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GRAMMAR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AT LESSONS OF GERMAN
AS A SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE



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Abstract

The ability to communicate efficiently at least in two languages has become an important competence in the modern world. The Russian Federation school curriculum before 2018 was aimed at developing communicative skills in one foreign language. The new requirement to introduce the second foreign language as an obligatory school subject arose much questions and discussion. Moreover, most teachers were asked to arrange classes in two languages. This made them rethink the methods and principles of teaching the second foreign language and search for the opportunity to use the students' knowledge and skills in the first foreign language as a kind of basis for teaching the second one. This made it possible to integrate the comparative linguistic methods in the process of teaching foreign languages. No doubt, all aspects of the linguistic competence may require a similar approach. The article deals with the problem of the German language grammar skills development that is the second foreign language for the students who study it on the basis of English as their first foreign language at secondary school. The authors present theoretical foundation for using comparative linguistic analysis as an education method and suggest an approach aimed at developing the above mentioned skills. The authors singled out the sources of inter-language interference and transference in teaching German as a second foreign language. The article proves that teaching German grammar in Secondary school should be based upon the principles of interference and transference phenomena integration when teaching the compared English and German languages.

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1. Introduction

International communication, Mass media development, open access to the Internet and other political, economic and social factors determine the necessity of broadening integration opportunities in education sphere. That results in importance of innovations in the education process.

Nowadays, Ministry of Education in the Russian Federation introduces studying the second foreign language as an obligatory course as it is part of the Federal State Education Standard of the Secondary Education (Letter of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, dated 17th May, 2018 № 08-1214, 2018).

Most of the Schools specializing in the Arts have already introduced the second foreign language as a subject to their curriculum. The fact that all the schools should adopt this practice arouses several problems and discussion.

The key principle in teaching foreign languages in the situation of multilingualism are the language transfer that can mean a positive impact of one language studying upon the other one (transference) and the negative influence – the interference. The previous studies current to the present research relate to the language transfer in general (Adamson, 2009) or several linguistic skills and competences such as lexical transfer, spelling and writing (Julio & Lopez 2011), teaching students different techniques of reflective activities (Falkovskaya et al., 2018), spelling and writing (Julio & Lopez 2011), socio-cultural interference (Sinichkina, 2018), bilingual and multilingual interference (Dmitrienko, 2017) and grammar interference (Mukhtarova & Tsyganova, 2018).

The core research problem raised in the study is the approach and principles of teaching German Grammar to the students whose native language is Russian or Tatar and the first studied foreign language is English, that is, in the situation of the artificial multilingualism.

2. Problem Statement

Most EU countries face the similar problem. As the Journalist from Goete-Institute, Degener (2017) states that in a way Germany still falls behind the aim of the European Council in their requirement that every European should be able to speak at least two foreign languages. Though some Federal lands insist on studying the second language only in gymnasiums.

Marcus Bayer, the professor of the didactics of the Spanish language in Wuppertal University calls to two foreign languages in all types of Secondary schools though realizes its being problematic. He complains that here are many successful projects already. However, foreign languages have little in common in terms of contents and the teaching stuff (as cited in Degener, 2017).

As a newly introduces requirement in the Russian Federation the problem also arouses questions in terms of the contents and methods of teaching the second language. The aim is developing a multilingual person as an important aspect of socializing, culturing the student and their linguistic and cultural self-identification. In such circumstances the school is required to create the necessary academic conditions and challenge the teachers in accordance with them.

3. Research Questions

Most of the researched questions include the aspects the teacher should take into account when teaching the second foreign language on the basis of the first foreign language. This includes selecting the textbook, choosing the appropriate methods of teaching as well as the contents based upon the research of the two languages interference and transference.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to work out a system of the methods and techniques to develop school students' grammar skills based upon the phenomena of interference and transference of the English and German languages in the process of teaching German Grammar in secondary schools.

5. Research Methods

The study was held on the basis of the scientific and methodological literature analysis, as well on the method of the comparative studies of the German and English languages grammatical systems. The methods allowed to define the dependence of linguistic competence in the second foreign language on the first foreign language competence and processes of interference and transference.

