

Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities

Theses of the Doctoral Dissertation

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**Interference Phenomena in Syntax in Mirror of Scripts of Hungarian High
School Students and College Students**

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a language teacher, I had the opportunity to take a high number of written works into consideration over the past few years. In particular, I studied the written works of the students who were at a strong intermediate level. In my opinion, besides raising the awareness of the writing process, correction and assessment of works form a very important part of a teacher's job. A written work is generally more conscious and a way more time-consuming than an oral performance and it clearly reflects progress therefore students expect a detailed and thorough feedback.

Hypothesis and research

The first step of my research is to clarify the purpose of highlighting and discussing the errors caused by interference. Contrastive error analysis results in conclusions that can give scope to a more effective educational work. In terms of cardinal points, a comprehensive picture of language teaching can be gained. The cardinal points need greater attention because the occurrence of mistakes is more frequent.

The second step is to provide a literature review.

The third step is to set up a hypothesis. I assume that the errors committed by the students can be caused by the interference between languages, namely how the Hungarian language as a mother tongue and English as an already-mastered foreign language influence Italian language learning.

The fourth step is to form concepts i.e. to determine concepts being examined..

The next step is to designate research methods.

The sixth step is to collect and analyse data.

Research is a systematic process of data acquisition and analysis aimed at enhancing our understanding of the studied phenomena. Correlations have to be discovered to give a scientific claim answer to the questions arisen.

Object and purpose of the thesis

The subject of my thesis is to examine, to compare and to analyse the essays and translations written by Hungarian high school students and college students learning Italian, based on syntactic criteria. My observations cover the areas of morphology and vocabulary of which processed material is also inserted in my dissertation.

Since the errors are mainly due to the interference between productive rules existing in another language, morphological examples are necessary to illustrate the operation of productive rules characterizing student performance, while lexical examples are needed to present another practical realization of interference.

Furthermore, I examine the role of the mother tongue in foreign language education, and the interference phenomena caused by the mother tongue. Similarly, I examine the use of the existing foreign language knowledge, and its role in second foreign language education.

I do not cover the interference in the target language. I rather focus on the interference of the foreign language i.e. English on the target language.

Processing and methods

Contrastive analysis (CA), error analysis (EA) and contrastive error analysis (CEA) – these concepts are introduced and explained in detail in my work. CEA is applied in corpus processing.

The two goals of contrastive examinations are to reveal similarities (i.e. similarities facilitate the acquisition of a foreign language), and to explore the differences (i.e. differences hinder the learning of a foreign language).

I collect and study the essays with specified topics written by students freely, filtering out the parts suitable for drawing conclusions in order to realize the above-mentioned tasks.

The method I mostly used is free association¹ which means collection of ideas, emotions and feelings in connection with titles, topics or only key words. This technique accelerates thinking process during which essays are born in the next step.

Besides, I analyze translation homework – mostly unrelated sentences as well as small-scaled texts handed out during the class and sentences translated into the target language. They all form a more concentrated corpus.

The main purpose of the different translation exercises is to raise the awareness of the grammar structures. Although translation exercises are not in close connection with real life communicational situations, they contribute to enhancing the awareness of the differences between the two languages. Translation exercises improve contrastive language view and contribute to the growth of the awareness of the similarities and differences between the languages.

¹ Original meaning of association is association of notions.

Target group of the thesis

As my thesis is a theoretical conceptualization of researches based on practice, it can be used by any Italian language teacher who have the experience in everyday language teaching and systematically reflect on the questions concerned on the basis of these conclusions. Due to the comparative nature, it also draws attention to the given and the expected problems of the language use.

In terms of linguistic approach, I discuss specific topics conveying a material I partly mastered within the framework of my doctoral program. I take a piece of that theoretical knowledge as basis, putting my theoretical knowledge into practice, and I analyze the questions confirmed by practice.

2. THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE AND THE UTILISATION OF THE FIRST FOREIGN LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE IN THE NEW FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Vocabulary and grammar

As far as language teaching is concerned, it is therefore recommended to link similar lexical sets and grammar of the native language and the foreign language ,to make parallels between the different grammatical structures, to emphasize the parallels and to draw attention to the differences.

If it is possible to draw parallels between the grammatical structure of the mother tongue and the foreign language, the learner will understand the sentence structure and logical connectivity sooner.

It is important to treat the deviations in relation to the mother tongue, emphasizing the benefits of the richness of the linguistic means of expression.

The role of the mother tongue in foreign language teaching

In terms of the beneficial effects of the use of the mother tongue in foreign language classes, there are a couple of good examples as follows:

- 1 raising motivation with the help of reports on experiences held in the native language
- 2 explaining grammar rules
- 3 explaining the lexis, for example, explaining the meanings of antonyms and synonyms
- 4 carrying out translation tasks
- 5 giving instructions

”The mother tongue has its own role in foreign language education. I can even broaden this claim: the mother tongue plays an inevitable and indispensable role in foreign language education. This statement can be treated as an axiom.”

