

Grammatical interference in written papers translated by Russian and American students

by Alexandra Galkina and Alexandra V. Radyuk

Alexandra Galkina Paul Valéry University alexandragalkina94@gmail.com

Alexandra V. Radyuk Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) rad_al@bk.ru

Published in Training, Language and Culture Vol 3 Issue 3 (2019) pp. 89-102 doi: [10.29366/2019tlc.3.3.6](https://doi.org/10.29366/2019tlc.3.3.6)

Recommended citation format: Galkina, A., & Radyuk, A. V. (2019). Grammatical interference in written papers translated by Russian and American students. *Training, Language and Culture*, 3(3), 89-102. doi: [10.29366/2019tlc.3.3.6](https://doi.org/10.29366/2019tlc.3.3.6)

Language interference is one of the most common problems in foreign language teaching. Language learners inevitably apply knowledge of their native language to a second language, which leads to linguistic interference. The more differences there are between the two languages, the more prominent the interference between them will be. This paper examines the key issues faced by Russian students learning English and English-speaking students learning Russian and suggests key areas of teaching needed in both disciplines.

KEYWORDS: *interference, Russian, English, grammar, translation, to-infinitive, modal verbs*



This is an open access article distributed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited (CC BY 4.0)

1. INTRODUCTION

The differences in the Russian and English languages pose problems for students studying Russian or English as a foreign language. This problem of language interference is most frequently caused by a misunderstanding of the foreign language grammar and, particularly by Russian students, a tendency to translate word-for-word. Interference can be broken down into a number of areas, analysed in detail below. The five areas are grammatical, lexical, phonological and orthographical. Based on the author's experience of teaching EFL in Russia and teaching Russian in the United States this paper focuses primarily on grammatical interference between the two languages. It analyses key factors causing problems in translation, including *there is* and *to*

have, the use of infinitives, aspect, gender categories, modal verbs and negation. In doing so the paper recommends that greater attention should be paid by teachers in correcting student errors in speaking and writing.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Transfer and interference

Researchers analysing the processes occurring in second language acquisition first started analysing the phenomenon of linguistic interference in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1957, linguists subscribing to the theory of behaviourism were the first scholars to come up with the term *transfer*, which is defined as 'the set created by the first language habits' that affect the learner's use of a foreign language (Lado, 1957). They view

foreign language learning as a process of transferring the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to a foreign language and culture. According to them, this transfer is governed by language learners and they decide based on their linguistic perceptions what can be transferable and what cannot.

In the 1980s, more definitions of the linguistic phenomenon of interference emerged and more terms were coined by linguists. Dulay et al. (1982) defined it as the automatic transfer of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface structure of the target language. They also used the term *interlingual errors* referring to the same process of interference. Lott (1983) believed that interference mostly represents the errors occurring in the speech of language learners that can be traced back to their mother tongue. Sharwood-Smith and Kellerman (1986) introduced the term *crosslinguistic influence*, believing that it might refer to such phenomena as *transfer*, *borrowing* and *avoidance* encompassing all these notions in one. However, the term *interference* first appeared in the mid-80s when Alderson (1984) proposed to use it over the then commonly used term *transfer*. Selinker (1972) sticks to the term *transfer* and distinguishes two main types: positive and negative. In the positive transfer, the knowledge of the mother tongue or another foreign language facilitates the acquisition of a second/third language, whereas in the negative transfer it, on

‘Since in Russian word order is not fixed, many Russian learners of English alter the sequence of subject, predicate and object, which inevitably leads to interference’

the contrary, has a negative effect resulting in errors and mistakes. This negative transfer is otherwise known as interference.

2.2 Types of interference

One of the most widely accepted classifications distinguishes the following types of interference (Thorovský, 2009). The examples of these types of interference are indicative of the interference between the Russian and English languages.

