

CONTRASTIVE STUDIES AND INTERLANGUAGE

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The term *interlanguage* (IL) is understood here as the language of the learner who is in the process of acquiring a given foreign language. In our case it is the English language used by Polish learners. In this sense IL was introduced as a concept by L. Selinker (1972) and it resembles the notions of *approximative system* and *idiosyncratic dialect* introduced by W. Nemser (1971) and by S.P. Corder (1971) respectively.

From the point of view of description IL can be treated like any dialect or register but one has to remember two features which make it different from other linguistic phenomena.

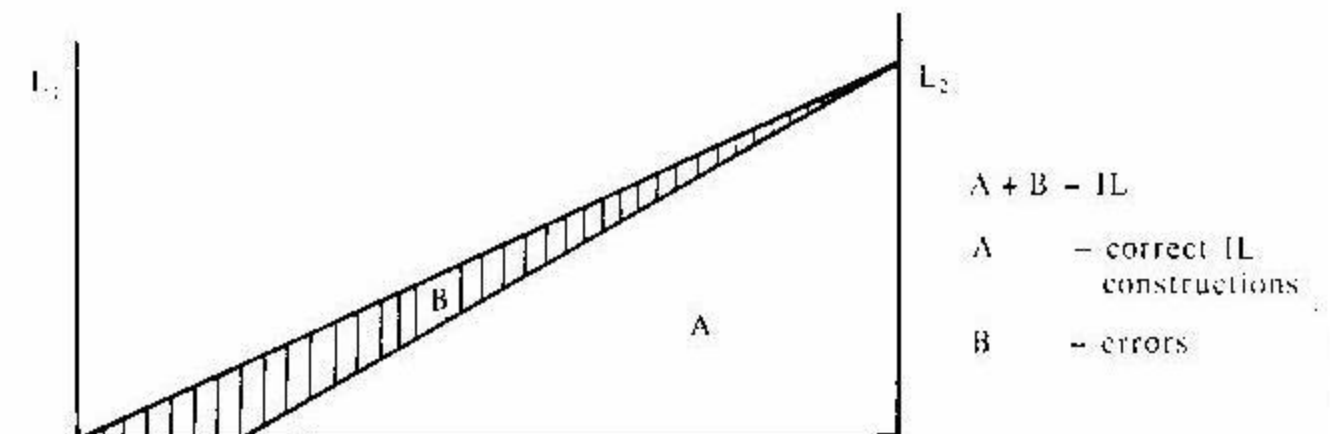


Figure 1

- I. IL is not a complete system. It is a system which is being built. In this respect it resembles child language and these two phenomena have many features in common.
- II. The most characteristic feature of IL is its erroneous constructions. The presence of errors provides IL with its unique status. Some authors are

inclined to treat IL analysis and error analysis as the same field. One of them is S. P. Corder (1971).

"What has come to be known as 'Error Analysis' has to do with the investigation of the language of second language learners.

... the language of such a learner, or perhaps certain groupings of learners, is a special sort of dialect." (Corder 1971: 147).

This kind of approach is very important from the point of view of the economy of description. We concentrate only on the deviant constructions (deviant from the point of view of L₂) since they are responsible for the idiosyncratic character of IL. One could, of course, undertake some other kind of IL studies e.g. stylistic studies and concentrate on the description of A. This kind of research, however, would be less economic. It would have to consider a much bigger corpus. The studies of A would not tell us much about the processes occurring in second language acquisition. We receive this information from the study of errors.

The role of error analysis is different from what it used to be. According to George (1972: 189):

"at the beginning of the sixties the word *error* was associated with *correction*, at the end with *learning*."

The sources of errors are numerous and some errors can be predicted by Contrastive Studies (CS).

It has been agreed that CS can predict or explain only those errors which originate from the native tongue. However we do not share this opinion. In this paper we would like to concentrate on two types of errors which are of L₁ origin and we would like to show the role of CS in connection with these errors. The errors presented below are the result of negative transfer. Errors of this category are easily recognizable by error analysts but unfortunately the analysts do not go beyond labeling or counting them.

