THE PROBLEM OF LEXICAL INTERFERENCE IN TEACHING TRANSLATION

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of lexical interference in teaching translation to linguistic students. With the development of the translation training, the interest in identifying and preventing problems associated with translation has also increased. Nowadays, a comprehensive consideration of these problems is traditional in courses of theory and practice of various translation types. Since no one is immune from translation errors caused by interference, i.e. the influence of the first language system on the second one, there was a need to study this phenomenon when teaching professional translation in more detail. Identifying and analysing certain patterns associated with this problem can help avoid interference errors and, thus, optimize the process of teaching foreign languages and translation. To achieve this goal, firstly, we learnt the phenomenon of interlingual interference, where we focused on its lexical type, and, secondly, we conducted an experiment in which 60 linguistic students took part. At the final stage, we found a high percentage of interference errors, which confirmed the relevance of this topic. In the future, we plan to continue our research and identify effective ways to overcome this problem.

1. Introduction

Back in the 19th century, scientists concluded that languages influence each other. At that time the observation of languages was carried out in Great Britain, France, Russia, the USA and other countries. The term "interference" (from lat. inter – "between, mutually" and ferentis – "carrying") was borrowed by linguistics from psychology (psychology borrowed it from physics), and was first used by scientists of the Prague School. Even Shuhardt (1950), an Austrian linguist, drew attention to the fact that the mixing of languages does not occur as a result of borrowing, but as a result of the contacting languages adapting and striving for simplification. The confusion of languages is manifested in the fact that each language absorbs some elements characteristic of the second language, and thus the individual parts of the language become less distinguishable (Bodujen de Kurtenje, 1963). Various aspects of linguistic interference are taken into account in the next definition:

> Interference is the interaction of linguistic systems in conditions of bilingualism, which develops either during linguistic contact, or during the individual assimilation of a non-native language; expressed in deviations from the norm and the system of the second language under the influence of the native. (Kuzmina, 2008, p. 37)

The interference that usually occurs in the process of learning a new language is further developing if the two languages are typologically related. For linguistic students who, in addition to English, study German or French, the problem of lexical interference is important. In the process of acquisition of a foreign language, semantic closeness between two languages can "facilitate the process of acquisition of a foreign language, since many words have similar meanings" (Chacón Beltrán, 2006, p. 30). In other words, the scientists' opinion who share this point of view boils down to the fact that if words have a common origin, it is much easier to learn them, and it helps to develop linguistic abilities and improve vocabulary (Arce Medero, 2006). Many scholars believe that the level of lexical translation depends on the contact between the two languages (Frunza, 2006; O'Neil & Casanovas, 1997). At the same time, the proximity between the two languages is a key factor in the intensity of linguistic influence, which makes it possible to predict the occurrence of possible errors and use different methods and techniques when teaching students to translate (Calvo, 2005). Moreover, learning a foreign language can also "affect the native language (or primary language system), and perhaps rebuild a person's cognitive abilities" (Oldin, 2005).

Another important aspect in acquisition of a second language is the weight of the context: background knowledge becomes a significant factor that influences "the semantic construction, since the new processed information must coincide with the information we voiced earlier" (Duran, 2004, p. 89). The subject's communication experience is the main factor that influences the results of the assignment.

1.1. Lexical interference

At the lexical level interference is the intervention of the native language vocabulary into the vocabulary of the target language due to the similarity of the lexical units of the two languages. It is

reflected in terms of both content and expression. Phonetic proximity of words leads to an involuntary violation of the target language norm when using the word of the target language (Kuznecova, 1998). In this case, students often face with the problem of "false friends of the translator", when words of different languages are similar in spelling or pronunciation, but differ in their lexical meanings (Akulenko, 1961). As R. Chacon-Beltran notes, due to negative interference, the lexical similarity of different languages can not only lead to an incorrect translation, but also impede the acquisition of the second language in general (Chacon-Beltran). For the manifestation of interference, objective conditions created by the specifics of the language are necessary: the presence of differential features in it that can be contrasted within one language or in contact with the native language, that is, the presence of intra-linguistic and inter-linguistic oppositions (Al-Faki & Siddiek, 2015).

2. Problem Statement

Any person who learns two or more languages is not immune from translation errors caused by the influence of the first language system on the second one, or interference. It necessitates the study of this phenomenon in the linguo-methodological aspect in more detail. The analysis and identification of certain patterns associated with this problem can help to avoid interference errors and optimize the process of teaching a foreign language and translation.

