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## **Linguistic and Communicative Competence: Coping with the Typical Errors of Georgian Learners of English**

### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to provide certain advice for Georgian teachers of English who aim to develop both the linguistic and communicative competences of their students. Hence, the paper focuses on the challenges related to the development of linguistic competence, embracing vocabulary and grammar issues. In this regard, typical errors of Georgian learners of English are analysed. Hints are provided as to what issues should be addressed with the aim of avoiding native language interference. The theoretical basis for the given research embraces scientific works by R. Lado, C. Fries, C. Prator, G. Leech and other scholars. The use of the contrastive method has enabled the author to identify the basic semantic and structural differences between the native and the target languages (in this case, Georgian and English). The empirical material has been collected and analysed during twenty years of teaching experience at the English Department of Tbilisi State University.

It is widely known that, apart from linguistic competence, the aim of every teacher is to develop the students' communicative competence. The latter embraces social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. Therefore, this paper also dwells on politeness rules and norms of speech etiquette as certain utterances that are quite acceptable for Georgian culture, in interactions with foreigners may turn into face-threatening acts. Thus, based on the author's previous research (a monograph and numerous papers published in various linguistic journals), the paper provides certain hints on how to equip Georgian students with the knowledge of politeness rules, appropriate forms of address, tabooed words and expressions, proper understanding of the illocutionary force of indirect speech-acts, phatic communication and other culture-related language factors.

A focus on the errors frequently made by Georgian learners of English has proved the necessity for the publication and use of textbooks compiled by Georgian authors. Such manuals should contain special notes and exercises with the emphasis on the structural and pragmatic aspects related to typical errors of Georgian learners of English.

The findings of the given research might be of interest for Georgian teachers of English who aim to provide their students with the necessary linguistic and communicative skills in the target language.

**Key Words:** *Typical errors, language patterns, transfer, interference, communicative competence, speech etiquette, norms of politeness, speech acts, face-threatening acts.*

### **Introduction**

It is well-known that every language is a collection of habits, and the learner of a foreign language has to acquire new ones. When speaking a foreign language, people frequently transfer the patterns of the native language into the foreign one (Gass, 1979:327). In the foreword to R. Lado's book *Linguistics Across Cultures*, C. Fries notes that the process of studying a foreign language largely differs from native language acquisition: when learning a native language, new skills are acquired on the background of the non-existence of previous ones, whereas when studying a foreign language, new habits are opposed to the already existing ones, and this leads to certain difficulties (Lado, 1957:1). If the new habit resembles those acquired when learning the native

language, the learning process is facilitated. However, when there is a significant contrast between the native and foreign languages, acquisition is complicated due to the interference of the native language (ibid, p2). Similar structures between the two languages facilitate positive transfer, whereas different structures lead to negative transfer i.e. interference (Corder, 1981:1).

As Georgian and English belong to different families and also reveal little (if any) structural similarity, naturally, there are innumerable differences between the two at all levels (phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary and pragmatics). Hence, cases of facilitation are extremely rare. Therefore, this paper focuses only on the errors related to interference (negative transfer), which, as a rule, is a source of errors and complexities in the process of foreign language acquisition. Based on the contrastive method, the paper analyses the errors caused by semantic and structural differences between the English and Georgian languages, as well as culture differences between the two nations reflected in speech etiquette. These errors have been identified and observed during the long-standing practice of teaching English to Georgian students at different levels of language acquisition. I hope, the focus on these errors will be of use and interest for both the teachers and learners of the English language.

### **Typical errors of Georgian learners of English on the level of grammar:**

1. In the Georgian language, the word “ერთ-ერთი” /ert-erti/ meaning “one of the...” is followed by a noun in the singular form. As you know, this is not the case in English. Thus, due to the negative transfer of this structure into English, Georgian students often say: “One of the book” instead of the correct form “one of the books”.
2. Another widespread problem is related to the use of the complex object (e.g. I want him to read this book). Although the structure of the complex object is quite simple (despite its name), Georgian students transfer the native language pattern into English and say “I want that he reads this book” (because in Georgian, a subordinate clause with the conjunction “that” is used to denote the same meaning „მე მიხდა, რომ მან ეს წიგნი წაიკითხოს“ /me minda, rom man es ts’igni ts’aikitxos/. The experiment I carried out with a group of students of the English department at Tbilisi State University has proved ctranslate the sentence: „მე მიხდა, რომ ის ბედნიერი იყოს“ /me minda, rom is bednieri ik’os/ (I want her to be happy). The vast majority of students translated this sentence as: “I want that she be happy”.
3. Many typical errors are related to the use of interrogative forms. In Georgian, general questions are formed without inversion or auxiliary verbs, simply by means of a different intonation. Thus, at the beginner level, students find it hard to perceive this difference. At the later stage, when they have overcome this problem, another difficulty arises, regarding questions which comprise subordinate clauses of object. According to the rules of English grammar, questions in such clauses are given as affirmative sentences. Yet, about 90% of students say: “I don’t know where is he” instead of “I don’t know where he is”.
4. As for special questions, the errors of Georgian students are related to the incorrect use of certain question words. On the initial level of studies, the Georgian learners of English often say: “How many years are you?”, literally translating the Georgian question: „რამდენი წლის ხარ?“ /ramdeni ts’lis xar?/ (How old are you?). At a later stage of learning, a widespread error is related to the literal translation of the question „როგორ ფიქრობ?“ /rogor fiqrob/, which leads to the use of an incorrect form “How do you think?” instead of the correct question: “What do you think?”
5. Another interesting case of negative transfer is related to clauses connected by means of the relative pronoun “which“. Its Georgian correlate is “რომელი“ /romeli/. In certain subordinate clauses the genitive case of this word – “რომლის“ /romlis/ – is used. In similar cases the construction “of which” is found in English, e.g. “I went to the restaurant, the manager of which was my friend”. In such cases

Georgian learners tend to say: “I went to the restaurant which’s manager was my friend”, putting the word “which“ IP the genitive case, based on the Georgian pattern. Besides, due to negative transfer of the native language rules, they use “which” to refer to both animate and inanimate nouns, instead of using “who”. Thus, they say: “the man which was looking at me”.

