

Language Contact and the Linguistic Impact**Linguistics**

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Abstract

This article presents a study on language contact and interference, otherwise known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, or mutual-interference. The object of this paper is to show that when two languages come into contact, they interfere with each other, and language speakers may use elements of either language. Phonological interference implies foreign accent such as stress, rhyme, intonation and speech sounds from the first language influencing the second. Grammatical interference is defined as the first language influencing the second in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determinants, tense and mood. Interference at a lexical level provides for the borrowing of words from one language and converting them to sound more natural in another and orthographic interference includes the spelling of one language altering another. This paper is worth reading because it describes interference in a language contact situation, shows differences between the English and Albanian languages as potential causes of interference, describes types of interference and provides considerations about the use of transferred words in the Albanian language.

When two languages come into contact, they interfere with each other, and language speakers may use elements of either language. This article focuses on the following issues:

- Interference in a language contact situation
- Types of interference: phonic and orthographical interference, grammatical interference, lexical interference
- The use of transferred words in the Albanian language

1. What is interference?

Language transfer (also known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross meaning) refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from their native language to a second language. Transfer may be conscious or unconscious. Consciously, learners or unskilled translators may sometimes guess when producing speech or text in a second language because they have not learned or have forgotten its proper usage. Unconsciously, they may not realize that the structures and internal rules of the languages in question are different. Such users could also be aware of both the structures and internal rules, yet be insufficiently skilled to put them into practice, and consequently often fall back on their first language. Interference may be viewed as the transference of elements of one language to another at various levels including phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical levels (Berthold, Mangubhai & Batorowicz, 1997).

What are types of interference?

Interference can be considered to be a transference that covers all domains of language. According to Weinreich (1974: 2): "Great or small, the differences and similarities between the languages in contact must be stated for every domain: phonic, grammatical and lexical- as a prerequisite to an analysis of interference".

Berthold et al (1997) define phonological interference as items including foreign accent such as stress, rhyme, intonation and speech sounds from the first language influencing the second. Grammatical interference is defined as the first language influencing the second in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determinants, tense and mood. Interference at a lexical level provides for the borrowing of words from one language and converting them to sound more natural in another and orthographic interference includes the spelling of one language altering another(<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Skiba-CodeSwitching.html>), [June 12, 2005].

1.1 Phonic and Orthographical Interference

Concerning phonic interference, Weinreich (1974: 14) writes: *The problem of phonic interference concerns the manner in which a speaker perceives and reproduces the sounds of one language, which might be designated as secondary, in terms of another, to be called primary. Interference arises when a bilingual identifies a phoneme of the secondary system with one in the primary system and, in reproducing it, subjects it to the phonic rules of the primary language.*

Although speakers tend to pronounce the sound in conformity with the foreign accent, the accent of their own language interferes and in many cases, it may be liable to misunderstanding. Weinreich (1974: 21) shows how the process of interference proceeds.

When a lay uni-lingual hears his language spoken with a foreign “accent”, his perception and interpretation of the accent is itself subject to the interference of his native phonic system. A bilingual attempting to speak language S, for example, renders sounds of S by reference to the system of language P, which to him is primary. There are a variety of reasons that lead to the interference of the native phonic system, but the main ones are the very reasons that relate to interference in general: the individual and social ones. Weinreich (1974: 27) writes: “The exertion of effort to retain the original sounds is probably governed by individual and social factors very similar to those which regulate the total amount of interference”.

When languages come into contact, the native sounds may be retained, but more often than not, they are liable to change. Hock and Joseph (1996: 9) write that what determines pronunciation is not only related to linguistic and extra linguistic factors. “Sound change is not only the only change that may affect pronunciation. Words often change their pronunciation under the influence of, or by analogy with other words” (Hock & Joseph 1996: 9).

A further possible determinant of the selection, which has not yet received sufficient attention, is the speaker’s attitude toward the source language of the borrowed morpheme. If that language enjoys great cultural or social prestige in the language community, the pronunciation of loan words in a phonic form close to the original may serve as a mark of education or status. On the other hand, if the foreign language’s prestige is rejected, it may bring forth artificial mock forms. Some types of interference may cause misunderstanding even in the same context, and some resist time and tend to be part of the lexis (Weinreich (cf. 1974: 21)

Since words can also be borrowed from a language in its written form, phonic integration sometimes starts with the spelled form of a word. The orthographic level shows how the spelling of an English source word is adapted into the orthography of the receiving language.