(Budai 2010:9)

More and more experts give voice to their opinions that the role and the use of the mother tongue do play an important role in foreign language education.

Questionnaire survey about the use of the mother tongue in foreign language teaching

I carried out my surveys in Vác.

Part One: high school students: 100 students who were interviewed came from three local high school institutions². All the interviewees participated in an ECL National Language Competition organized by the AVKF Language Center, voluntarily taking part in the survey. The use of foreign language at the beginning of the language classes is more dominant than the use of the mother tongue. Mother tongue is used more in grammar teaching and far less in lexical processing. At the beginning of the lesson the teacher keeps in mind that the students should be introduced into a foreign language environment, while it becomes less important toward the end of the class (also because the students get back to their normal Hungarian environment).

Part Two: college students: A questionnaire was filled out by students of the Department of Language and Literature of AVKF³, by future kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers, a total of 100 people. The reliance on the mother tongue is significant. The deeper we dig into the grammatical structures of the language, the more we realize that it is well recognized that language learning requires a lot of work and time. The more complex grammatical structures and exceptions are easier understandable with the help of mother language invocation. Groups with a stronger command of foreign language possess better language skills so that it is easier for them to understand a foreign language explanation. The development and expansion of lexical knowledge does not cause a problem if it is carried out in a foreign language.

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Selye János Humán Szakközépiskola
Váci Madách Imre Gimnázium

³ Apor Vilmos Catholic College

According to Szabari, each learning process is a comparison at the same time, a comparison between the new elements and the already well-known elements, and raising the awareness of the differences between the two. This comparison is done during learning a foreign language when the benchmark is the mother tongue, and the well-known languages. (Szabari 2001:9).

3. VOCABULARY

Lexical errors

My thesis particularly focuses on the different areas of syntax therefore I briefly speak about this part. By all means it is important to note that creativity is one of the sources of lexical mistakes since non-existing words, phrases and expressions are born while the language is used in a creative way. The characteristic group of lexical errors is inappropriate word choice. It mainly arises in the use of synonyms. For instance:

[*Tu non *sai* Marco.] [You do not *know* Mark.] → the exchange of the words

Secondly, I mention hypercorrection which contributes to the formation of non-existent words, and which is treated as a natural linguistic phenomenon by linguistics.

'*abbaglia*' instead of the word '*abbaia*'

[*Il mio cane *abbaglia* tutto il giorno e non mi lascia a studiare.]

**sagittaria* <*sagittario*

[Sono nata in dicembre e per questo sono una **sagittaria*.]

Anglicisms

Interference can result in linguistic borrowing on each level of the language system. The material is divided into two and discussed in detail:

English words and expressions used in student essays due to the influence of interference (in this case also anglicisms)

Anglicisms incorporated in Italian, accepted and used by Italians

On the basis of the available corpus, my own aspects are the following:

1. lexical borrowing (loanwords borrowed in their original forms)
2. semantic borrowing (expansion and extension of meaning) – semantic casts
3. structural borrowing (mirror words) – translation casts
4. grammatical and syntactical borrowing

4. PRODUCTIVITY IN MORPHOLOGY

Productivity is generally accepted as an essential concept of creativity manifestation. In fact, it is an aspect of linguistic creativity because students use productive rules in their language productions on their own.

I examine productivity on the basis of certain criteria as follows:

Productive patterns in word formation

1. There are non-existent formations: **calmamente*;
2. There are those that exist but the report does not reveal the meaning of the adjective: *unicamente*;
3. There are also the ones where the Hungarian interference causes a problem: *nagy=grande*, *nagyon=grandemente*.

Productive patterns in inflection

Conjugation in indicative mood with present tense verbs:

A pattern applied to regular verbs' inflection is given. For example, in case of the not irregular ending verb *tem-ere* the indicative mood present tense conjugation is the following: *temo, temi, teme, temiamo, temete, temono*

This can productively influence the conjugation of irregular verbs. For example, the *dov-ere* modal auxiliary verb's conjugation is the following:

**dovo, *dovi, *dove, *doviamo, dovete* (the only correct form), **dovono*

Participium formation

Instead of the regular *messo*, the wrong form of the irregular word *mettere*, the participium form of *metteto* can be considered as a productive pattern. Interestingly, it doesn't follow the right form of the verbs ending in *-ere* because it should be **mettuto* according to the rule of regularity. The pattern is as follows: *are / ato, ire / ito, ere / *eto*

5. SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

Contrastive analysis and error analysis

Considering that the syntax of the mother tongue and the foreign language are different from each other, it is very important that the differences and correct usage through specific examples should be taught in order to achieve a higher level and demanding communication.

When students listen to a foreign language speech or read a text, they meet grammatical forms to which they automatically and subconsciously add meanings - meanings that would be appropriate in their native language. When speaking or writing, they put together grammatical structures which are expressions of similar meanings in the mother tongue.

