

Interference and transfer on the phonological level in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Ukrainian students

Abstract: The article is devoted to teaching English as a foreign language to Ukrainian students. The publication focuses on the interaction between the languages, namely interference and transfer on the phonological level.

Keywords: Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), phonological level, interaction, interference, transfer, articulation basis, pronunciation habits.

Teaching a foreign language at the Linguistic University aims at the formation of the students' linguistic competence close to that of the native speakers [1]. Many scientists (I. L. Bim, S. Yu. Nikolayeva, L.V. Shcherba, etc.) note that one of the main difficulties in learning a new language is the interference of the native language and/or previously learned foreign languages.

In the methodological literature the complex process of interference is classified as direct and indirect, perceptual and productive, as well as negative and positive (the latter is considered as a "positive transfer") [2; 3].

The term "interference" is understood by the majority of authors as an unwanted and wrong mix of languages in the process of learning and communication, while the term "transfer" (or "positive transfer") means the coincidence of the norms of both languages. In this article, the term "interference" is used with the sign "minus", and the term "transfer" – with the sign "plus". To identify a combination of these two phenomena, the term "interaction between the languages" is used.

Interference is manifested at all levels of the phonological system of the languages. Therefore, the student should master the articulation of sounds and syllables, as well as the word stress and intonation. To do it, the student should first learn the differences between the articulation bases of the languages, that is "the general tendencies the native speakers have in the way they move and hold their lips and the tongue both in speech and in silence" [4].

The articulation basis of the English language is characterized by the following factors: the lips are "flat" (close to the teeth), spread (resemble a smile) and tense; the tip of the tongue is against the alveoli, not touching them; the middle and the back parts of the tongue are flat and low. The Ukrainian articulation basis is as follows: lips are slightly rounded and not very close to the teeth; the tip and the blade of the tongue rest on the teeth; the front and the middle part of the tongue are raised to the palate. The native articulation basis prevents a learner from mastering the English one: as a new starting position of the speech organs seems to him uncomfortable and unnatural. This results in interference, which is impossible to overcome without comparative analysis of the sounds of the English and Ukrainian languages.

The systems of English and Ukrainian vowels differ in many points.

1. The number of vowels is not the same in the two languages. There are 20 vowels in English: / i:/, /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ɑ:/, /ʌ /, /ɔ:/, /ɒ/, /u:/, /ʊ/, /ɜ:/, /ə/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/, and only 6 vowels in Ukrainian: /i/, /u/, /e/, /a/, /o/, /y/.

2. According to the stability of articulation and quality, English vowels are divided into monophthongs and diphthongs. All the Ukrainian vowels are monophthongs, there are no diphthongs in Ukrainian.

3. Besides the difference in quality, English vowels differ from Ukrainian in length. In the English language there are long and short vowels, while in Ukrainian long vowels do not exist.

4. The division of vowels into different groups according to the position of the tongue is not the same in the English and Ukrainian languages. In the English language there are front, back, and mixed vowels. In Ukrainian there are no mixed vowels. The English front and back vowel groups include a considerably greater number of vowels than those of the Ukrainian language.

5. The English and Ukrainian languages differ also in the articulation of vowels within the same group. Thus, the English front vowels /i:/, /ɪ/, /e/ are closer and more front than the corresponding Ukrainian /i/, /ɪ/, /e/. The English back vowels /ɔ:/, /ɒ/, /u:/ are more retracted than the Ukrainian back vowels /o/ and /y/.

6. The position of the lips is not the same in forming English and Ukrainian labialized vowels. In forming Ukrainian labialized sounds the lips are considerably protruded. The position of the lips is not the same in forming non-labialized vowels either. In pronouncing English non-labialized vowels the lips are "flat" (close to the teeth), while in pronouncing Ukrainian non-labialized vowels the lips move noticeably forward from the teeth.

