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SYNTACTIC INTERFERENCE IN CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

Summary. The article considers the phenomenon of language interference, instances of which are revealed in consecutive interpreting. Negative and positive interference (transference) are differentiated at various language levels, focusing upon that of an utterance syntactic organization. Definition for the syntactic interference is provided; identification procedure of either positive or negative syntactic interference instances is offered and illustrated.

Key words: syntactic interference, negative syntactic interference, positive syntactic interference, consecutive interpreting.

Formulation of the problem. At present consecutive interpreting is widely used during negotiations of all levels ranging from the top official meetings to the field interpreting when experts and monitors who represent international organizations undertaking the role of mediators go to the field to speak to eye-witnesses and talk to different parties of the conflict. The job of an interpreter is one of the key ones in settling military crises as professional interpreters' activity can help either prevent or aggravate further escalation of the conflict. Adequate interpretation can, sometimes, actually save lives; however, inadequate interpretation can lead to misunderstanding between the parties and thus, cause new casualties. It is quite often, therefore, that the quality of interpretation can literally mean peace or war. One particular factor influencing the outcome quality of interpretation is known to be language interference.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Language interference has been studied mostly as a definitely negative phenomenon revealed at various language levels. Only some attention has been given by researchers to instances of positive interference (also known as *positive transfer* or *transference*) – mainly with respect to the use of vocabulary items, while positive interference at the level of syntax has not been studied yet. The above mentioned accentuates the actual necessity of the research, its theoretical value and applicability for practicing interpreters.

Most scholars use the term “language (linguistic) interference” to speak about deviations from language standards that can occur when two or more languages are in contact: either used by a bilingual in everyday life or used professionally by an interpreter or translator. It was the Prague Linguistic School that introduced the term *interference* in linguistics to define the phenomenon. Such interference is usually understood as transfer of particular features specific of one language into another language speech production, as substitution of language units' particular characteristics by those of another language. That is, if a particular fragment of speech produced by a bilingual or

a multilingual individual “sounds strange, foreign” to a native speaker, such case is referred to as a language interference effect (interference occurrence).

Viewed as a kind of deviation from the language standards, interference is mostly considered to be a definitely negative phenomenon which should necessarily be overcome (see, for example works by Uriel Weinreich (1953) [2], Einar Haugen (1972) [7], V.Yu. Rosenzweig (1972) [6], etc.)

It should be noted that Western research schools, focusing upon the negative effect of interference on particular interpretation or speech product, terminologically define the phenomenon differently: *transfer* (Heine and Kuteva) [8], *convergence* (Hinskens, Auer, and Kerswill) [9], *cross-linguistic influence* (Jarvis and Pavlenko) [10], *code-copying* (Johanson) [11], to name just some of the terms. The use of various terms (*cross-linguistic influence*, *code-copying*, *convergence*, *interference*, *transfer*) in describing one and the same phenomenon, naturally, leads to certain misunderstandings. As a result, researchers studying into the field of languages intercourse adhere to contradictory views upon the same phenomena.

However, the Prague School linguists speak also of a positive interference phenomenon that can help non-native speakers produce correct speech in a foreign language, that of a *positive transfer*. It is believed that correct language production is that which is in line with most native speakers' notions; cases of the *positive transfer* may be observed when the relevant units or structures of the languages in contact are similar. The more similarity is found in certain phenomena of the two languages and the more language users are aware of the respective similarity, the more positive transfer will occur. The results of such positive transfer can have a great effect, though they are, largely, unnoticed.

The very term *interference* was borrowed from physics, where interference is treated as either positive or negative. Taking this fact into account, Prof. Alimov introduced the terms *positive* and *negative interference* as rather more logical than those of *positive* and *negative transfer* [1]. V. Alimov also defines linguistic interference as either negative or positive inter-influence of the languages in contact. According to these linguists' position, the negative interference is revealed via deviations from the accepted norm in one language under the influence of the other language. The positive interference, on the contrary, is traced as cases of acquisition, internal encoding and amplification of skills in one language under the influence of the other [1, p. 35]. We support this suggestion and are going to follow this logical paradigm in the current research.

