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## Common Interference Errors in Macedonian - Speaking German as a foreign language - Students

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### Abstract

This paper is a practical reference guide that explains how Macedonian-speaking German language students make errors in their interlanguage by borrowing and using patterns from their mother tongue, a process referred to as "negative transfer" or "interference" by a number of researchers. The author hopes that this paper will help teachers of Macedonian-speaking German language students anticipate the characteristic errors potentially made by this particular student population and understand how these errors arise. The aim of this study is to analyze, describe and explain the common interference errors in the area of morphology and syntax that occur in the written works of Macedonian first-year students who are studying German as a foreign language (GFL) at the Faculty of Philology, the University "Goce Delčev" in Štip, as well as to describe the learning difficulties in studying and acquiring German as a foreign language. Firstly, the author tries to describe in details the basic terms and definitions that are closely connected to the subject of this paper. The focus of this work is in particular on the interference at morphosyntactic level. Above all, the process of intralingual transfer is laid in foreground. In the practical part, the results of the analyzed common interference errors taken from the written test of the first-year students were described and explained. A main focus is laid on the morphosyntactic differences between the Macedonian and the German language systems and the common interference errors in the written works of GFL-students during the foreign language acquisition process. The researched results of this paper can serve as a basis for preparation of teaching materials and GFL-techniques that will facilitate Macedonian students in acquiring the German language, literature and culture.

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## **1. Introduction**

In linguistic literature, it is obvious that the terms such as *interference* and *transference* are defined differently and their exact explanation and meaning is not easy to understand or rather, quite complicated and controversial. The opinions of linguists often diverge and they have different opinions about what might cover the meanings of these terms, or rather, what they include explicitly. According to Weinreich [11] interference is:

The following statement „Diejenigen Fälle der Abweichung von den Normen der einen wie der anderen Sprache, die in der Rede von Zweisprachigen als Ergebnis ihrer Vertrautheit mit mehr als einer Sprache, d.h. als Ergebnis des Sprachkontaktes vorkommen, werden als Interferenzerscheinungen verzeichnet.“ *translated into English: "Those instances of deviation from the norms of one or the other language, in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language occur as a result of the language contact, are listed as interference phenomena."*

I understand this definition as a deviation or deflection of the linguistic norm and it occurs by mutual interference of two language systems, in this case it is the language pair German-Macedonian. On the other hand, Juhász [5] defines the term *interference* with the following definition:

The following statement „Interferenz (Int.) ist die durch die Beeinflussung von Elementen einer anderen oder der gleichen Sprache verursachte Verletzung einer sprachlichen Norm bzw. der Prozeß dieser Beeinflussung.“ *translated into English: "Interference (Int.) is caused by the influence of the elements of another or the same language violation of a linguistic norm or the process of this influence."*

In this sense, I understand by the definition of Juhász [5] that the term *interference* exists not only in two or more languages, but also within one language system or within a language itself. I can conclude that this definition deals with the so-called intralingual and interlingual interference. According to Spiropoulou [8], there is a distinction as a result of the use of the communication strategies between "interlingual" and "intralingual" and "external" and "internal" interference, or "backlash"-interference. In the communication strategies we distinguish the following possibilities of interference, "the teacher translates word for word from the native language and produces in this way sometimes incorrect utterances; The teacher introduces the words of another language as a form of interlingual and the linguistic element is phonologically or morphologically adapted from another language into the target language" [8]. The term *intralingual interference* refers to the interference within one language. One can observe this type of interference both within the foreign language system as well as within the native-speaker system. [1,5]

I analyze in this paper the notion of interlingual interference and interference errors, and verify this analysis with representative examples that are taken from the written works of the first-year GFL students. And these interference errors are mainly result of the divergence which is the object of study of this work.

## **2. Some peculiarities of the Macedonian compared to German**

Before I explain the basic forms of interference, I intend to describe some properties and peculiarities of the Macedonian language in contrast to German, which I find important for this analysis. Macedonian belongs alongside with Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian and Bulgarian to the group of South Slavic languages. In this context, I mention some characteristics of the Macedonian language system:

-Declination: Macedonian has completely lost the noun declension (e.g.: МК: историја на јазикот / istorija na jazikot, DE: Sprachgeschichte (EN: language history). The preposition "на" literally 'auf' (EN: "on, of"), as a substitute for the synthetic expression of the genitive form and is interpreted as a prepositional case in Macedonian).

