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## THE MOTHER TONGUE IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE: AN ACCOUNT OF RUSSIAN L2 LEARNERS' ERROR INCIDENCE ON OUTPUT

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### Abstract

Based on Selinker's hypothesis of five psycholinguistic processes shaping interlanguage (1972), the paper focuses attention on the Russian L2-learners' overreliance on the L1 as the main factor hindering their development. The research problem is, therefore, the high incidence of L1 transfer in the spoken and written English language output of Russian learners as an EFL issue largely ignored, and the research question, how much these learners' dependence on the L1 affect their interlanguage (IL) development. The objectives are to offer an account of Russian L2 learners' interlingual error incidence in free output, the L2 areas these error affects the most, and the effect of non-traditional remedial work in IL development. Thirty students out of a cohort of 123 were chosen for the study because of their little progress in the FL and later divided into two groups depending on their time of English-only L2 instruction. Their L2 spoken and written samples were used to determine their communication strategies and the output areas they affect the most. The study shows that time under L2-learning through the L2 does not modify significantly the students learning and communication strategies historically acquired through transfer of learning. The comparison with similar data from Spanish-speaking students, classroom observation, and introspection reveal the students use three L1-based strategies to cope with L2 communication demands. These strategies are so closely connected with their beliefs and language practices that non-traditional remedial work is ineffective unless the students understand the nature of their problems and willingly engage in overcoming them.

*Keywords:* Interlanguage, interlingual errors, fossilization, translation, L1 overreliance

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## 1. Introduction

The main author of this paper taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Cuba for thirty years, first under mother tongue (MT) “strict” banning and then under its ‘judicious use’ when Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced in Cuba in the early 1980s. Six years ago after moving to Russia the author, beginning with the very first lesson he taught, was shocked to encounter, students who constantly resorted to the L1, regardless of their language level. From then on, a consistent behavioral pattern in class regardless of the language course level has been observed. First, the students usually make use of online translators such as google or consult bilingual dictionaries even when visual means are used to introduce a new word. In all cases, the students record the word with its translation. The second significant feature in their behavior is code switching during performance. On code switching, the students ask themselves or a classmate ‘How can I say ...?’ in Russian, thereby demonstrating that their output is based on translation from the MT. Advice and classroom practice to eliminate these habits have been unsuccessful so far.

The role of the MT in FLT seems to have been defined during the educational revolution carried out by the Soviet Union just after 1917. Karpov and Miroliybov (1957) in a forty-year historical review of language teaching in the country highlight the scientific basis of this type of educational practice. In the 1960s, further research refined the method in terms of the role the MT and consciousness was to play in FL learning. Rogova (1975, p. 40) asserts “...language learning implies comprehension of a linguistic phenomenon of language material by the pupil usually [through] the medium of the native language...” [my addition]. On the same topic, Shsherba (1974) argues,

*“The requirement to manage without the native language often causes the great time, energy and ingenuity expenditures that are quite wasteful in most cases since the complete understanding usually comes after the student’s finding his own equivalent in the native language. Moreover this requirement makes it quite impossible to explain the students more subtle language phenomena that leads to the devaluation of foreign language learning from the educational point of view”.*

At the same time, research in psychology was applied to FL teaching. For instance, grammar rules were taught inductively in the form of algorithms and practice supported by theory to develop habits and skills in the right direction became common tenets. Both presupposed the use of the MT and were supposed to lead to the establishment of direct associations between concepts and their means of expression in the second language. This

preoccupation with consciousness had its basis on Marxism, the official ideology in the country. One of the main problems of any philosophy is the relationship between the individual and consciousness. As a materialist philosophy, Marxism considers the first as primary and from that point of view; the conscious aspect is determined by the individual and as such can be modeled by outside influence. However, in an early assessment of the FL learning situation carried out in situ, Glyn (1962, p. 10) states, “The principle of consciousness assured two things: more formal teaching of grammar...and ... greater emphasis upon the value of the mother tongue as the basis for teaching the foreign language, though translation was discouraged.” A recent critique states that “in Russia consciousness-raising and comparative method as a modification of grammar-translation method was commonly used in teaching foreign languages, which was based on structural linguistics, the cognitive approach and a teacher-centered model (Obdalova & Logan 2014, p. 114). In conclusion, MT overuse in the FL classroom has its origin in seventy-five years of educational practice. This tradition has not and cannot be erased so easily. Remnants of the Conscious Practical Method may still be observed in textbooks prepared for teacher formation, (Solovova, 2006) and the teaching of foreign languages in general, (Ivanova, 2010; Litvinov, 2004; Nuzhdin, Marin, & Lora, 2003; Zikova, 2006).