Grammatical interference influences FL in terms of tense categories, mood, sentence structure, word order, use of pronouns and determiners, etc. Since in Russian word order is not fixed, many Russian learners of English alter the sequence of subject, predicate and object, which inevitably leads to interference. Weinrich (1953) distinguishes three types of grammatical interference: 1) the transfer of morphemes from the source language to the recipient language (s- ending in the English third person singular forms); 2) grammatical relations in a particular word order; 3) functions or meaning of grammatical forms (singular-plural agreement).

‘One of the most widely accepted classifications suggested by Martin Thorovský distinguishes grammatical, lexical, phonological and orthographical interference’

Lexical interference is typical of spoken and written speech when language learners translate word-for-word some of the vocabulary items that make perfect sense in their native language, but for FL do not seem to be the best choice due to differences in collocability, the polysemous character of words, false friends, literal translation, etc. A very common example might be the Russian phrase *Прости(те) / Извини(те)*, which is typically translated in English as *I’m sorry*. However, its English counterpart has another meaning that comes into action when people wish not only to express gratitude but also to express sympathy. Unfortunately, many learners of Russian neglect this peculiarity of the use, hence while speaking Russian they say *Прости(те) / Извини(те)* in order to be sympathetic, which by Russian standards is considered as an erroneous utterance.

Phonological interference is more frequently manifested in word stress, intonation, or speech sounds that are typical of a native language and that are influencing the acquisition of FL. For example, the phonological process of aspiration is

non-existent in Russian, hence many learners of Russian tend to aspirate voiceless stops at the beginning of words (*tiger – murp*). Another vivid example is different types of rhotic consonants in Russian and English (retroflex approximant in English vs trill or rolled ‘r’ in Russian). It becomes problematic for students who are not used to the phonological system of another language; hence, they make phonological errors that might complicate their comprehension.

Orthographical interference occurs in spelling and is characterised by the alteration of spelling words under the influence of the native language. For example, the Russian equivalent for English *standard* is *стандарт*, or *salad* becomes *салат*, which often creates confusion and leads to spelling errors.

3. RESEARCH MATERIALS AND PROJECT

Despite such a diverse typology of linguistic interference, the purpose of this research was to study the most common instances of its grammatical representations that are typical of American and Russian students learning the Russian and English language. The students’ written papers such as essays and translations serve as material for the analysis. Since I am currently teaching English for Russian learners and had a year-long experience teaching Russian to Americans, I have been witnessing the reversed process of grammatical interference when Russian

grammatical structures influence significantly the students' English sentences. Working as a Russian teaching assistant in an American university in upstate New York I had ample opportunities to observe the students' writing samples (essays, translations) and I have traced a number of recurrent mistakes that are the results of linguistic interference or all sorts of lacunae between the grammatical systems of the two languages.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the most common recurring mistakes I made a survey that was distributed among American students learning Russian and Russian students learning English in my class. It included sentences that had to be translated from a mother tongue into an appropriate target language. Below are the sentences that students had to translate (Table 1).

Table 1

Sentences for translation suggested in the survey

TO BE TRANSLATED BY AMERICAN STUDENTS	TO BE TRANSLATED BY RUSSIAN STUDENTS
The city has five good restaurants.	В кафе можно столько всего попробовать!
Every day I have three Russian classes.	У меня есть к вам несколько вопросов.
The museum has twelve rooms.	Джону нужно выучить стихотворение.
The girl has a dog.	Возможно, я приду вовремя на занятие.
It is a bad question to ask.	Ты должен быть очень внимательным.
There are so many places to see in Moscow.	Ей следовало позвонить раньше. Может он бы не уехал.
The cafe has so much food to taste.	Он не знает, как это работает. По правде говоря, я тоже.
I flew to Saratov.	Я тоже не хочу ехать на конференцию.
I will have written an article by tomorrow's evening.	Уилу тоже интересно это предложение. Напиши ему!
It's not a good idea to buy food on the street.	Его голос звучал смущенно.
Russia invested much money in education.	Этот пирог так хорошо пахнет!
She went to Moscow to learn more about its culture.	Я плохо себя чувствую.
I knew that he worked in a foreign company.	Он сказал, что вернется в субботу.
She told us that she was going to the library next week.	Том просил передать, что все занятия отменили.
I always thought that my sister was beautiful.	Они сказали нам, что идут в библиотеку.