The notions of transfer and negative transfer were borrowed from psychologists and introduced to the field of foreign language learning. Unfortunately the notion of transfer in language learning has not been as well described as some other psycholinguistic phenomena. The aim of this paper is to show some aspects of transferring L₁ habits into IL.

The influence of L₁ is especially well illustrated in the errors caused by the transfer of Polish phraseological rules. In the following examples

Chciałbym	<u>mieć</u>	tę książkę.	I would like	<u>to have</u>	this book.
	<u>mieć</u>	dwadzieścia lat.		<u>to be</u>	twenty.
	<u>mieć</u>	tę pracę.		<u>to get</u>	this job.

Polish *mieć* is rendered by English *have*, *be* and *get*.

A situation like this is a source of errors where *have* for example, may be used instead of *be* or *get*. The contexts of Polish *mieć* only modulate its meaning (c.f. Lowicki 1976), whereas in the case of English, the contexts *this*, *twenty years old* and *this job* require different verbs. Learners unaware of these rules apply Polish rules to the above contexts and as a result they produce:

When I *have* 19 years ... (When I *am* 19 years old)
I must finished the study earlier and *have* a job
(I must finish my studies as soon as possible and *get* a job)

In the case of the above errors the L₁ meaning is transferred by a translation equivalent which we shall call *primary counterpart*. Primary counterpart is the equivalent which in the process of foreign language learning is acquired to render the common meaning of a given L₁ lexical item. In situations when a learner produces an L₂ utterance sticking to L₁ rules he would use primary counterparts to render a given L₁ construction. Primary, in this case, is a matter of statistics. In a great majority of cases Polish *mieć* is rendered by *have* and only some contexts in English require *get*, *be*, etc. Whenever these contexts occur the usage of a primary counterpart will be erroneous.

Since in the majority of cases Polish *mieć* translates as *have* it will most probably be introduced as a translation equivalent of *mieć* before the other equivalents. This will enable the learner to acquire *have* as a primary counterpart of *mieć*. The *have-mieć*, being more common than other *x-mieć* relationships, will occur more often in the texts to which a learner is exposed. In this situation a learner will be exposed to *have-mieć* with greater intensity than to other equivalents of *mieć*. It is both the order and the intensity with which a given L₂ equivalent is introduced which are responsible for its acquisition as a primary counterpart.

In Polish-English IL preposition errors are very numerous. The main reason for this situation is the fact that a given surface L₁ preposition would have many surface structure counterparts in L₂. Underdifferentiation between these counterparts leads to errors. The following list presents some counterparts of the Polish preposition *w*, which in turn may be counterparts of the Polish preposition *na*.

w lesie	in the woods
w szkole	at school
w środę	on Wednesday
w dzień	by day
w lewo	to the left
w kapeluszu	with his hat
w bek	(burst) into tears
(słowo) w słowo	(word) for word

The above English prepositions in different syntactic functions and in different contexts may render Polish preposition *na*.

in the coalmine	<i>na kopalni</i>
at a signal	<i>na sygnal</i>
on a motorcycle	<i>na motorze</i>
by Saturday	<i>na sobotę</i>
to dinner	<i>na obiad</i>
(be ill) with the measles	<i>na odrę</i>
(divide) into parts	<i>na części</i>
for a walk	<i>na spacer</i>

The list which presents translation counterparts of only one Polish preposition which are at the same time counterparts of another L_1 item shows how complicated the prepositional system of English is for Poles. Using the data from the list we can predict the hypothetical number of underdifferentiation errors likely to be made by Poles. The number can be calculated by the following formula (Arabski 1968):

$$S = N^2 - N$$

where N stands for the number of L_2 constructions rendering a given L_1 construction. There will be 112 wrong substitution errors (56 for each Polish preposition) in using w and na English counterparts.

