

Linguistic Interference in the Context of Teaching Future Translators

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Abstract — The paper deals with the problem of linguistic interference in the field of translation from one language to another. It is generally accepted that, when contacting, two languages affect the norms and standards of each other. People participating in cross-cultural communication, especially those who are to transfer information, both orally and in written form, should keep in mind that such difficulties can inevitably occur. The phenomenon of interference is believed to be especially important in the context of teaching future translators. The study of negative consequences of interference contributes to methodological recommendations for overcoming or avoiding interference in order to develop translation skills and competences. On the basis of the data, the authors generalize some ways of dealing with linguistic interference in the process of teaching future translators at university.

Keywords — *translation, cross-cultural communication, interference, language interaction, perceptual standards, cognitive*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays cross-cultural communication demands not only professional skills in different spheres, but also soft-skill proficiency, such as a foreign language competence, communication confidence, teamwork, critical thinking and cross-cultural experience. Studying foreign languages along with professional translation helps strengthen communication skills and therefore cross-cultural communication in general.

Theoretical and practical training of translation skills forms translation competence. But during this training, students can face a lot of difficulties due to the interference, which is inevitable when two languages contact. One language influences another using its norms in oral and written speech. Interference happens when two language groups communicate with each other.

In the modern didactics of foreign language, teaching interference is considered to be a particular methodological principle. Communication between the two language systems is the reason for the interference which is the object of

psycholinguistics and linguistics research. From the point of view of psycholinguistics, it is a negative transfer of language habits and skills from the mother tongue or from a foreign language to another foreign language. From a linguistic point of view, 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.

It is very important to study various types of interference and the means of its overcoming because of the intensification of professional activities in foreign languages.

This paper is devoted to one of the most significant problems of the modern methodology of teaching foreign languages, i.e. the methods of teaching translation in the context of the necessity to overcome interference. The study of negative consequences of interference contributes to methodological recommendations for overcoming interference in order to develop translation skills.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The purpose of this paper is to analyze interference in the context of cross-cultural professional communication and to give practical recommendations for teaching students translation competences taking into consideration the problem of interference and its solution.

To achieve the purpose of the study the authors:

- considered the cognitive basis of interference analyzing the translation practice in the process of teaching students,
- confirmed the transfer of perceptive standards from one language into another, which leads to both positive and negative interference,
- indicated possible directions for further studies of interference in translation.

The authors tried to identify the main types of interference and develop recommendations for its overcoming in the process of teaching translation for a professional sphere in non-linguistic university.

The concept of interference became popular in Russia in the middle of the 20th century. V. Vainraigh gave the following definition to interference: “intrusion of language system norms into another one’s scope” [1]. A. Reformatsky noted that “to master a foreign language you should get over your native language, as your native language is a sieve through which you perceive the distorted facts of a foreign language” [2].

Researchers of linguistics, pedagogy, cognitology are interested in different aspects of interference. They study phonological, phonetic, lexical, grammatical, semantic aspects of this phenomenon. Moreover, it was suggested that interference may be primarily related to cue translation and response selection processes rather than resulting from cross-talk [3].

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of interference is still very important and relevant for cross-cultural communication in the modern society, which is characterized by “trolling”, “billing”, “crumble”, “crowdfunding”, “networking”, “rope-jumping” and so on. If we underestimate the phenomenon of interference in the process of cross-cultural communication, the communicative task of translation will not be accomplished.

This will lead to the lack of adequacy and equivalence, reduce the quality of translation and, therefore, reduce the level of communication. Translation is connected with the problem of understanding the source text. Understanding the source text is the first step in the process of translating and this step could only be taken by mastery in the source language and mastery in the subject domain [4].

Any translation is performed in three stages. At the first stage, a translator should understand the meaning of a saying (what is the saying used for?). Secondly, he should realize the comprehensive outline of a saying (how is the saying used?). If a translator understands the meaning and the outline of a saying, he comes to the third stage of translation: paraphrase or transmission of the original saying into another language. In this process it is essential to be able to use translation transformations. But for this it is necessary to have basic knowledge of the subject and the object of the saying as well as of the peculiarities of a different language system. Besides, translation training should focus on such skills as ability to analyze a text before translation, work with different kinds of dictionaries, translation of non-equivalent vocabulary, proofreading.

Interference has cognitive basis in translation, i.e. a translator sometimes should replace the perceptual standards of one language by perceptual standards of another one. It happens, when there are no formed standards in this or that language, and a translator has to use the existing perceptual standards. It is undoubted that understanding the meaning of words in a language includes knowledge of how the world of a specific community is categorized and labeled [5].