In the course of the research, I ended up with several major recurring mistakes that represented different instances of grammatical interference. As far as American students are concerned, the most common mistakes included the constructions *there is/there are* and the verb *to have*, aspect forms, masculine and feminine endings of verbs, nouns and adjectives, sequence of tenses and infinitive structures. I also checked on the use of the constructions *there is/there are*, the infinitive constructions and the sequence of tenses used by Russian students learning English. Also categories such as linking verbs, modal verbs and the use of negation were added to the list. Each group consisted of three to four sentences to be translated. As a result, the survey helped detect major problems that students were dealing with while subconsciously translating sentences from their mother tongue into the target languages. Since the research is just the starting point of the analysis, the paper includes a fairly limited number of categories that seemed to be of interest in my professional experience.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS

4.1 There is/are vs to have

While translating impersonal sentences indicating location or descriptions of certain objects very few American students were using the constructions *there is / there are*, preferring to use a combination of a subject and predicate (such as the verb *to have*). Therefore, they would keep the same

‘Phonological interference is more frequently manifested in word stress, intonation, or speech sounds that are typical of a native language and that are influencing the acquisition of a foreign language’

structures while translating similar sentences into English, as in: *The city has a bunch of good restaurants* - Город имеет много хороших ресторанов; *The museum has twelve rooms and 700 meters* - Музей имеет 12 комнат и семьсот метров.

However, in Russian it is not always the best option as Russians are not likely to make a city or a museum animate and they would rather use the preposition *в*, which would sound more natural to a native speaker, as in: *В городе много хороших ресторанов; В музее есть 12 комнат.*

That is why it is clear that Russians are so fond of the constructions *there is / there are*. It perfectly fits into most Russian sentences as it also requires the preposition *в* or any other adverbial modifier of place and largely imitates the English sentence.

Many researches claim that the constructions *there is / there are* are not so frequently used in modern

English and native speakers would rather rephrase such sentences with verbs, as in *The picture hangs on the wall* (instead of *There is a picture on the wall*). Moreover, it is often recommended to avoid using *there is / there are* at the beginning of the sentence as these constructions make the sentences sound too bulky. So linguists recommend rephrasing the sentences and avoid, if possible, using the construction altogether, as in *Four characters in this story are very important* (instead of *There are four characters in this story who are very important*).

As the verb *to have* is very frequently used in English sentences in context where Russians would use either a different verb or a different construction, American students who learn Russian end up producing weird Russian sentences because of the word-for-word approach to translation, as in: *Ямал имеет национальные праздники, соревнования, фольклорные фестивали, костюмированные игры; Затем невеста имеет девичник, где обмениваются подарками*. The loss in translation is also due the absence of a predicate in a similar Russian sentence, which turns into an adverbial modifier of place (*в городе, в комнате* instead of *у города, у комнаты*): *У этой статьи есть только одна писатель; У Ямала есть так много мероприятий в природе*. Another common tendency is an excessive use by American students of the verb *есть* when in Russian sentences it can

be omitted. This might be explained by a fixed word order in the English language, which requires the presence of both the subject and the predicate. In Russian, however, it is not necessary and the use of *есть* is redundant. This verb is likely to be omitted when the idea of possession is not emphasised: *Том больше не играет в хоккей, потому что у него есть два сотрясения* (instead of: *У него два сотрясения*); *У меня сегодня есть два занятия по биологии* (instead of: *У меня сегодня два занятия по биологии*).

Overall, Russians are overusing the constructions *there is / there are*, considering them as the only possible way of translating sentences dealing with location, whereas modern tendencies indicate that native speakers of English prefer using verbs to impersonal sentences with *there is / there are* even though they are absolutely correct from the grammatical point of view.