The above formula shows that from the point of view of CS, where one compares languages without the consideration of learning and teaching processes, every translation equivalent of Polish w has an equal chance of being accepted by a learner as a counterpart of w and of being used instead of other counterparts. Since *w kapeluszu* translates by *with a hat*, *with* may be picked up as the only equivalent of w and be used instead of *in*, *at*, *on*, etc.

Using the data from the list *with* may represent 8 different prepositions in the same way that every other preposition may represent the same 8 items from the list. This would give us 64 combinations (8×8). We have to subtract from this number the usage of *with* instead of *with* or *in* which are not erroneous forms (minus 8). This calculation leaves us with 56 combinations of possible error types.

In practice, however, it does not work this way. Polish *w lesie* (*in the woods*) is very unlikely to be translated as *with the woods* and it is very likely to be rendered in IL as *at the woods*. A learner in his process of L_2 acquisition learns that a given meaning of a Polish item, e.g. w is rendered by English *in*. Hypothetically from this time on every occurrence of Polish w will be rendered by the learner as *in* (with the exception of those phrases which are correctly acquired and do not occur in IL as a result of translation from Polish). In a situation like this a learner sticks to his L_1 system and transfers it into IL

by an item which we have called a *primary counterpart*. A primary counterpart is an item which in IL represents the whole group (list) of L_2 translation equivalents and thus causes underdifferentiation errors.

It changes its character throughout the process of language acquisition, i.e. during IL development. Using the example of *in* representing the whole list of w counterparts we can say that in the course of IL development *in* represents a smaller and smaller number of L_2 prepositions. In the course of Target Language acquisition a learner acquires the proper usage of each of the w counterparts until *in* represents only itself (the correct usage). Shown below is the hypothetical model of this process.