All the researchers dealing with interference agree that the phenomenon can appear at any language level: phonetic,

stylistic, lexical, grammatical or cultural. Moreover, bilinguals activate words from both languages when listening, reading, or speaking in one of their languages, although language mode and language context can mitigate influences from the non-target language. Cross-language activation does not only occur in learners newly acquiring a second language, but also in bilinguals highly proficient in both languages [6]. The extent of its presence is due to the degree of language distinctions, in other words - to their typological proximity or distinction. They also differentiate between positive (constructive) and negative (destructive) interference. Positive interference contributes to achievement of translation goals. This is “a positive influence of phenomena, functions and means of another language in the language contact (e.g. in the process of studying a language, communicating and translating from one language into another)” [7].

Negative interference can be seen in the lack of identification in the process of translation between two languages that have different systems. A good example of the failure to identify can be translation of the Russian sentence “Руководство хотело бы, чтобы они (студенты) участвовали в переговорах” into English with the help of the “Complex Object” construction: “The management would like them to take part in the negotiation”. The conducted empirical studies show that identification is a frequent manifestation of interference: “decade” means “10 years” and not “декада”, “rehabilitation” is not “реабилитация”, but “reeducation of criminals.

It is common knowledge that Russian language does not have any articles, it is difficult for the Russians to use the verb “to be”. Moreover, there are typical mistakes in the usage of prepositions, etc. With these in mind we agree that grammar norms and standards lead to interference, too.

Phonetic interference affects the improper pronunciation of phonetic sounds in the second language caused by the existence of different phonetic structures from the point of view of the mother tongue or the first foreign language. Grammatical interference concerns changes in the structure and the structural elements in the foreign language. It is caused by semantic and formal resemblances and distinctions between the native and the foreign language system. Languages differ not only in terms of existing language categories, but with respect to the distinctive combination of language items. The most popular example of this is the sentence order in English. Not thinking about the fixed order of the words in a sentence, students can ask a question “Why the bill was amended?” instead of “Why was the bill amended?” The usage of Passive Voice and Present Perfect Tense presents difficulty for Russian students, too.

Thus, translation in the sphere of professional communication is a complex multi-stage cognitive process of perception, selection (conscious / unconscious) of perceptual standards, text processing in the head of a translator and transmitting the received text to the recipient of information. Translators’ ignorance of meaning implications causes problems for target audience. Incomprehensibility and confusion are the results of translators’ sticking to the surface structure. In addition, the translations show that inter-language

frequency shifts systematically occur in the direction of target-language norms [8].

It is very important to know the differences in linguistic and cultural phenomena between the languages in contact. Before any translation a translator should develop a strategy that will help to solve the problem of interference, as a translator will forecast the difficulties he might face in his work. A future translator should develop self-discipline and critical thinking, as these skills will help him to switch from one language to another keeping in mind translation transformations, analyzing previous mistakes, correcting them and trying not to make again.

We should note that in the process of studying a foreign language the influence of negative interference is leveled, but to some extent the problem still exists at the final stage of training for professional translation. Some researchers develop challenging methods to cope with the negative interference: recently, Bloem and Heij isolated an experimental variable that was capable of reversing semantic interference into semantic facilitation. In the task that they used, backward translation (translating a target word from the second language, L2, into the first language, L1), context words induced semantic interference whereas context pictures induced semantic facilitation [9].

The most difficult aspects are semantics and grammar. The foregoing analysis highlights the fact that one source of difficulty in learning comes from the unfamiliar, or less meaningful, nature of L2 words, making both response and stimulus learning more difficult for them than for L1 words [10]. In phonology inconsistent items had longer latencies and more errors than typical items in the mixed lists but not in the pure list. The consistency effect depended on word frequency, but not on language membership, lexicality, or instruction [11].

To overcome interference in their understanding of a foreign language students should learn business correspondence, country study, business etiquette, in other words they should take the courses developing their cross-cultural and socio-cultural competences. Similar realities and the rules of behavior cause interference, since extra linguistic factors bring the images characteristic only to a given country. Take, for example, an English expression “ground floor” that means “first floor” in the UK, but not “basement”.

Taking into consideration, that interference is a natural and, therefore, predictable phenomenon, we should prevent it at all levels of studying a foreign language. It is one of the most important tasks in the process of teaching translation. Undoubtedly, language interference is reduced through the use of authentic education materials, media and the Internet. It is very important to work with dictionaries, looking up different meanings of words and using them in the right context.

For example, the word “difficult” can have different meanings in English depending on word combinations: “challenging”, “complicated”, “complex”, “multi-level”, etc. A special attention is also paid to the translation of negatives, the application of such a transformation as an antonym translation: “The witness didn’t say a single word” - “The witness was silent”.

