INTERFERENCE ERROR ANALYSIS ON NATIONAL EXAMS IN ENGLISH AT LEVEL B1

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This research deals with the cross-linguistic transfer from the Croatian language into the English language in written materials created by Croatian second-grade grammar-school students on national exams aimed at level B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL). It focuses on errors as defined by the CEFRL and the theory of Error Analysis. The errors were collected and grouped into two major categories: lexico-semantic and syntactico-morphological. After the collection, transcription, analysis and discussion of the learner corpus, the researchers came to the conclusion that at level B1 the following areas pose the greatest problems for Croatian students: use of articles, use of prepositions and word order.

Key words: cross-linguistic transfer from Croatian into English, error analysis, national exam in English, CEFRL B1 writing

1. INTRODUCTION

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFRL, 2001) has become a highly useful tool in systematizing the levels of communicative competence of language learners. However, the descriptions of the levels are still very general

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and do not say what the learner language at a particular level is supposed to look like, especially from the perspective of the learner's first language. We wanted to determine how the influence of the Croatian language manifests itself in written materials created by Croatian second-grade grammar-school students at level B1 in the English language.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

In the area of grammatical accuracy, the CEFRL (2001) describes the language user at level B1 as someone who "communicates with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts; generally good control though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what he/she is trying to express" (CEFRL, 2001:114).

Chapter 6.5 of the CEFRL (2001) deals with errors the users make, but it does not specify which errors or what kind of errors appear at what level. It differentiates between errors and mistakes, claiming that errors "are due to an *'interlanguage'*, a simplified or distorted representation of the target competence. (...) *Mistakes*, on the other hand, occur in performance when a user/learner (as might be the case with a native speaker) does not bring his competences properly into action" (CEFRL, 2001: 155). The present research focuses on errors resulting from the influence of the speakers' first language, Croatian.

2.2. Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis and Interlanguage

Literature shows that the effect that the first language has on second language acquisition has been the focus of a lot of debate and research in the past (Corder, 1981; Krashen, 1981; Lakshmanan and Selinker, 2001; Pham, 2005; Gass and Selinker, 2008; Adamson, 2009). The consequence was a need to develop a system to explore the differences between various language systems. The result was Contrastive Analysis (CA)[1].

CA has developed into two versions – the strong version and the weak version (Pham, 2005; Gass and Selinker, 2008). The strong version claims that it can predict the difficulties the learners may have by comparing the differences between the learner's native language and the target language. The weak version suggests that linguists can "account for the observed difficulties in second language learning" (Pham, 2005: 56), which means that, unlike the strong version, it focuses on the errors and mistakes that the speakers had already made.

However, research has soon proven that the strong version is not the best predictor

of the difficulties the learners may have in studying a foreign language (Pham, 2005; Gass and Selinker, 2008). It was concluded that the fact that two language systems differ in some areas does not mean that learners are necessarily going to have problems in those areas and that a large number of errors the learners make have not been caused by the interference from the first language (Corder, 1981; Krashen, 1981; Lakshmanan and Selinker, 2001; Pham, 2005; Gass and Selinker, 2008).

In contrast, the weak version of CA has still remained useful since its focus is not on the prediction of a difficulty or potential error, but on the explanation of already observed errors (Pham, 2005). This weak version has been later developed into Error Analysis (Gass and Selinker, 2008).

Error Analysis (EA) does not deal with the prediction of possible errors; it is more descriptive and focuses on the errors the users have already made (Gass and Selinker, 2008). Corder (in Pham, 2005; in Gass and Selinker, 2008) was the first to emphasize the importance of errors in language learning, because by analysing them, more can be found out about the language learning process. Corder (1981; in Pham, 2005, in Gass and Selinker, 2008) differentiates between mistakes and errors, and this distinction was taken over by the CEFRL (2001: 155).

Research has shown that learner language, although flawed, is systematic and Selinker (in Corder, 1981; in Pham, 2005) has introduced the term *interlanguage* to name it. Interlanguage is defined as "a systematized approximation to the target language, a series of organized way-stages, based on hypotheses, on the road to mastery of the TL" (McCarthy, 2001: 74). This means that not all the language rules in learner's interlanguage correspond to the system of rules in the target language. Errors are a manifestation of this phenomenon.

3. THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1. Procedures

The corpus collected during the research consisted of 8000 tokens for 244 essays written on the national exam in English at level B1 according to the CEFRL (2001) by second-grade grammar school students whose overall result on the exam satisfied the criteria for level B1 (70 per cent or higher).

The foci of analysis in the research were morphological, syntactic, lexical and semantic errors. Thus, the errors were collected and listed in two groups: syntactico-morphological and lexico-semantic. The aim of the research was to list all the errors which appear more than once in the corpus.

During the listing of errors, we had to decide whether the error is intralingual (e.g. overgeneralization or simplification) or interlingual, i.e. the result of first

language transfer (Richards, 1970). All three researchers, Croatian native speakers with a degree in English, had to reach a consensus that the error is the result of cross-linguistic transfer from the first language. If we could not agree, the example was not included. When providing commentaries, grammar books (Eastwood, 2005; Težak and Babić, 2007) and dictionaries (Bujas, 2001a; Bujas, 2001b) were used as well as the data from the British National Corpus (BNC, 2007). The British National Corpus (2007) is a 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century, both spoken and written.

3.2. Findings

The following examples are quoted directly from the corpus and may include errors other than those under the given subcategory. The English examples in the commentaries are given under quotation marks and Croatian examples are printed in italics. We did not include the errors which appear only once in the corpus.

Table 1: Syntactico-morphological errors

Example from the corpus	Commentary
* You should *listen them (listen to them)* and if you study hard and start to get good grades, maybe they accept your preposition.	'To listen to sb.' is the translation equivalent *of slušati nekoga* (no preposition in Croatian).
*I *said them (said to them)* that we need to talk seriously.	'To say to sb.' is the translation equivalent of *reći nekome* (no preposition in Croatian).
*It is *worth of waiting (worth waiting)*	It seems that the student is looking for the Genitive case which exists in Croatian in this structure (*vrijedno je čekanja*, non-standard Croatian).
*...and then they will *let you to stay (let you stay)* late.	The infinitive in Croatian is formed with the suffix *–ti* or *–ći*. whilst in English the correct use of infinitive often requires the knowledge of collocations.
*She *enjoys in (enjoys)* little satisfactions of life...	The preposition *u* (which is translated as 'in') is used after the verb *uživati* (= 'enjoy') in Croatian.

*This idea also *helped to my best friend* (helped my best friend).*	It seems that the student is looking for the Dative case, which may be used in Croatian. in this structure ('to help sb' = *pomoći nekome*)
*Sometimes I had problems with my parents but I solve it without mistakes, of course *on the way (in the way)* I told you.	The preposition 'on' (= *na*) collocates with 'the way' in Croatian. 'In the way' is the translation equivalent of *na način* into Croatian.
*You're probably going crazy but it will be over *for (in)* two years.	In Croatian the preposition *za* (which is most frequently the equivalent of 'for') is used with time expressions in the meaning 'from now'.
*Peter took Matt with him *on (to)* a football match with Burmingten or something like that.	'To take sb. to a football match' is the translation equivalent of as *odvesti nekoga na nogometnu utakmicu* (where *na* is most frequently the equivalent of 'on').
*It is again *in Saturday (on Saturday* so if you want we can go and see it.	*U* (generally the equivalent of 'in') is used with the days of the week in Croatian.
*I can *take care about (take care of)* myself ...	The preposition *o* (usually the equivalent of 'about') is used after *brinuti se* ('to take care') in Croatian.
I asked her if she would like to *go with me on a ice-cream (have ice-cream with me).*	Literal translation of *ić (go)i na* (=on) sladoled.
* The story is *about very young man (about a very young man).*	Omission of indefinite article.
*...and they don't know that *other one is secret agent too (the other one is a secret agent)*	Omission of definite and indefinite articles.
*I went *to theatre (to the theatre)* last night...	Omission of definite article.
*I have *a good grades...(good grades)*	Indefinite article 'a' used with a plural noun, redundant use of article.
*My parents won't let me stay long when I'm going out, especially if I *have a training (have training)* , school or competition the next morning	Indefinite article with an uncountable noun.