On the above issues, Ter-Misanova (2013) states, “The changes, challenges (and confusions) of the present are rooted in traditions (and certainties) inherited from the past... Languages of ‘capitalistic countries’ were seen as a suspicious subject that led straight into the arms of ‘potential enemies’, which actually meant the rest of the world.” In references to the methods [later transferred to learning strategies], she adds, “There has always been a firm belief that a really efficient solution to the problems of language teaching must be sought for with the help of linguistics, that the practice of ELT must be based on theoretical studies of language, that theory and practice must go hand in hand as it will do a lot of good for both of them [ibid. My additions].”

In conclusion, though dependence on the L1 to learn the L2 is not only typical of Russian students, the three case studies reported by Forteza (2015) showed that, their reliance on translation processes has its origins in traditional teaching and learning practices as well as beliefs about how languages are to be taught/learned. These are derived from almost sixty-year old research in educational psychology and its turned-into-principles findings are still present in the minds of many teachers. These have been acquired during teaching formation through their official course textbooks as well as from their teachers’ teaching style. Afterwards, they become part of the learners’ language learning strategies repertoire resulting in classroom-modelled ingrained teaching-learning ‘habits’. The study also demonstrates how the

complexity of the psycholinguistic processes involved in departing from the MT to communicate on the FL hampers accuracy and fluency during communicative. The teacher's skills to discern the cause of the learners' lack of progress as well as their compromise and actions to solve them are identified as key aspects in dealing with such classroom issues.

## **2. Review of literature**

Attitude and approaches to errors and their correction in language learning significantly vary in the history of language teaching. While the audio-lingual method tried through drilling to form habits aimed at error-free language output, and when it occurred, immediate correction followed; the direct method recognized errors were possible and bet on self-correction usually through the choice of language samples or recognition of the correct model given by the teacher. Total physical response practitioners, on the other hand, expected errors to happen and were tolerant of them, to the extent that correction was delayed until the student was somewhat proficient in the language. As a result, two attitudinal and error-solution responses can be identified in language teaching: first, avoidance and immediate correction; and second, acceptance of the inevitable and adequate correction based on research and experience. This change in theoretical and practical conceptions is the result of a shift in research interest from teaching to learning in the last decades of the twentieth century.

According to structural-behaviorist teaching research traditions, studies in second language learning (SLA) carried out before the last four decades of the twentieth century emphasized the need to prevent errors at all costs in the language classroom. Interference from the mother tongue, that is interlingual errors, were thought to be the cause of L2 learner difficulties in learning that were likely to be predicted through Contrastive Analysis (CA) of the two languages in question. In the late 1960s, however, new teaching approaches and considerations derived from SLA research changed attitudes about the nature and significance of errors, and the nature of interlanguage (IL) (Corder, 1967, 1976, 1981; Selinker 1972, 1984). Error analysis (EA), the new theoretical position, acknowledges that though mother tongue interference in learning does exist, it is not the only error source and continues on by identifying many other sources.

Among these other error sources are the ones that have their genesis in the learning process itself, before the new language material has not yet been interiorized, and those that derive from the very complexities of the L2. Intralingual errors, as they have been called, are subdivided, according to their origin, into overgeneralization and simplification of rules, communication based, false analogies, ignorance of rule restrictions or their partial application as well (Richards, 1972). Keshavarz (2003) asserts these type of errors are due to faulty or

partial learning [the student's fault?] (My additions). Stenson (1974), on the other hand, considers three main reasons for errors: (1) incomplete acquisition [learning?] of the target [lexico] grammar; this may be related to (2) exigencies of the learning/teaching situation, [which lead to] (3) errors due to normal problems of language performance (My additions). The problem is that it is extremely difficult to point to a single/group of reason(s) because there are so many factors that influence learning and performance that it is usually a combination of them, acting together, that constitute the cause of faulty L2.