3. Research Questions

We have previously formulated the following tasks:
- to describe the phenomenon of interference as a problem in teaching translation;
- to consider lexical interference as one of the types of linguistic interference;
- to develop a plan and conduct a training experiment aimed at identifying cases of lexical interference when translating from Russian into English and from English into Russian;
- to analyze the translation results obtained through the experiment.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to prove the existence of lexical interference as a problem arising in teaching translation to linguistic students through an educational experiment.

5. Research Methods

Analysis of the literature in order to generalize the available knowledge contributed to the development of a methodology for conducting our own experiment, which goal is to analyze the obtained results.

Among 60 respondents who took participation in this experiment there were fourth-year linguistic students. They were directly related to the study of foreign languages in an artificial environment and have not only theoretical knowledge, but also practical experience in translation. For the purity of the experiment, we gave them a small amount of time to translate some sentences without using aids such as

dictionaries, translators, etc. All sentences contained "false friends of the translator", which may cause lexical interference. To achieve the goal of the study, we conducted the experiment in two stages (Dmitrienko & Vlavatskaya, 2019).

5.1. The first stage

At the first stage, we offered the students a list of sentences for translation from Russian into English. They contained words potentially causing lexical interference.

1. На тот момент я не чувствовал к ней ничего, кроме *симпатии*.
2. Тема данной работы всегда будет *актуальна*.
3. И тогда мы сразу же поехали на *автобазу*.
4. Джону всегда нравился *ром*.
5. Она выиграла, потому что ей выпал *валет*.
6. Ты знаешь *аккорды* для этой песни?

5.2. The second stage

For the second stage of the experiment, we created an open questionnaire in the Google Drive in the Internet, which allowed us to receive, organize and analyze the data obtained. This time, we gave the students sentences in English for translation:

1. His delegation believed that they had such special *expertise*.
2. He was a *genial* and kind man.
3. You need someone to lift your *morale*.
4. The U.S. Army adopted a new *ammunition*.
5. Apologies should, however, be followed by *rehabilitation*.

6. Findings

6.1. Results of the first stage

After the first stage of the experiment we obtained the following results.

- In the first sentence, *sympathy* (46%) and the phrase *liked her* (23%) were quite frequent variations for translation. This result indicates that 46% of students fell under the influence of a "false friend" and misidentified the word. While 23% of students, in order to avoid mistakes, were unsure of the correctness of their choice of an equivalent and used a synonymous translation, slightly modifying the sentence. The suitable word for translation in this case – the word "affection" - is found only in 3% of answers. The rest show different versions of the translation: "liked her", "a great affection", "sympathy", "great attraction", "very nice for her", "was about to fall in love", "feeling", "felt in love".
- When translating the second sentence, students gave different answers including one of the most accurate – *relevant*, the overall percentage of its use was about 26%. The most common translation was "actual" (31%), which confirms the manifestation of lexical interference. We

also found such translations as "popular", "important", "up-to-date" (9% each); "essential" and "a matter" (2% each). In 12% of the answers, students were unable to provide a translation at all.

▪ The most frequent translations of the lexeme "автобаза" were – "autobase" and "car station" - 23% and 20%, respectively. We need to dwell on the first word in more detail, since it contains the most common mistake in translation. The word "автобаза" refers to potentially existing asymmetric dialexemes. There are morphemes auto- and -base in English, but there is no such a word "autobase". This error often occurs when translating from Russian into English due to the presence of morphemes similar to the native language, which seem correct to the translator. The equivalent lexeme in translation – *depot* – was used in 6% of translations, and the percentage of omission of this word was 22%.

▪ When translating the word "ром" in the third sentence, the number of suggested translations increased to 10. The respondents often used the names of other drinks, namely: "brandy", "scotch", "gin", "whiskey", or generalized – "hard beverages". They translated the word "ром" by four spelling variations – "rome", "romm", "rom" and "rum". The last two are the most common (21% and 28%, respectively). The last word is the only correct one. As for the replacement of the lexeme with *rum* by other alcoholic beverages when translating, they are all prepared using different technologies using different ingredients, which can be an important element, especially in the professional field.

▪ Having analyzed the fourth sentence, we found 14 different translations. This number also includes isolated cases of use – "a lover", "a win card", "a special card", "trump card", as well as "V". The most frequent and at the same time correct translation – *Jack* – reaches 38%. The use of its synonym "knave" we found only in 4% of cases. There were also four English spelling variants for translating this lexeme: "valet", "valet", "vailet" and "vallette". The first word is the equivalent of the Russian lexeme "servant".

Thus, most of the translations are not equivalent. When replacing the name of the card with a general "a win card", the meaning is slightly distorted. It might be extremely important for the plot of the work, as, for example, in the "Queen of Spades" story by A.S. Pushkin.

