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‘DAY TO DAY’ or ‘DAY IN DAY OUT’?

(Case Study: Benefits of Linguistic Relativity Ideas Application In Language Teaching)

Abstract: This paper provides an overview of an educational technique used for teaching English on the basis of advantages of linguistic relativity ideas known as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The use of its principal notions in teaching English was occasionally combined with psycholinguistic, cognitive and cross-cultural analysis. Final contribution to the understanding of the outer world through the language explication of metaphoric transfer was demonstrated by the examples from general English teaching experience. A case study was illustrated by verbal description of some spatial and orientation relations among objects as well as temporal indications. They were interpreted in the light of linguo-cultural correspondence between English and Russian languages. The conclusions comprise summarized results of the technique developed, aimed at the improvement of English language acquisition including students’ intercultural understanding abilities.

Keywords: linguistic relativity, language acquisition, linguo-cultural correspondence, educational technique.

Introduction

The study deals with the applicability of Sapir-Whorf linguistic relativity manifestations in the course of English language acquisition. The material presented is not intended to prove or disprove the Whorfean determinism so much debated in the last five decades and stating that “all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar” [1; 2]. Neither it is considered to bring forth new theoretical or experimental arguments in favour of its recent distractors, opponents or proponents [3; 4; 5; 6; 7]. The idea is to find out and demonstrate how an insight into the everyday use of the language can serve as an educa-

tional technique for the improvement of teaching and learning English as a foreign language. But prior to this, both the teacher and the learner, have to master the cognitive linguistic approach that would help to answer the question: how a language is influenced by unseen cultural patterns. Most of the techniques under study gained practical approval in the course of long-term teaching both general English and English for specific purposes, carried out by the authors in the linguistic environment of Chinese and Ukrainian shipbuilding colleges and universities.

From time to time it was found impactful to scrutinize the language patterns from the viewpoint of psycholinguistic and cognitive analyses [8] so as to

understand certain features of the outer world on the linguistic background.

The most applicable areas of the language habitual behaviour display were selected from three domains: 1) relations among objects expressed by spatial or orientation prepositions and adverbs defining location or direction; 2) everyday English lexicon units that became phraseological combinations due to the hidden metaphoric similarity; 3) temporal indications denoting position in time.

Methodology

Conventional scientific and specific linguistic research methods were used in the study. Discourse analysis was applied in order to clarify the ways a language is used in a wider communicative context and accounts for changing its denotations, from structural characteristics to the ways how texts are organized and constructed to create meaning, and, finally, to socio-cultural interpretations that unite speakers and communicative events.

Admitting the intuition as a classic linguistic method for evaluating the correction of judgement, we verified it, wherever possible, in the existing linguistic corpora materials as the most reliable sources based on millions of usages.

The authors used conceptual analysis only as a way of the notion explication. Certain focus was centered around associative reconstruction method that made it possible to analyze chosen patterns of verbal memory of society and cultural stereotypes of nations, reflected in the language: the so-called Standard Average European (SAE) way of perception, introduced by B. Wharf. Descriptive method was applied to the explications of language structures and forms functioning in society. The reconstruction of the use of orientational, spatial and temporal metaphors, fixed in the language at a definite historic period, was based on comparative-historical method, especially when viewing similarity and differences of relations among objects. To explain the reasons of such likeness or divergence in the language structures, describing physically equal ideas, cross-cultural interpretation was used.

Discussion

Language relativity phenomena are encountered almost in every field of language manifestations. The authors of the hypothesis often demonstrated them on the most bright examples of sound imitation, perception of colours, forms, causes of the events, etc.. Actually, in English we transcribe the cock's cry as a [kɒk-ə-du: dl-du:], Frenchmen hear [kɔ-kə-ri-kɔ], whereas Russian language native speakers imitate it as [ku-ka-rə-ku:]. Various animals, – dogs, cats, cows, sheep, wolves, goats, birds, insects, – sound differently judging by their transcription notification in different languages, although the latter do have equivalent sounds in their phonetizing kits for similar audial reproduction to obtain the closest onomatopoeic effects. The bee is *buzzing* in English, however the same nectar sipping insect [зʊз'зит] in Russian. The most popular examples of linguistic relativity proponents are well known divergencies among the one-word names for rainbow colours. There are seven of them in Slavonic languages, but five in German and English, four in the Shona language of the people of Zimbabwe and only two in the language of Bassa (Liberia).

Numerous facts of different ways of identifying objects by means of metaphoric reconsideration could be highly encouraging for English language acquisition by foreign students. They demonstrate great distinctions and it would be helpful to find an efficient way of their mastering by EFL students, absorbing specific ways of imaginative thinking and retaining patterns of another vision of the outer world. For example, *a brow of a hill* has once obtained its image on the similarity basis with the arch of hair above each eye. The same notion in Russian is fixed as *гребень холма*, associated with a crest or a comb on a bird's upper flesh over the head. *An eye of a needle* will take time to be understood by a Russian language speaker unless he has at hand his own language equivalent associated with an ear – *ушко иголки* (literally *an ear of a needle*).