The aim of the article is twofold: guided by the overall definition of *language (linguistic) interference*, to work out a definition for the term *syntactic interference*, differentiating between its positive and negative varieties; to determine particular ways of identifying cases of *negative vs positive syntactic interference*.

The theoretical conclusions offered are based upon the results of an all-round analysis of the positive and negative interference occurrences observed during consecutive interpreting events. Within this article the theoretical items are illustrated by examples of syntactic interference identified and analyzed by us in the 34-minute video of a joint press-conference given by President of Ukraine and Secretary of State (the USA) in Kiev on 2 July 2010 involving consecutive interpreting from / into Ukrainian / English [12;13].

The presentation of the main research material. Viewed from various stylistic, cultural and other aspects linguistic interference is commonly researched at different language levels, such as phonetic/phonemic, lexical, and grammatical (mostly, morphological). Therefore, it is logical to differentiate between the *negative* and *positive interference* at every respective language level, rather than limit oneself to describing only negative effects of languages influence. It is practically important to highlight the positive, constructive effect of interference at all these levels.

Adhering to the idea of the positive interference at the level of lexis, Prof. Alimov has compiled a glossary [1, p. 195] of English and Russian lexemes whose form (sound and written sign) and contents (meaning) are similar in both languages. These units are defined as lexical positive *interferents* (the term itself being coined by Prof. Alimov). Most of the commonly used positive interferents are borrowings that have become internationalisms, e.g.: *contingent* – *контингент*, *brigade* – *бригада*, *drone* – *дрон*, etc. As active interpreters working between English, Russian and Ukrainian languages, we can confirm that using this glossary helps reduce potential discrepancies in any interpretation product, thus, contributing to the overall quality of our everyday work. Many colleagues of ours make use of this phenomenon either consciously or subconsciously – employing their linguistic intuition. Since intuition always leaves some space to hesitation and uncertainty, purposeful learning and conscious use of such glossary items seems to be much more effective contribution to the interpretation quality.

The same positive effect should, supposedly, be reached due to conscious use of positive interference on the level of syntax. The level of a sentence structure is most important in organizing words into a logical unity called a thought. Syntax, as a part of a language grammar, studies and sets the rules according to which words and word collocations are linked together and joined to make a simple or a complex sentence. Therefore, interference at the level of syntactic organization of a sentence can be defined as *syntactic interference*, which, theoretically, may produce either a negative or a positive effect on a target language (TL) speech production.

There can hardly be found any specification in theoretic sources of how to recognize and identify a particular case of language interference. Analysis of examples provided, though, suggests that the very first marker of such influence is that of a visible similarity between the forms in the respective source (SL) and target (TL) languages: letters / phonemes composition

within a word; words / sentence elements linear arrangement within a word collocation or a sentence or its part; etc.

Therefore, we take it that identification of any type of interference should be based upon such visible formal similarity. Thus, instances of dissimilarity of forms in the source and target texts fragments fall out of the research focus.

Analysis of the consecutive interpreting (English / Ukrainian) event under study (a 34-minute video of a joint press-conference given by President of Ukraine and Secretary of State (the USA) in Kiev on 2 July 2010) [12; 13] was organized in several stages. First, a detailed transcript of the respective speech fragments (those of political leaders', their interpreters', journalists' questions) was made in such a way as to facilitate identification of every peculiarity in their pronunciation, intonation, pauses, etc. Then, the number of fragments interpreted from English into Ukrainian and from Ukrainian into English was counted; timing of each fragment in the SL and TL was measured. Next, every sentence and its syntactically defined fragments in the source language messages are analyzed to reveal their syntactic structure. Then, in the target text, to each of such source text fragments found are their counterparts and compared are the respective syntactic organizations. This is done in order to see if there is any structural coincidence in the respective fragments.

Thus, the visible similarity of any particular sentence fragment in the target language interpretation product to a respective form in the source language text shall be treated in this research as an occurrence of *syntactic interference*.