-Determinacy / Indeterminacy: Three different articles are mentioned in the grammarians in the modern Macedonian language: -от for the "neutral use" in the sense of 'the'; -ов with the meaning of 'here/this' (not 'there'), and -он 'there, that'.

-Narrative: A feature in the South Slavic languages, typical for the Macedonian, too.

-Renarrative: Typically in Macedonian.

-Copula: Fading in the East Slavic languages, but complete preservation in the South Slavic languages (МК: Тој е студент / Ние сме дома, *Er ist Student / Wir sind zu Hause* / EN: He is a student / We are at home).

-Omission of personal pronoun in subject position (МК: Доаѓам утре / DE: Ich komme morgen. EN: I'll be back tomorrow). The loss or omission of the subject or personal pronoun is possible in Macedonian.

-The basic form of the verb or the infinitive is lost in Macedonian, and instead the construction *да + present tense* is developed (МК: Сакам да пливам, Сакам да трчам / DE: Ich will schwimmen, Ich will rennen, / EN: I want to swim, I want to run).

-In Macedonian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian there is a post-positive article. For example: МК: таткото (m.), which is not the case in German and in English, examples: the father / der Vater.

### **3. Grammatical interference**

According to Juhász [5], the distinction in interference is made in the field of phonetics, grammar, lexicology, and semantics. Therefore, there are three basic forms of interference. In the following, I try to describe the grammatical and the lexic-semantical interference, which were defined by Draxler [1] and Juhász [5].

According to Juhász [5], grammatical interference occurs, when there is syntactic or morphological significance in the target language, which is also found in the source language, or if this significance is structured differently. Providing examples of syntactic interference, the word order may be mentioned as a representative example in a given sentence. It is shown in examples of the word order in the subordinate clause and the word position in the main clause when using a modal verb.

DE: *Ich bin ins Kino gegangen, weil ich den Film "Zodiac" sehen wollte.* DE: *Er kann nicht mitkommen, da er sich nicht gut fühlt.*

EN: I went to the cinema because I wanted to see the film "Zodiac". EN: He cannot come because he is not feeling well.  
MK: *Тој не може да дојде со нас(,) бидејќи не се чувствува добро.*

MK: Отидов во кино (,) бидејќи сакам да го гледам филмот „Зодијак“. \**Er kann nicht mitkommen, da er fühlt sich nicht gut.*

\* *Ich bin ins Kino gegangen, weil ich wollte den Film "Zodiac" sehen.*

The finite verb in German, in contrast to Macedonian, in a subordinate clause is introduced by the verbal context, usually at the end of the sentence, which is not typical for the Macedonian. As for the modal verbs, the modal verb and the infinitive (introduced by "да-construction" in Macedonian) usually stays right behind each other (да работам, да трчам). In German, the infinitive form is usually at the end of the sentence. The "да-construction" in Macedonian is represented by the structure *zu + Verb* in German. Therefore, errors occur (DE: *Ich will Fußball spielen.* EN: I want to play football / I will Fußball zu spielen \* / MK: Јас сакам да играм фудбал). An exception in both cases is the so-called exclusion.

This means that parts of speech can break the frame. The word order in Slavic languages (also in Macedonian) is relatively free, and in some cases, conditioned and shaped by region or dialect. As an example of morphological interference, the regimen of the verbs can be cited. It is shown in the example of the verb *beantworten*. In Macedonian, the verb with the preposition "на" is connected, and in German it is, however, associated with the accusative case.