6. Findings

When teaching the second foreign language, it is necessary to pay attention to the problem of interlanguage interaction, which has both a positive and negative impact.

This study is focused on an artificial trilingualism, in which the second foreign language is not learned through contacts with native speakers, but is already a learned language. The bilingual rarely uses the learned language for constant communication with native speakers. In this case, due to the contact of different language systems, the phenomenon of interference is possible (Mikhalchenko, 2006).

There are certain patterns that occur while mastering the second foreign language (German based on English):

- a) the problem of interference is caused not only by the native language, but also the first foreign language and covers all the language levels. E. Haugen refers to interference as "linguistic overlap", in which one linguistic unit is simultaneously involved in two systems (Haugen, 1972).
- b) there are possibilities for transference. Transference is a transfer in which the affected language does not cause violations of the norm in the language being studied but stimulates the existing patterns in it (Bagramova & Lifanova, 2015).

Unstable skills influence the occurrence of interference. This fact is confirmed by Alishova (2012), who notes that both phonetic and grammatical interference decrease due to the proper practice.

Analysing and comparing the grammatical system and linguistic phenomena of German with those similar in English and Russian, the following features can be identified which result in errors in the utterance construction in German.

The first feature of German grammar is the unique normative character of grammatical phenomena. The change in noun cases is standard but complicated by the uniqueness of gender category and the type of its declension, which affect other related grammatical phenomena that agree with them by gender, number and case.

In English, the gender category is absent and there is almost a complete absence of inflections.

Gender category characterizes Russian grammar, but this fact doesn't help Russian-speaking students learn German nouns. On the contrary, it makes this process more difficult due to the difference between Russian and German noun gender systems.

The second feature is the frequent framing structure in sentences, for example: *Ich habe dich noch nie hier gesehen*. These two features (nouns and framing structure) become a serious obstacle for Russian-speaking students. The utterances construction is accompanied by complex mental activity associated with the nominal group forms and verbal framing structure, as well as with the placement of all forms in the sentence according to the norms of strict word order in German.

The third feature is the frequent use of inversion. Inversions can occur in simple narrative sentences, in interrogative sentences without a question word (*Kannst du schwimmen?*) or with the question word (*Warum bist du heute böse?*), in compound sentences, if the main clause follows the subordinate clause (*Wenn du Lust hast, können wir ins Kino gehen*).

Such frequent use of inversion is not specific to English grammar. Inversion in English is realized in interrogative sentences; in sentences with the construction *there is/are*; in subordinate clauses (when the conjunction *if* is omitted); in sentences with Past Perfect; in sentences beginning with *nearly, suddenly, barely*. More than that, the reverse word order in English does not have a framing structure of German.

Inversion is possible in Russian, but it's not related to strict word order. Thus, the German inversion is a complicated thing for Russian-speaking students.

The fourth feature is a high degree of morphological differentiation of grammatical phenomena. Morphological changes in grammatical phenomena in German manifest significant difficulties due to a large number of morphological forms. For example, in the singular nouns declension, the speaker should be aware of variations in four cases of noun forms and of case changes in articles and other words that agree with the noun: *Solches schlechte Wetter haben wir noch nicht erlebt*.

The fifth feature is that German grammar is characterized by constant combination of morphological and syntactical components. For example, the forms of possessive and demonstrative pronouns depend on the noun form: (*meine Freundin*); the use of declinable adjectives depends on the gender and case of the noun (*Heute haben wir einen besonderen Tag*); the form of the predicate verb depends on the form of the subject (*Ich warte auf dich*); verb affects the form of the object (*Störe mich nicht!*).

The sixth feature is the fact that German abounds in highly communicative grammatical phenomena comprising morphologically and syntactically relevant components in a word form. Reflexive verbs and those with separable prefixes are the examples of such phenomena. The problem of

morphological modifications of German verbs with separable prefixes goes alongside with the problem of verb parts arrangement in the sentence. Thus, the problem of separating the prefix from the verb stem arises, for example: Sie sollen Ihre Hefte mitbringen.