4.2 Infinitives

The Infinitive is a form of verb that is not limited by person, tense or number. The English language has two distinct ways of realising the infinitive, the form with the participle 'to' (*to do, to play*), and the bare or zero form without 'to'. Even though the present infinitive is the most common form, the English language has in total five forms of infinitive: the present infinitive, the perfect infinitive, the perfect continuous infinitive, the

‘The problem that English to-infinitives cause are mostly related to translation because the infinitive is a very compact form conveying a wide variety of different meanings, which is not always the case for Russian’

continuous infinitive, and the passive infinitive. This section, however, focuses on the complex and multifunctional character of the English infinitive and situations in which it may be used by native speakers and the way it differs from the Russian infinitive. The problem that English to-infinitives cause are mostly related to translation because the infinitive is a very compact form conveying a wide variety of different meanings, which is not always the case for Russian.

Therefore, the infinitive structures in English do not have a direct equivalent in Russian and such phrases are usually translated with the help of modal verbs, rephrasing or complex sentences with subordinate clauses: *Там можно было столько всего попробовать; В Ялте можно увидеть столько необычных мест; Я думаю, что России следует прощать внешние долги.* It is also possible to resort to the infinitive omission because some of the ideas are already implied without a specifying verb or add a subordinate clause to a sentence making it complex: *Это был неудачный (плохой)*

вопрос; Я думаю, что было бы неплохо, если бы все перестали врать.

In this respect, Russian seems more complicated because there are many ways of translating sentences with complex objects, whereas in English it is done in a very compact and simple way. In my experience, I have never seen any of the textbooks for learners of Russian include at least one chapter on infinitive structures. When I was teaching Russian, American students would often translate similar English sentences that included infinitives exclusively by means of using either infinitives or the particle *чтобы*, which would create very confusing sentences. Here are some authentic examples of translation: *Есть много мест, чтобы увидеть в Ялте - There are so many places to see in Yalta* (instead of: *В Ялте можно увидеть столько мест*); *Я считаю, что это хорошо для России, чтобы прощать внешние долги - I think it's good for Russia to forgive external debts* (instead of: *Для России было бы неплохо прощать внешние долги*); *Это сложный вопрос, чтобы ответить по нескольким причинам - It's a difficult question to answer for a couple of reasons* (instead of: *На этот вопрос сложно ответить по нескольким причинам*).

Such instances of erroneous translations are numerous in my teaching experience. I also noticed that Russian students prefer bulky and

lengthy sentences with several clauses to very compact infinitive structures that are described in this chapter. That suggests Russians are either unaware of them or prefer to use direct word-for-word translation from their native language which is a clear example of grammatical interference.

The purpose of the research was to confirm or to deny these assumptions in the course of the empirical analysis. The research showed that of all the problems that both American and Russian students face while learning a foreign language, the infinitive constructions prove to be one of the major stumbling blocks. It is especially relevant for American students, since their direct translations of the *to*-infinitive lead to grammar mistakes and wrong Russian sentences. Even students with a very high level of language proficiency, including heritage speakers, would stumble at the infinitive sentences and fail to use them properly.

4.3 Aspect in English and Russian

Aspect is a grammatical category that denotes the development of an action over time. It is the form of the verb that shows how the meaning of that verb is considered in relation to time, typically expressing if an action is complete, repeated or continuous. In English, the category of aspect goes along with the grammatical category of tense, which specifies the time when a certain action takes place. Aspect, on the contrary, emphasises if an event is ongoing or if it is already complete. In

other words, it expresses how an action is extended over time. English possesses a large variety of tenses and tense-and-mood forms and only two categories of aspect; progressive (continuous) and perfective (perfect).

The verbal category of aspect in Russian, however, seems to be more complicated. It is believed to be one of the most unpredictable and one of the most characteristic grammar features of the Russian language. Even though the Russian verb presents a relatively simple structural picture with only two tenses (present and past, as future is formed with the help of a perfective verb in the present), it possesses a complexity in terms of forming aspect forms. Most commonly, there is no universal way of forming a perfective or imperfective aspect. Almost every Russian imperfective verb is paired with its perfective counterpart, which significantly complicates life of the learners of Russian. These are two sets of verbs with identical lexical meaning but different in terms of their grammatical usage.

