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# PRONUNCIATION PERILS: OVERCOMING PHONETIC INTERFERENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Summary.** *Interference in foreign language acquisition involves unintended transfer of linguistic elements, impacting tone, accentuation, word usage, order, and vocabulary. It challenges bilinguals striving for accuracy, underscoring the complexity of bilingual communication and the need for mitigation strategies. Phonetic and phonological anomalies indicate speech difficulties. Age and phonological interference affect language acquisition, especially post-primary language acquisition. Phonetic interference disrupts auditory-language interaction, impacting speech and perception. Second-language vocabulary acquisition depends on linguistic distance. Intonation, rhythm, and phoneme articulation are also affected. Objective instrumental and auditory examinations are key in studying phonetic interference in bilingual speech.*

**Keywords:** *Interference, bilingualism, transfer, phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, lexicon, pronunciation*

While the definition of interference may differ among researchers and academic institutions [5; 12], in the context of learning foreign languages, it generally refers to the impact of one or more languages on an individual's speech when they use multiple languages [12]. However, some scholars in the field of foreign language studies prefer not to use this term, arguing that it carries negative implications, and instead propose the term "transfer." In recent times, both terms are frequently employed interchangeably [11, 12].

Interference, a phenomenon commonly observed in bilingual individuals, involves the unconscious transfer of linguistic elements from one language, typically the native language, into the language they are currently speaking. This process results in a collision between two linguistic systems, leading to various



manifestations perceived by the listener as deviations from the norms of the target language. These deviations may include alterations in intonation, accentuation, incorrect usage of word endings or prefixes, unusual word order, or the use of obscure lexical choices or metaphors.

Interference is not limited to a specific level of language; rather, it can permeate across multiple linguistic domains. At the phonetic level, it may result in subtle differences in pronunciation or accent that betray the speaker's linguistic background. Phonological interference may manifest as the application of native language phonological rules to the target language, leading to pronunciation errors or difficulties in distinguishing between sounds.

Morphological interference involves the inappropriate application of morphological rules from one language to another, resulting in grammatical errors or non-standard word formations. Semantic interference occurs when speakers inadvertently transfer meanings or interpretations from their native language to the target language, leading to misunderstandings or ambiguous communication.

Syntactic interference involves deviations from the standard word order or sentence structure of the target language, influenced by the patterns of the native language. Lexical interference occurs when speakers use words or expressions from their native language that do not have direct equivalents in the target language, resulting in lexical gaps or awkward phrasing.

Overall, interference affects various levels of language processing and can pose challenges for bilingual individuals striving for linguistic accuracy and proficiency in their second language. It underscores the complex interplay between languages in bilingual communication and highlights the need for awareness and strategies to mitigate its effects. An illustration can be an affirmative sentence in the Present Simple in the third person singular: *He play tennis every Sunday* (instead of *He plays*). Cross-linguistic interference is a similar transfer of the language behavior program of one's native language to a foreign one. As an example, we can cite the classical mistake of bilinguals-beginners – omitting forms of the verb *to be* in sentences like *I am a teacher*, saying "*I – a teacher*", since in Ukrainian the verb *is* omitted.

The attention of linguists, methodologists and teachers-practitioners, as a rule, is focused on the negative result of interference, its prediction, research and prevention, because it creates known obstacles during communication in the language of bilinguals.

Speaking a foreign language, no matter how high the level of mastery of it, is usually not phonetically strictly sustained in accordance with the requirements of the system and norms of the given language. Certain deviations in pronunciation due to interference are generally predictable and usually accompany the learning of any foreign language. In the latter case, it is customary to talk about phonetic negative interference. In other words, when there are violations of the sound system of the non-native language in the bilingual language, they are usually classified as the result of phonological or phonetic interference.

Among linguists-teachers of foreign languages, there is a fairly widespread misconception that phonetic errors, unlike phonological ones, are unimportant from the point of view of recognizing semantics and are therefore acceptable in the



speech of foreign language students. However, they make it possible to localize the manifestation of a foreign accent, for the analysis of which a systematic approach is necessary [7].

