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NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SIMILARITY – A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Summary. The subject of this work is presentation and contrastive analysis of the negative aspects of similarity. Moreover, for the purpose of this study special emphasis will be given to the discussion of false friendsas an important aspect of negative similarity. Nowadays, people are less aware of the quality of language that they use and the authors of this paper want to explore the reasons for this situation. The authors' interest lies also in the role of language similarities regarding foreign language learning.

Key words: similarity, negative aspects, false friends, linguistic analysis, foreign language learning.

Stating the problem. Similarity and difference occur in every aspect of life, in every little thing that exists in the universe. These two concepts stand in the opposition because of their nature. Both, similarity and difference may bring advantages and obstacles. When there is a similarity one may be sure that difference also will appear. Since the beginning human beings have tried to simplify their lives because it is natural for a person to see connections between things and use them, for example, to communicate with each other and to establish social connections. Similarity and difference are tools that may sometimes be used in an improper way.

The main focus of our interest is the role of language similarities in foreign language learning as to understand the disadvantages of using them through the presentation and contrastive analysis of the negative aspects of similarity.

The language is declared to be the most important notion for discussion based on the variety of language examples to present a better perspective of the value and disvalue of similarity, as well as the value of difference. The analysis will be based on comparison of sentences and words that may cause problems for foreign language learners where examples will try to provide answers why speakers should make errors while using a second language. Moreover, for the purpose of this study special emphasis will be given to the discussion of false friends, one of the critical issues regarding the negative and positive aspects of similarity.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. On hearing the word *similarity* one thinks that it is a state of being like something or somebody which is a proper way of thinking, as Oxford Wordpower Dictionary explains *in similar way* and *the quality of being similar* [1]. Therefore, similarity occurs everywhere, not only words are similar but also people, for example, in their appearance, behaviour and the way of thinking, nature, and, what is more, the whole universe has at least one similar feature, one thing that two pieces share in common. However, even if there are twins that are perfectly similar in their looks, one must remember that they have their own personalities or when one observes the snowflakes may say that they are similar, which is not really true be-cause scientists proved that there are no two identical snowflakes in the world. Everyone needs identity; something that only one person has and makes him or her special.

While discussing the notion of similarity it is worth observing that in linguistics there are many types of similarity, for instance: semantic similarity, phonetic similarity, grammatical similarity or lexical similarity [2].

Moreover, for the purpose of this study special emphasis is given to the notion of how similarity influences communication between people and what is more important how language learners use similarity. The most common example how the native language affects language learning is a transfer which is presented as follows: "Transfer is the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired" [3, p. 27].

K. Bardovi-Harlig and Rex A. Sprouse who are working in the field of applied linguistics underline that any two languages are similar in one way and different in another one. When the mother-tongue has a big impact on the target language causing some errors in the usage then we deal with negative transfer or interference [4]. Moreover, mechanisms that lead to negative transfer are related to different linguistic levels, such as language itself, psychology, information theory and relationship between language and culture [5].

There is much research today done in the field of pedagogical implications related to the notion of negative and positive transfer (H. Ringbom, S. Jarvis, A. Pavlenko, B. Van Patten, A. Vainnikka et al. Ringbom and Jarvisvia investigation of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic similarities value outlined the main question for pedagogy as to the necessity of successful strategies application for foreign language learning [6, p. 106–118].

Educational psychology is a new direction today for solving the problems of negative and positive transfer in the process of learning and teaching. H. Gehlbach, M. Brinkworth and A. King in the article "Creating birds of similar feathers: leveraging similarity to improve teacher-student relationships and academic achievements" wrote about the experiment via which they managed to improve teacher-student relations by leveraging actual similarities and their promotion further on [7, p. 343–352]. Psychological or linguo-psychological issues in terms of positive and negative opinion modelling and the influence of another's similarities and dissimilarities are investigated by professors C. Hilmert, J.Kulik and N. Christenfeld from the University of California taking into consideration such psychological and physiological categories as gender, age and behaviour [8, p. 440–452].

1.1. The value of similarity. According to Odlin there are two kinds of transfer, positive and negative (also called interference).