English sentences where one single action takes place against the background of another action in progress also causes difficulties for American speakers. Russian sentences often have verbs of motion that are used in the imperfective aspect, while the other one is in the perfective aspect: *Куда вы шли, когда мы вас встретили? Where were you going when we met you?*

‘When it comes to Russian students learning English, mistakes caused by the grammatical interference of aspect forms are also frequent but it is mostly due to the fact that English has a very elaborate system of tenses that students sometimes fail to memorise’

The preposition can often create perfective verbs of motion (*идти – пойти*) but in the past tense they form sentences with slightly different meanings. In this case, the function of aspect is not only grammatical but also lexical: *Вики нет, потому что она пошла в бассейн; Вики нет, потому что она ходила в библиотеку*. In the first sentence, we describe actions that started in the past and have not finished yet. In the second sentence, Vika is gone but she has come back already. These are the differences that cause a great degree of interference.

Finally, the prefix *по-* in Russian is not only responsible for creating perfective verb forms, it also has its lexical meaning, indicating either not very significant actions or brief actions: *Мне захотелось походить по залу; Я погуляла сегодня*.

When it comes to Russian students learning

English, mistakes caused by the grammatical interference of aspect forms are also frequent but it is mostly due to the fact that English has a very elaborate system of tenses that students sometimes fail to memorise. It is specifically related to compound verb forms such as perfective forms because the distinction between Past Simple and Present Perfect or Past Perfect is non-existent in Russian, therefore Russian students are likely to use the Russian regular past without distinguishing the shades of meaning that every tense form entails: *I will write an article by tomorrow evening* (instead of: *I will have written an article by tomorrow evening*); *Я ему дала книгу - I gave him a book - I've given him a book - I'd given him a book*.

Nevertheless, Russian is definitely more complex as there are no universal rules that can be applied to each and every verb and this greatly complicates the life of American students learning Russian, hence we can trace so many instances of interference.

According to the results of the research, the following should be noted.

The phrase *I flew to Saratov* had more than five variants of translation in terms of aspect. Of course, the context was not provided, which gives certain freedom to the students but not all their variants might be considered appropriate.

Я летал в Саратов. (1)

Я летел в Саратов. (2)

Я полетел в Саратов. (3)

Я слетал в Саратов. (4)

Я прилетел в Саратов. (5)

Я долетел до Саратова. (6)

Я полетал в Саратов. (7)

For example, (2) might be considered incorrect because in English the continuous tense is required as the action is clearly in progress (e.g. *I was flying to Saratov*). (7) is also wrong as the prefix *по-* with the imperfective verb usually means *a little bit, for a short while*. The rest of the variants might be accepted in case the context is provided. The prefix *по-* denotes the beginning of motion (perfective aspect) in (3). The prefix *до-* in (6) implies that the destination was reached by the speaker and the prefix *при-* hints at somebody's presence in the given place. All these differences are very subtle but it is necessary to know all the shades of meaning to use the verbs appropriately.

The Future Perfect Continuous generally conveys the idea of action complete by a certain point in time in the future. In Russian, the same idea of completeness might be expressed with the help of the perfective aspect. In the course of the research sentences including the Future Perfect Continuous such as *I will have written the article by tomorrow evening* were translated in the following way. The

most difficult sentence that had to be translated was: *It's not a good idea to buy food on the street*. Although it has an infinitive construction that was described in the previous section, it also has the verb *to buy* that needs to be used in the imperfective aspect but with the prefix *по-*. This might be confusing for the students because normally the presence of the prefix implies the perfective aspect of the verb.