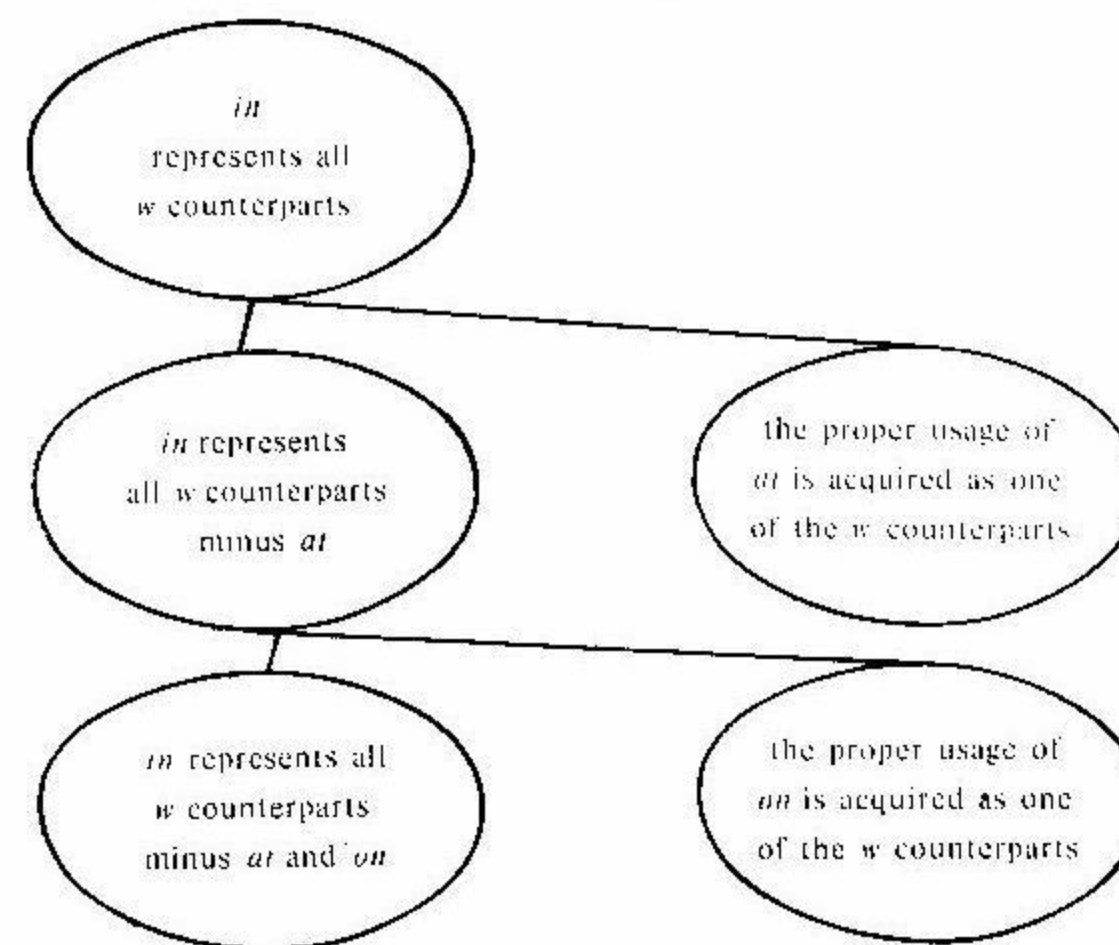


Figure 2

The above underdifferentiation process can also be classified as a simplification and it occurs also in pidgins and creoles discussed by E. C. Traugott (1974). The Niger-Kongo pidgin language Sango renders English *at*, *in*, *on*, by Sango *na* (the similarity in sound with Polish *na* is purely coincidental) (c.f. Traugott, 1974 : 274).

Acquisition of a given construction is a process. It does not occur in a given moment. There is a period of time when the same construction is sometimes used properly and sometimes erroneously. This may be illustrated by the examples from two tests a week apart taken by the same learner.

Someone *to* whom I'd have to prepare meals. (*for* whom I would ...)
Someone *for* whom I'd have to prepare meals

One could argue that a *primary counterpart* is an individual phenomenon. A given learner may be first exposed or exposed with a bigger intensity to e.g. different *w* counterparts from another learner. As a result these two learners would acquire different counterparts for Polish *w* in their ILs.

This again is only partly true. In an organized school teaching process all the learners are exposed to the same materials and textbooks. Also teaching materials always present certain constructions first and thus enable the learners to acquire them as their primary counterparts. *In the classroom* and *on the shelf* are likely to be introduced before *word for word* and *be ill with the measles*.

The errors found in the corpus support the above hypothesis. The *w* counterparts are represented by *in* and Polish *na* is mostly rendered by *on*.

Besides, it is difficult, in my opinion, to be a good father and a good husband and a good student *in* the same time. (*at* the same time)

My husband could not help me *in* the housework. (*with* the housework)

He disappears *in* the door (*through* the door)

The problem of money is very real *in* student married couples. (*for/among* student married couples)

Marriage *in* the time of study can be a new problem. (Marriage *during* one's studies)

I wish study *on* the University (*at* the University)

I have time *on* marriage (*for* marriage)

results *on* this field (try to attain the best possible)

I have only one answer *on* this question (*to* this question)

results *in* this field)

You should concentrate on it and try to have the best results *on* this field (try to attain the best possible results *in* this field)

Most confusion observed in IL concerns underdifferentiation of *in* and *at*. The syntactic functions of *in* and *at* are similar, e.g.,

He married *in* old age.

He married *at* a young age.

and sometimes they are interchangeable:

They live *in* Stirling.

They live *at* Stirling.

This syntactic and semantic closeness is an additional factor causing underdifferentiation errors.

I think that marriage *in* young age depends on great love (*at* a young age)

I wrote it *in* the beginning of my paper (I wrote this *at* the beginning)

Being a married woman is a pleasure, especially when husband can help *at* studies (*when* a husband can help *in/with* one's studies)

The substitution of L₂ prepositions by their IL primary counterparts is only one aspect of the transfer of the Polish prepositional system. As soon as a primary counterpart of a given Polish preposition is acquired, a learner begins to use Polish constructions with their English counterparts. This may lead to erroneous expansions or to omitting prepositions in English phrases which from the point of view of preposition usage are Polish constructions with English lexical items.

