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UDC 811.161.1

**LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE  
AND HOW TO CONSIDER IT WHEN TEACHING THE TOPIC  
“PREPOSITIONS OF SPACE IN RUSSIAN” TO A FOREIGN AUDIENCE**

*SUMMARY.* This article discusses the phenomenon of language interference, and proves the separation of the mistakes made by students while teaching them prepositional government for interference mistakes (made due to the influence of the native language of students) and non-interference mistakes (caused only by ignorance of the relevant grammatical material). The article proves the difficulty of detection of signs of the influence of the English language on the absorption of the grammatical topic “Russian spatial prepositions”. The basis for this conclusion is a high degree of unmotivated errors in the speech of English-speaking students when they use Russian spatial prepositions (the article contains examples of such errors). The lack of signs of interference is an obstacle to the use of the comparative-contrastive method of teaching of this subject to the English-speaking audience with the support of the students’ native language. The theme of “Russian spatial prepositions” has a high national-Russian specificity. Specifically Russian grammatical phenomena in comparison with the English language are the rich system of Russian cases with its various word endings; the presence of interdependence between such categories of the Russian language system as prepositions and cases; the harsh impact of the values of Russian prefixes on the government of the verb; the dependence of the choice of the preposition on a variety of factors of development of the Russian phrase (prefix in a prefixed verb, semantics of animate or inanimate nouns, etc.). The article concludes that the national specificity of the grammatical category of Russian prepositions is the reason for the creation of non language-oriented but universal methods of its teaching for the different audiences of foreign students.

*KEY WORDS.* Interference, bilingualism, typicalness, stereotypes.

When teaching it is very important to take into consideration students’ native language and to refer to it, as in this case the assimilation of a foreign language can be facilitated. Therefore, the creation of linguistic oriented methods in teaching Russian as a foreign language is an important task. The objective of this article is to substantiate the fact that when teaching the topic of Russian spatial prepositions to a foreign (particularly an English-speaking) audience, the development of a linguistic-oriented method causes great difficulties.

In order to determine the degree of native language influence on the mistakes made by students, it is necessary to understand what interference is. It will allow

distinguishing between interference mistakes and non-interference mistakes caused by simple ignorance of the relevant grammar material. This article is devoted to this issue.

“*Language interference*” is the violations that occur in the systems of contact languages. Since human speech behavior is determined by psychological program, the two languages cannot be functionally identical [1, 104]. The elements of one linguistic structure overlap with the elements of the other one, resulting in a speaker forming a statement in one language by the rules of the other one [2, 9]. Speaking a foreign language, a bilingual should switch from the mechanism of native speech to the mechanism of foreign speech. Thus when speaking a foreign language, mistakes can occur due to the use of the native language means: that is a demonstration of interference [3, 56]. In the language consciousness of a bilingual speaker, distinct features of a foreign language become erroneously like the structure of the native language, thus a partial *identification*, mixing of language systems occurs, which leads to mistakes in speech [1, 104].

The rules of language are not produced by science, and they exist objectively and came into existence long before the emergence of dictionaries, grammar, and the science of language. A linguistic norm is a *protective function* of national language existence, a basis and a condition for its stability, unity, originality and vitality. When two or more languages come into contact, their linguistic norms collide, hence the phenomenon of interference arises (i.e. *assimilation*): the norm of one language tends to subdue the norm of the other one. In the speech of students learning a second language, this confrontation acts as a confrontation of unequal power, as the elements of the alien language system as yet comprehended by students invade their already formed language experience. Therefore, in the consciousness of a monolingual speaker, the protective function of the native language functions and the linguistic norms of the native language tend to be *likened* to the norms of the target language: in the linguistic consciousness of the speaker, the individual features of the non-native language are mistakenly likened to the structure of the native language [1, 104], [4, 96]. A student faces the phenomenon of interference as soon as he tries to understand and learn the language of another nation, as the protective function of the native language, inherent to its nature, stands in the way of an “alien” language. Interference, i.e. the assimilation of the elements of one of the languages in contact to the elements of the other language, is the result of an objective demonstration of the protective function of the native language.