Then, if a coinciding syntactic structure does not violate the TL standards and contributes to the adequate message conveyance, the fragment is defined as an instance of *positive syntactic interference*. Instances of the *positive syntactic interference*, then, are those cases when the respective visible similarity of syntactic form is characteristic of both source and target languages. For example:

We discussed ways that Ukraine and the United States can deepen and expand our strategic partnership, moving forward with the work of the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Commission that I co-chair along with the foreign minister. → *Ми обговорили, як Україна та Сполучені Штати можуть поглибити і поширити наше стратегічне партнерство і як ми можемо продовжувати роботу американо-української комісії із стратегічного партнерства, яку я очолюю разом із міністром закордонних справ Грищенко.*

Ukraine is an independent nation, and we hope Ukraine will have good relations with its neighbors → *Україна є незалежною державою, і ми маємо надію, що Україна буде мати добрі стосунки із своїми сусідами.*

The respective bold typed fragments in the source and target texts are similar as to their syntactic form, which is in full accordance with the norms and common usage of both languages.

On the contrary, if a coinciding syntactic structure – the outcome target language form – is characteristic of the source language but is violating the norms of the target language or is unnatural to it and / or alters the SL message, the fragment is defined as an instance of *negative syntactic interference*.

For example: *The president and I had a very productive meeting.* → *Президент і я мали дуже корисну зустріч, продуктивну зустріч.*

The case is considered to be that of negative syntactic interference since the collocation of the type *The President and I* is

quite common of English while «Президент і я» sounds strange and unnatural in Ukrainian instead of a typically Ukrainian «Ми з паном Президентом». The latter of the phrases in Ukrainian indicates that both persons were participating in one and the same event, while the former one («Президент і я») may also be interpreted as the two persons separately were involved in some different events. To sound Ukrainian the whole of the sentence should have been transformed into an utterance like «Наша зустріч із паном Президентом була дуже (корисною і) продуктивною».

Syntactic negative interference was mostly revealed in copying sentence or phrase constructions that are typical of the English language but unusual for and uncharacteristic of the Ukrainian discourse. Negative interference has been traced in various aspects, the most vivid of which include breach of the following:

word-collocation rules / natural common usage, e.g.: *We do not believe in the concept of "spheres of influence". We believe that it is up to Ukrainians to chart your own course towards your own future.* → *Ми не вважаємо, що концепція сфер впливу є правильною концепцією, але ми переконані, що українці самі мусять простеляти свій шлях;*

sequence of syntactic elements within a simple sentence, e.g.: *As Ukraine moves forward, the country will face questions about its place in the region and the world.* → *Тоді, коли Україна просувається вперед, ви будете стояти перед питанням щодо Вашого місця у регіоні та світі;*

sequence of clauses within a complex sentence, e.g.: *Вашингтонський саміт, який відбувся навесні цього року за ініціативи Президента Обами, для України мав велике значення, перш за все з точки зору послідовності своїх дій щодо політики, безпекової політики, яка стосується ядерної безпеки.* → *The Washington summit that took place in spring of this year on the initiative of President Obama was very important for Ukraine, primarily in terms of its consistent policy in the area of national and international security and, in particular, nuclear security;*

in a way similar to the source language syntax, use of elements which are atypical of the target language syntactic structure: e.g. frequent use of possessive pronouns in Ukrainian (*Let me begin by thanking the President for his hospitality and I want to extend on behalf of President Obama and myself congratulations on your upcoming both birthday.* → *По-перше, я хочу подякувати Президенту Януковичу за його гостинність в його державі і від імені президента Обами і від моего імені я хочу привітати Вас із Вашим днем народження, що наближається).*

Negative interference at the sentence level can result in a drastic breach of the TL sentence logical structure and thus alter its message, which, in its turn, may lead to the failure in message conveyance and communication in general (for a more detailed analysis of negative syntactic interference see [4]).

Positive syntactic interference, on the contrary, can appreciably improve the quality of the interpretation product and increase the message delivery efficiency. Hypothetically, positive interference at the syntax level may appear as a particular outcome of universal similarities underlying the models of sentence and word collocations structure as well as syntactic operations and rules similarly applied in the compared languages.