Other researchers (Burt & Kiparsky, 1974) advance the notion of local and global errors. The former are those that do not affect communication and need not be corrected immediately, while the latter require immediate correction. This idea has led many teachers to neglect many "local" errors that do demand correction because what the learner said is understood. These are not exactly what Corder (1967) considers mistakes, i.e., a performance error due to a random guess or slip, and errors that refers to idiosyncrasies in the IL which is a manifestation of the learner's system at work while learning and are seen as L2 deviations.

Despite criticism to error definitions and subsequent classifications (Hammarberg, 1974; Schachter & Celce-Murcia, 1977; Lennon, 1991) as well as the methodological weaknesses of error analysis (Etherton, 1977; Abbot, 1980), the advent of EA marks a breakthrough in language teaching theory. At last, errors in the language classroom were seen as something natural that could be object of research. In other words, as Tarone (2006, p. 752) puts it, "The IL Hypothesis provided the initial spark that ignited a field of research on second-language acquisition/learning, and it continues to provide what some feel to be the most productive framework for research." Essential features and essence in this framework are Selinker's hypothesis on five psycholinguistic processes shaping IL (1972): (1) native language transfer, (2) overgeneralization of target language rules, (3) transfer of training, (4) strategies of communication, and (5) strategies of learning and the concept of fossilization, understood as the process that shows that IL apparently stops developing permanently towards the L2.

Indeed, making errors is an integral part of life and as such must be perceived in language learning where they serve significantly different heuristic functions. First, according to Corder (1981), errors tell teachers how far towards the goal the learners have progressed and, consequently, what remains for them to learn. Secondly, they provide researchers with evidence of how language is learnt or acquired as well as the strategies or procedures used by the learner in their discovery of language. Finally, they inform the learner because committing errors is a way learners have of testing their hypotheses about the nature of language they are learning. The same author asserts the need to distinguish between the deviancies from the

learner's language that are accessible to automatic self-correction and as such do not count as errors and those that "reveal his underlying knowledge of the language to date" and are not likely to be self-corrected by the learner himself since they are systematic and regular.

However, as usually happens with conceptual aspects of language-related disciplines with respect to their relation to language teaching, it is sometimes extremely hard for the practitioner to understand the whole picture that theory offers to practice. For instance, Selinker (1972) seems to discard the concept of "errors" by viewing the language used by the learners as a whole language system under construction, that is, 'IL'. The concept implies that learner language is a continuum. On one end, there is the mother tongue or any previously acquired language, and on the other, there is the target language. In other words, IL departs from the mother tongue and develops on and away from it. Ideally, during the learning process, the farther away IL moves from the mother tongue, the closer it gets to the target language and resembles it in all aspects. Similarly, Nemser (1971) understands learner language as an approximative system characterized by "deviancies actually employed by the learner attempting to utilize the target language" where the mother tongue acts a source of errors. This author's idea seems to point to the strategic aspect of communication; that is, what the learner does in his attempt to communicate effectively while constrained by his skills to make use of the finite resources his knowledge of the L2 offers to convey infinite meanings, usually well beyond his means. The former points out that success in L2 learning is not usually the norm. True, classrooms are full of learners that hardly ever get rid of L1 dependence and who, as a result, never develop and succeed in mastering the L2. In other words, their IL fossilizes.

The last observation is closely related to the different processes involved at different stages of the learning process: input, intake, output, and the two distinctions Kohn (1986, p. 22) makes of transfer from the L1. During the learning process, transfer supports "the learner's selection and remodelling of input structures as he progresses in the development of his IL knowledge." Transfer during output is involved in the retrieval of this intake and the learner's efforts, "to bridge linguistically those gaps in his knowledge which cannot be side-stepped by avoidance." Intake is equivalent to the Piagetian concept of accommodation during the assimilation of new input. It is at this stage that the learner (over)generalizes, hypothesizes, etc. and is likely to receive the most L2 transfer as he engages in mental processes, whereas during output, he is likely to ignore rule restrictions or apply them incompletely as well as entirely rely on the L1 to communicate in the L2 (Forteza, 2015).