▪ In the last sentence the percentage of correct translation *chords* is dominant - 41%. Students also proposed synonymous translations *notes, tabs*. However, the second place in terms of frequency belongs to the word "accords" (38%), which means "agreement". To avoid the exact translation of the word *chords*, some respondents suggested an approximate translation – "How is it played?". They changed the structure of the sentence, but kept approximately the same semantics.

In all sentences, we also found omissions in word translations. In two cases, this amount reaches a large percentage. Figure 1 shows the results of the first stage of the experiment.
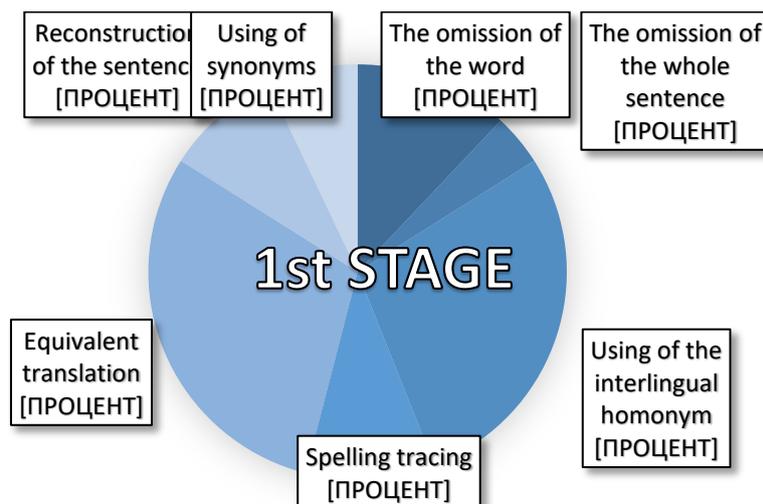
Figure 1. Results of the first stage

6.2. Results of the second stage

- When translating the first sentence almost 19% of the respondents did not offer any translation. For translation of the lexeme *expertise*, 43% of the students suggested a Russian word *экспертиза (inspection)*. They (28%) used also such words as "знания" (knowledge), "компетенция" (competence), and a phrase "они были самыми компетентными" (they were the most competent), which can be considered as equivalents. In addition, there were such translations as "уникальная экспертиза" (unique experience) and "специальная проверка" (special verification), which are not equivalent, but have some semantic similarity with the Russian word "экспертиза".

- When translating the second sentence, about 10% of the respondents could not give the exact translation of *genial*, and 38% did not translate this sentence at all. The dictionary defines *genial* as "marked by or freely expressing sympathy or friendliness" (https://merriam-webster.com). The interlingual homonym for this word is "гениальный" (genius*)*, it does not quite fit as an equivalent translation. Nevertheless, 20% of students used it. In addition, they used such words as "искренний" (sincere) and "щедрый" (generous*)*, which represent only an approximately correct translation. Thirty two percent of respondents gave the equivalent translation *дружелюбный (friendly)*.

- Almost 28% of respondents did not translate the sentence *You need someone to lift your morale*. The word *morale* has a certain external similarity with the Russian word "мораль", but it has a completely different meaning, "the amount of confidence felt by a person or group of people, especially when in a dangerous or difficult situation" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org), namely "боевой дух". Only about 11% of the students chose this translation. Along with these translations, respondents proposed synonymous ones, for example: "кто поднимет твое настроение" (who will cheer you up), "кто поддержит тебя" (who will support you) and "ты нуждаешься в какой-то моральной поддержке" (you need some kind of moral support). All other respondents preferred to translate this word as

"мораль" (morality) using different variations: "кто поднимет тебе моральные устои" (who will raise your moral foundations), "кто научит тебя морали" (who will teach you morality) and "кто поставит тебя на место" *(*who will show you your place) where it is demonstrated how interference affects translation. In other words, the respondent translates the word *morale* into Russian, but having felt the aggressive context, he paraphrased the sentence, completely changing the meaning of the original sentence.

- To translate the word *ammunition* students used such words as "обмундирование", "снаряжение", "военная форма", "униформа", "боеприпасы" и "аммуниция". About 36% of students chose *аммуниция*, while tracing the spelling of the English word (in Russian, the word is written without doubling the consonant "m"). To determine the specifics of these words that relate to military topics, we again use the dictionary. From the definition of the English word (https://dictionary.cambridge.org): *ammunition - objects that can be shot from a weapon, such as bullets or bombs*, we can conclude that its most equivalent translation into Russian would be the word "боеприпасы" (20% of the respondents used it). The words *снаряжение (equipment)* and *оружие (weapons)* are relatively close to "боеприпасы", but have different denotative meanings. About 30% of respondents used the words *форма (uniforms)* and *обмундирование (uniform),* which is completely inconsistent with the meaning and can lead to an error in translation, in particular, when it comes directly to the military sphere.

