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SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND SOME OF ITS ASPECTS

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Abstract: The goal of our study is to present the issues of second language acquisition. It is an interdisciplinary scientific field that tries to point out the processes that accompany the learning of each additional language (after the first, mother tongue). Special attention is devoted to the role of the first language in relation to second language acquisition, and we juxtapose various perspectives – from accepting the statement that first language influence on the second one is minimal, to the concept of first language influence on the second one in the form of linguistic transfer, which is also the reason for occurrence of a number of errors in the acquisition process. The influence of the first language on the acquisition and afterwards on the use of the second language can be positive, negative, or even zero. Positive influence is manifested by the fact that the practical and theoretical knowledge from the mother tongue, the language habits and skills facilitate the process of acquisition and usage of the next language as a communication tool. Negative influence is manifested at all language levels though the so-called negative transfer or interference – these are the errors occurring as a result of the influence of the first language on the second, and having the characteristics of the first.

Keywords: second language acquisition; language transfer; collocations; empruntology

Second language acquisition is one of the fields of interest of psycholinguistics, where, mostly until the middle of the 1990s, the differences in the acquisition of the first (mother) tongue and a second language were emphasized and brought to the fore. From that moment on psycholinguistics has been dealing largely with the issues of the acquisition of more than one foreign language. We need to make a note here that we distinguish between the usage of the concepts *acquisition of the first language* (the so-called *mother tongue*) and *acquisition of a second* (also *foreign*) *language*. While the acquisition of the first (mother) language includes the natural process of language acquisition on the part of the child, that process being deeply connected to the development

of the child's brain, and at each age we observe various current phases of this process (Čermák 2011, p. 53), by the very concept "first language" in this work we will understand "the language one thinks in, talks in, dreams in". When we talk about second language acquisition in most cases we mean a situation where people study a language other than their mother tongue, even if the language being acquired is third, fourth, fifth and next (Cairns, Fernández 2014, p. 122). The *second language acquisition* concept also includes the situation where a student having some degree of control over one language system is presented with a second (even a third or a fourth) such system (Snow 1998, p. 545), i.e. this process applies to all the next (non-mother) languages. In this line of thought we have to underline that we differentiate the situation where a child acquires simultaneously two languages since birth – in such case we talk about natural bilingualism and not about second language acquisition.

There are some differences between first and respectively second language acquisition, that we should note. First language acquisition is similar to the acquisition of a child's other skills at early age; unlike it second language acquisition – at a later stage and not in early childhood – is more difficult, and this is mostly seen in conditions other than the usual uses of the respective language (Cairns, Fernández 2014, p. 23). The differences between first and another language acquisition can be systemized as follows (Corder 1981, p. 6): first language acquisition in comparison to second language acquisition is inevitable; first language acquisition is a part of the whole process of a child's development while second language learning starts after the transition, figuratively speaking, from infancy to childhood and is connected to a certain degree of maturing; a child starts acquiring their first language without any preliminary knowledge of any language behaviour. The motivation is different in the two cases.

The Czech linguist František Čermák finds the differences in second language acquisition in analogies and associations. Learning a second, respectively a next language, especially in the period after childhood, is different as it is based on analogy, association and repetition, and more specifically repetition by means of creating familiar versions of specific structures (Čermák 2011, p. 53).

On the other hand, there are also views which to some extent reject the differences between the first and another language acquisition, while also taking into account manifestations of interference. For example American psychologist John Bissel Carrol maintains that the conditions for second language acquisition are the same as in first language learning (Bhela 1999, p. 23). B. L. Compagnon also supports the opinion that the acquisition process is practically identical for the first and for the next language, not excluding the hypothesis that the first language interference plays an important role in the second language's learning process, and simultaneously pointing out that the differences in the errors in first and second language acquisition can be explained with the wrong

preconditions resulting from having a command of the first language, which results in excessive generalization of forms in the target language (Compagnon 1984, pp. 39 – 57).

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). This influence, called 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.).

Negative transfer as one of the sources of linguistic errors in learning a foreign language can also result in avoiding the usage of a specific linguistic phenomenon, or in the excessive usage of other linguistic phenomena or constructs (Ellis 1997, p. 51). Another term used in linguistics what conserns the mutuals influences in second language acquisition, is *interference*.