The above-indicated area of a language display reveals dissimilar approaches in different languages as a result of nomination process and it is first and foremost the reflection of specific understanding of outer world through the language. It proves to be highly productive as a result of cognition processes fixed in different languages and pertaining to various cultural stereotypes.

The focus on word-building elements of everyday objects could reanimate the visual image of a once bright notion, gradually fading away until complete oblivion. Explicating **breakfast** as created of two components, **break** and **fast**, the language user can reconstruct the feeling and attitude of the people of Early English period, as if they oversaw the fast all the night before breaking it by the morning act of food consumption. In Russian, the hostess gathered all the leftovers, that remained in the house in the evening, to prepare them for tomorrow's early meal **завтрак**, i.e. **к завтраку** [1; 2].

Each EFL teacher knows frequent occurrence of repetitive errors in the use **preposition of space and time by beginners** and pre-intermediate students, e.g. **on** [1;2].

This fact was first observed by Chicherin A. V., an outstanding Ukrainian philologist, founder of lingual stylistics in literary criticism [9; 10].

the street instead of **in the street**; erroneously used **on the picture** instead of **in the**

picture, or in an attempt to express continuum by **from day to day** instead of the verbal collocation **day in, day out**, etc.. This negative recurrence could be eliminated by using the educational technique of the insight into cultural stereotypes reflected in a language. Cross-cultural interpretation of the same structure in the mother tongue (L1) and that of a foreign language (L2) will reinforce the retention of historical and cultural divergencies in learner's memory and, finally, contribute to the effective improvement of English language acquisition.

Let us demonstrate it by a few examples. EFL learners often tend to substitute preposition **in** by

on in prepositional phrase **in the street**. This erroneous substitution can be justified by identifying 'the street' with 'a road surface' where preposition **on** would sound quite reasonably. Especially when in an EFL learner mother tongue **on** (**на**, 在...) literally means to be located on (the surface of) smth.

In order to radically correct the situation we can refer to the historic and cultural facts of the urban development history of medieval towns in Western Europe. As is known, a fortified town centre was usually located on an upland area or a hill, surrounded by a defensive stone wall. The outside area was populated by craftsmen and merchants in the so-called **down-town**, where later a business centre were erected and finally changed its meaningful shade from an underdeveloped place into an advanced one. Nowadays it became "related to, or located, in the lower part or business center of a city" [11]. On the contrary, **upper town** or **up town**, literally meant a topographically elevated area where the municipal administration was located and nobility lived.

Due to frequent internecine wars among small but multiple feudal principalities, which was peculiar for Western Europe, craftsmen population suffered most of all. Naturally, the people strove to get inside a safer fortified space of a town where the land was limited and cost extremely high. These were the reasons that resulted in a familiar features of today's ancient quarters of almost all West European cities: the streets were narrow, the area deficit urged the construction workers to build up the storeys higher and higher.

In order to enlarge inner sizes of premises the walls of upper floors were brought out as much forward as possible. They literally towered the street, so it became deeply shadowed. Sometimes they even closed up above the street. All this created an impression of a closed stony box. Hence, the verbalized notion **in the street** was encoded in the mind of a native speaker and retained as a historical and cultural pattern in the English language.

In East European town erection traditions, the street looked like a broad area of the road, fenced by low one- or two-storied rows of houses on two sides. It looks quite vivid that the space-related word combination *на улице* (Russian), or 在街上 (Chinese) retained in the national language memory practically the same as 'on the surface of the road between two opposite row of houses' [1].

Another similar example of divergencies of understanding is connected with different traditions in the history of painting, even remaining within the frames of Whorfean Standard Average European (SAE) idea and based on Aristotle-Newton model of the world. and creation and perception of the works of arts differently in English, Russian and Chinese.

English prepositional combination *in the picture* brings forth one and the same **frequent mistake as far as the use** of its equivalent is concerned [1].

An interesting fact is the emergence of the word combination "on the street" in early American English practice, fixed in Webster's dictionary (who was a great proponent of American English as a separate language). The first meaning of the word entry 'street' had the following definition: "a road in a city or town that has houses or other building on one or both sides" e.g. "They live on a busy/residential street" [11]. It is likely to be a direct consequence of the first towns planning by the American settlers, that didn't follow the West European patterns. In the course of time it was substituted by the same *in the street* as the consequence of the US linguocultural development.

Russian and Chinese present a distinctive difference in the preposition used in the same sence: *на картине*, 在图. Both mean literally *on the picture*. The easiest way to find the explanation of this difference is to refer to the world history of arts, namely to drawing and painting history.

