

PAPER

INTERFERENCE IN THE USE OF PRONOUNS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: TYPICAL STUDENT ERRORS AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The present article investigates the phenomenon of cross-linguistic interference in the domain of pronominal categories, drawing on material from the Russian, English, and Uzbek languages. It examines the typical grammatical and semantic errors committed by Uzbek-speaking students in the course of learning Russian and English as foreign languages — errors conditioned by the structural influence of the agglutinative Uzbek system upon the inflectional and analytical systems of the target languages. The article also offers methodological recommendations for mitigating interference in language teaching practice.

Key words: interference, pronouns, Russian, English, Uzbek, learner errors, foreign language acquisition, agglutination, inflection, linguistic typology.

Introduction

The problem of linguistic interference occupies a central place in both the theory and practice of foreign language teaching. It becomes especially salient in contexts where languages of markedly different typological profiles come into contact. Russian, as a synthetic-inflectional language, English, as an analytic language, and Uzbek, as

an agglutinative language, form a three-way typological opposition in which the transfer of linguistic habits from one system to another inevitably generates a variety of learner errors.

The pronoun, as a grammatical category, is universal — present in every known language — yet the precise mechanisms of its realisation differ substantially from one language to the next. It is precisely for this reason that pronouns constitute

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a zone of heightened interference risk: learners unconsciously project onto the target language the structural, semantic, and functional properties of their native pronominal system, giving rise to persistent, systemic errors.

The aim of the present study is to identify and systematise the typical interference errors in pronominal usage made by Uzbek-speaking students of Russian and English, and to trace these errors to specific features of Uzbek agglutinative grammar. The empirical basis of the study consists of written work produced by students at Bukhara University of Innovation, as well as spoken utterances recorded during practical language classes.

1. Theoretical Foundations: Interference in the Domain of Pronouns

In the broadest sense, linguistic interference refers to the interaction of two language systems in the mind of a bilingual speaker, whereby the norms of one language are superimposed upon those of another, generating deviations from the target-language rule [10, p. 34]. More narrowly, interference is understood as negative transfer — the projection onto the foreign language of structures characteristic of the speaker's native tongue [8, p. 18].

Contrastive linguistics conventionally distinguishes several levels of interference: phonological, lexical, grammatical, and semantic. With respect to pronouns, the grammatical and semantic levels are of primary significance, since it is here that the systemic differences among Russian, English, and Uzbek are most sharply in evidence.

From a typological standpoint, Russian possesses an elaborate system of case-inflected pronominal forms (up to six cases) and a grammatical gender category that is absent in Uzbek and only weakly residual in English. English, for its part, is characterised by a rigid positional word order, the obligatoriness of the subject pronoun, and a distinction between nominative and oblique pronominal forms (I/me, he/him, etc.). Uzbek, as an agglutinative language, employs postpositional constructions and affixation where Russian and English resort to pronominal forms [7, p. 56].

These typological divergences inevitably

generate numerous learner errors — errors that are systemic rather than incidental, which is precisely what makes their investigation particularly valuable from a pedagogical standpoint.

2. Typical Pronominal Errors in Learner Language

2.1. Errors in the Learning of Russian

The most widespread category of error among Uzbek-speaking learners of Russian involves the incorrect use of case forms of personal pronouns. Because Uzbek expresses case relations through postpositions and suffixes rather than through modification of the pronominal stem itself, learners habitually employ the nominative where an oblique case is required. Typical examples include: *«Я дал книгу он» instead of «ему» ('I gave him the book'); *«Учитель говорил мы» instead of «нам» ('The teacher was speaking to us').

A further persistent error is the failure to distinguish pronouns by grammatical gender. Since Uzbek has no grammatical gender category, learners frequently use the masculine pronoun он ('he') to refer to feminine nouns: *«Книга лежит на столе. Он интересный» ('The book is on the table. He is interesting'). This error arises from the direct transfer of the gender-neutral nominal reference of the native language — the Uzbek third-person pronoun у ('he/she/it') — onto the Russian pronominal system, which requires gender agreement.

The reflexive pronoun себя ('oneself') and its case forms also present considerable difficulty, since Uzbek expresses reflexivity through affixation (with the suffix -ни/-га/-дан on reflexive verbs, or through the construction with ўзи). Learners either omit the reflexive pronoun entirely or substitute a personal pronoun: *«Он купил ему подарок» instead of «себе» ('He bought himself a present').

Possessive pronouns generate errors of gender and number agreement: *«Моя брат» ('my [fem.] brother'), or *«её дом — он красивый» where the antecedent pronoun does not correctly govern the attributive form. These errors likewise stem from the fact that Uzbek marks possession through suffixation (менинг — 'my', сенинг — 'your', etc.) with no agreement for the gender of the possessed noun.

2.2. Errors in the Learning of English

In the learning of English, learners' errors derive from interference by both the native Uzbek language and the already-acquired Russian. Among the most frequent errors is the omission of the subject pronoun. In Uzbek, the subject pronoun is commonly dropped, since person and number are recoverable from context or from verbal affixation. When this norm is carried over into English — where a grammatical subject is obligatory — it produces errors such as: *«Is very interesting» for «It is very interesting»; *«Yesterday went to market» for «I went to the market».