- About 37% of students ignored the last sentence. The difficulty in translation lies in the word *rehabilitation* itself, which is similar to the Russian word for *реабилитация*. They can be equivalents, but only in the medical field: *the process of returning to a healthy or good way of life, or the process of helping someone to do this after they have been in prison, been very ill* (https://dictionary.cambridge.org). However, 30% of students chose this word for translation. In this case, we are talking about the improving of a situation, where the culprit should apologize. The rest of the answers are synonymous adequate substitutions: *Извинения должны сопровождаться действиями (Apologies must be accompanied by actions); Извинения должны быть искренними (Apologies must be sincere).* In the last version, the structure of the sentence is completely changed, the adjective is included in the predicate, but the meaning of the sentence remains the same, and the translation is equivalent.

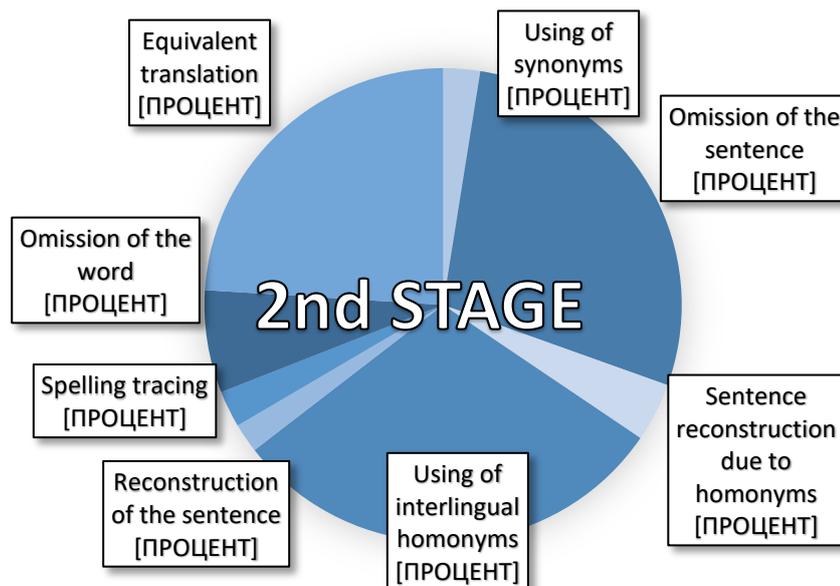The percentage of the results of this stage of the experiment is shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2. Results of the second stage

The results of the two stages of the experiment indicate the existence of lexical interference when teaching translation from English into Russian, and vice versa.

The diagrams show that when translating from Russian into English, and vice versa, the percentage of interlanguage homonyms use is approximately the same - an average of 29%. As for the equivalent translation its percentage at the second stage (translation from English into Russian) is slightly lower – it differs by 6% (30% and 24%). A word is missing in approximately the same number of answers (7% and 12%). However, we observed a significant gap in the percentage of omissions of entire translations – when translating from English, the absence of a translation of the sentence is found in 28% of cases, while in translation from Russian this amount is only 4%.

Spelling tracing occurs at both stages of the experiment, but prevails when translating from Russian into English, which indicates the influence of the native language in translation. In addition, at both stages, we revealed the replacement of the words of the sentence with phrases similar in meaning.

Erroneous tracing, the use of interlingual homonyms in translation, as well as the absence of the translation itself, all this proves the negative influence of the lexis of the native language on the lexis of the secondary language system, in this case represented by the English language.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the results of the experiment confirmed the existence of the problem of lexical interference in teaching translation to linguistic students. On average, we identified interlanguage homonyms in 29% of the answers; in 26% of cases we found the omissions of individual words or entire sentences due to lack of knowledge of the exact translated equivalents of similar lexemes. Spelling tracing is more common when translating from Russian into English. At the same time, the percentage of submitted equivalent translations is on average 33%.

All this proves the presence of interlingual lexical interference, or the negative impact of one language on another when teaching translation, which manifests itself when the imprecise meaning of a word is transmitted when translating words from a native language into a foreign language and vice versa.

In general, interference is an inevitable phenomenon for all learners of foreign languages, including translators. Nevertheless, the topic declared in this article needs further research in order to develop thoroughly a technique for overcoming lexical interference in teaching foreign languages and translation.

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