As is known, the development of this kind of descriptive arts has covered a long way from petroglyphs of primitive peoples through Ancient Egypt arts, frescos of Ancient Greece and Rome, mosaic

smalts of Bysanth, icon paintings of old Christian tradition, etc.. All their images were plane, two-dimensional by their character. More realistic reflection of the outer world in arts found its implementation in the West European painting when a mystical influence of the Medieval Church started to loose its positions in the Renaissance.

By the middle of the XV century, the theory and practice of the perspective or three-dimansional portrayal became firmly established in Italian painting. It was percieved quickly by the West European schools of arts and through France and Holland became a heritage of English arts. It is due to this fact, the artistic image has moved inside the picture perspective in the English native speaker's mind. A contemplator, with the help of vision and imagination, is shifting from the objects located on the surface within the picture frames, into the deeper unfolding perspective, – *in the picture*.

In the East European painting, canonic plane arts has dominated as an artistic technique since the Roublyov tradition and other later masters. Secular painting of the VII–VIII centuries inherits these traditions and does not conceive the achievements of the Renaissance so promptly as it happened in West European arts. Therefore, it was natural for Slavonic language speakers to perceive the image depicted in plane technique, when the painter put the paint by the brush touches on the canvas surface. Hence, the prepositional phrase *на картине* (literally *on the picture* has finally consolidated in the language in this form and become an instrument and result of cognitive thinking.

No doubt, English language memory has retained and used actively the version *on the picture* though at radically lower frequency rate, which is fixed in all representative lexicographic sources, such as defining and frequency dictionaries,

linguistic corpora, etc.. We have confined ourselves from statistical data and extensive exemplifying it by two reasons: firstly, due to the space limits of material presentation, and secondly, because

qualitative contextual occurrences are more essential for our study of the above phenomena.

The meaning of this prepositional phrase, – *on the picture*, – is clarified easily from the appropriate context, namely, on the surface of the picture, e.g.: ‘There was a thick layer of dust *on the picture*’.

This dual existence and, hence, comprehension, precisely discloses Wharf’s idea, that objects of the outer world are identical for different native speakers. But divergencies, fixed in the language, lie in the coordinate system of perceiving this reality. The explication of this approach, reducing metaphorical meaning of ‘coordinates’, to its literal sense, could be the following: the point on the plane in Cartesian and polar coordinate systems is the same. Different are the frames of reference and fixation of this reality: in the first system it is understood as perpendicular projections of the point onto the two axes, in the second one it is the point on a plane determined by a distance from a reference point and an angle from a reference direction.

The last examples of language relativity manifestation in different languages, as well as the ways of their disambiguation as an educational technique for better language acquisition deal with temporal indications. First and foremost, they concern errors or inaccurate language use caused by misunderstanding of differences among the systems of verbal description of actions and processes in various languages. Even superficial comparison of tenses system in English, Russian and Chinese proves that due to elaborate ways of analytical formation of means of action or process description, English is by far more accurate among the languages mentioned. Concerning the example of verbal collocations and prepositional phrases, expressing the time flow by different language speakers, we can readily analyse by the following.

Russian *из одного дня в другой* (from one day into another day, literally translated into English) is associated with the illusion that we are ‘moving’ from one temporal space into another, and so on.

English equivalent collocation *day in, day out* implies quite the opposite process: we are staying statically in one temporal space and the days are moving through it. One day comes in and goes out, then the process is repeated, creating the illusion of time span continuity. Such perception, explained as an insight into the language functioning, forms a reliable basis for its proper acquisition and durable retention in memory by foreign learners, in contrast to other versions that appeared as a result of borrowings from other languages. Much more study cases of this phenomena applications can be taken from the register of scientific and technological language manifestations. For example, in the lexicon of ESP teaching for naval architects and shipbuilding, over 570 somatism-based terms (N.B.: for the ship’s structure only) were singled out by us in the course of teaching this discipline. They constitute a great resource for the effective use of the educational technique described above and form a strong basis for further studies.

Conclusions

We have demonstrated the peculiarities of emergence and functions of linguistic facts in the language memory by two representative examples for each case of their possible occurrence. On occasion we have resorted to allusions of metaphoric transfer, vividly present in the discourse and constantly participating in the development of the language, speech and culture. They possess a high potential not only for nominations in everyday English, but are extremely numerous in the English language register of science and engineering originating in result of notion transfer, based on visual similarity, contrast, adjacency etc.

The practical result of the article is supposed to lay another small brick into the huge structure of a foreign language acquisition techniques, namely, how to highlight a word, word combination or phrase, so as they could be perceived comprehensively, retained durably and retrieved easily in the course of verbalizing a communicative task.

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