There are few verbs in English that can become reflexive in a certain context, and this is carried out only by adding the pronoun 'oneself' in the corresponding form. However, even such an expression of reflexiveness will in most cases be replaced by the structure to be/to get + Participle II.

The seventh difficulty of German grammar is obligatory two-part sentences. This feature is difficult enough for learning, as in Russian either subject or predicate can often be omitted in the sentence. It leads to constant inter-language interference in utterances which is manifested in the word order reverse (subject and predicate displacement in the sentence). Inter-language interference manifests itself in impersonal sentences and sentences with the indefinite personal pronoun 'man', because correlated one-part constructions of the Russian language are layered on them (Es ist warm. – Тепло. Man soll nach Hause gehen. – Нужно идти домой).

Sentences are required to be two-part in English, but there is no indefinite personal pronoun corresponding to German 'man', i.e. there is only the impersonal pronoun 'it' in English, corresponding to German es (It is raining. – Es regnet).

The eighth characteristic feature is the widespread representation of analytical forms in German. The analytical forms are: almost all verb tenses of active voice; all forms of passive voice (Sie wird gefragt); compound nominal predicates (Er blieb immer ruhig); predicates in Präsens and Präteritum, that include modal verbs (Du sollst mir alles erzählen); reflexive verbs (Er verspätet sich oft); forms of nouns that are used with articles (Ich wohne in einem alten Haus). This feature of German grammar is a serious complicating factor in the process of teaching German as the second foreign language. When making up an utterance students have to remember not only form-building rules but also the placement at least two words of a particular sentence member or phrase in the statement.

In this case, English causes great interference since it is richer in analytical forms than German; however, these forms are not complicated by framing structure characteristic of German.

In general, German grammar is characterized by the fact that most grammatical phenomena combine several of the above-mentioned features. What is more, they are often realized in one sentence simultaneously. The combination of different grammatical phenomena in a syntactic whole becomes a serious obstacle to the learners.

Taking into account the difficulties of learning German grammatical phenomena, the most common grammar mistakes when learning German as the second foreign language are:

- wrong word order: Ich gut lerne (correct: Ich lerne gut);
- improper use or complete absence of the copular verb *sein*: Ich Student (correct: Ich bin Student);
- use of the wrong article or its complete omission: Er liest Text (correct: Er liest einen Text);
- improper use of reflexive verbs: Ich erhole am Wochenende (correct: Ich erhole mich am Wochenende – I relax at the weekends);
- preposition errors in prepositional verbs: Wir warten für Sie im Konferenzraum (correct: Wir warten auf Sie im Konferenzraum. – We're waiting for you in the conference room.);

- errors in translating the interrogative word *when* and the conjunction *when*: Ich rufe dich an, wann ich frei werde (correct: Ich rufe dich an, wenn ich frei werde. – I'll call you when I'll get free);
- verb-forms and tense errors: Er hat gegangen (correct: Er ist gegangen. – He has gone.).

However, the comparative analysis of the grammatical phenomena in German and English shows the possibilities for transference:

- formation of comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives: clean – cleaner, rein – reiner;
- existence of articles and rules of using definite and indefinite articles: It is a table. – Das ist ein Tisch;
- use of modal verbs: I can swim. – Ich kann schwimmen;
- analytical formation of verb forms: I have bought a car. – Ich habe ein Auto gekauft;
- inverted word order in interrogative sentences: Can you swim? – Kannst du schwimmen?

Thus, the specific features of German grammar should be taken into account by teachers and constitute the basis of teaching grammatical phenomena in German as the second foreign language.

7. Conclusion

The implemented approach made it possible to make the following conclusions:

- grammar skills formation and development in the second foreign language should be based upon the comparative and methodological approach. It helps to avoid interference and contributes to transference in the process of learning and teaching foreign languages;
- the tasks and exercises correspondingly should rely upon the analysis of the distinguishing and common features in English and German.

The developed approach proved to be effective in the group of multilingual students with a medium level of the linguistic competence.

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