The borrowed morpheme may be integrated into the phonic pattern of the language, but it may be rendered in terms of the original sounds. It has been argued that if the speaker is bilingual, s/he attempts to reproduce the borrowed morpheme with its original sounds; if s/he is unilingual, s/he is likely “to force the loan words to conform to the native phonetic and phonemic pattern” (Weinreich 1974: 26).

Speakers succeed in pronouncing the foreign word through reinforcement. Weinreich (1974: 21) writes: “The spurious conception of the foreign way of speaking is structurally determined by the unilingual’s phonemics; because of constant reinforcement, it easily becomes stereotyped”.

Phonological interference results in structural interference. According to Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 38): Incorporation of phonological features that enter the borrowing language with loan words may seem the first and most obvious kind of structural borrowing to be expected...at least in cases of moderate to heavy borrowing...where there is phonological interference, there will be a comparable degree of syntactic interference too. Morphological interference lags behind.

1.2. Grammatical interference

The problem of grammatical interference is one of considerable complexity. It is currently among the most debated questions of general linguistics. Many well-known linguists have questioned the possibility of grammatical, at least morphological, influence altogether. Weinreich (1974: 29) describes a model of how a grammatical system penetrates into another. The grammatical systems of two languages ...are impenetrable to each other” said Meillet and he was echoed by Sapir: “Nowhere do we find any but superficial morphological interinfluencing”. With equal vigor, the opposite view has been defined by Schuchardt “Even closely knit structures...], like inflectional endings, are not secure against invasion by foreign material”. According to a contemporary restatement, “there is no limit in principle to the influence which one morphological system may have upon another.

When analysing which class of words mostly enters a language in a language contact situation, nouns occupy the first place. This fact and the reason behind the fact are shown by Weinreich (1974: 36).

In the list of loanwords nouns figure so predominantly. The reason is probably of a lexical-semantic rather than a grammatical and structural nature. Under different structural or cultural contact conditions the ratio may be different. For example in the contact of a European language, where many concrete “things” are generally indicated by nouns with a language in which verbs fulfill some of the same functions, the ratio of nouns among the loan words would probably be lower than usual. Further, on a cultural setting where the emphasis in borrowing is on things spiritual and abstract, loanwords other than nouns may again occupy a larger place, even in a European language

In the domain of grammatical relations, interference is extremely common. If a native English speaker were to maintain the English type word order S-V-O, this would be superfluously monotonous, but would not violate rules of grammar. Concerning grammatical genders, borrowed nouns denoting animate beings receive genders according to their sex. With inanimate nouns, the form of the word is paramount. Thus, according to Weinreich, a choice is often

made by the speaker between integrating and not integrating the transferred words - a choice which seems clearer in the matter of grammar than in sounds. The choice itself would appear to depend not on the structures of the languages in contact, but rather on individual psychological and socio-cultural factors prevailing in the contact situation (cf. 1974: 46).

1.3. Lexical Interference

Due to its loose structure compared to phonemics and grammar, the vocabulary of a language is the main domain of borrowing. Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 37) write: "Invariably, in a borrowing situation, the first foreign elements to enter the borrowing language are words".

Borrowing is the most common development in contact situations; it is the adoption or adaptation of words from one language to another. People are prepared to accept the existence of lexical borrowings since these go hand in hand with the borrowing of the objects, ideas or concepts expressed by words. Hock and Joseph (1996: 14) write: "[... lexical borrowing is today the result of the international socio-economic exchange. Science, sport, technology, the media and so many other activities to which men are devoted, are the determining factors of lexical borrowing".

There are various ways in which one vocabulary can interfere with another and they are convincingly explained by Weinreich (1974: 48): Given two languages, A and B, morphemes may be transferred from A to B, or B morphemes may be used to designate functions on the model of A- morphemes with whose content they are identified, finally, in the case of compound lexical elements, both processes may be combined.

According to Weinreich (cf. 1974: 47-48), the most common type of lexical interference is the outright transfer of a phonemic sequence from one language to another (interjections, *hello*, *pizza-pie*). He is of the opinion that the transferred word is occasionally of such a form as to resemble phonemically a potential or actual word in the recipient language (e.g. *troca-truck*). In his opinion, the other major type of interference involves the extension of the use of an indigenous word of the influenced language in conformity with a foreign model.