The psychological basis of the occurrence of interference is *stereotyped* habits of speech [5, 58]. When studying a foreign language one must acquire a new, alien system of distinctive features, and for a time in the mind of a student a third “system” is formed (an incorrect foreign language) [6, 161]. “The linguistic system of the native language leads not only to a clash with the system of the target language, but also to the emergence of a new linguistic system — an interlanguage” [7, 12], which characterizes the language of people who are not very competent speakers of a foreign language. An interlanguage forms on the basis of one linguistic system (native),

absorbing the elements of another language [7, 17]. The result is language knowledge not belonging to any of the languages in contact [7, 18]. In the consciousness of a foreign language learner, the language system is composed of two planes of expression and one plane of content, the construction of which is stipulated by the common objective and actual concepts that lie outside the values of different languages: more exactly, a community pulls together two languages in close contact [8, 14]. “What is called a word by bilinguals consists of three elements: a *value* representation and two *sound representations*. If one of these two elements is weak ..., then another ... replaces it” [9, 193]. When learning a foreign language, the grammatical phenomena of a target language are spontaneously introduced into a system similar to the system of the native language [8, 15].

When speaking an insufficiently assimilated foreign language, the inner form of the native language is preserved to a greater or lesser extent, so that thought passes first through expression in the native language. For this reason, mistakes similar to the native language occur [5, 30]. A learner has two codes and two systems of rules — a native and a foreign language — that are not fully differentiated [10, 55], so there is redistribution of values: a distinctive feature of the foreign language is replaced by a distinctive feature of the native one. U. Weinreich states that interference causes the reconstruction of models, resulting from the introduction of a foreign element into structurally more organized language fields [cf. to 11, 60].

Interference is an objective process that occurs when languages are in contact, regardless of the will and desire of the speaker. The system of native language, learned in early childhood — the program of a person’s speech behavior — is in the subconscious [8, 15]. A child’s language acquisition, i.e. the formation of a primary language competence, is the transition from “out of lingualism” (the absence of language) to monolingualism. When teaching an adult a language, a new (*secondary*) language competence forms based on the existing *primary one*, i.e. the transition from monolingualism to bilingualism takes place. In the first case there is no interference, in the second it accompanies second language learning [10, 44].

When speaking a native language, the choice of the necessary form in the process of building an expression is made unconsciously, automatically. But when speaking a foreign language, a speaker tries to bring together the language structures and establish the *univocal* correspondence between interacting languages. Then there are mistakes regularly repeated in speech in a foreign language — i.e. there is interference between the native language learned in childhood, and the second one [12, 3].

From a psycholinguistic point of view, students should have formed a new internal language system, Russian language awareness [13, 12]. This formation always takes place under the influence of the established system of the native language of students and their existing language consciousness. When linguistic phenomena of the native and target languages are similar, the influence of the native language is positive and appears in the transfer of matching elements from one system to another. In the presence of interlingual differences or the partial discrepancy of phenomena the

interference effect arises: the formed system of the native language prevents the formation of a new system in the target language, in our case, of Russian. The psychological basis and the principal mechanisms of positive and negative interference are the same: it is *the identification* and the transfer of linguistic units, phenomena and functions from one language system to another.

The mechanism of foreign speech includes three groups of skills [14 317]. 1) Speaking skills in the native language, which require *only transfer* to new language material and *actualization*. In this case, the native language, rather than the foreign language's rival, becomes a means of its assimilation. 2) Skills that have been formed again in the native language and when learning a foreign language should only be adjusted. 3) Skills that need to be re-formed: for example, for an Englishman or an American, the Russian case system is completely alien. Therefore, in particular, the topic of Russian spatial prepositions is a significant difficulty for English-speaking students: in the Russian language, spatial relations are expressed by prepositions and case endings, and in English only by prepositions, as nouns with which they are combined do not have special endings. Taking into account interlingual relations allows to foresee the difficulties in learning the phenomena of the target language, and to predict the common mistakes of students. It promotes a positive transfer, at the same time alerting and overcoming interference.

The comparative analysis of the native and target languages shows that the difficulties of assimilation are stipulated by the lack of the target language categories in the learner's native language, or by different functioning of categories existing in both languages, for example, when identical semantics is expressed by structurally different phrases. When teaching, more attention should be paid to interference, since the transfer of similar speech operations occurs automatically and the interfering influence of the native language should be *overcome by* correction, and sometimes by the breakdown of old models and the formation of new design thinking skills that requires a lot of exercise and time. The greatest difficulties arise in the process of assimilation of phenomena missing in the system of the native language of students, that are "blind-spots" for them.