DE: einen Fragebogen beantworten / MK: одговара на прашалник / EN: to answer a questionnaire

#### 4. Lexical-semantic interference

There are two basic ways in which the lexical and semantic interference errors can arise. The first option are words that are identical or similar in Macedonian and German, but have different meaning. They are referred as so-called false friends (MK: лажни парови / DE: falsche Freunde / EN: false friends) [4]. As an example, I analyze the word pair DE: *Konkurs* / MK: конкурс / EN: bankruptcy. The word *Konkurs* in German means *Bankrott, Insolvenz, Pleite, Ruin* [3] / or in English: bankruptcy, insolvency, bankruptcy, ruin/. In Macedonian, we use this word either only with the meaning – *open call* or *application for something* (MK: *јавен повик, конкурс, отворен повик, тендер*). The German equivalent to the first meaning of the word is the word *competition*.

Another example would be the German word *Absolvent* / EN: *Graduate* / МК: *апсолвент*. The German word has the following meaning: a person who has successfully completed the prescribed training at a school and has finished the higher education process [3], and in Macedonian, this word means: a student in the final year of the study, and has not finished the training and schooling yet.

The second possibility is caused by the error caused by a process of divergence. That is, a word in the source language corresponds to two or more equivalent words in the target language. For example, I can mention the Macedonian word *сам*. Into German, the word *persönlich*, (EN: *alone* / DE: *allein*) or in some cases it might be translated as *personally*. But it is important to distinguish between situations in which the equivalents are used. [4]

I demonstrate this statement with the following examples:

DE: *In der Ferienwohnung bin ich allein geblieben.*      DE: *Die Villa hat er selbst gebaut.*

EN: I stayed alone at the holiday accommodation.      EN: He built the villa by himself.

МК: Останав сам во викендицата.      МК: Тој сам ја направи вилата.

DE: *Ich persönlich habe mich mit dieser Frage nicht beschäftigt.*

EN: I personally did not deal with this question.

МК: Јас (сам) лично не се занимавав со ова прашање.

#### **4.1. The conjunctions *damit*; *um ... zu* and their Macedonian equivalents (EN: *thereby*; *in order to*, *so as to*)**

There are three ways in which the German conjunctions *damit* and *um...zu* can be translated into Macedonian (МК: *за / за да / дека*). In contrast to the Macedonian, one has to distinguish between situations in German, in which the conjunction is used [7].

In Macedonian the "да-construction" is an important feature in the subordinate clauses, and the link between the element "да" and the finite verb is very tight, allowing no other element between (except the negation word) and expresses the human will or intentions of the doer of the action to perform an activity.

*damit* (МК: *за да, да* / EN: *in order to, so as to*)

The conjunction *damit* or *um ... zu* will be used when there is a final clause [7].

Examples:

DE: *Ihr must jetzt los gehen, damit ihr den Zug nicht verpasst. (um den Zug nicht zu verpassen)*

EN: *You must now go, so you do not miss the train. (in order not to miss the train)*

MK: *Вие морате да тргнете, за да / да не го испуштете возот.*

DE: *Das Orchester hat laut gespielt, damit alle es hören könnten.*

EN: *The orchestra has played loudly so that all could hear him.*

MK: *Оркестарот свиреше гласно, за да / да / со цел / за да можат / сите да го слушат.*

Whether it is a finale sentence or not, we can determine it by using the question word *why* for making questions [4].

DE: *Dass, / MK: дека, да / EN: that, so that, so as)*

The conjunction *dass* is used when there is a set of objects. Subordinate clauses that precede main clauses, introduced by the conjunction, in which mainly verbs such as *want, like, ask (yourself)* or *happen* occur [7, 9].

Examples:

DE: *Ich beeile mich, dass ich pünktlich bei dir bin.*

DE: *Er sagte, dass er kommt.*

EN: *I will hurry to reach you in time.*

EN: *He said, he is coming.*

MK: *Ќе побрзам за да стигнам кај тебе навреме.*

MK: *Toj рече дека ќе дојде.*

DE: *Erlauben Sie es mir, dass ich Ihnen unseren neuen Geschäftspartner vorstelle.*

EN: *Allow me to introduce you to our new business partner.*

MK: *Дозволете ми да ви го претставам нашиот нов бизнис партнер.*

#### **4.2. The conjunctions "aber" and "sondern" and their Macedonian equivalents**

In German, there are two equivalent conjunctions that are expressed by the Macedonian conjunction “no”, or sometimes we can use the conjunction *туку*. These are the conjunctions *aber* and *sonder*. Each of them is used in different situations.