To complete the view on transfer it should be stressed that positive transfer has value due to its helping characteristic during language learning [3]. To underpin this statement H. Ringbom demonstrates that positive transfer is a good situation because language learners use the value of similarity between their mother tongue and a target language [6].

Let us focus our attention on transfer in addition to the positive aspect of similarity. As it was shown above, similar words are helpful for language learners because they facilitate acquisition of a target language.

People who are able to notice the similarity between two languages are much more successful in learning a foreign language. However, only the learners who are aware of it are prone to be under the influence of positive transfer because interference brings problems for the unwary speakers.

It is worth mentioning that not only transfer supports the good nature of similarity but also that the concept of metaphor, metonymy, and polysemy may be presented so as to emphasize the value of similarity.

Metaphors are needed because of their nature, for instance the definition of a metaphor presented in the dictionary is: "Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or expression normally used of one kind of object, etc. is extended to another" [9, p. 243].

1.2. The disvalue of similarity. It goes without saying that the universe deals with lots of similarities, for example, the human body contains 75% of water and most types of fishes and fruit also contain 75% of water. Thus, the question arises, if they contain the same amount of water, are people fishes and fruit or are fishes and fruit people? The answer is simple – no, they are not, so similarity here has no value. Accordingly, it may be reasonably assumed that even if objects or living creatures share some similar features, one cannot say that it is the same thing because it may contribute to the situation of *generalization* presented by Crystal as follows: "Generalization in second language learning occurs when the rules of the foreign language are applied too liberally" [10, p. 131].

Generalization discussed while speaking about foreign language learners leads to unpleasant situations because people sometimes overgeneralize everything. Crystal (1999) points out that when the second language learner notices that he or she needs to add -s/es ending so as to make the plural form of a word, he/she may overuse this pattern and does not obey the rule about exceptions, for instance, one may say *mouses* instead of *mice* because of generalization [10].

Another important feature, which characterizes the disvalue of similarity, is the issue of interference. Interference, as H. Ringbom claims, is also called negative transfer because of its harmful influence on language learners.

Negative transfer contributes to errors; it is, in relation to foreign language learners, a source of problems with ambiguity, false friends, mistranslation. Bilinguals and people who use more than two languages are exposed to the tricky nature of language [6].

To conclude the discussion, similarity has obstacles which are presented in the notions of generalization, polysemy and interference. Mostly, the negative aspects of similarity contribute to the situations when speakers are confused by the words which they use because similarities are judged to help people rather than cause such problems in communication.

1.3. The value of difference. Before making the employment of the value of difference among languages, let us consider the notion of the origin of languages. As Gascoigne (2001) notices: There are about 5 000 languages spoken in the world today (a third

of them in Africa), but scholars group them together into relatively few families – probably less than twenty. Languages are linked to each other by shared words or sounds or grammatical constructions. The theory is that the members of each linguistic group have descended from one language, a common ancestor.

The theory that all languages have one ancestor is also presented by Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams and it is called *the monogenic theory of language origin* explained further as: "The belief that all languages originated from a single source is found not only in the Tower of Babel story in Genesis, but also in a similar legend of the Toltecs, early inhabitants of Mexico, and in myths of other people as well" [11, p. 26].

This notion refers to the concept that is followed by people who believe in God, or gods and may be explained wider by the example of the Tower of Babel. According to the Book of Genesis, after the Great Flood people lived together in one city and spoke a single language. Once, they decided to build a great tower the top of which would reach the heavens. However the tower was not created for the worship of God but to emphasize the power of man. Then, Yahweh (the name for Jewish god) became angry that man tried to behave as him and decided to stop people. He came down and puzzled people's languages in the way that they could not communicate any longer. From the Christian point of view, that was the origin of language varieties.

Nevertheless, there are other explanations of the origin of language varieties presented by scientists and people who strictly follow the theory of human evolution. According to Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams [11], this theory also says that there was one language which was divided into separate languages that were in one language family. That happened because of migration of tribes and constant habitation in isolated areas where clans could not have contacted with each other. As a consequence, a language that once was shared by many tribes started to become independent.