According to the cognitive-semantic syntax theory (Prof. E. Obraztsova) [5], both syntactic structure and semantics of a sim-

ple (kernel) sentence constitute a cognitively induced dialectic unity. This stance is tentatively argued to be a language universal and has been proved for English, Russian and Ukrainian by a complex analysis of over 30 000 000 examples selected consecutively from modern fiction (10 000 000 examples for each of the languages).

The conclusion is based upon the fact that the inventories of both the structural and semantic models (the latter are viewed as a complex of proposition and semantic roles models) were found similar within simple sentences in the compared languages. There has been revealed an evident correlation between particular semantic and structural models, the complex of which is correlated to the linguistically acknowledged text composition types (description, narration, and reasoning). It suggests that sentences and texts are composed according to the same rules.

The scholar has showed that the inventory of obligatory sentence elements and their linear arrangement within the simple (kernel) sentence clearly depend upon the situation (process) type and specifically reflect the sequence and algorithms of how the human mind sensually perceives and logically interprets typical fragments of the environment.

From here it follows that the universal character of cognition algorithms may give way to universal sentence structural features in languages. Therefore, if we can identify similar sentence structures (syntactic elements inventory and their linear arrangement) for particular languages (Ukrainian and English, in this case) we will be able to compile a list of constructions as *positive syntactic interferents* which can be recommended for starters and professional interpreters to apply in their work.

Conclusions. Language interference in the interpretation process is a particular factor influencing the outcome quality of the target text. *Syntactic interference* is defined as interference at the level of syntactic organization of a sentence or text. Identification of any type (either *negative* or *positive*) of syntactic interference should be based upon a visible formal similarity of the respective fragments in the source and the target texts.

If a coinciding syntactic structure is characteristic of the source language but is violating the norms of the target language or is unnatural to it and / or alters the source language message the case is considered to be that of *negative syntactic interference*. The more common instances of *negative syntactic interference* have been traced in use of elements that are atypical of the target language syntactic structure, in breach of the word-collocation rules and/or natural common usage, in violation of syntactic elements sequence within a simple sentence, as well as sequence of clauses within a complex sentence.

Negative interference at the sentence level through violation of the sentence logical structure can result in a drastic alteration of the source message, thus failing in message conveyance and communication in general; while *positive syntactic interference* can appreciably improve the quality of the interpretation product and increase the message delivery efficiency.

Instances of the *positive syntactic interference* are those cases when the respective visible similarity of syntactic form is characteristic of both source and target languages. Hypothetically, positive interference at the syntax level appears as a particular outcome of universal similarities underlying the sentence and word collocations structural models as well as syntactic operations and rules similarly applied in the compared languages. The named similarity is hypothetically understood to result from the

universal character of cognition algorithms predetermining the universal semantic and structural features of sentence composition in languages.

The skill of simultaneously using positive interference and avoiding negative interference may improve the quality of the consecutive conference and media interpreting considerably.

The researchers are planning to look into the source of the positive interference phenomenon regarding its origin and see if it is based on the universal laws of the language systems resulting from the universal laws of human cognition process.

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Образцова Е. М., Кузнецова А. В. Синтаксична інтерференція у послідовному перекладі

Стаття досліджує явище мовної інтерференції, приклади якої виявлено у послідовному перекладі. Розрізнено інтерференцію негативну та позитивну (трансференцію) на всіх мовних рівнях, особливу увагу приділено рівню синтаксичної будови висловлення. Дано визначення синтаксичної інтерференції; запропоновано та проілюстровано принцип та процедуру ідентифікації випадків позитивної та негативної синтаксичної інтерференції.

Ключові слова: негативна синтаксична інтерференція, позитивна синтаксична інтерференція (трансференція), послідовний переклад.

Образцова Е. М., Кузнецова А. В. Синтаксическая интерференция в последовательном переводе

Статья рассматривает языковую интерференцию, случаи которой выявлены в последовательном переводе. Различается интерференция негативная и позитивная (трансференция) на всех языковых уровнях, особое внимание уделено уровню синтаксической организации высказывания. Дано определение синтаксической интерференции; предложены и проиллюстрированы принцип и процедура идентификации случаев отрицательной и положительной интерференции.

Ключевые слова: отрицательная синтаксическая интерференция, положительная синтаксическая интерференция (трансференция), последовательный перевод.