In the 1950s scientific interest in language contacts grew, and interest in interference grew along with it. In 1953 U. Weinreich defined interference as follows: "Those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact, will be referred to as interference phenomena." According to Weinreich interference occurs when the bilingual individual identifies the elements of the second language with the elements of the first one, and reproduces them (Weinreich 1974, p. 14). R. Lado said that the interaction of the systems of the languages in contact results in an inter-language interference, i.e. influences resulting from knowledge and skills intrinsic to the speech habits of the native, the first language, which have a negative influence on foreign language acquisition (Lado 1964, p. 91). L. Shcherba distinguished between two processes in interference: 1) borrowing and 2) language mixing, with the first process being based on bilingualism – the equal operation of two languages within one individual (or society), and the second process being based on a “mixed language with two terms,” i.e. when one language system of concepts is associated with two forms of expressing it (Shcherba 1974, p. 40). J. Veselý defined as interference the penetration of elements from one language into another during permanent mutual contacts of two language systems (Veselý 1985, pp. 28 – 29). G. Grosjean characterized interference as a specific linguistic deviation in bilinguals resulting from the influence of another (deactivated) language. It can appear at all language levels and in all types of speech (Grosjean 1994, p. 1657). E. Hadjieva also stated that interference included all levels of the language systems. This is why consistent study of the components of the systems of the languages in contact, where interchangeability of some or other linguistic units is most frequent, i.e. the

basis of interference processes, determines the fundamental principles of foreign language acquisition (Hadjieva 2013, p. 9). A division into real and potential interference is made by P. Ilieva-Baltova (Ilieva-Baltova 1991, p. 24) and E. Hadjieva (Hadjieva 2013, p. 8). As real interference Hadjieva defines the errors depending largely on the degree of proficiency in the new language (beginner, slightly advanced, very advanced, etc.), the individual sense of the language and the specific situation as determined by the topic of the conversation, the issues discussed, the place where the conversation takes place. The real interference depends on the emotional and the psychological state of the person speaking. To some extent these factors obstruct the exact predicting of manifestations of real interference, the frequency and intensity of its effect. Potential interference is a system of errors whose predicting is possible after a comparative analysis is made of the separate levels of the two language systems – the native language of the learner and the foreign language studied (Mihnevich 1985, p. 60).

Interference can be classified according to various factors, including for example direction of transfer or genetic proximity between the first and the acquired language. Many authors' typological classifications overlap; here we will only mention two of them – those created Choděra and J. Veselý. R. Choděra (Choděra 2006, p. 50) lists more types of interference and mentions the following categories: interlanguage/intralanguage interference; proactive/ retroactive interference; interference in close cognate / distant cognate languages; interference in competence and performance; explicit/implicit interference; interference at the level of knowledge / habits / secondary skills. J. Veselý (Veselý 1985, p. 29) looked at a smaller number of distinctive features, but at the same time new categories appeared in his typology: intralanguage and interlanguage interference; interference according to the language plans; explicit and implicit interference.

Another psycholinguistic issue discussed often is the impact of genetic proximity between languages on their acquisition. Many linguists think that the acquisition of a second language when it is a genetically close one takes less time than the acquisition of a language which is not cognate with the first one (Snow 1998, pp. 471 – 472), as the basis for positive transfer is present at all language levels. But the studying of close cognate languages is also accompanied by specific problems as the contacts between for example two (or more) Slavic languages in an individual's consciousness results in much more complicated relations and influences, and in addition the proximity of these languages sometimes results in the temptation to erroneously identify the foreign with the own, which provokes interferences. However, there is also another perspective, according to which languages proximity is considered to be an advantage mostly as regards perception, whereas in terms of sending, production of information such proximity does not have the same effect (Choděra 2006, p. 50). When acquiring

a genetically close language, it is necessary to emphasize not only what connects the two languages but also what sets them apart. In addition, some linguists even hold the opinion that pointing out only the common can result in faster passive acquisition of the language, while emphasizing the differentiating, the different – to much faster active acquisition (Zimová 1967, p. 9).

The peculiarities of close cognate bilingualism pre-determine an extremely high degree of interpenetration of interacting units in comparison to bilingualism in the case of non-cognate languages. The presence of overlapping phenomena also stimulates the mutual identification of differentiating phenomena, which results in transfer of linguistic units from one language into the other. Clarifying the similarities and differences between the linguistic systems of two cognate languages contributes to predicting transfer and interference in the foreign language acquisition, to reduction of the linguistic, communicative and pragmatic errors (Hadjieva 2013, pp. 9 – 10).

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, p. 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. 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. (Stalyanova & Krejcova 2022, p. 10).

There is a certain aspect of language interference and transfer we would like to pay attention to. It is the interference in translation as a specific category of interference realization. Interference in translation has its own specifics and concerns bilinguals who are proficient the respective language(s) on a really high level. As Z. Kufnerová points out, interference is not always a manifestation of the translator's lack of knowledge. It occurs automatically in the brain of anybody who works with foreign languages, and slips in the translation when the translator starts feeling tired (Kufnerová et al. 1994, p. 52).