Thus, in articulating English vowels Ukrainian students are apt to make the following mistakes:

- (1) they do not observe the quantitative character of the long vowels: *The sheep arrived at the port* (*The ship arrived at the port*);
- (2) do not observe the qualitative difference in the articulation of such vowels as /i: — ɪ/, /u: — ʊ/, /ɔ: — ɒ/;
- (3) replace the English vowels /i:, ɪ, ɔ:, ɒ, u:, ʊ, æ, ʌ/ by the Ukrainian vowels /i, и, o, y, e, a/;
- (4) pronounce /i:, ɪ, e, ei/ without the "flat position" of the lips;
- (5) soften consonants which precede front vowels /i:, ɪ, e, æ, ei/ as a result of which the latter become more narrow and the consonants are palatalized;
- (6) articulate /ɔ:, ɒ, u:, ʊ/ with the lips too much rounded and protruded;
- (7) make the sounds /æ, ɒ/ more narrow because they don't open the mouth properly, similarly to the Ukrainian /e, o/;
- (8) do not observe the positional length of vowels;
- (9) make both elements of the diphthongs equally distinct;
- (10) pronounce initial vowels with a glottal stop (?).

The systems of English and Ukrainian consonants differ in many points, too.

1. The number of consonants is not the same in the two languages. There are 24 vowels in English, and only 32 consonants in Ukrainian.

2. In Ukrainian there are short and long consonants: *жити* – *життя* /т/ - /тт/, etc. This feature of articulation does not exist in English.

3. In Ukrainian there are non-palatalized and palatalized consonants. There are pairs of consonants in Ukrainian which differ only in the degree of palatalization and yet different phonemes: *кiнь* – *кiн* /нʲ/ - /н/, *знати* – *зняти* /н/ - /нʲ/, etc. Palatalized consonants do not exist in English. Dark and clear variants of the English sonorant /л/ depend upon the position of the sound in the word. The English /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are slightly palatalized but there are no corresponding non-palatalized consonants.

4. English voiceless plosives /p/, /t/, /k/ are aspirated, while there are no aspirated consonants in Ukrainian.
5. The English glottal fricative /h/ is voiceless, while the Ukrainian glottal fricative /ɦ/ is voiced.
6. The Ukrainian group of forelingual consonants includes /ɥ/ and /ɟɜ/ which do not exist in English. In its turn the English group of forelingual consonants includes /θ/ and /ð/ which do not exist in Ukrainian.
7. The group of English backlingual consonants includes /k/, /g/, /ŋ/, while in Ukrainian /ŋ/ does not exist. At the same time there are two additional Ukrainian backlingual consonants /x/ and /ɣ/.
8. There is no correspondence to English bilabial sonorant /w/ in Ukrainian.
9. In pronouncing Ukrainian forelingual consonants the place of obstruction is generally nearer to the front upper teeth than in the corresponding English consonants. The Ukrainian /t/, /ɽ/, /c/, /z/, /ɦ/ are dental, while the English /t/, /d/, /s/, /z/, /n/ are alveolar; the Ukrainian /p/ is alveolar, while the English /t/ is post-alveolar.
10. The shape of the tongue in pronouncing English and Ukrainian forelingual consonants is different. English forelingual consonants are usually apical, while the Ukrainian ones are cacuminal.
11. The English voiced consonants /b, d, g, v, ð, z, ʒ, dʒ/ are not replaced by the corresponding voiceless sounds in word-final positions and before voiceless consonants, e.g. /'bɪg teɪbl/.

The most common mistakes that may result from the differences in the articulation bases of the English and Ukrainian languages are the following:

- (1) dorsal articulation of the English forelingual apical /t, d, s, z, n/;
- (2) the use of the Ukrainian alveolar rolled /p/ instead of the English post-alveolar constrictive /r/;
- (3) the use of the Ukrainian backlingual /x/ instead of the English glottal /h/;
- (4) mispronunciation of the English interdental /θ/ and /ð/: the use of /s, t/ for /θ/ and /z, d/ for /ð/: *think – sink*;
- (5) the use of the labio-dental /v/ instead of the bilabial /w/: *wery yell*;
- (6) the use of the forelingual /n/ instead of the backlingual velar /ŋ/: *thing /θɪŋ/*;
- (7) the use of the Ukrainian dark /ɥ, ɟ/ instead of the soft English /ʃ, ʒ/;
- (8) absence of aspiration in /p, t, k/ when they occur initially;
- (9) weak pronunciation of voiceless fortis /p, t, k, f, s, ʃ, ʒ/;
- (10) devoicing of voiced /b, d, g, v, ð, z, ʒ, dʒ/ in the terminal position: *said /seɪ/*.