*I hope my *advices (pieces of advice)* will help you.	Advice – uncountable noun in English, countable in Croatian
* *Few days (A few days)* before , my parents didn't let me go on a party	Omission of the article in this example has a distinctive function and therefore impedes understanding.
*The hall movie is about *one women (a woman)*	The quantifier *jedan* 'one' is used in this kind of structure in Croatian. (*film o jednoj ženi,* non-standard Croatian)
* *I feel sadly (I feel sad)* when I have to go home while my friends have got fun	In Croatian adverbs are used after *osjećati* (=feel)
* When you *will be (are)* more older...	It seems that in this case, the future tense is used instead of present because it is used in time clauses in Croatian when referring to the future.
*When she tought that her boyfriend *will proposed (would propose)* to marie her, he left her and went university.	It seems that in this case, the future tense is used because there is no sequence of tenses in Croatian when referring to past events.
The last thing you parents can do to ensure your safety ist to control how long you stay out and *who are your friends (who your friends are)*	Indirect questions require inversion in Croatian. The word order in this indirect question is therefore question word ('who') + verb ('are') + subject ('your friends').
**That I solved (I solved that)* with my parents.	Typical Croatian word order with object in the beginning of the sentence.
* I think it is horror film, *but is not scary at all (but it is not scary at all).*	There is no subject for the verb in the second part. In Croatian the subject can be understood from the ending of the verb.
I hope you realise that your parents are just trying to prevent *that anything doesn't happen* to you. *(something happening to you)*	In Croatian the negative form is used like in the example on the left.

Table 2: Lexico-semantic errors

Example from the corpus	Commentary
* I will *borrow (lend)* it to you.	'Lend / borrow' corresponds to one word in Croatian (*posuditi*) and therefore the student confused the words.
* There are three paralell *actions (plots)* in which every *action (plot)* presents life of three characters.	*Radnja* is the equivalent of both 'action' and 'plot' in Croatian. The translation equivalent 'action' is not appropriate for this context.
*We decided *to look some comedy. (watch a comedy)*	Although there are two words in Croatian (*vidjeti, gledati*) which correspond to 'look/see/watch', the uses are different which is confusing for Croatian learners of English.
* It describes world war ii and Japanese atack on *american flote. (American fleet)*	The translation equivalent of 'fleet' is *flota*. The words sound similar when pronounced. The student used a hybrid of the Croatian stem with the English suffix.
* *Scenario (The script)* was written by famous film star Mel Gibbson.	The translation equivalent of 'script' is *scenarij*. The word in this example 'looks English and international'.
* *I have 16 years. (I am 16)*	Like in German or French the verb 'to have' (*imati*) is used in this type of structure in Croatian. The sentence on the left is the translation equivalent of Croatian *Imam 16 godina.*
* I know *they have right. (they are right)*	In Croatian the verb *to have* is used in this type of structure. The sentence on the left is the equivalent of Croatian *Znam da imaju pravo.*
**they know that outside has a lot of dangerous people (they know there are dangerous people outside)*	Literal translation: *znaju da ima* (=have) *mnogo opasnih ljudi.*
if you have bad grades, you should corect them (if you have bad grades, you should improve them)	In Croatian *ocjene* (the translation equivalent of 'grades' collocates with *ispraviti* (the translation equivalent of 'correct'). The student is not aware of the English collocation.

4. DISCUSSION

This research has shown that students made the majority of errors in the use of articles, the use of prepositions and word order. There was more omission of articles than redundant use of articles, which can be expected from learners who do not have articles in their mother tongue (Croatian). Also, most errors were found in the following areas: the difference between *a few/few*, use of *one* instead of *a*, use of *say/ tell, look/watch/see, let, listen, enjoy.*

We did not find many sentences which were very difficult to understand, which corresponds to the descriptor for grammatical correctness for level B1 (CEFRL, 2001:114).

The research findings also show that altogether there were more morpho-syntactic errors than lexico-semantic, which might be partly due to vocabulary range restricted to topics at level B1 (family, hobbies and interests, work, travel and current events) (CEFRL, 2001:29) and the avoidance factor (Ellis, 1994).

We also came to the conclusion that the cross-linguistic transfer, in some cases, takes place not from standard Croatian, but from non-standard (spoken) Croatian. The examples of this transfer are *It is worth of waiting*. The expression exists in Croatian in the Genitive case in this structure. *Vrijedno je čekanja (translation equivalent of* 'It's worth waiting' belongs to non-standard Croatian whilst its translation equivalent in standard Croatian would be *vrijedno je čekati.)*

Another example of the same transfer is *The hall (i.e. whole) movie is about one women*. The quantifier *jedan* 'one' is used in this kind of structure in Croatian. The expression *Film o jednoj ženi* 'the movie about one women' belongs to non-standard Croatian whilst its translation equivalent in standard Croatian is *Film o ženi*.

