ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE TRANSFER IN TEACHING ESP

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Summary

A learner's native language strongly influences a foreign language acquisition. Cross–language transfer of skills and knowledge can be both positive (helping students to learn a foreign language easily and quickly) and negative (generating some expected errors).

Concept of a language transfer. Its impact on foreign language learning

The aim of this paper is to consider the problems of the negative language transfer in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the Law Academy of Lithuania.

It is a popular belief that foreign language acquisition (FLA) is strongly influenced by the learner's native language. The belief has been supported by the research, mainly carried out in the USA, where a fundamental assumption in the schooling of language minority children is that skills and knowledge learned in the native language transfer to English. This transfer is referred to as the cross–language transfer of skills and knowledge [1; 2]. Research evidence suggest that first language literacy promotes second language acquisition, and that literacy skills in the native language are likely to transfer to the second language [3]. In other words, language skills, once learned, transfer globally from one language to another.

The everyday observation also offers the support for this opinion. The best example comes from ,,foreign" accents in the second language (L2) speech of learners [4]. ,,Foreigner's talk is also characterized by a slower rate of speech, repetition restating, use of Yes/No instead of Wh–questions and other features that make messages more understandable, which proves the point that speakers 'translate' mentally before saying anything" [5]. Some authors believe that the influence of the first language (L1) in FLA is negative because it interferes with the learning of the L2: the features of L1 interfere or are transferred into the L2. In other words, if the same meaning is expressed differently in L1 and L2, an error is likely to arise in the L2, i. e. the language transfer is negative. Transfer is positive when the same way of expressing the meaning is used in both languages, therefore no errors could be expected. The differences between the L1 and L2 are bound to lead to learning difficulty and errors, whereas the similarities help atudents to learn easily and quickly.

There are many occasions when grammatical accuracy is very important to the speaker and the listener. This is particularly true on the professional level where it is desirable to make an impression of 'know how' in all the circumstances. Thus, a sound knowledge of the English grammar and its appropriate usage are essential.

Both Lithuanian and English belong to the Indo–European family of languages. However, there are many differences, caused by their development, between these two languages. The major feature which distinguishes the Lithuanian sound system from English is the absence of diphtongs and the sounds ð, θ, η, h and w. English stress patterns and rhythm are also hard for Lithuanian speakers to master. We do not intend, however, to deal here with either pronunciation, rhythm or stress patterns, although errors in either of them might hinder and do hinder listener's comprehension. These features require a special attention of English teachers [6]. Our main concern is with the characteristic difficulties in grammar and syntax encountered by most of our students whose native language is Lithuanian. If a teacher of English anticipates the common problems that occur in the process of teaching and understands the origin of students' difficulties, he/she will facilitate the students to cope with these problems effectively and efficaciously.

Differences in grammar

The grammar of Lithuanian and English are fundamentally different. Lithuanian is a synthetic language, in which the majority of forms are made through changes in the structure of words, i.e. there are systems of verb conjugation and adjective/noun declension. There is no fixed word order. There are three main tenses – past, present and future, and neither progressive nor perfect forms of verbs exist. There are no auxiliary verbs like *be, do, have, shall, will* or articles like *a, an* or *the.* Phrasal verbs, which are a distinctive feature of the English language, are non existant in Lithuanian. Such major differences in grammar systems will undoubtly cause some problems for a Lithuanian speaker learning English, as a natural way of events, because ,,when the learner actively attempts to extract regularities from what she/he hears or reads in the L2 and to produce a grammar with limited information, errors will occur" [7]. Moreover, ,,where needs are minimal or artificial, so is the learner's grammatical system, producing simplification and fossilized error types" [8]. Its good point is, though, that learners treat grammar more as a matter of selection than correction. So, ,,grammar is, in other words, about selecting the appropriate options from a range of possibilities, rather than simply recalling and producing – or reproducing – language in one particular form, that is, the one prescribed by the grammar teacher or another authoritative source" [7].

For a number of years we observed the Lithuanian learners speaking English and gathered some material which, in our opinion, is relevant to the interference of two languages and could serve as precaution measures for other students at all levels of language proficiency. These findings will be presented below.

Use of auxiliaries in questions, statements

As it has already been mentioned, the auxialiary verbs do not exist in Lithuanian, while they are essential for making questions in English. For this reason, many learners produce sentences like

– *When the police <u>arrested</u> him? – Yesterday arrested.*

Under circumstances, the information/message conveyed is more important to the students than the form to put it into.

The usage of *do/does* is often remains confusing:

– *Drugs <u>doesn't come</u> by car.*
– *The policewoman <u>don't use</u> riots kit.*
– *We <u>doesn't</u> know the Chief of the CID.*

Students keep mixing up the correct usage of progressive, perfect and simple tenses as well as the usage of verb *be*:

– *People <u>thinking</u> the police officer <u>?</u> nice.*

– How long you <u>wait</u> here?
– The police officer <u>like walk on beat.</u>
– Fingerprints <u>it is</u> our signature.
Subject – verb agreement
Plural nouns like ,,police" are often used incorrectly because in Lithuanian this word is singular, while in English it is a plural noun.
– The police <u>serves</u> the society.
– The police <u>is</u> always on duty.
In fact, these two sentences provide a most typical example of subject – verb agreement errors.
Conditional sentences.
In subordinate clauses of first conditional the future tense is used in Lithuanian. However the present tense should be used in English. Hence, the common errors are as follows:
– If a hacker <u>will break down</u> into your computer, you will have to inform the police.
– If you <u>won't sue</u> them, you will lose the case.
Second and third conditionals are even more erroneous:
– If the police <u>would be</u> there, they <u>would stopped</u> the thieves.
Passive voice.
The passive voice also causes some difficulties to Lithuanian speakers, in particular the progressive and perfect tenses. Other tenses cannot be excluded, though.
– A bank <u>have robbed</u> by men wearing stocking masks.
– The Great Train Robber <u>was</u> <u>catch</u> and jailed for 25 years for conspiracy.
– Cocaine and marijuana <u>was hide</u> in bumpers of BMW.
Modal verbs.
The infinitive form of verb follows modal verbs in Lithuanian, and our students keep ,,translating" and adding ,,to" after ,,*can", ,,must", ,,may"*, etc.
– The bodyguards <u>can to save</u> the President's life.
– The kidnappers <u>must to receive</u> the money.
Imperatives.
In spoken Lithuanian, future tense or modal verbs ,,must" or ,,*have to"* are used to give directions, leading to mistakes in English.
– You <u>must</u> take a bus number ... You <u>will get off</u> at ... You <u>will turn</u> left at the traffic lights...
Gerund.
There is no equivalent in Lithuanian to the English gerund, and the *to infinitive* is used instead of it by Lithuanian speakers. It is common for students to say something like
– I <u>enjoy to listen</u> / <u>to watch</u> / <u>to read</u>, etc. – We <u>suggest to go</u> / <u>to do</u> / <u>to arrange</u>, etc.
– Drug addicts <u>should to inject</u> drugs regularly.
Countable/uncountable nouns.
Students often confuse singular/plural forms of irregular nouns like *policeman – policemen, knife – knives*, etc. They also find it difficult to remember that nouns like *news, furniture, hair, money, advice, information* are singular and uncountable unlike in Lithuanian, while *police* and *Customs* are plural – these nouns are singular in Lithuanian. So naturally the sentences with these nouns are usually erroneous.
– The news <u>are</u> bad.
– The <u>Custom</u> officer asked us to fill in a declaration form.

Relative pronouns.
Our students quite often confuse *who* with *which* for the same reason of ,,translating" from their native language.
– A person <u>which</u> was identified from DNA profile had committed previous offences.
– Police are using sophisticated forensic methods <u>who/what</u> lead to many offences being solved.
– The notorious robber <u>which</u> was released on bail escaped.

– Customs officers found drugs in the bodies of ,,mules" <u>which</u> risk their lives by swallowing them.

Prepositions nad adverbial particles.

The use of prepositions and adverbial particles often results in errors because students find it difficult to memorise a great number of relevant collocations.

– He was sentenced <u>for</u> 30 years for armed robbery.
– He escaped <u>in</u> England and arrived <u>to</u> London.
– A 12–year–old boy was sued <u>of</u> entering a company's credit computer.
– The banker was charged <u>for</u> money laundering.

Word order ina sentence.

There is no strict word order in Lithuanian sentences. It is common for a Lithuanian sentence to start with adverbial phrase of time and place, which causes certain errors. Indefinite sentences of the type *there is/there are* are particurlarly problematic.

– <u>Yesterday near the police station was</u> a powerful explosion.
– <u>Found</u> a cigarette butt discarded at the scene of crime.

Other errors include the misplacement of subject and object, often instead of each other:

– <u>Police practices and Procedures stipulate the various chapters of Justice Act</u>.
– <u>Crime prevention activities coordinate the Crime Prevention Council</u>.
– <u>Allocated to police are warning and evacuating civilians in emergency</u>.
– <u>Administrative functions the police conduct driving tests and issue driving licences</u>.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have pointed out the most common errors caused by the language transfer. The awareness of the error origin will help teachers of English to design appropriate activities which their students can benefit from. It is particurlarly important for students who developed wrong speaking stereotypes at school or have poor native language skills, as it is also proved that literacy skills in the native language are likely to transfer to the foreign language – *re–teaching is harder than teaching anew. But the comprehension of differences between* L1 *and L2 promotes better language skills*. Given enough time and enough opportunities to communicate and to receive feedback on attempts at producing meaningful language, these errors will gradually diminish, as the learner continually reanalyses, adjusts, and elaborates the mental grammar to bring it more into line with the grammatical system of the L2.

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Kalbinio perkėlimo problemos mokantis anglų kalbos specialiesiems tikslams

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SANTRAUKA

Mokantis svetimų kalbų, gana didelę įtaką turi besimokančiojo gimtoji kalba. Jos žinios ir įgūdžiai perkeliami į svetimą kalbą. Šis reiškinys vadinamas „kalbiniu perkėlimu". Jis gali turėti teigiamos (padeda besimokančiajam greičiau ir lengviau perprasti svetimos kalbos sistemą) ir neigiamos (tipinės klaidos) įtakos. Šiame straipsnyje ir nagrinėjami kalbinio perkėlimo aspektai mokant/–is teisinės anglų kalbos, pateikiama praktinių rekomendacijų dėl problemiškiausių kalbinio perkėlimo sričių.