Dynamic aspect of the articulation basis is manifested through the minimal unit of articulation – the syllable. The syllable is an utterance consisting of one or more syllabic sounds. In Ukrainian these are only vowels and in English these may also be sonorants /l/, /m/, /n/ if they occur in an unstressed final position preceded by a noise consonant: *little* /'lɪ-tl/, *blossom* /'blɒ-sm/, *garden* /'gɑ:-dn/. The commonest types of the syllable in English are VC and CVC: *Mum*. In Ukrainian more than half of all structural types constitute CV syllabic types: *ма-ма*. It is important to pay attention to the connection English consonants and vowels, which in the English language can be characterized as "not close", unlike the Ukrainian language where this connection is defined as "close". Compare: *no – ni*, etc [3, s].

The singling out of one or more syllables in a word is known as word stress. In English three degrees of word stress are usually distinguished: *primary* (stressed syllables), *secondary* (half-stressed syllables) and *weak* (unstressed syllables). A large group of polysyllabic words have both the primary and the secondary stresses: *conver'sation*. In Ukrainian there are only two degrees of word stress, *primary* (stressed syllables) and *weak* (unstressed syllables). That is why Ukrainian learners of English must be particularly careful not to omit secondary stress in English words since the interference of Ukrainian pronunciation habits is very strong in this case. Compare: *організація* — *organi'zation*.

As for intonation patterns of the English and Ukrainian languages, they are also very different. The intonation of English utterances is marked by greater intensity and stronger energy with which the stressed and the unstressed

syllables are pronounced. The intonation of Ukrainian is marked by almost four times longer duration of their syllables. Consequently, Ukrainian utterances of the same number of syllables take more time to be pronounced than the English utterances. That is why the Ukrainian speech is fluent and the English speech is slightly harsh. Compare: *'Once upon a time / there was a 'man / who had an 'old 'cat. // 'Жив собі ко'лись чоло'вік / і 'був у нього ста'рпий 'кіт. //* Though the total number of syllables is almost the same — 14 in English and 16 in Ukrainian, the duration of the Ukrainian utterance exceeds that in the English version. It is due to rhythmic organization of the intonation groups. The rhythmic structure of the intonation groups of the Ukrainian sentence does not display the regularity of the stressed and the unstressed syllables characteristic of the English version of the same sentence.

One more difference concerns the pitch range. The Ukrainian intonemes, no matter whether their nuclear tones are falling or rising, have a narrower pitch range than the English ones, and the concluding stressed or unstressed syllable is never pitched as low in Ukrainian as it is in English.

In English, General questions are usually pronounced with the Descending Stepping Scale up to the last syllable which, whether stressed or unstressed, has a rising nuclear tone: *'Is he at 'home now? 'Must I 'read the passage?* In Ukrainian this tone concludes on the last stressed syllable of the communicative unit only. The unstressed syllables, following the last stressed syllable, are pronounced with the falling tone: *Він сьогодні вдома? У сєреду ви прїїдете?* This is especially felt when the polite request *Will you give it to me, please?* uttered by the Ukrainian student with Rise-Fall sounds impolite and even a bit rude.

Thus, the comparative analysis of the articulation bases of the English and Ukrainian languages, as well as the analysis of typical errors of Ukrainian students, shows that in the interaction of the languages on the phonological level negative interference prevails; cases of positive transfer are limited.

The knowledge of the above mentioned differences in the pronunciation habits of English and Ukrainian speakers is important both for intercultural communication and EFL teaching practice. It helps clarify the interaction of English and Ukrainian pronunciation bases and enhances mutual intelligibility between the speakers who use English as a lingua franca. In teaching practice, the teacher's awareness of typical violations of English pronunciation norms by Ukrainian learners will help devise efficient teaching techniques and direct the learners' efforts at the acquisition of accurate English pronunciation habits.

References:

1. Соловова Е. Н. Методика обучения иностранным языкам. Москва, 2008. – С. 7.
2. Дмитриева Ю. В. Проблема межъязыковой интерференции в преподавании иностранных языков в вузе [Электронный ресурс] / Режим доступа : <http://www.sgu.ru/files/nodes/13579/Dmitrieva.doc>.
3. Мегердичев Г. А. Методическая терминология, касающаяся процессов интерференции // Психология и методика обучения второму языку. Механизм переноса навыков и умений. Москва, 1971. - С. 65.
4. Vassilyev V. A. English Phonetics: A Theoretical Course. Moscow, 1970. – P. 117.