Whatever conceptual framework is used, practitioners have to face a classroom reality that obliges them to find solutions. Errors determine not only marks for an exam, but also quite often the possibility to enter a higher education institution or to enjoy success in the labour

market as happens in countries far from the L2 environment. In these places, adolescents, pressed by competitive university entry exams, and adults, desiring to climb the professional ladder, do not have all the time of the world to achieve proficiency in the L2. Classroom observation, for instance, reveals both Russian learners concern themselves a lot with grammatical accuracy, much less with vocabulary choice, and little with pronunciation, stress and intonation as long as they do not interfere with making themselves understood.

These learner attitudes toward structure suggest those of their previous teachers' as well as their beliefs and language teaching methodology that are later transferred to the students as learning strategies. This transfer during training, in Selinker's terms, becomes an integral part of the learner's L2 repertoire when dealing with the foreign language as Pan (2013) and Forteza (2015) report. The three case studies as well as other classroom instances described by the latter further illustrate the role of previous educational experiences in modelling learning styles to such an extent that limited progress in communicative skills in English and Spanish is achieved due to the students' constant reference to the MT system.

These students do something similar when they deal with a new word or expression in a known grammatical structure. Without thinking about the context, the learner is always more likely to choose the denotation translation and record it, neglecting other issues such as pronunciation, other connotations, as well as collocations. As a result, the learner usually has problems with word choice during output. For instance, in a remedial session after discussing the meanings of certain collocations related to city life, while using them in contextual exercises, a student said, "There is no fresh breath in an industrial area" during a discussion of the living conditions in her neighbourhood. The reason for such error was breath was learned and stored in her mental lexicon as air. It is no surprise that she retrieved it automatically during output regardless of having seen the correct collocation just minutes ago.

The analysis of language teaching methodology in Russia, the study of teaching materials produced in the country, observation of students at work with the L2 and covert observation of teaching provided the basis to hypothesize that, at least, three out of the five psycholinguistic processes described by Selinker are present in the IL of Russian learners. The first, (over)use of translation conforms to transfer of training during the learning process. This, in turn, causes the second: learning strategies based on the understanding and storing of L2 meanings making use of the L1. Therefore, the third, communication strategies probably are based on the retrieval of stored translated forms and real-time translations during L2 output.

The presence of Russian-like forms in the English IL of actual learners and that of those who have successfully completed language courses is a ubiquitous phenomenon. This is sometimes, humorously or scornfully, referred to as RusEnglish. It is to this largely ignored

phenomenon impairing development that this paper is devoted. It attempts to provide a vivid, comprehensive picture of a problem affecting many learners met by the author after living six years in the country.

### **3. Problem Statement**

The high incidence of L1 transfer in the spoken and written English language output of Russian learners as an EFL learning issue.

### **4. Research Question**

How much does their reliance on the L1 affect Russian learners' IL development?

### **5. Purpose of the Study**

The objectives are to offer an account of Russian L2 learners' interlingual error incidence in free output, the L2 areas intralingual error affects the most, and the effects of non-traditional remedial work in IL development.

### **6. Research Methods**

Because of their poor results in lexicogrammar progress tests and faulty language during free-output sessions signalling IL underdevelopment, language samples (Word Volume  $\bar{x} = 3259$ ) from thirty students out of a cohort of 123 were chosen for study. Time (years) under English-only instruction was the criterion used to divide the sample into two groups of fifteen learners each: A ( $\geq 3$ ) and B ( $< 3$ ). Therefore, it was possible to hypothesize that H0: A=B; that is, no significant difference between the media of interlingual errors in the two samples is to be found. A second hypothesis H1: A>B, that is, the difference in the media between the two groups is significant, was also considered. Their spoken and written language samples were the sources used for error identification and classification into interlingual and intralingual groups. Interlingual error ratio was identified as the dependent variable; while others such as educational level, years of traditional L2 study in Russian style methodology, years of only-English L2 study, and total ratio of error were considered the independent ones. The data was statistically processed with SPSS 18 software, and the inferences later triangulated with in-class observation and the learners' remarks about how they studied and processed the language for communication. Interlingual error impact on L2 output was compared with similar data obtained from Spanish-speaking learners of English. Finally, a qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of non-traditional remedial work on lexicogrammar accuracy according to the context of situation was carried out.