Most people find it valuable that nothing is similar because diversity is good on its own. There is a reason why there are so many species of animals, plants and bacteria. If people looked the same, they would bear resemblance to clones. Nonetheless, even if people were identical, they would find something what would help them to distinguish themselves, for example, they would wear different clothes or would change their hair style because homogeneity steals identity. Moreover, every person wants to be different, to feel special, for example, people belong to the groups where they may feel independence and alterity. In addition, within a group members like to use slang as not to be understood by other people.

As indicated earlier, difference is valuable because similarity does not take into account every single person's demands. Hence, not everything is fine for everyone, for example, one may say that drinking cow's milk is good for health whereas there are people who are allergic to it.

The conclusion is that the difference has always driven humans' attention. For many something that is different is better, more exotic and exciting, it may be compared to the feeling of exploring a wild undiscovered land. In addition, the diversity of words contributes to the situation when words are not overused.

Now let us name the negative aspects of similarity. They are ambiguity, false friends and mistranslation. In our investigation we are going to discuss false friends' aspect in more detail as it causes many difficulties in communication.

The notion of false friends causes many inter-language difficulties in communication. False friends are words that in two or more

languages have the same spelling or pronunciation but at the same time sometimes totally different meanings. It is explained in the dictionaries as follows: "False friend is a word in one language which sounds like one in another and may be taken by mistake as having the same meaning" [9, p. 136].

In *An English – Polish Dictionary of False Friends* by Szpila this term is presented at the same level with other aspects in linguistics: "The term *false friends* in linguistics, the theory of translation studies, foreign language teaching and comparative lexicography refers to words of at least two languages, which are graphically and/or phonetically similar but which are semantically incompatible" [12].

This explanation shows that false friends are unwelcomed during acquiring a new language and it is a common problem which must be dealt with teachers of foreign languages, translators and second language learners.

According to Szpila there are different types of false friends which occur in language, for instance, grammatical, phonological or lexical false friends. Here we will analyse lexical false friends which may lead to misunderstanding and situations when a speaker is ashamed because of using the wrong translation of a word. Moreover, unwary translators, but not only, are exposed to the use of incorrect equivalents of a word. Many false friends are easy to recognize their double meanings, however due to passing of the time some words have changed their meaning [12].

Moreover, the concept of borrowing can be shown here as an example of such a situation when a word changed its meaning because of passing of the time. Quoting from Wikipedia, borrowings or loanwords are words that were adopted by the speakers of one language from a different one, called the source language which often has authority. The process of borrowing is complex, it is a result of a cultural contact between two languages communities and it may be presented as some kind of a path. Firstly, a word is put in the foreign language and it is used even by people who are not familiar with a new word. Secondly, the new word is used more commonly and starts to be a part of a foreign language. In English there are many examples of loanwords, for instance, from Latin: *anchor, wall*, from Scandinavian: *anger, egg*, from French: *court, crime*, or from Japanese: *geisha, sushi* [13].

Accordingly, a borrowing may become a false friend when the meaning changes within a new language, when speakers add a new meaning or understand loanword wrongly. According to Baker, "Once a borrowing or expression is borrowed into a language, we cannot predict or control its development or the additional meanings it might or might not take on. Some false friends are easy to spot because the difference in their meanings is so great that only a very inexperienced translator is likely to be unaware of it" [14, p. 25].

It is important to present an example of false friends, for instance, Baker shows that the English word *feminist* which is *a person who believes in and supports the aims of feminism* is understood differently in Japan because "*feminist* in Japanese is usually used to describe a man who is excessively soft with women" [14, p. 31]. Moreover, the Ukrainian word *baton* which means "a chocolate bar or a special kind of bread" is often confused with English *baton* which is "a short thin stick used by the conductor of an orchestra." Also the word *conductor* in Ukrainian is misunderstood because Ukrainian learners confuse "a person who collects the fares on a bus" with "a person who stands in front of an orchestra and directs the musicians." Thus, the word *conductor* has two meanings in English. Ukrainian speakers have only the first