DE: *aber, sondern* / MK: *но, туку* / EN: *but, however*

The conjunction *aber* is used to connect opposing parts of a sentence or sentences. The conjunction *aber* can be used by another conjunct, however - which can be replaced in Macedonian with *сепак* [2,4].

Examples:

DE: *Normalerweise fahren wir mit dem Fahrrad zur Arbeit, aber im Winter nehmen wir den Bus.* DE: *Sie wollte eine Weltreise machen, aber sie wurde krank.*

EN: *We usually ride my bike to work, but in the winter we take the bus.* DE: *They wanted to do a world tour, but she got sick.*

MK: *Обично одиме со велосипед на работа, но во зима користиме автобус.* MK: *Таа сакаше да патува низ светот, но се разболе.*

DE: *Das Restaurant bietet Vor- und Nachspeise an, aber kein Hauptgericht.*

EN: *The restaurant offers starters and dessert, but no main course.*

MK: *Рестаранот нуди предјадење и десерт, но не и (без) главен оброк.*

DE: *sondern* / MK: *туку, веќе* / EN: *but*

The conjunction *sondern* is used when a negative statement occurs in the first sentence and the second sentence or phrase is in a contrast of the first one and/or corrects it [2,4]

The conjunctions that can be used are: *туку, туку и, веќе*.

Examples:

DE: *Wir fahren nicht weg, sondern wir bleiben zu Hause*

EN: *We're not going away, but we are staying at home.*

MK: *Ние не си одиме, туку остануваме дома.*

DE: *Wir fahren nicht morgen ab, sondern nächste Woche.*

*EN: We're not going tomorrow, but next week.*

*МК: Утре не тргнуваме, туку / веќе следната недела.*

*DE: Das Fotomodell ist nicht nur schön, sondern auch sehr klug.*

*DE: In Berlin habe ich nicht nur studiert, sondern auch ein Praktikum gemacht.*

*EN: The photo model is not only beautiful, but also very smart.*

*EN: In Berlin I have not only studied but also made an internship.*

*МК: Фото-моделот не е само убав, туку и многу умен.*

*МК: Во Берлин не само што студирав, туку обавував и практика.*

## **5. Conclusion**

The focus of this paper is to analyze the common interference errors in the field of morphology and syntax, which occur with Macedonian students studying German as a foreign language and the errors that occur during the language learning process as well as the learning difficulties which arise, in order to be analyzed, described and explained. The basis for the practical part of this paper presents an empirical scientific investigation, which was conducted at the Faculty of Philology of the University "Goce Delčev" to Štip. Therefore, 20 essays were written on different topics by the students from the first year of study. On the basis of the material obtained in this way, I analyzed some typical and representative error sources for Macedonian students that could be identified. Since the focus of this work lies in particular in the interference at morphosyntactic level, the errors were excluded in the area of spelling, although there were a number of them in the examined texts.

The aim of the study in this paper is the description and analysis of grammatical, lexical and semantic interference errors in the language pair German-Macedonian and to realize how the studied interference errors in the written work that seem obvious at the German students, whether the interference errors are made really often and whether the students improve over time. The reasons for failure examples can be of different nature. Basically, the students are trying to avoid the mistakes, or in some cases they have problems with the right application because they were handling two different language systems.

It must be emphasized that the results of this work are taken only from twenty texts, a number, in my opinion, that can only give a small insight into the error behavior of Macedonian students who study German. Processing a larger corpus would be a starting point for further research projects. It is also restrictive and it should be noted that other parameters, such as individual talent or motivation of the students, the learning environment, the learning experience already gained, etc., could not be included here. This analysis could serve an idea and motivation for a larger and deeper research study in this context. The topic seems to be interesting and current, and it is worthwhile to perform a deeper study and research, because with each passing year the number of



Macedonians who study or learn German as a foreign language or study German philology or language and literary studies of German is increasing.

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