## **7. Findings**

In general, the statistics results show that time under only English L2 instruction has had very little impact on the students' dependence from their MT. From a quantitative point of view with  $\alpha 0.05$ , the T-Test reveals that  $H1: A \bar{x} = (4.2) > B \bar{x} = 5.2$  (p-value 0.001); that is, the result is statistically significant, but not enough to affect output qualitatively. In other words, time alone and new approaches to learning cannot modify beliefs and deeply embedded learning and communication strategies. However small the difference makes it possible to predict that more focus on the learner, their individual language problems, and advice on how to tackle them may eventually counteract L1 influence on the L2 output, provided they feel the need to advance and work hard to do so.

Interlingual errors account for almost 50 % of the errors identified in the spoken and written samples. This figure speaks by itself of the enormous impact of ineffective learning and communication strategies that, when compared to the normal occurrence of intralingual errors, add classroom workload. Finally, educational level has no influence in dealing with L2. However, the mean ratio of interlingual errors every 100 of high school students and professionals with a third level of education are above the rest of their peers, 5.33 and 6.5 respectively. A possible explanation for this is that the first are under two different approaches to teaching learning at the same time; that is, they study English at school where their teacher uses Russian all the time while their private tutor does not. In the second case, constant reference to Russian is the method they have always known and stick to it no matter what their instructor says.

In conclusion, from a quantitative viewpoint the data reveals the profound impact that dependence on the Russian language has on IL development. Nevertheless, this type of data does not offer a vivid picture of the phenomenon. An analysis of the quality of the errors as well as hypothesizing on the possible psycholinguistic processes used during output are deemed necessary to have a full notion of the issue.

The students in the samples seem to resort to three different communication strategies involving translation when producing the L2. These are quite similar to those employed by Spanish-speaking students learning English. The first of these strategies consists of the direct translation of a fixed phrase in the L1 into the L2; the second entails word choice. That is, the learner chooses either the only translation he knows or any of the ones given, usually the denotative meaning, on online translators without paying attention to the other different connotations a word may have. The third strategy consists of direct translation of a grammatical structure in the L1 to organize the message in the L2 that results in anomalous, difficult to understand language. Each of these is exemplified in the tables below.

**Table 1.** Word by word translation of an equivalent fixed phrase

	L2	L1	IL
a	On the one hand/on the other (hand)	S odnoi storony/s drugoi storony	On the one side/on the other (side)
b	I see	Ponimayu	I understand
c	to some extent	v nekotoroj stepeni	in some extent
d	It remains to be seen...	Babushka nadvoe skazala...	Granny half said...
e	in the short/long run	v kratkosrochnoi/dolgosrochnoi perspektive	In the short/ long perspective
f	We were in the middle of nowhere.	My byli v seredine neizvestnosti.	We were in the center of nowhere.

This communication strategy does not lead by itself to serious problems in understanding proverbs. Whereas examples d, e, f cause no such difficulty, b and d are very likely to generate comprehension problems because they seem to break co-text; that is, the words surrounding a particular word or passage within a text that provide context and help to determine meaning (OCD). Spanish-speaking students who rely on the L1 to speak English use the same strategy.

According to the author's corpus, these students may render the proverb between the sword and the deep sea as 'between the sword and the wall'; that is, a literal translation of the Spanish proverb. The same is true for other fixed phrases such as on the one hand/on the other (hand). In this case, these learners said 'by one side/by the other evidencing again the use of translation. They do also break the flow of co-text with expressions such as to touch the lottery (*tocar la lotería* in Spanish), where the use of to touch instead of to win makes no sense. Accuracy of what the learners say or write when they resort to the translation of fixed phrases can give rise to serious comprehension difficulties and even break communication by the interruption of its normal flow.

Something similar happens when the student can produce the L2 grammar correctly but chooses a lexical item incorrectly. The examples below show the results of this second communication strategy. It seems that the learners sometimes knows only one meaning of a word; when they do not, they hurriedly look up for the translation in an online dictionary revealing they are interested in the meaning and nothing else. It may also happen the student believes he knows the word and use it in which case the result is the same.

