

Integrated bilingual class as a way to overcome interference of English in German

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Abstract. *This paper is the result of a study investigating the role of integrated bilingual classes in reducing interference in acquisition of German as the second foreign language. Focus groups were students of the Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Arkhangelsk. The students studied English as a first foreign language and German as a second foreign language. The aim of our study was to find a way of reducing the negative effect of English on German acquisition during speaking. Throughout the study, we applied such methods as observation, interviews of focus groups, surveys and oral testing. To achieve the aim of our research, we conducted a series of integrated classes. During the experiment, we found out that integrated class activities contributed to reducing vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation mistakes during learners' speaking. This study can provide a basis for future research into the phenomenon of interference and the ways of overcoming it.*

Keywords – *foreign language acquisition, integrated bilingual classes, interference**.

I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary world, a command of one foreign language is not an advantage, but rather an imperative of the modern age. Due to the fact that every sphere of people's life is becoming globalized speaking two or more foreign languages is considered to be beneficial. People strive for mastering languages because they want to participate in multicultural dialogue. This is why the issue of acquiring two or three foreign languages is interesting both for the specialists involved in this process and for the foreign language learners.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the interference concerning second language (L2) acquisition. Researchers have specified different types of linguistic and non-linguistic interference [5]. They analysed how vocabulary and sound systems of languages belonging to the same or different genera as well as L2

proficiency are exposed to negative influence during L2 acquisition [2].

In case of simultaneous learning of two foreign languages in a higher education institution (HEI), we define interference as the factor hindering the process of second foreign language acquisition. A teacher's main task is to provide strategies and techniques of preventing it. The recent studies have not dealt with integrated bilingual classes (IBCs) as a strategy of overcoming interference in simultaneous acquisition of two foreign languages in detail.

The aim of this research was to identify a way of reducing the interfering influence of English on German during speaking. We considered conducting IBCs to be one of such ways. Among the learning outcomes of IBCs is the reduction of the first foreign language (FL1) interference in the process of the second foreign language (FL2) speaking. Moreover, socio-cultural mutual influence makes the students' outlook broader and encourages them to behave correctly both verbally and non-verbally. We assumed that IBCs could help students avoid errors and difficulties caused by the first foreign language interference in the process of speaking a second foreign language. In order to test the hypothesis, we conducted a series of classes with integration of English (FL1) and German (FL2).

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The 1990s were marked by changes in the aims and content of language education in HEI. That was largely due to the fact that the world had evolved into the new era of globalization, which placed emphasis on integration of cultural, linguistic, economic, political, and religious systems. Education is also an integral part of the globalization process. The most widely-used model of global education is the one developed by R. Hanvey in the 1970s. It describes the world as an integral unit existing within the system of interrelations and interdependencies [3]. Within the framework of higher education, such interrelation can occur during integration of academic subjects, such as foreign languages, country and cultural

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studies, etc. Implementation of the integrity principle results in interconnection, convergence and complementarity of subject areas [1]. With regard to our study, this refers to FL1 and FL2 within one class.

Acquisition of two languages gives rise to the concept of bilingual teaching. Thus, it is necessary to study the specifics of IBCs. This issue remains underexplored in scholarly literature. We agree with the opinion of E.V. Krivolapova, who believes that integrated classes demonstrate significant advantages when compared to traditional lessons [4]. The following are such advantages:

- an opportunity to master two languages within the unity of the topic in question contributing to the reduction of mistakes caused by interference;
- development of students' intellectual potential (critical thinking, active cognition of the social realm, comprehension and identification of cause-effect relationships, improvement of communicative skills, shaping abilities to compare, generalize and draw conclusions);
- raising interest and motivation of students through application of unconventional and engaging modes of study in an integrated classroom;
- a possibility to reduce the levels of tiredness and stress in students by means of switching between the different types of activities;
- an outlet for teacher's personal fulfillment, self-expression and creativity.

However, the issue of overcoming interference in the integrated classroom in the course of simultaneous acquisition of two foreign languages remains unaddressed by the researchers.

The concept of interference came into widespread acceptance in linguistics after the work *Languages in Contact* by U. Weinreich [7]. According to the researcher, interference is conditioned by a contact of languages and shall be determined as those instances of deviation from the norms of either language. Such instances occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language.