Moreover, both phonological and phonetic deviations in speech in a non-native language, incorrectly formed during the acquisition of the second language system, indicate insufficient formation of speech skills for performing articulatory movements [5].

There are several approaches to the problem of marking acquired foreign languages. According to the so-called "linear model" [4], the first learned language is called L1, the second learned - L2, and the third - L3: in other words, the learned languages are numbered in the order of acquisition. Such a model has both advantages and disadvantages, since several completely different trends can be observed here, among which the interference of sound characteristics, since L2 and L3 as the first and second non-native languages in different life situations can "compete" and "overlap" each other, creating a lot of problems. In addition, according to the researchers, the linear model does not take into account the interference of languages learned at the same time, languages learned intermittently, and languages acquired almost unintentionally due to their proximity.

There is another model that is more suitable for classifying the levels of acquisition of several foreign languages. It is based on the hypothesis of the so-called "critical period" or "CP model". According to her, the level of acquisition of a non-native language is determined depending on the age at which a person learned it, namely, whether it was acquired before or after puberty. Languages acquired before puberty should be called L1, while languages learned after puberty are called L2. Following the first, "linear" model, it is possible to determine the order (and circumstances) of language acquisition. On the other hand, in the "CP model", the order of language acquisition is not important in determining L1/L2, since only the age at which the foreign language was acquired is important.

To analyze the methodology of successful language acquisition, in particular, those learned after learning the first L2, one should focus on the next learned languages, because they have a special status thanks to the knowledge, experience and strategies already obtained after learning the first L2. Therefore, in its definition, L1 (acquired before puberty), L2 (acquired after puberty) and L3, which is defined as a non-native language used or acquired in a situation where a person already has knowledge of one or more L2, should be distinguished (ibid).

Interesting, in our opinion, are the observations that when learning a foreign language after CP ("critical period"), the phonological level of acquisition is usually the first to be lost, compared to syntax or semantics. In general, when learning the phonetics of the L2 language, the age of study is considered one of the most significant factors [12].

Phonetic interference is manifested both in auditory perception and in the speech process. In turn, this means that it affects the perceptual and articulatory bases, manifesting itself in a violation of the interaction of auditory-language skills in speaking a second foreign language.

In addition, the study of interference between the two L2s indicates that linguistic typological distance plays an even more important role in the acquisition of



L3 vocabulary, rather than the chronological order of acquisition. Thus, in several phonological studies, [5, 7] the regularities and influential coefficients of assimilation of sounds of several M2 were analyzed. It was found that one foreign language L2 (learned earlier) affects the learned other foreign language L2 (learned later) as follows: there is a more significant influence of English (L1) than French (L2), pronunciation when learning German (L3). Moreover, these indicators were dominant in all experimental groups [9]. On the other hand, the study [Wrembel (2009)] analyzed the learning of English as a third language by Polish students with German as a second language. It was found that the pronunciation of L3 is influenced by L2, but not by L1. Although there are not enough analytical studies, the first conclusions indicate the influence of "typological distance" between the languages being studied: namely, if German and English are the languages of the same group, then they are learned more easily, and vice versa, if Polish and German or English and French are typologically more distant, their acquisition is more problematic.

Phonological interference is also manifested in the intonation pattern of the language, its rhythm and articulation of phonemes. It is noticeable, for example, in the accentuation of the accent (*deve'lopement* instead of *dev'-elopement*), change in the type of assimilation (progressive in English, regressive in French), etc. Incorrect articulation together with intonation create a foreign accent that is difficult to overcome.

The articulation of native or first foreign phonemes instead of L2 phonemes is a common phonetic interference of the substitution type, such as, for example, the pronunciation of the palatalized Ukrainian phoneme [l'] as analogous to a French sound. Modification phonetic interference occurs due to the mixing of phonemic features, which leads to the formation of specific allophones, which can be used to say with great confidence what previous foreign language was learned, as well as in what sequence foreign languages were learned by a specific person. Such an allophone is, for example, the pronunciation of French [t] with English aspiration and apical-alveolar articulation.