meaning of it in their lexicon. People may spot the existence of deceptive words especially when they want to communicate with people whose mother tongue belongs to the same language families, for example, Crystal presents that Slavonic languages include Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian, Bosnian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Czech [10]. There are also stories about the use of false friends which occurred when the two cultures met together. Accordingly, a group of Polish scouts who wanted to travel to Czech for a winter holiday. They booked the rooms in Czech youth hostel but they also announced that they did not need the bedclothes, in Polish *pościel*, because they had their own sleeping bags. The Czech organizer was a little bit surprised but agreed on that. When the Polish scouts arrived, they were shocked because in the rooms of the young hostel were no beds. The reason for that was that the Czech organizer had taken the beds away because in Czech *postel* means a bed and the proper equivalent for Polish bedclothes in Czech is *povleceni.* When the misunderstanding was explained Czech put the beds in but they had a lot of work to do because there were 150 Polish scouts. Language is a way of communication, human beings always want to contact with other nations and cultures. There are many reasons for existence the failures in people's international conversations caused by the use of false friends. Speakers and the language learners may use deceptive words for Alot of reasons, however, the most obvious one is that that kind of words seem to be familiar with speaker's mother tongue words. Rudolf notices that not only the beginning speakers of foreign language use false fiends but also experienced translators and human beings who have lived abroad for many years. People use this kind of words unconsciously, they trust that the word which they have chosen for an equivalent in translation is the proper one, they believe that they are right, and as a result, because of their wrong choice they are exposed to many unpleasant situations. Like Rudolf claims the use of false friends leads to mistakes, misunderstandings and even to public embarrassments [15]. Speakers use false friends because they do not know that this equivalent is bad, they have good intentions but insufficient knowledge of a foreign language. They choose this equivalent because of their wrong understanding of similarity. Learning a second language or acquiring an additional one, needs a lot of effort and time, and may create obstacles. Deceptive words cause problems which lead to unwanted situations, especially in works, schools and during abroad travels.

Conclusion. To review summarily, the pivotal topic of concern was the role of the similarity and difference in everyday life, the strongest emphasis was given to the area of language.

Similarity is useful and helps in a variety of situations, such as faster foreign language learning when languages belong to the same language family and thus share common features. For example, grammar and sentence patterns or words that have one ancestor which may be found while studying its etymology – the history of words. Nonetheless, similarity may bring troubles which have their source in wrong understanding of similarity. The disvalue of similarity refers to the disvalue of human conceptions of similarities among languages. Disvalue of similarity may be also presented by the example of interference; there was a reason why it is called *negative transfer* as it is negative influence of source language on the target language and the situations when words are mixed by foreign language learners because of imperfect acquisition that should be avoided.

Finally, the analysis shows the value of difference which is supported by the examples of the concepts of language varieties origin discussed from different points of view.

Though similarity has its certain value it is not always desirable in the process of foreign language learning because of its misleading characteristic. For example, false friends may force a foreign language speaker to use this kind of words in a way which misleads a person and causes problems in communication. The reason for that is that false friends are words which seem to be similar in two or more languages but convey sometimes totally different meanings. Thus, false friends are an example of a negative aspect of similarity.

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Байбакова І. М., Драпалюк Г. С. Негативні аспекти ідентичності – лінгвістичний аналіз

Анотація. Темою цієї роботи є презентація і контрастивний аналіз негативних аспектів ідентичності. Акцент у цьому дослідженні робиться на аналізі поняття «фальшивих друзів» як важливого негативного аспекту ідентичності. Сьогодні люди не приділяють належної уваги якості мови, яку вони використовують, і автори намагаються проаналізувати причини цієї ситуації, а також визначити роль лінгвістичних аспектів ідентичності у контексті вивчення іноземних мов.

Ключові слова: ідентичність, негативні аспекти, фальшиві друзі, лінгвістичний аналіз, вивчення іноземної мови.

Байбакова И. М., Драпалюк Г. С. Отрицательные аспекты идентичности – лингвистический анализ

Аннотация. Темой этой работы является презентация и контрастивный анализ отрицательных аспектов идентичности. В этом исследовании акцент делается на анализе понятия «ложных друзей» как важного отрицательного аспекта идентичности. Сегодня люди не уделяют должного внимания качеству используемого языка, и авторы статьи стараются проанализировать причины этой ситуации, а также определить роль лингвистических аспектов идентичности в контексте изучения иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: идентичность, отрицательные аспекты, ложные друзья, лингвистический анализ, изучение иностранного языка.