**Table 2.** Translation of an L1 close equivalent into the L2

	L1	L2	IL
g	They <i>predicted</i> more rain for today.	<i>Oni predskazyvali bolshe dozhdei na segodnya.</i>	They <i>promised</i> more rain for today.
h	I would like to <i>talk about</i> a Hollywood film <i>shot</i> in the United States.	Ya hochu rasskazat o gollivudskom filme, sdelannom v Soedinennyh Shtatah.	I want to <i>tell about</i> a Hollywood film <i>made</i> in the United States.
i	I enjoy <i>science fiction</i> films.	<i>Ya naslazhdaus filmami nauchnoi fantastiki.</i>	I enjoy <i>fantastic</i> films.
j	I <i>represent</i> a serious accounting company.	<i>Ya predstavlyayu serioznuyu buhgalterskuyu kompaniyu.</i>	I <i>present</i> a serious accounting company.
k	My interest/aim/intention/ is to buy...	<i>Moi interes/cel/namerenie zakluchaetsya v tom, chto ya hochu kupit...</i>	My <i>issue</i> is that I want to buy...
l	Some people in my country <i>look down</i> on others.	<i>Nekotorye ludi v moei strane smotryat sverhu v niz na drugih.</i>	Some people in my country <i>look at</i> others from <i>above/top to bottom</i> .
m	We have clean <i>air</i> .	<i>U nas chisty vozduh.</i>	We have clear <i>breath</i> .
n	Then my wife and I went for <i>lunch</i> at a nearby restaurant.	<i>Togda moiya zhena I ya poshli na biznes-lanch v sosednii restoran.</i>	Then my wife and I went for a <i>business lunch</i> at a nearby restaurant.
o	I can't do it <i>alone</i> .	<i>Ya ne mogu sdelat eto sam.</i>	I can't do it by <i>myself</i> .

While g, h, and i will not necessarily cause problems for the listener/reader, j, l, and m do for they do not allow the receiver to infer the meaning from what is being said or written. On the other hand, example n has a cultural nature. A business lunch is something different in an English speaking country and in Russia. In the latter, it means a cheap lunch in a restaurant, not necessarily an occasion to foster socially effective links and networks where business issues may not even be mentioned while eating.

Similarly, Spanish-speaking students usually employ this same strategy when they say, "I could not assist to your lesson because..." and translate '*asistir*' in Spanish as assist and not attend. The issue is that attend and assist are false English cognates in Spanish. However, this concept does not tell much to the student who relies on the L1 to produce the L2, even if he understands what it means. This student is more likely to use the Latinized version of an English word such as '*pork*' or '*liberty*' to refer to '*pigs*' and '*freedom*' respectively. The reasons for such use is that Latin versions sound closer to Spanish or are chosen as the possible translations of '*puerco*' and '*libertad*' without stopping a moment to think that they might be used differently or have dissimilar connotations in English.

A third strategy used during output is when the Russian learner copes with communication inefficiencies by transposing through translation the L1 grammar into the L2 as the table below shows.

**Table 3.** Transposition of the L1 grammar into the L2

	Column Heading	Column Heading	Column Heading
p	For instance, parents are usually well-informed about their teenager’s plans for the future.	<i>Naprimer, roditeli obychno horosho informirovany o planah na buduzchee ih podrostka.</i>	For instance, usually parents well informed about teenager’s plans on future.
q	I am not interested in literature.	<i>Ya ne interesuyus literaturoi/ Ya ne zainteresovan v literature.</i>	I don’t interested in literature.
r	I like ... very much.	<i>Mne ochen nravitsya...</i>	I very like ....
s	I <i>have never been</i> to Europe.	<i>Ya nikogda ne byl v Evrope.</i>	I <i>never wasn’t</i> in Europe.
t	If he goes, I won’t.	<i>Esli on poidet, ya ne pridu.</i>	If he will go, I won’t.

This L1 to L2 grammar transposition explains the omission of ‘be’ in p above because this verb form is not used in the Russian present tense. This is not negative transfer; the students’ behavior is always consistent (see the explanations for p and q below). Though ‘interest’ as a verb is present in English, the form ‘be interested in’ is more common to express having curiosity, concern and giving attention to something. Whereas Russian does express the same through the form ‘*uvlekayushiicya*’, ‘interest’ as a verb is closer to their language, and thus is preferred. Example r generates discourse problems most of the time. This L1 grammatical transposition also happens in sentences with such verbs as hate, and enjoy. Furthermore, Russian students usually place the degree adverb ‘very’ before verbs as is normal in their L1 syntax and think they have said ‘very much’ for in Russian ‘very much’ is expressed as ‘*ochen*’.