V. Straková (Kufnerová et al. 1994, pp. 81 – 84) divides interference in translation into two spheres of influence. On the one hand there is the influence of the grammatical structure of the source language, and on the other hand – the reflection of the respective translated work. The long-term pressure of the grammatical structure of a language can cause the adoption of certain figures of speech (this is most often manifested in the spheres of lexicology and phraseology). Interference on stylistical level deforms the sentence structure, and is most hidden.

Interference errors in translation can also result from insuitable usage of the mother tongue, and can also be due to the fact that in a specific text different languages use different systemic resources to a different degree – i.e. interference can occur both on quantitative and on qualitative level. Qualitative errors can be identified by means of confrontation analysis while quantitative interference errors are more difficult to characterize and can not be identified easily. D. Lott for example (Lott 1983, p. 256) defines an error as an interference error only if it has one of the following characteristics (mostly in foreign language learning): overextension of analogy – incorrect usage of a word because it has similar functions to the word in the first language; transfer of structure – grammar mistake occuring on the basis of the first language instead of compliance with the rules of the target language; interlanguage/intralanguage error – grammar mistake occuring due to the lack of grammatical difference in the usage in the first language or an incorrect usage of a word due to the lack of lexical difference in the first language.

The interference in translation on lexical level could be prevented to some extend and in one direction by acquisition of stable expressions and word combinations and active acquisition of the vocabulary of the second language not only as separate lexemes, but mostly as combinations of words – free and stable, i.e. lexical combinatorics, stable expressions in the language, the so-called collocations. Collocation can be defined as a semantic combination of words/tokens or lexical syntagms, especially in the form of multi-word names, the formation of which is determined by their mutual collocation and therefore compatibility (Čermák 2006, p. 11). A collocation is a word combination, the content of which are words that automatically connect other words with each other and together form some meaningful naming. Fr. Čermak and V. Cvrček (Čermák & Cvrček 2017) also add to the definition of collocation that it is a syntagm of linguistic elements with a lexical character, which represents a realization and is the result of the fulfillment of the premise of their mutual collocation and compatibility, and collocation represents individual formal and semantic connectivity, ability to combine a given linguistic element with another or other elements, created by one or more of its collocational paradigms, conditioned by its compatibility with them; together with valence, it belongs to the main components of the syntagmaticity of any linguistic element.

In the process of acquiring a second language, it is extremely important to apply the principle of empruntology, wchich D. Vesselinov shows as a part of the the transfer of lexical items from one language to another, namely „transfers from one language system to another as a long-cultural process of interaction of different conceptospheres“ (Vesselinov 2019, p. 392). The principles of impruntology, 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, p. 393) should be understood as a natural part of the didactic process.

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, p. 3). The principles of empruntology are essential to apply in the process of learning second language to avoid negative transfer from the first to the second language.

In conclusion, we could summarize that teaching work related to second language acquisition aims to avoid negative transfer. This is especially important for the acquisition of the semantic volume of lexical units and their connotative meanings. It is the lack of knowledge of them that is most often reflected in the process of translation from one language to another. It is for these reasons that the emphasis of teaching efforts should be directed towards the acquisition of collocations, the combinatorics of lexical units, breaking this down through the principles of empuntology.

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УСВОЯВАНЕТО НА ВТОРИ ЕЗИК И НЯКОИ НЕГОВИ АСПЕКТИ

Резюме. Целта на настоящото изследване е да представим проблемите на усвояването на втори език. Това е интердисциплинарна научна област, която се опитва да посочи процесите, които съпътстват изучаването на всеки допълнителен език (след първия, майчиния). Специално внимание е посветено на ролята на първия език във връзка с усвояването на втория език, като съпоставяме различни гледни точки – от приемането на твърдението, че влиянието на първия език върху втория е минимално, до концепцията за влиянието на първия език върху втория под формата на езиков трансфер, който е и причина за появата на редица грешки в процеса на усвояване. Влиянието на първия език върху усвояването и след това върху употребата на втория език може да бъде положително, отрицателно или дори нулево. Положителното влияние се изразява в това, че практическите и теоретичните знания от майчиния език, езиковите навици и умения улесняват процеса на усвояване и използване на следващия език като средство за общуване. Отрицателното влияние се проявява на всички езикови равнища чрез т.нар. отрицателен трансфер или интерференция – това са грешките, възникващи в резултат на влиянието на първия език върху втория и притежаващи характеристиките на първия.

Ключови думи: усвояване на втори език; езиков трансфер; колокации; емпрунтология

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