In the work *The Practical Study of Languages* H. Sweet asserts that the previously acquired FL1 adversely affects the process of FL2 acquisition [6]. We hereby share the opinion of H. Sweet. When studying a foreign language in the bilingual setting, the sources of interference vary subject to the type of speech activity. As far as simultaneous acquisition of English and German is concerned, the interference is of probabilistic nature influenced by cognate languages. In this case, there is interference of FL1 and FL2 cognitive elements.

III. METHOD

The developed series of IBCs was subject to experimental validation procedure within the Higher

School of Social Sciences, Humanities and International Communication of the Northern (Arctic) Federal University (NArFU) in Arkhangelsk. The classes took place throughout the 2018-2019 academic year. The experiment involved an experimental group (15 third-year students and a control group (12 third-year students). Each class was intended to reduce the impact of FL1 interference on FL2 acquisition in the process of speaking. The control group was engaged in a traditional training lessons, while the work in the experimental group included the series of IBCs. The aim of the experiment was to check the efficiency of the IBCs developed by the authors of the present study.

The experiment consisted of four stages. The preliminary stage included a survey to determine the basic, initial level of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge as well as students' opinion on the simultaneous study of two foreign languages; planning the experimental teaching procedure; syllabus selection procedure; and the IBCs development. The pre-experimental stage included testing of students with the aim to identify the level of their spoken communication abilities. IBCs were given at the stage of experimental teaching. The post-experimental stage required benchmark assessment in order to verify the effectiveness of the IBCs developed. After the experimental teaching was over, we interviewed the students from an experimental group to get their feedback on the IBCs.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the preliminary stage, a survey was conducted among the students studying German as FL2. Students were asked the following questions: *How often do you compare English and German in class? Does your knowledge of English help you or obstruct to learn German? What aspects of English help you to understand German grammar better and what prevents you from learning German? Do you often confuse German words with English ones? Why? Do you find it difficult to switch from English to German phonetic system?*

The findings of the questionnaire survey revealed that the students have controversial and ambivalent attitude towards the second language as an academic subject, notwithstanding all the advantages of second language acquisition. The following responses are illustrative of the positive effect the first foreign language have on the second foreign language acquisition: "a lot of similar lexical units" (50% of the respondents), "some similarities in grammar" (45% of the respondents), "similar sentence structure" (25% of the respondents), and "identical letters in the alphabet" (75% of the respondents). Responses like "I am confused about pronouncing certain sounds" (70% of the respondents), "I am tempted to read it the English way" (50% of the respondents), demonstrate the negative impact of interference.

With regard to the results of the survey and individual interviews with the students, we concluded that, on the one hand, the students' experience of the first foreign

language allows positive transfer of knowledge, skills and abilities into the second language learning process. On the other hand, this knowledge might have a negative impact on the second language acquisition. Students replace the system of rules in the language they are currently studying with the set of rules applicable to the previously acquired language. The more extensive the knowledge of the first foreign language is, the more visible are its manifestations in the second foreign language, resulting in a variety of mistakes due to interference. Implementation of IBCs could help students avoid such mistakes and difficulties.

During the pre-experimental stage, the level of students spoken communication abilities was identified. The following criteria were applied to assess the level in question:

1. Content (observing the utterance length, correspondence to the topic, representation of all aspects stated in the task, stylistic appearance of the speech, argumentation, compliance with the rules of politeness);
2. Interaction with the partner (ability to carry on a conversation in a logical and cohesive manner, follow the sequence of utterance exchange, provide substantiated and detailed answers for the partner's questions, be able to initiate and maintain the conversation, or renew it in case of failure by means of repeated questions or asking for clarification);
3. Vocabulary (vocabulary applicable to the communicative task set and sufficient at the certain stage of training);
4. Grammar (employing a variety of different grammatical structures in accordance with the communicative situation and the requirements for the certain stage of language learning);
5. Pronunciation (correct articulation of English and German sounds, correct accentuation and intonation).