Many may argue that the last two examples (p and q) in the table are the result of negative transfer from the Russian language; however, when asked to say what is wrong with these sentences, the learner is always able to give the correct form. As the author has argued before (Forteza, 2015), many Russian learners literally transpose the L1 grammatical structure into the L2. In “I never wasn’t in Europe”, the double negation demonstrates that translation is involved in the process of production while the simple past use, instead of the present perfect, may be accepted as possible negative transfer with no translation since Russian has no perfective verb forms—which really pose a problem for them. However, the next case is more likely to be the product of translation because many students almost never come to terms with the obligatory present tense in the if-clause of the English first conditionals.

An extreme instance of L1 transposition on the L2 through translation is what the author has called the of-error. The next example, not included in the table and taken from a learner's essay, demonstrates that when writing, the learner was just translating, "On the fourth level of equivalence of syntactic structures in addition to the mentioned above characteristics the community of syntactic structures of the source and target texts is kept." Cases like this are, unfortunately, quite difficult to correct, and understand.

The Spanish-speaking learner of English who relies on the MT to communicate in the FL also uses the strategy discussed above. The relatively fixed order of the English sentence as well as the need to have a subject for each verb cause more than just a few problems. Errors such as the one in o above said as, "I like very much ..." or "I hate very much to have to get up early" are also common. Furthermore, this learner quite often omits the subject of the verb as in, "usually go to bed late" simply because while speaking in English, the learner just translates, just chooses the words and puts them in the Spanish grammar slots forgetting that, unlike Spanish, English verbs do need an explicit subject.

### *7.1. Remedial work in IL development*

This section is devoted to a recount of some non-traditional remedial work approaches, that the author has put into practice in view of the poor results obtained after traditional re-explanation and additional exercises on a language item were considered ineffective. Two principles apply to everything done in class. First, diagnosis and feedback is an integral part of every lesson. However, this does not exclude specially designed remedial lessons within a lesson system. Second, remedial work must encourage the students' active participation in the diagnosis, if possible, and engagement in the solution of their language problems.

These principles owe their existence to an observation: the learner(s who rely) on the L1 to produce the L2 usually performs quite well in traditional remedial work sessions; that is, when given further lexicogrammar practice, they seem to know how the language works and even say so. However, when they have to focus on communication, they seem to have forgotten everything and err again on the same issues. When the error is pointed out, they are usually able to correct it. Therefore, the problem affecting performance is not likely to be their competence or potential to express a specific meaning, but a psycholinguistic one: they do not (know how to?) control or monitor output.

In other words, the use of translation is so embedded in their communication strategies that it is almost impossible for them to eliminate it. Therefore, teaching the students how to monitor their language output seems a good option, but this is likely to be time-consuming. As the statistical analysis above shows, eliminating deeply ingrained learning habits and ways

of doing things such as how to learn and communicate are not a matter of time, advice, or opportunities, but of will.

At the same time, it is expected that the students who fully comply with the English-only learning environment psycholinguistically set themselves on a new path. Consequently, their affective filters lower and establish the conditions necessary to cope with the new demands and ways of doing things in learning and using the L2 through the L2. A general implication derived from the above is that the students learn how to learn and work on their own; a pedagogical move that encourages creativity and self-confidence based on their own potentials. However, full compliance is only achieved when the learners understand the nature of their problems and strive to solve them; and this is what the students from group A have been doing.

These new demands and ways of doing things are:

1. Learning from their own errors and those of their peers.

The students are encouraged to monitor the language of their peers all the time, point out errors, and their correction. At the same time, they are asked to identify their language problems in recorded speech and give solutions.

As it is not advisable to pounce on every error during free output, it is much better to pretend one did not understand what the student said encouraging further thinking and realizing that an error has been made. This has proved to be very useful, especially with those students who focus on accurate communication and regard their fluency as something very important too.

In the case of the written language, correction involves three steps. In the first, the teacher highlights the problematic language items in the essay, and the student has to correct it. Surprisingly, they usually come up with the correct version. The second step involves just writing the number of problems at the end of the line. In this case, the student has to identify where the problem is and correct it. In the third, just a cross at the end of the line signals there are problems in this area. Unsolved difficulties are dealt with in general error correction sessions with the whole class.

2. Using monolingual dictionaries.

This has been difficult to implement, but has proved useful for all the students who installed the OED, CAD, or the Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary apps as well Oxford Collocations Dictionary in their electronic devices. These are used to answer dictionary

activities. In class, they also look up words but only after exhausting all other possibilities of understanding a language item in its context.