While learning a foreign language, students must acquire a new code. However, at the same time, they are able to utilize their native language knowledge skills in acquiring the new knowledge. Therefore, first and foremost, they need to learn the differences. If they are able to utilize their native language knowledge while acquiring new language skills, it leads to success and motivation.

The mother tongue and the foreign language do not equally influence each other. In particular, the foreign language is distorted by the knowledge and usage of the mother tongue.

What can be considered an error?

An important part of language learning is how to treat errors. There are several types of errors. Rarely-occurring mistakes can be regarded as individual students' individual errors. If there are many and several language learners have the same or similar errors, it is worth examining the root causes.

I would like to highlight the two main groups of the concept of 'error' and a sub-group of them. Each one is considered a deviation: mistake (actual), error, and error caused by interference. The latter can be divided into two directions: interference caused by the mother tongue and well-known foreign language interference on the second foreign language.

CEA in my dissertation

In my opinion, CBA must become an integral part of foreign language education. I highlight spontaneous and provoked examples. I attribute most of these errors to interference, so I make a point on them.

I consider the types of errors mentioned by Corder (1973) as primary categorization: Omission, Addition, Selection, Ordering.

When do we have to do corrections?

We must distinguish gaps and errors of oral and written communications and must judge them differently in terms of the improvement of the errors. In my view, the improvement of written communicational errors should be given more emphasis.

In the following sections I discuss **the noun group, the subject, the predicate, the adjuncts (object, adjective used as a noun).**

Phrases

The questions of the word order

The Hungarian SOV word order has an effect on the shape of the Italian sentence therefore SOV takes shape instead of a consistent SVO.

There is a difference between the object and the adverb because the object is mostly post-verbal and the adverbs are usually preverbal therefore it is rare to have an object in preverbal position - the adverbs appear more often instead.

[Én *mindig* az olaszt akarom tanulni.] SOV

[* Io voglio studiare semper l'italiano.] * SOV

The general formula of the English sentence structure: VP + NP (noun phrase + verb phrase)

Therefore it is an SVO structure. Following this rule, the student doesn't make a mistake:

[He studies Italian and Russian.] SVO

[Lui studia italiano e Russo.] SVO

By contrast, if the student starts thinking from the aspect of the Hungarian language, the sentence will be wrong:

[Ő olaszt és orosz tanul.] SOV

[* Lui italiano e Russo studio.] * SOV

Incorrect use of English structures

One type of sentence often appearing both in essays and translations due to English interference is the following: [* Lui tardi era.] ← [He was late.]

Complex sentences

Omitting conjunction

Omitting conjunction is not possible in each type of conjunctive sentence structures and it can never happen in declarative mode:

*È naturale vengano / È naturale che vengano

*Penso sono arrivati / Penso che sono arrivati (Penso (che) siano arrivati)

(Salvi – Vanelli 2004:252)

Adding a suggestive word

In many cases suggestive words in Hungarian capital sentences appear as an addition in the Italian sentences. The following phrases are good examples. The first couple of sentences are taken from an essay of a high school student:

[*Ha detto *quello* che ieri non ha studiato niente.] [*Penso *quello* che sarà un bugiardo.]

Wrong choice in the use of moods and tenses

a. The present conditional after *if* in the Hungarian language has a strong effect on the Italian phrases, resulting wrong grammatical structure (or it can also originate from the fact that students have not mastered the use of the subjunctive):

[*Se avrei più tempo, guarderei ogni giorno un film.]

b. The lack of subjunctive mode in the following sentences is presumably due to the fact that students follow the simple present time of the Hungarian structure - but it is also possible that they have not mastered the use of the subjunctive (the indicative mood is accepted in colloquial language style as in the below example):

[*Penso che Laura è la mia amica migliore.]

6. Topic and Focus

In this chapter I cover the following:

Topic and focus in Hungarian

Topic and focus in Italian

I intend to cover foreign language teaching of advanced groups, separately focusing on the rules of the Hungarian language and that of the Italian language, pointing out the possibility of interference and presenting exercises for the sake of clarification.

7. CONCLUSION

The results of the study

I looked at the achieved results from two perspectives, namely from the teachers' and the learners' aspects. The main goal was to detect the interference errors from the available corpus, to identify the sources of errors and to set up clear categories. A systematic material that can be used in teaching has been created. The joint work of students resulted in measurable results. The individual text creation contributed to spontaneous recall of the different grammar and lexical forms and developed creativity. The translation exercises raised the awareness of the structural differences between the native and foreign language. It prompted a demand for subtle and nuanced language expressions. In addition, it led to right and regular use of dictionary.

In my opinion, the interference of and the interference between the native language and the first (already available) foreign language competence (English) can be detected, can be structured and can be used in education since it draws attention to the points that represent the "weak link" categories and that need to be given a greater attention in the Italian language teaching in Hungary.

Further research opportunities

The chapters discussed in my thesis could be further expanded with the help of the contrastive error analysis investigating other essays and translations. In addition, it would be a challenge for me to map the interference phenomena in live speech.

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