In contact situations, in contrast to abstract words, concrete words are easier to transfer. Weinreich (1974: 35) quotes Linton who states that: [...other things (e.g. prestige association) being equal, certain sorts of culture elements are more easily transferable than others. Tangible objects such as tools, utensils, or ornaments are taken over with great ease, in fact they are usually the first things transferred in a contact situation. The transfer of elements which lack the concreteness and ready observability of objects is the most difficult of all. In general the more abstract the element the more difficult the transfer.

Compound words and phrases can be transferred. As to their transfer, Weinreich suggests the following:

- All elements may be transferred, in analysed form, for instance, *conscientious objectors*.
- All elements may be reproduced by semantic extensions, for instance *e gets nga perendia*.
- Some elements may be transferred, while others are reproduced
- Only the most concrete loanwords, such as designations for newly invented or imported objects can be thought of as mere additions to the vocabulary.

In Weinreich's (1974: 35-54) opinion, only the most concrete words, such as designations of newly invented or imported objects, can be thought of as mere additions to the vocabulary. Except for loans with entirely new content, the transfer or reproduction of foreign words must affect the existing vocabulary in one of three ways: a) confusion between the content of the new and old word; b) disappearance of the old word; c) survival of both the new and old word, with a specialization in the content.

2. The use of transferred words in the Albanian language

In the opinion of Coulmas (1989: xi), language adaptation refers both to deliberate and unguided processes of linguistic change. Language is seen as a system which tends to evolve in such a way that it serves the needs of those using it, but whose development can also be influenced by conscious intervention if need be.

Languages may be subject to a pressure to adapt. Coulmas (1989: 3) writes that languages cannot be made suitable for serving new functions out of thin air. In his opinion, it is using a language for the purposes of modern communication that generates the necessary registers and thus leads to functional expansions In Albanian: *Fjalët që merren nga gjuhët e huaja i janë nënshtruar sistemit fonetik dhe gramatikor të gjuhës sonë, d.m.th shkruhen dhe shqiptohen sipas vlerës fonike të alfabetit tonë, eptohen sipas klasave gramatikore dhe rregullave përkatëse. Në qoftëse janë emra, kanë trajtë të shquar, të pashquar, numrin njëjës e shumës dhe lakohen; po të jenë folje, marrin ato forma në mënyrë, vetë e kohë, sikurse fjalët e tjera.*¹¹⁹ (Thomai 1999: 231)

¹¹⁹ Words borrowed from other languages submit to the phonetic and grammatical system of the Albanian language i.e. they are written and pronounced in conformity with the phonic value of the Albanian alphabet, and fall under their respective grammatical classes and rules. If they are nouns, they may be definite or indefinite, singular or plural and are declined. If they are verbs, they acquire different inflections in conformity with their respective mood, tense, person and number

Foreign names have to be declined in conformity with the Albanian declension system, they acquire case inflections without a hyphen, for example, *Shakespeare* should be written *Shekspiri*, *Shekspirit* and not *Shekspir-i*, *Shekspiri-t* (Ismajli 1998: 312). Concerning orthographical adaptation, *Drejtëshkrimi i Gjuhës shqipe* (1974: 90)¹²⁰ reads: *Shkrimi i emrave të përvetshëm hë huaj mbështetet përgjithësisht në shqiptimin e tyre në gjuhët përkatëse duke iu përshtatur sistemit grafik të shqipes... kështu shkruhen Aligeri (not Alighieri), Karduci, (not Carducci), Shekspir (not Shakespeare), Ruso (not ousseau) apo emrat e vendeve Bolonjë (not Bologna), Nju Jork (not New York) dhe kështu me radhë.*¹²¹

In conclusion, by infiltrating into the Albanian language, foreign words undergo changes in form and content. They evolve in the background of the Albanian language, become items of its vocabulary and submit to the current historical conditions, which determine the evolution of the Albanian language and become productive stems.

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¹²⁰ The Orthography of the Albanian Language

¹²¹ The orthography of proper names is based on their pronunciation in their respective languages by adapting them to the graphic system of Albanian... in this way we write *Aligeri* (not Alighieri), *Karduci*, (not Carducci), *Bolonjë* (not Bologna), *Nju Jork* (not New York) and so on.