The results for each of five criteria were evaluated on a one to twenty scale, summarized and further represented in percentage terms. One hundred points was equal to 100%. The low level of speaking skills corresponded to 50-65%. The average level was 66-80%, while the high level was 81-100%. The analysis of test results confirmed a rather low basic level of students' spoken communication abilities. The mean level of students' speaking skills in the experimental group was 57%. The mean level of students' speaking skills in the control group was 60%.

The IBCs were held three to four times during a semester. The following were fixed conditions of the experiment: the teacher, training period, number of classes, training materials, benchmark assessments and their quantity, content and criteria for the assessment of spoken communication abilities, roughly the same academic performance in student groups. Integration in the experimental group was a variable condition.

We conducted 15 integrated classes on *National German and British Cuisine, Education System in Great Britain and Germany, British and German Holidays, Expression of Emotions in English and German*. Table 1 shows the types and modes of the classes given.

The main objectives of the integrated bilingual class were formulated in the following way:

- The development of the ability to compare the linguistic phenomena of English and German;
- The development of translation skills in Deutsch-English, English-Deutsch mode.

We suggest dividing an integrated class into the following stages: warming-up, updating knowledge and practicing spoken communication skills in different situation, self-reflection and summarizing stage.

TABLE I. TYPES AND MODES OF AN INTEGRATED BILINGUAL CLASS

Class type	Class mode
Developing new knowledge	travel class; performance class; excursion class; multimedia class.
Developing skills and abilities	dialogue class; role play class; combined class
Activating knowledge, skills and abilities	role plays; project defense; journey.
Systematizing and consolidating knowledge, reinforcing abilities	project; debate; game; performance-like class; excursion.
Monitoring and assessing knowledge and skills	quiz; contests; project defense.

The lessons were held in both English and German. This is the example of one of the tasks on the topic "Cuisine":

As you've finished studying the topic "Cuisine" in both languages we'd like to see the way you remembered the information. We've got some questions for you but the point is you'll have to answer them in English or German according to the card you've taken.

At every integrated bilingual lesson the students worked on mini-projects. The following is the example of such work:

Jedes Land, jede Nationalität hat ihre eigene Traditionen. Dazu gehören auch nationale Küche, Spezialitäten, Essgewohnheiten. Was kennen Sie von den nationalen deutschen und englischen Küchen?

Now we want you to make groups of three or four. Sit the way you like.

Get ready with the following activity. The first group prepares the leaflet about the English cuisine.

Die 2. Gruppe soll traditionelle deutsche Küche vorstellen. Die 3. Gruppe – Richter-Dolmetscher. Sie sollen nach von Ihnen ausgearbeiteten Kriterien die beste Vorstellung einer Nationalküche feststellen.

We need the interpreters because while presenting the leaflet, we are going to provide the rendering from one language into the other (from English into German and from German into English).

Für die Arbeit bekommen Sie 20 Minuten.

After the series of IBCs had been over, we conducted another benchmark assessment. We applied identical criteria for evaluating the students' utterances at pre-experimental and post-experimental stages. The results revealed significant performance improvement with the experimental group as the mean level of students' speaking skills was 88% (the results went up 31% on average). The students in the experimental group demonstrated a decrease in grammatical (15%), lexical (20%) and phonetic (23%) mistakes. The results of the control group changed but the progress was not as high as in the experimental group (the mean level of students' speaking skills raised to 69%).

We also interviewed the experimental group students to learn their opinion on the IBCs. The students highlighted that the selected type of classes was unconventional and engaging. As a consequence, the students showed an increased interest in studying FL2.

Thus, the results of the experiment show that speaking skills of the experimental group students, who were trained using the IBC-based approach, are higher than those of the control group students trained in accordance with the traditional foreign language teaching methods. So, we consider the level of interference in the experimental group to have been reduced.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Against contemporary multilingual background, it is particularly important and necessary to develop a strategy aimed at overcoming interference in the process of integrated teaching of two foreign languages. Integration of FL1 and FL2 contribute to reduction of lexical, grammatical and phonetic mistakes in the students' speech. Moreover, IBCs allow to systematize and deepen the students' knowledge and abilities, as well as to increase their interest and motivation by the use of unconventional and engaging classes unlocking teachers' creativity.

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