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Phonetic interference in the speech of students learning English as the second foreign language

The purpose of the article is to describe cases of phonetic interference in the process of teaching English to bilingual students who can speak both Russian and German languages. Typical phonetic mistakes that occur in English speech of students are considered. Recommendations for overcoming phonetic mistakes in students' speech are offered.

Key words: phonetic interference; native language; foreign languages; language system; pronunciation skills; phonetic system.

Interference signifies the contact between two or more language systems. It arises when the systems of a foreign language and the native one interrelate. Linguists define interference as «the assumption of various inaccuracies in the speech of a bilingual in relation to the norms of the language being studied under the influence of the native language. Language interference can affect the areas of phonetics, vocabulary, grammar and syntax» [1, p. 13]; [2, p. 27]; [3, p. 197]; [6, p.62].

When students first start learning a foreign language, they use their native language as a model. In this regard, violations arise in the second language system. The native language is considered the main system and, therefore, a source of interference. A foreign language is considered as a secondary system. It turns out to be an object of interference. However, a studied foreign language can also be treated as the main system. As a result, when a student start learning the second foreign language, so then interference occurs between the systems of studied languages. So, interference arises under the simultaneous interconnection of the native language system and other previously studied language. The differences found in interacting language systems are a major source of interference. This can manifest itself in phonemic composition, grammatical categories and vocabulary, etc.

Tomsk Polytechnic University trains students whose native language is Russian. Some students studied their first foreign language German at the secondary school. Then they start learning English in accordance with syllabus at TPU. In this respect, when learning English, interference may arise from both the Russian and German languages.

When we teach English to students who have already studied German, we should bear in mind that it is German that influences the process of learning English. Nevertheless, such interaction of language systems can presuppose both positive and negative sites.

To begin with, students have some experience in learning the language. They learn the structure of English more easily and quickly. It belongs to the group of Germanic languages. Therefore, it has many similarities with German in structure and lexical composition.

On the contrary, students try to transfer existing skills in German to English. It can occur not only where these similarities exist, but also where they are completely absent.

When student start learning English, phonetic interference presents the greatest difficulties. Students transfer pronunciation skills from German to English. This makes it difficult for them to learn correct English pronunciation. Phonetic interference manifests itself at the levels of phonemes and prosody. Phonetic mistakes can change the sound form and meaning. It complicates the act of communication in speech.

Phonetic systems of German and English languages differs. The same phonemes can be found in both languages. Even though there are significant differences between them. These differences are related to the articulatory features of these two languages.

Thus, for example, the English vowel sound /u:/ is similar to the German sound /u:/. However, when an English sound is pronounced, the lips do not round as much as when we pronounce the corresponding German sound. The lips almost do not protrude. The tongue is pulled back, and the tip of the tongue extends away from the lower teeth. In addition, there are some sounds in English, such as for example, /θ/, /ð/, /w/, /ɜ:/, /æ/, etc., that are absent in German.

The most typical phonemic errors in student speech include the following substitutions in English:

– replacing the sound [s] with the sound [ʃ], for example, Germ. *spielen*, *sprechen* – Engl. *spring*, *speak*;

– replacing the sound [s] with the sound [z], for example, Germ. *sehen* – Engl. *semester*;

– replacing the sound [z] with the sound [ts], for example, Germ. *zusammen* – Engl. *zeal*;

– replacing the sound [w] with the sound [v], for example, Germ. *der Werdegang* – Engl. *winter*;

– replacing the sound [dʒu], [dʒæ], [dʒe] with the sound [ju], [ja], [je], for example, Germ. *jetzt*, *ja*, *Jan* – Engl. *just*, *jealous*;

– replacing the sound [u:] with [o:], for example, Germ. *das Boot* – Engl. *book*, *look*;

– replacing the sound [æ] with [a], for example, Germ. *Anne*, *der Apfel* – Engl. *apple*, *bank*;

– replacing the sound [ɪ:] with [e:], for example, Germ. *der Tee*, *der See* – Engl. *meet*, *need*;

– replacing the sound [ei] with [ai], for example, Germ. *mein*, *kein* – Engl. *neighbor*, *veil*.

In addition, certain difficulties arise when pronouncing English vowels at the beginning of words, for example, *art*, *English*, *Autumn*, *Ursent*, etc. These vowels are pronounced with a glottal stop, as in German. In English there is no glottal stop before vowels. On the contrary, the English language is characterized by a free beginning of the vowel sound.

In simple non-derivative words, the stress usually falls on the first syllable in German, for example, *ˈMorgen*, *ˈsprechen*, *ˈhören*. Compound words with two or more syllables have two stresses. The stronger stress falls on the first part of the word, and the weaker stress is on the second part of the word, for example, *die ˈKinderˈkleider*, *die ˈSonnenˈbrille*, *die ˈWaschˈmaschine*, *das ˈTaschenˈtuch*, *die ˈGroßˈstadt*. In English, as well as in German, the most common stress falls on the first syllable. Almost all nouns, unborrowed words, words without prefixes, words with two syllables are pronounced with emphasis on the first syllable. However, in English verbs of two syllables, the stress often falls on the second syllable, which also causes some difficulty in placing the stress correctly [5, p. 15].

Thus, interference can be understood as the intervention of elements of one language into another one in the process of language contact. To overcome interference, interlingual comparisons, exercises for interlingual contrast, and verbal rules for explaining complex situations are required. In this case certain tasks in conscious imitation can be practiced. In the classroom the teacher can use actively tongue twisters, short poems or dialogues, in which the studied sounds are often repeated.

Imitation tasks can be divided into three groups.

– tasks for conscious imitation. Students should repeat after the speaker or teacher words with a certain sound, for example, *cheese* [ʧi:z], *ice cream* [ˈaɪskri:m], *chips* [ʧɪps], *milk* [mɪlk] and memorize other words with sounds [i:] and [ɪ].

– imitation tasks with elements of active listening. Students should repeat words after the speaker, for example, *brother*, *summer thing*, *sing*, *thumb*, *city*, *this*. After listening, students select words with a voiced sound [ð] from the list.

This group also includes the following task. Students repeat words after the teacher and find words with the same sound in the list, for example, *dog*, *hare*, *goose*, *frog*, *moose*, *bear*.

– tasks for conscious imitation with elements of phonetic exercises. Such tasks can be used at the beginning of a lesson as a speech warm-up, for example, sound training [θ]. The task begins with the direct pronunciation of this sound. Next, students pronounce a tongue twister, for example, *Tom threw Tim three thumbtacks*. At first, it is better to pronounce the tongue twister in parts. Then you can add subsequent words each time.

This group can include the following types of exercises such as reading words, sentences, dialogues, mini-texts, tongue twisters, poems; pronouncing phrases with different intonations; listening to identify mistakes; repeating synchronously after the speaker or teacher with an additional task; repeating something during a pause after the speaker or teacher's speech [4, p. 35–36].

In conclusion, we should say that phonetic interference is typical, as a rule, at the beginning of learning a new foreign language. When students develop a steady correct pronunciation, interference gradually disappears. The main role of the teacher is to help students minimize phonetic mistakes. The teacher describes students how to compare two foreign languages and analyze the coinciding elements in the native and other two languages being studied.

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