It seems that form which interfered with English was the one in wider use and / or more familiar to learners, regardless of its standard / non-standard status. Furthermore, we have observed that some students once used the structure correctly and once made an error with the same structure in the same essay. For example, the same student wrote *I started to listen my parents* and *Your parents just want good for you and maybe you should listen to them*. This might mean that the error is not really an error, but a mistake; or that it is easier for them to remember to use 'to' after 'listen' in front of a pronoun.

5. IMPLICATIONS

The interference error analysis on national exams aimed at level B1 could be useful for teachers, curriculum designers, materials developers, evaluators, assessors

and students. Being aware of the possible errors at a certain level of acquiring a language, they can then take different attitudes and actions with regard to the relevance of learner errors (Corder, 1981).

Furthermore, this research gives us more information about the level B1 of Croatian students as defined by the test criteria. It can also be useful for teaching the higher CEFRL (2001) levels in which accuracy becomes more important as clearly stated in the CEFRL (2001). At level B2 users are expected to demonstrate "Good grammatical control; occasional *'slips'* or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure may still occur; but they are rare and can often be corrected in retrospect" (CEFRL, 2001:114).

In this context, the role of curriculum developers, evaluators and assessors is very important because their decisions have a more systematic influence on the way English is taught in schools. They make decisions regarding the areas which are taught and provide the explicit and implicit guidelines for the treatment of errors.

6. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings of this research the following can be concluded about the level B1 of Croatian high-school students who took the national exam in English in 2007:

The researchers did not find many sentences which were very difficult to understand which is in line with the CEFRL (2001) description for grammatical correctness at level B1.

The students made more morpho-syntactic than lexico-semantic errors.

The students made most errors in the use of articles, the use of prepositions and word order.

However, the results of the findings should be taken with reservations because the task was done within a low-stakes test. The students might have made fewer errors if they had taken a high-stakes test.

Also, the researchers cannot be sure whether the exam tests the level B1 from the CEFRL (2001) or not, because the linkage of the exam to the CEFRL (2001) has not been analysed and proven yet. Likewise, the origin of a lot of errors cannot be traced back to Croatian with a high degree of certainty so some of the explanations require further research. Our corpus consisted of essays in which students were given a lot of freedom to choose their words and structures so they probably avoided those areas they were not sure about. The classification of errors and their explanation give ground to further discussion and re-examination. The findings and corpus of this research could be used for further research, especially the one dealing with a more

comprehensive study of the interlanguage of Croatian learners.

[1]CA has a long tradition in Croatian linguistics. The Zagreb English–Serbo-Croatian Contrastive Project, itself a continuation of the Yugoslav Serbo-Croatian–English Contrastive Project, ran from 1972 to 1993 and provided a lot of material on the difference between Croatian and English (Filipović, 1985).

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ANALIZA INTERFERENCIJSKIH GREŠAKA NA NACIONALNIM ISPITIMA IZ ENGLESKOG JEZIKA NA RAZINI B1

Svrha istraživanja prikazanog u članku bila je proučiti međujezični transfer iz hrvatskog jezika u engleski jezik na pisanim tekstovima koji su nastali u sklopu nacionalnih ispita iz engleskog jezika za druge razrede gimnazija na B1 razini prema Zajedničkom referentnom okviru za jezike (ZEROJ). Autorice su se usredotočile na sustavne greške (*errors*) kako ih određuje ZEROJ i teorija analize pogrešaka (*Error Analysis*). Greške su prikupljene i svrstane u dvije glavne kategorije: leksičko-semantičke i sintaktičko-morfološke greške. Nakon što su sakupile, zapisale, analizirale i raspravile greške, zaključile su da na razini B1 najveće probleme za hrvatske učenike predstavljaju sljedeća područja: uporaba članova, uporaba prijedloga i red riječi.

Ključne riječi: međujezični transfer iz hrvatskog jezika u engleski jezik, analiza pogrešaka, nacionalni ispit iz engleskog jezika, ZEROJ B1 pisanje