4.4 Gender categories

Mixing up masculine and feminine endings falls into the category of grammatical interference (transfer of morpheme of a source language, according to Weinrich (1953)). In Russian, gender is a grammatical category because it governs the grammatical forms of different parts of speech that refer to masculine, feminine or neuter gender because nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives are governed by it. Since gender is not always treated as a distinct grammatical category in English as it does not change the grammatical structure of a sentence and only deals with lexical meaning, learners of Russian often fail to use gender forms properly. One of the most common mistakes related to gender occurs when female learners use masculine endings of verbs, adjectives, and participles: *Я не ожидал знать что ВИЧ, в России, такой большой проблем что цифры не регистрируются совершенно правительством. Я также был удивлен, что телепрограммы и ролики, казалось, самым популярным методом стратегии*

‘Since gender is not always treated as a distinct grammatical category in English as it does not change the grammatical structure of a sentence and only deals with lexical meaning, learners of Russian often fail to use gender forms properly’

профилактики в России (written by a female student).

It makes sense as in English there is no such distinction because the same word forms are used, regardless of the gender in all parts of speech. However, male learners of Russian also fail to use gender forms properly and, for some reason, they add feminine endings when speaking about themselves. This seems very unusual but remains a common mistake that I (the lead author of this article) observed on a regular basis in students’ written papers and translations: *Я ездила этим летом в Россию и прежде чем я пошел, я должен был получить визу* (written by a male student).

In English, gender is not a feature of nouns but it is a reference to the biological sex. If a gender assignment for human beings is more or less clear, Russian nouns and their gender type tend to be more tricky and complicated. Assigning gender to inanimate nouns and notions is the most

inexplicable process in a language and while memorising vocabulary language learners are supposed to learn the gender that a word belongs to. Nevertheless, the absence of formal differences of gender in English entail the same assumption for Russian – hence very often students make mistakes in gender use especially when it comes to countries: *Россия также простил долг Кыргызстана в суммой \$500 миллионов. Тем не менее, когда я думаю о случае Америки, который дал странам так много денег.*

The category of gender in English is not as clear-cut as it seems. It is very common for the speakers of contemporary English with certain inanimate nouns to use masculine or feminine gender with corresponding endings and pronouns. This tendency, in its turn, contributes a lot to grammatical interference for students learning a foreign language while they are translating English sentences into Russian.

4.5 Modal verbs

Modal verbs proved to be a problematic area for Russian speakers. What is important is that modality in Russian and English is expressed in different ways. English modals verbs in a very concise form are capable of expressing all sorts of attitudes to a situation. Mastering expressions of modality requires a great deal of language proficiency because these expressions are often polysemous or multifunctional. Russian learners

often tend to use lexical ways of expressing modality prioritising them over modal verbs because the system of their language is programmed this way: *Probably he will come* (instead of: *He may / might come*).

Therefore, we can single out two major problems related to modal verbs that language learners face while learning Russian or English. First of all, Russian students often translate sentences using modality exclusively using words such as adverbs or adjectives because the structure of their language focuses predominantly on a lexical means of expressing modality. Secondly, American students often lack enough vocabulary to render all the expressions of modality from English into Russian as there is no direct correlation between the forms.

In this research modal verbs are analysed exclusively in the speech of Russian students learning English. The research proved that modal verbs are still viewed as a stumbling block for students. The sentences given for translation were: (1) *Возможно, я приду вовремя на занятие.* (2) *Ты должен быть очень внимательным.* (3) *Ей следовало позвонить раньше. Может он бы не уехал.* As was expected, most of the students preferred adverbs or adjectives as a way of expressing modality over using modal verbs. Even though, it cannot be counted as a mistake, it is still viewed as an instance of interference. In (3), however, the

‘Since gender is not always treated as a distinct grammatical category in English as it does not change the grammatical structure of a sentence and only deals with lexical meaning, learners of Russian often fail to use gender forms properly’

situation is more complicated as almost a half of the students failed to use the predictive infinitive. This might be explained by the absence of such an infinitive in Russians.

