

Grammatical Interference in English Language Acquisition: A Comparative Study of Uzbek and Russian Learners

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Abstract. *The current paper examines grammatical interference as a significant factor influencing foreign language acquisition (FLA), focusing on Uzbek and Russian learners of English. We analyze how syntactic and morphological structures of learner's first language (L1) affects foreign language production and comprehension. Based on comparative linguistic analysis, we try to highlight repeated grammatical errors and mistakes that stem from the differences in word order, article usage, verb aspects, and prepositions. Particularly, we emphasize such structural features of Uzbek and Russian as agglutination, free word order, postpositions, gender, and inflections, which often conflict with English grammatical norms. The findings underscore the necessity to raise learners' grammatical awareness in order to foster accurate and fluent English language use.*

Key words: *first language interference, grammatical interference, foreign language acquisition.*

Introduction

Language is the main instrument used to promote communication, which is the foundation of human interaction. The development of language is an essential and captivating part of human growth. From their first sounds of "boos" and "babbles" infants demonstrate a desire to communicate. Language acquisition involves both conscious and subconscious processes, such as learning the written system of language and understanding the nuances of grammar, vocabulary, and speech patterns. Strong language skills in one's first language are critical to succeed in cognitive functioning and professional settings.

In the era of globalization and technological advance, it is a common phenomenon to hear several languages being spoken around us and oftentimes we have to use more than one language in order to converse with others. As a language learner, it is common to experience hardships in acquiring a new language. This is particularly true for individuals whose first language is drastically different from the language they are endeavoring to learn. According to Derakhshan and Karimi (2015), the role of L1 in acquiring FL is crucial with its impact depending on how similar or different the two languages are. Mitchell et al. (2019) similarly observed that mastering a language involves from replacing habits in the first language with new ones in the target one.

One of the extensively researched areas, in foreign language acquisition is, therefore, the role of native language, which is commonly referred as language interference. The term "interference" was firstly used in the exact and natural sciences. In physics, for instance, interference is a phenomenon in which two waves overlap each other, shaping a resultant wave of greater, lesser or equal amplitude¹. The notion became widely recognized and later applied in linguistics once a Jewish-American linguist, U.

¹ <https://www.vedantu.com/physics/interference-in-physics>

Weinreich released his work “Language in Contact” in 1953. Language interference (also known as L1 interference or linguistic interference) is a phenomenon occurring when an individual unconsciously applies his/her first language rules to the foreign language he/she is learning. This can cause errors in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and even syntax.

In this article, we aim to explore how grammatical interference manifests itself when Russian and Uzbek-speaking learners master English. By providing real examples and dissecting underlying linguistic causes, we would like to shed light into grammatical interference which, we believe, will contribute to a better understanding of L1 influence on language learning process.

Grammatical interference

In the realm of foreign language acquisition, grammatical interference stands out as an occurrence wherein learners transfer structures from their native language to the target language resulting in errors and deviations, from natural language patterns. This interference can significantly impact a learner’s ability to produce and comprehend language in the target language. The process of grammatical interference begins when learners transfer the rules and structures of their L1 to FL. This interference can create various challenges for learners, especially when the two languages have different grammatical features. One of the main sources of grammatical interference is the influence of L1 syntax and morphology on FL. It is obvious that different languages have distinct grammatical systems and set of rules which can lead to errors in the target language. When it comes to learning Uzbek, Russian and English, grammatical interference presents itself in forms due to the disparities between these languages.

For instance, speakers of languages with gendered nouns (Russian) may struggle with the lack of gender distinctions in FL, resulting in mistakes in adjective-noun or pronoun-noun agreement. Or, vice versa, the languages with no gender distinction may face difficulties distinguishing between them. For many foreigners, it is problematic to learn the Russian language, which is full of inflections for gender, case, plurality, verb conjugations and others (Gorbett, 1982).

Further, we will delve into how the grammatical patterns of Uzbek and Russian can influence the usage of English. The *agglutinative structure* of Uzbek, which is among the Turkic languages, where affixes are attached to the root word to convey meanings may lead speakers to overuse affixes in English sentences and construct unconventional phrases (Swan&Smith, 2001). For instance, the Uzbek word “dalalaringizdagilardan” (which are from your fields) consists of the root “dala” (field) and six formant affixes – 1. The plural sign “-lar-” (*fields*); 2. The possessive affix of the II-person plural number “-ingiz” (*your*); 3. The locative case “-da” (in this case *located in*); 4. A derivational affix – formant of adjectives “-gi-” (which); 5. The sign of plurality “-lar-” (*are*); 6. Ablative case affix “-dan-” (*from*).