Syntactic interference results in unnecessary long and complex sentences and structures which could affect comprehensibility. The reader may have to spend more time and effort to understand a sentence which could otherwise have been written in a simple and straightforward way. The mere presence of interference shows that the text is a translation, refuting the illusion of sameness through an excess of similarity [12].

In order to reduce interference and overcome the mistakes in the speech of our students we should go in two directions. First, we should use preventive measures that will help to avoid interference mistakes. These measures include work with educational materials that consider language system peculiarities of both languages (mother language and foreign language); reviewing typical mistakes before practicing the language and predicting them in oral and written speech. A teacher should have a good knowledge of not only a foreign language, but also his mother language just to be aware of the interference and to take adequate measures.

Secondly, we should use corrective measures if the mistakes already occur. Different types of exercises will help at this stage. These can be exercises for overcoming phonetic, lexical, grammatical mistakes, e.g. exercises with nouns and verbs that change their meanings in various collocations (verbs with prepositions, nouns changing their meaning according to Number or Gender); exercises with nouns that are used only in singular in a foreign language but demand correspondent plurals in the native language or on the contrary.

Researchers experimentally prove that in adults’s Second Language vocabulary acquisition, learners attach new information (new Second Language) to First Language conceptual representation (First Language translation words); since the First Language word can function as a “cognitive hook to hang the new item on”. Consequently, how well the “cognitive hook” functions to create the paired association between First Language and Second Language words depends on how well the learners know or how much they are familiar with the responsive items, that is their First Language translation. Therefore, learners face difficulty if they are not familiar with the given First Language translation [13].

A translator is fully responsible not only for adequacy and equivalence of his translation, but also for doing communicative task. Moreover, the ability to produce words from only one language suggests that bilinguals can exercise a certain degree of control over language selection in production [14]. That’s why they should be self-disciplined and be able to proofread their own translations. Two-three days after translation they read the text, find the mistakes, analyze them and correct. Sometimes they work in pairs or in groups and compare the translation of the same text.

This kind of work is popular among students as they like comparing the texts, discussing, proofreading, consulting different sources. Regarding comprehensibility, interference does influence simplicity – one dimension of comprehensibility pertaining to lexis and syntax. This fact answers the questions “why do translations not satisfy students?” and “why do translations partially occupy an inferior place compared to original texts?” to some extent. The answer is that students do

not feel themselves easy in reading and understanding translated texts. In fact, there was not much difference among the three translations regarding interference [4]. Evaluation criteria of the translation show the absence of negative consequences of interference. There is no doubt, translation must conform to the norms and standards of the language.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The above information proves that perception and translation of a saying from one language to another are connected with person's mental activity at the highest level. Perceptual standards help to form a text in another language in the process of recoding, which leads to interference, both positive and negative. One of the questions that have attracted the attention of researchers in bilingualism has been the representation of the two languages' vocabulary in memory.

Different studies have been conducted to determine whether bilingual memory is composed of two separate stores, one belonging to each language, or a single store shared between the two languages. Today, the most accepted conception of bilingual memory is that of a hierarchical system. From this point of view, bilingual memory is seen as composed of two levels of representation: one storing the word form (lexical level) and the other one storing the word meaning (conceptual level) [15].

Thus, translators should have particular skills and know how to overcome negative interference and to use positive one. Thus, they will achieve the purpose of translation, taking into account the peculiarities of cross-cultural communication in the context of professional vocabulary.

In training future translators it is very important to organize competent work with a text, consulting the "right" dictionaries to find the meaning of the vocabulary and further using the words in the right context. It is necessary to develop the students' ability to define the differences of linguistic and cultural phenomena in the languages. They should know how to develop a strategy of their translation. It plays an effective role in overcoming interference.

We recommend teachers to create the situations at the lessons of translation, when students can analyze mistakes of their own and of others. They should explain the reasons for the mistakes and, what is more important, the ways of their correction. Thus, they develop critical thinking and self-discipline. These exercises form the ability to switch from one language to another, predicting translation transformations necessary for understanding.

IV. CONCLUSION

The current study identifies the peculiarities of theoretical and practical training of students – translators, i.e. the difficulties caused by interference. The authors confirm the

cognitive basis of interference giving examples from their experience working with students. They point out that transfer of perceptual standards from one language to another leads to interference, both positive and negative. The issue of language interference is directly related to the place attributed to the mother tongue in the foreign language teaching system. Contemporary practice of foreign language teaching proves that we cannot expect good results from our students if we ignore the peculiarities of our native language. To overcome negative interference, we should use different types of exercises and tasks at lessons: reproductive exercises, transformation exercises, grammar exercises.

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