Są *w* tym samym wieku.

They are *in* the same age. (They are the same age)

Nie mogę pozwolić sobie *na* małżeństwo.

I can't afford *on* marriage.

(I cannot afford to marry)

Nie mogą poświęcić *swoim dzieciom* tyle czasu ile potrzeba.

They cannot devote *their children* as much time as necessary.

(devote as much time as is necessary *to* their children)

Larry Selinker (1972) distinguishes five central processes which occur in IL. They are "language transfer", "transfer of training", "strategies of second language learning", "strategies of second language communication" and "overgeneralization of target language linguistic material". According to H. G. Widdowson (forthcoming)

"all of the processes which Selinker refers to are tactical variations of the same underlying *simplification* strategy and ... in general error analysis is a practical account of basic simplifying procedures which lie at the heart of communicative competence and which are not restricted to people engaged in the learning of a second language system."

(italics mine)

The above mentioned errors are typical representatives of language transfer. Our aim was to show how language transfer is technically realized. We also wanted to show how simplification strategy works technically.

According to Widdowson the simplification strategy is not restricted to foreign language acquisition. We have already mentioned the case of simplification in the pidgin language Sango. The notion of *overextension* in child language can also be treated as simplification. It is a well known process of using e.g. *dog* to range over dogs, cats, cows, horses, sheep, etc. (see Clark 1973). Looking for analogies we could go further and see the development of child language in terms of Piaget's theory of learning (Clark 1975 : 312):

"For Piaget, the central processes of learning, the functional invariants, include assimilation and accommodation. According to this view the child is born with a very limited set of behaviour patterns or schemata, which he seeks to assert on any object he encounters. For instance, he will try to suck blankets and fingers

as well as the nipple or a teat. This process, whereby the child seeks to encompass an available object into an activity schema, is called assimilation. While trying to assimilate these objects to his schema, the infant discovers that he has to open his mouth in a different way to suck different objects, so his schema becomes differentiated as a result of interaction with his environment. This process is called accommodation."

The notion of *primary counterpart* (in functioning as *in*, *at*, *on*, *with*, etc.) can be compared with *overextension*, which is a linguistic counterpart of Piaget's *assimilation*. The development of the IL prepositional system presented in figure 2 (differentiation process) may in turn be compared to Piaget's notion of *accommodation*.

In light of the above discussion, *primary counterpart* is the lexical or grammatical construction transferring L_1 construction into IL. When we deal with one to one correspondence between L_1 and L_2 (congruent constructions), the transfer is positive and results in the acceptable L_2 construction.

Tom jest dzielny. = Tom is brave.

Whenever L_1 item is rendered by more than one translation equivalent one of these equivalents will be selected to act as a *primary counterpart* and thus will simplify L_2 system. As we can see, language transfer occurs with those constructions which are simpler in L_1 . By simpler constructions we mean here those which represent a wider semantic range. In the process of IL development they undergo differentiation.

The errors presented above cannot be described in terms of their origin without realizing the differences existing between Polish and English prepositional systems. CS enable us to comprehend the source of difficulties manifested by language errors. Their role however, is explanatory. CS cannot predict the type of error, since it depends on input and intake in the process of foreign language teaching and learning. It is this input and intake which play the decisive role in selecting a given item as a *primary counterpart*. CS, being involved in the comparison of L_1 and L_2 systems, cannot predict all the circumstances in which these two systems are put in contact. CS do not consider the quantitative aspect of the described constructions and this aspect also governs the role of a given L_2 construction in IL.

The notion of prediction itself applies to phenomena which are about to happen in the future. The difficulties in the acquisition of English by Poles are taking place *now* in hundreds of schools, evening courses, private tutorials and at the Universities. They occur in every situation where English is taught and learnt. In order to learn about them one should study these difficulties. There is no need to predict them like there is no need to predict today's weather.

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