A linguistic description of phonetic interference, as a rule, begins with a prediction of its phenomena in the speech of speakers of two languages. In this sense, the comparative analysis of sound contacting systems allows to predict possible violations of the secondary sound system with a greater or lesser degree of accuracy. Comparative analysis is still the best method for describing the behavior of bilinguals. Nevertheless, its meaning should not be absolutized, since the real picture of phonetic disorders in the language of bilinguals may differ significantly from the predicted one. Benchmarking data helps to reveal and explain the cause of a particular distortion. "From the standpoint of modernity, it is necessary to recognize that the study of phonetic interference will be most effective if the procedure of "establishing similarities and differences" proposed by E. Haugen is supplemented by an objective instrumental analysis of the language of bilinguals and an auditory analysis of the perception of the peculiarities of their speech by native speakers of this language" [7].

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To overcome problems with interference at the level of pronouncing at the initial stage of education, special phonetic exercises should be developed to overcome the negative impact of the phonetics of the first foreign language on a new, sometimes unfamiliar pronunciation. This is due to the fact that the phonetic skills of the first foreign language usually prevail and dominate the phonetics of the bilingual, if they were learned before "CP", and English was either not studied at all or at an insufficient level. Such exercises direct the student to the prevention of possible difficulties. Comparative phonetic exercises that demonstrate common and distinctive features with the articulation of the first foreign language and distinctive features of articulation should be developed in detail in order to quickly overcome negative interference.

To achieve good results in the corrective and installation course of English pronunciation, it is necessary during the initial period to devote the entire study time to the careful study of problematic combinations of sounds, individual words, syntagms, and later sentences for the transition to the so-called phonetic reading. The phonetic teacher, putting the sounds of pronunciation, working with each of the students separately, offering the rest of the group to repeat the phonetic exercises independently, realizes the importance of such classes. Explanations of articulation rules at this stage are of an approximate nature and must necessarily be accompanied by a demonstration of sound standards both from a live voice and from a voice in an audio recording. The next stage is the intensive training of students in pronunciation, which includes both active listening to the sample and conscious imitation. When working on pronunciation, the use of authentic audio materials is mandatory.

Students should be required to make audio recordings of their own presentations of reading or fragments learned by heart. It is very useful to listen to these audio recordings, followed by a comparative analysis with the original audio text, also directly in classes. The idea of relying on authentic audio materials for repetition and study, rather than simple educational texts without accompanying audio files is important at this stage.

As for the "conversational" mode of the first practical classes, it is to be noted that during the first 10-12 lessons, students should be forbidden to speak English until the stage of final mastery of corrected pronunciation. At the end of the pronunciation correction course, students' skills must be evaluated in the form of an oral test or module. Learning grammar and conversational topics in such a case is postponed, since pronunciation correction must be done in the first year, and the main requirements for a first-year student in the first semester, in addition to grammar and conversational topics, should be correct pronunciation and study of the basic elements of English phonetics.



Work on pronunciation continues in the practical classes later on, which should include more serious, complicated work on pronunciation. Reliance on audio materials remains mandatory. Students should be taught to process emotions and emotional reactions prosodically. The teacher selects sketches, short plays for their next production on the student stage. Such an approach, of course, can only be successful if the previous correction of pronunciation is mandatory in the first semester.

Teaching grammar and speaking practice in this case should be postponed till after the teaching/correction of phonetics, since it must be done in the first year, and the main requirements for a first-year student in the first semester, in addition to grammar and speaking skills, should be correct pronunciation skills and basic elements of English phonetics.

Work on pronunciation is to continue further, in the next practical classes, which should include more serious, complicated work on pronunciation. Reliance on audio materials remains mandatory. Students should be taught to process emotions and emotional reactions prosodically. The teacher selects sketches, short plays for their next production on the student stage. Such an approach, of course, can only be successful if the previous correction of pronunciation is mandatory in the first semester.

To sum up we should mention that interference typically occurs in bilingual individuals who, often unconsciously, transfer elements of one language (typically their native language) into the language they are currently using. This results in a collision between two language systems, which may be perceived by the listener as unusual due to intonation, accent, incorrect word endings or prefixes, unusual word order, or unclear lexical choices or metaphors. Consequently, interference can manifest across various levels of language, including phonetic, phonological, morphological, semantic, syntactic, and lexical aspects.

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