6. Negation

Negation is universal in all languages. According to Lindstad (2007) negation always involves ‘adding an overt morpheme to an affirmative clause’ (Lindstad, 2007, p. 24) and it can negate certain parts or the entire sentence or clause. While the meaning of negation is simple, the formal realisation of it seems to be more complex as it significantly varies in different languages. The sentences given for translation were:

Он не знает, как это работает. По правде говоря, я тоже. Я тоже не хочу ехать на конференцию.

In the research, most of the Russian students (including those who are believed to have an

advanced level of proficiency) made mistakes in translating negative sentences. The reason for such a high percentage of wrong answers is the grammatical interference between Russian and English structures due to the presence of double negation / negative concord or its absence in the system of language. Even students of an advanced level of language proficiency fail sometimes to use negative particles according to the rules of the language.

5. CONCLUSION

The research into grammatical interference between Russian and English proved that Americans are likely to use stative verbs instead of impersonal *there is / there are*, whereas Russian students tend to use them a lot while translating Russian sentences into English. Even though such translations are grammatically correct, they are not always treated as the best possible variant.

Therefore, the study analysed the use of *there is / are* and the verb *to have* in the paper in order to see the frequency of their use. Americans, in their turn, often use verbs in sentences indicating locations attributing animate characteristics to inanimate nouns. This does not always sound correct to Russian ears and the level of interference between Russian and English seems to be significant.

The study showed that the most common mistakes that Americans learning Russian make are the *to-*

infinitive sentences that are non-existent in Russian, aspect forms that differ significantly in the languages in question, and the category of gender.

The category of aspect turned out to be one of the most challenging for American students taking Russian classes. The students mix up Russian aspects trying to trace similarities between English and Russian, which does not always make sense due to the structural differences between these languages.

Seeking simplification, Russian students prioritise word-for-word translations, which are not grammatically incorrect but which are, at the same time, not considered by native speakers as the best ways of conveying the same meaning. This particularly the case in compact English sentences comprising the *to*-infinitive that are substituted by literal translation and modal verbs that are generally translated by Russian students using lexical forms.

Areas of grammatical analysis such as the sequence of tenses, double negation, and the use of the perfective infinitive turned out to be problematic for Russian students, which can be easily explained by the absence of such grammatical phenomena in Russian. This means that teachers should pay more attention to these grammatical phenomena in class to make sure that students use them properly in speech.

The study thus highlighted some problematic areas that teachers of Russian and English as a foreign language should keep in mind in the course of their teaching practice. There could obviously have been more categories analysed in the paper since the arsenal of the two languages is constantly increasing. However, this article sheds

light on the most common grammatical mistakes which occur in written discourse due to language overlap. Further research into the issue of interference and its impact on the utterances produced in the target language is necessary to clarify its mechanisms and explain the possible pitfalls to improve the learning process.

References

- Alderson, J. C. (1984). Reading in a foreign language: A reading problem or a language problem? In J. C. Alderson, & A. H. Urquhart (Eds.), *Reading in a foreign language* (pp. 1-27). London, UK: Longman.
- Dulay, H. C., Burt, M. K., & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language two*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Sharwood Smith, M., & Kellerman, E. (1986). *Crosslinguistic influence in Second Language Acquisition*. New York, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures*. Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Lindstad, A. M. (2007). *Analyses of negation: Structure and interpretation*. Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo.
- Lott, D. (1983). Analysing and counteracting interference errors. *ELT Journal*, 37(3), 256-261. Doi: [10.1093/elt/37.3.256](https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/37.3.256)
- Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *IRAL-International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 10(1-4), 209-232. Doi: [10.1515/iral.1972.10.1-4.209](https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1972.10.1-4.209)
- Thorovský, M. (2009). Lexical linguistic interference in translations of science-fiction literature from English into Czech. *Ostrava Journal of English Philology*, 1, 86-98. Retrieved from <https://dokumenty.osu.cz/ff/kaa/ojoep/ostrava-journal-vol1-2009-full.pdf>
- Weinrich, U. (1953). *Languages in contact*. New York, NY: Publications of the Linguistic Circle of New York.