The conflation of subject and object pronominal forms (I/me, he/him, she/her, they/them) represents another typical error. Because Russian marks the nominative and oblique functions of pronouns primarily through the context of verb government, and because Uzbek marks case through postpositions, learners frequently select pronominal forms arbitrarily: *«Me and my friend went» for «My friend and I went»; *«He gave it to she» for «to her».

The pronoun *it* — as a formal, or 'dummy', subject and as a demonstrative — has no direct equivalent in either Russian (which uses *это* or *оно* in different functions) or Uzbek (where *y* is used only anaphorically). This gives rise to omission: *«Is raining», or to substitution: *«This is raining» for «It is raining».

Relative pronouns (*who*, *which*, *that*) pose difficulties because Uzbek has no direct parallel to the English relative clause construction, forming attributive subordinate clauses instead through participial phrases. Learners either omit the relative pronoun in positions where it is obligatory, or confuse *who* and *which*, and frequently produce structures with double pronominal marking of the referent: *«The book which I like it very much» — a calque of the Uzbek participial construction, in which the noun head is resumed by a pronoun inside the clause.

3. The Role of the Native Language in Generating Interference Errors

Analysis of learner errors reveals several distinct mechanisms through which the native language bears upon pronominal usage in the foreign language. The first and most transparent is direct

transfer — both positive and negative: the learner constructs an utterance on the model of the native language, slotting foreign-language lexemes into the native syntactic template. For Uzbek-speaking learners, this manifests most visibly in word order and in the omission of obligatory elements.

The second mechanism is grammatical assimilation: the learner, consciously or unconsciously, seeks within the target language grammatical categories analogous to those of the native language, and fills them with the nearest available form. The absence of grammatical gender in Uzbek leads learners to perceive Russian masculine and feminine pronominal forms as stylistic rather than grammatically obligatory variants.

The third mechanism is overgeneralisation: having acquired one pronominal form, the learner extends it to all contexts without regard for case, number, or gender restrictions. For example, having learned *he* as the equivalent of Russian *он*, a learner may use it in object position as well: *«I saw he». A fourth mechanism relates to what may be termed typological distance: the greater the structural divergence between the languages in contact, the more entrenched and resistant to correction the interference errors prove to be. This is why the errors of Uzbek-speaking learners in Russian and English are typically more systemic in character than those of learners whose native languages belong to the same typological family as the target language [6, p. 112].

It is also important to note the phenomenon of double interference: learners who are acquiring Russian and English simultaneously may exhibit the superimposition of structures from both target languages upon each other. English-language production may thus contain constructions that calque Russian pronominal patterns, further reinforced by Uzbek agglutinative logic — creating compound, multi-layered error types that are particularly challenging to address pedagogically.

4. Methodological Recommendations for Overcoming Interference

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, a number of practical recommendations may be offered to teachers of foreign languages working with Uzbek-speaking audiences. First and foremost,

it is essential to integrate into the curriculum systematic contrastive exercises that draw explicit attention to the typological differences between Russian, English, and Uzbek in the domain of pronominal systems.

Contrastive analysis should be employed as a deliberate pedagogical tool: the explicit presentation of typological distinctions reduces the risk of unconscious transfer of native-language structures. For instance, when teaching the case forms of Russian pronouns, it is effective to draw a parallel comparison with Uzbek postpositional constructions — an approach that allows learners to recognise the semantic equivalence underlying the formal divergence. Particular attention should be devoted to the most problematic areas identified in the present study: grammatical gender in Russian, the obligatoriness of the subject pronoun in English, reflexive pronouns in Russian, and relative clauses in both target languages. For each of these areas, it is advisable to develop dedicated practice materials with graded difficulty levels and systematic corrective feedback.

Finally, it is important to cultivate in learners a metalinguistic awareness — an understanding that language systems are not isomorphic, and that the direct translation of grammatical structures from one language to another is, in principle, impossible. This awareness is itself a powerful instrument for the prevention of interference errors, equipping learners with the capacity to monitor and self-correct their own output.

Conclusion

The present study confirms that interference in the domain of pronominal categories constitutes one of the most persistent and systemic challenges in teaching Russian and English to Uzbek-speaking learners. The typological distance between agglutinative Uzbek and inflectional Russian or analytic English predetermines the specific profile of errors: the absence of grammatical gender, the obligatory versus optional status of the subject pronoun, and the expression of case relations — all of these parameters generate zones of robust, self-reinforcing interference.

A systematic description of these errors, combined with their typological explanation,

not only enriches the theory of contrastive linguistics but also carries direct practical value for the methodology of foreign language teaching in the multilingual environment of Central Asia. Future research in this direction might include experimental evaluation of the proposed methodological recommendations, as well as an expansion of the error corpus to incorporate data from other regions and institutional contexts.

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