The students who want can help themselves with a bilingual picture dictionary, especially the ones published by Dorling Kindersley or OUP, to access the primary meaning of a word. Sometimes Google images are also used to convey meanings. These students exercise other meanings by means of additional activities. As meaning alone does not mean to know how to use a word, the learners are encouraged to record all the information they can about a new language item including usage examples as well as writing their own.

The above means that in case of word choice error in class, the student is compelled to find the correct version and given guidance in doing so, if necessary.

### 3. Doing all they can do without help.

Classroom time is precious and cannot be wasted in doing things the students can do by themselves. This assertion allows any teacher to devote more time of his two or four-hour a week language sessions to real interaction. For instance, long readings as well as exercises in grammar or vocabulary that usually take from 15-20 minutes of class time may be done as homework, provided the students know what they have to do. Discussion of the reading and use of the new language items serve as controls that the assignment was done. Other options are talking about a book, the news, and the student's real environment to check the assimilation of the new knowledge and skills.

These are not random class moments. On the contrary, they are constrained by knowledge of the student's individual differences, level of language, as well as a vision of their development. These limitations tell the teacher what may be done or not.

### 4. Transferring L1 communication skills to L2 learning and communication.

Language learners are usually competent speakers of their MT. This can be used to the advantage of language learning if the skills developed in the MT are transferred positively to the learning of the FL. What they have to be shown is that the two languages differ in the means they use to express the same concepts. A few examples will suffice. Politeness, respect and formality are present in English, Russian and Spanish. Therefore, it is essential to teach the students how to recognize situations demanding polite, respectful and formal language. Similarly, students know one writing requirement is that that each paragraph has only one main idea, so paragraphs in the FL meet that condition too.

### 5. Providing extra L2 input.

Undoubtedly encouraging students to read, see films, and listen to the radio or podcasts is good advice. However, if this extra FL input is appropriate to the student's language level and interests, it is likely to be more beneficial. Extra L2 output must be in the zone of proximal development and must boost learning. Providing the students with such materials is not difficult in the IT era. For instance, a short film such as *Arranged Marriage* (available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEOeC6seOe4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEOeC6seOe4)) can be used to give upper-intermediate students comprehension practice, cultural knowledge and the characteristics of the Indian variety of English as well as serve as the trigger for in-class discussions, and even practice reported speech.

At the same time, teachers can provide their students with adapted readers, pieces of news, extra listening material or at least can suggest them.

In general, the students who comply with all the demands seem to advance, though, unfortunately, at a slow pace. In some cases, the students' predisposition to learn in a different way is just formal, in others real. This second group accomplishes their objectives reasonably well, but this takes both the teacher and the student considerable time and effort.

## 8. Conclusion

As pointed out elsewhere in this paper, beliefs and practices are amongst the most difficult things to get rid of. Even when the student complies with all the demands of an L2-only approach to learning, they do not seem to advance in the right direction as fast as the teacher hopes. Their IL seems frozen in time and immune to any correction and further input. In other words, they relentlessly go back to what they have been doing all their lives. Three out of the five psycholinguistic processes hypothesized by Selinker (transfer of learning, learning strategies, and communication strategies) seem to shape these learners' IL. The statistical analysis confirms that teaching the L2 through the L2 is of little help in counteracting ineffective learning and communication strategies by simply changing the teaching-learning approach unless the learners willingly try to learn in a different way. From a qualitative viewpoint and despite the limitations of the corpus size, the comparison of language samples from Russian and Spanish English-language learners confirms the above as well as the use of similar psycholinguistic processes, though others may also be possible, an aspect that suggests further research is needed.



## 9. Implications

The significance of this study and others like it lie in the increasing importance of learning English all over the world. EFL teachers need to be sensitive to the intricacies of learner behavior in the learning of a foreign language and the inextricable relationship between the learners' mother tongue and the target language in determining the success (or failure) of the instructional approaches used. Over reliance on particular approaches which deny the influence of the mother tongue in the learning approaches used by EFL learners will result in frustration and disappointment for both the teacher and the learners concerned. This study has much to offer in terms of insights and practical applications for stakeholders in the teaching and learning of EFL.

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