Thus, if to break up the above-mentioned word step-by-step, it will look as follows:

1. *Dalalaringizdagilar-dan* “which are from your fields”
2. *Dalalaringizdagi-lar* “which are located in your fields”;
3. *Dalalaringizda-gi* “located in your fields”;
4. *Dalalaringiz-da* “in your fields”;
5. *Dalalar-ingiz* “your fields”;
6. *Dala-lar* “fields”;
7. *Dala* “field” (the root is the basis of the nominative case)

One notable instance of interference from Russian into English, for instance, is observed in the usage of the *present simple tense* (Апресян, 1980). In Russian, this tense is utilized for describing regular actions and general truths. (Зимой в нашей стране выпадает много снега. – It snows a lot in my country at this period.) Conversely, in English while the present simple tense serves these functions, it also includes events with a scheduled or planned aspect. This, in-turn, causes confusion between the usage of present simple, present continuous and future simple tenses. For example, in the

following sentence, “The bus arrives tomorrow at 3.45 pm.”, the verb “arrives” is translated into Russian using the future tense “Автобус придет (will arrive) завтра в 3.45 после обеда.” Another common mistake occurs with time clauses, such as if, when, until, as soon as and so forth. Russian speakers frequently use “If + S + will” construction, since in their language, the conditionals are used with the help of future tense.

Another area where interference arises stems from differences in *word order* (Gersonskaya & Fedorov, 2005). With its system Russian allows for flexibility in word order while still conveying intended meanings. For example, “Он завтра придёт домой.” “Он придёт домой завтра.” “Он домой придёт завтра.” “Завтра он домой придёт.” “Завтра он придёт домой.” All these five sentences are translated as “He will come home tomorrow.” Whereas in the Uzbek language, there is a fixed word order with the predicate coming at the end of the sentence. The remaining components serve to complete “blank spaces” of the predicate, each occupying distinct positions corresponding to particular contexts associated with it (Usmanova, 2005). “Senga sovg’a olib keldim.” (I have brought a gift for you.) “Men u bilan ertaga uchrashaman.” (I will meet him tomorrow). “Vazifangni qachon topshirmoqchisan?” (When are you going to submit your assignment?) In the provided sentences and others, the predicate comes in the end regardless of what a speaker wants to say.

On the other side, English follows a structured word order, typically Subject+Verb +Object. This difference causes Russian or Uzbek speakers to sometimes rearrange words, some of which can dramatically influence the meaning which a speaker wants to convey. One of the most common errors that language teachers come across to when teaching English is the *Subject + Object* expression. Since the *case declensions* and *verb conjugations* present in both Uzbek and Russian, the meaning of the uttered sentence can still be understood if word order rules are not followed. However, this could result in errors in sentence structure and overall meaning when applied to English sentences, as those features are absent in the target language. For instance, the Uzbek and Russian sentences “Suzish menga yoqadi”; “Мне нравится плавание.” (Swimming me like/I like swimming) can be mistakenly translated as “Swimming likes me”, when there is an obvious confusion in the *subject + object* translation.

The aspect system in Russian and English is another challenge. Russian has a system that distinguishes between perfective and Imperfective aspects, which do not have direct equivalents in English. In Russian, these verbs are mostly formed by adding prefixes. In English, they might be translated by changing the whole tense. This leads to difficulties for speakers in expressing aspectual meanings in English sentences. For example, they may use the wrong aspect, resulting in sentences such as “Я читаю (*imperfective*) эту книгу вот уже два часа.” (I have been reading this book for two hours.) and “Я уже прочла (*perfective*) эту книгу” (I have already read this book.) (Апресян, 1995).

Another example of interference occurs with prepositions. Russian uses a more different set of prepositions than English does, whereas the Uzbek language does not have preposition at all (Usmanova et al., 2023). Instead, there are ‘postpositions’ coming after a noun or case affixes which may also be translated as preposition + noun into English. Since the rules of using prepositions vary from language to language, this can lead to the direct translation from one’s native language (in our case, from Uzbek and Russian). For instance, we frequently hear a Russian individual (usually in beginner-pre-intermediate levels) expressing “I will wait for you on Monday” by using a time preposition “in” because in Russian, this time phrase is used with the preposition “in”. Another illustration is about adding propulsions after some verbs (e.g., answer, influence, ask) although it is grammatically incorrect to do so. A prime reason is the direct translation from one’s mother tongue. Therefore, it is common for Uzbek and Russian learners to say “contact *with* me” (Russian: свяжись со мной; Uzbek: men bilan bog’lan), “ask *from* me” (Russian: спроси у меня; Uzbek: mendan so’ra), “badly influences *on* me” (Russian: плохо влияет на меня; Uzbek: menga yomon ta’sir qiladi) and so forth.

Beyond verb related issues learners transitioning from Russian and Uzbek to English also face hurdles with using articles (a, an, the, -) since those languages lack articles. Moreover, forming plurals selecting prepositions and positioning adjectives areas where grammatical challenges arise for these

learners. This can cause mistakes, like leaving out or using articles much making the English sound unnatural. If these patterns of interference persist during language acquisition recurring errors may arise unless addressed through targeted language instruction.

Conclusion

To conclude, grammatical interference remains one of the central barriers to achieving English proficiency for Uzbek and Russian learners. According to the findings discussed in the current paper, we think that deep-seated syntactic and morphological patterns from learners' native languages often lead to frequently repeated errors in English. Challenges such as incorrect word order, inappropriate tense or aspect usage, as well as misapplication of prepositions and articles can be directly traced to structural disparity between the languages under focus. Not only is recognizing and timely addressing to these patterns essential for diagnosing common learner errors, but it is also crucial for tailoring effective language teaching strategies. In our opinion, with increased awareness and pedagogical responsiveness, it becomes possible to mitigate the negative effects of grammatical transfer and foster more accurate, confident language use among learners from linguistically diverse backgrounds.

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