влиянието на първия език върху втория и които носят знаците на първия език. Представяме и противоположни възгледи, че езиковият трансфер, от една страна, може значително да улесни усвояването на втори славянски език, но също така и мнението, че близостта между езиците може да доведе до прекомерна езикова интерференция.

**Ключови думи:** усвояване на втори език; български като втори език; езиков трансфер; емпрунтология