Interference can occur at any level of language: at *orthographic*, at *lexical-semantic*, *phonetic* (where it is particularly noticeable and is demonstrated in the emphasis [15, 197]), at *grammar* (morphology, syntax, punctuation), at *stylistic*, at *word-formative* or at even very formal - *graphic*. Lexicon is a side of the linguistic system most permeable and susceptible to changes. Grammatical interference, including morphological, syntactical and punctuation interference, is studied least of all [5, 11], although the proportion of grammatical interference in a speech flow is significant: the number of mistakes of this kind in relevant researches was two thirds of the total [16, 15]. U. Weinreich wrote that grammatical interference is one of the most complex and controversial issues of general linguistics.

Scientists believe that when studying a foreign language, *only part* of the mistakes made by students can be explained by the interference of the native language. It is important that in interference the breaches of language rules are *not spontaneous*, *not*

*chaotic, but to a large extent are subject to certain rules [5, 153], have a clearly directed nature of assimilation to rules, regulations, laws of another (native) language of a student. "Mistakes, ... due to interference are not a chaotic conglomerate of the obliquenesses of a studied language. They result from applying the rules and the systems of the native and target languages" [10, 62]. Therefore, all mistakes can be divided into two groups: 1) interference and 2) non-interference resulting from deficiencies of the learning process when learning a foreign language. The mistakes of the first type are stable, typical, characteristic, and constant for all or for the vast majority of native speakers.*

When the systems of the native and foreign languages collide, the restructuring of *stereotypes* of the native language of a student is required. The native language has a strong opposition to this restructuring, so a student brings laws *typical of their native language* into speech in the foreign language. Naturally, *all* native speakers in this case will make *the same typical or typological mistakes*. In our opinion, only such mistakes are an unqualified of interference. i.e. the criterion distinguishing facts of interlingual grammatical interference from cases of *simple ignorance of linguistic material* is the typicality of false speech products of *similar* origin in the speech of foreign language learners. At the same time, there frequently takes place a lot of similar mistakes made by second language learners regardless of their first language. These mistakes are *random*, resulting from inadequate training or educational material, "*mistakes of development*". The results of our experiments with 36 English-speaking students showed high *randomness* in their use of Russian spatial prepositions. Here are some examples of their mistakes.

#### **Mistakes of English-speaking students (a stating experiment)**

##### **1) Inconsistency of mistakes:**

Он вернулся домой из — 7; с — 4; у — 2; на — 1; в — 1; до — 1; к — 1 (брат).

Летом мы отдыхали на — 10; из — 2; от — 2; с — 1; у — 1; (деревня).

Мама сняла картину от — 8; на — 5; из — 4; в — 2; к — 1; у — 1; (стена).

##### **2) Similar mistakes, BUT not motivated by their native language:**

Он пошел в — 7; к — 1; от — 1; (концерт).

Дети играют на — 7; к — 1; с — 1; до — 1; (сад).

Письмо было на — 8; из — 2; (конверт).

From all the examples, it is clear that the incorrect use of the Russian preposition cannot be explained by the fact that the English language uses the same preposition. It is also hard to do because in certain uses (not only in spatial terms, but in general), the Russian preposition *в* corresponds to 12 different English prepositions, the preposition *на* 17, *из* 5, *с* 14, *к* 10, *от* 10, *у* 8 English prepositions [17]. The same pattern of *randomness of mistakes was observed among students* of other language groups (Chinese and Europeans, 25 people). This forces us to the conclusion that it is impossible to identify a clear interference effect of English on the use of Russian

spatial prepositions by students. Their mistakes are the result of insufficient knowledge by students of specific Russian grammatical material. In this topic, such specific Russian grammatical phenomena as the rich Russian case system with its various inflections, verbs of motion and their specific characteristics, the values of Russian prefixes and their often harsh impact on verb government, the dependence of the preposition choice on semantics, animate or inanimate nouns, are closely intertwined, interact and are inseparably linked. Therefore, when introducing the topic of Russian spatial prepositions, the teaching methodology in many cases is universal, independent of what language is native for students.

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