6. One more widespread error is related to the construction “both...and...”. In Georgian, construction of this kind is: “როგორც... ასევე...” /rogorts...aseve.../. The English correlate of the Georgian word “როგორც“ /rogorts/ is the word “as”. Therefore, Georgian students frequently say sentences like: “as State as private sector should be involved in this activity” instead of the correct form: “both the State and the private sector should be involved in this activity”.
7. An important source of errors is also the construction “That’s why”. In similar contexts Georgians say: “და ამიტომაც“ /da amitomats/. The English correlate of the word და /da/ is “and”, whereas the correlate of “ამიტომაც“ /amitomats/ is “because”. Thus, the given construction is literally translated into English as “and because”. Hence, the following errors are frequent: “I was ill, and because I didn’t go to school”, instead of the correct form: “I was ill, that’s why I didn’t go to school”.
8. Special mention should be made of the conjunction “that”, which leads to numerous typical errors of Georgian learners of English. Above all, the use of a comma before “that” is widespread due to the influence of Georgian punctuation rules (a comma is used before the correlate Georgian conjunction რომ /rom/).
9. Frequent errors of Georgian learners are related to the use of “what“ instead of “that“. e.g. “Everything what I have read”- (cf. Georgian ყველაფერი, რაც წაკითხული მაქვს “k’velaferi, rats ts’akitxuli maqvs/). This error is caused due to the fact that Georgian „რა“/ra/„რაც“/rats/ are the correlates of the English “what“.
10. Typical errors are also related to the construction “as for”. Under the influence of Georgian, students tend to make a word for word translation of the Georgian analogue „რაც შეეხება“/rats feexeba/ and start a new topic with “what about..” (What about John, he was ill). I come across this error on daily basis, when the students speak about some topic and move on to a new paragraph. As soon as they say “What about”, I am confused and unable to understand whether they are asking me a question or simply want to move on to another issue.
11. Another important problem is related to the pronoun “everything”. The Georgian equivalent of this pronoun is “ყველაფერი“ /q’velaferi/, whereas the Georgian for “this” is “ეს“ /es/. Thus, the students transfer the Georgian expression “ყველაფერი ეს“ /q’velaferi es/ saying “everything this”, instead of the correct variant – “all of this“.
12. Lastly, I would like to mention one more error which is related to reflexive pronouns. In Georgian the word “თავი“ /tavi/ is used to denote the reflexive meaning. Hence, students tend to add the reflexive pronouns in contexts wherever the word “თავი“ is used in Georgian. For instance, under the influence of the Georgian pattern, they translate sentences like “მან თავი ბედნიერად იგრძნო“ /man tavi bednierad igrdzno/ as “he felt himself happy” (adding the unnecessary reflexive pronoun). On the other hand, students sometimes omit the reflexive pronoun in English, because it is not used in similar contexts in Georgian e.g. “I enjoyed at the party” (instead of “I enjoyed myself at the party”).

### **Lexical Errors Caused by Negative Transfer of the Native Language**

Naturally, errors related to the acquisition and use of vocabulary are a widespread phenomenon. Naturally, it is impossible to enumerate all the lexical errors of Georgian learners of English. Thus, the given paper focuses on several most frequent lexical errors caused by semantic differences between the two languages.

C. Prator and his co-author (Prator, Celce-Murcia, 1979:3) distinguish the following levels of complexity of foreign language acquisition:

Coalescence – two items in the native language coalesce (merge) into one in the target language.

Underdifferentiation – the element which exists in the native language does not exist in the target language.

Overdifferentiation – the element existing in the foreign language does not exist in the native language.

Reinterpretation – one and the same element is perceived differently in the native and target languages.

Splitting – a certain concept is denoted by one word in the native language, whereas in the target language it is denoted by two different words.

If we view the typical lexical errors of Georgian students from the viewpoint of Prator's classification, we find the following interesting cases of reinterpretation:

- a. Misinterpretation of the word “intelligent”, which means clever, smart in English, whereas in Georgian it denotes a well-bred, educated person.
- b. The word “საყვარელი“ /saq'vareli/ in Georgian means both “cute” and “favourite”. It is a derivative of the word “სიყვარული“/siq'varuli/ which means “love”. As a rule, Georgian students translate this word into English as “lovely”: for instance, they say “My lovely writer” instead of “My favourite writer”.
- c. Another lexical misunderstanding is related to the word “novel”. A similar loan-word is used in Georgian to denote a short story, whereas the correlate of the English “novel” in Georgian is “რომანი” /romani/. Hence, the students misunderstand the meaning of the word “novel”.
- d. The word “პოემა“ /poema/ in Georgian denotes only an epic work of poetry, while in English the same word “poem” denotes all kinds of verse. Thus, if the English teacher tells the class that they have to learn a poem by heart, the students get scared and nervous, thinking that they have to memorize the entire epic poem.
- e. Another frequent source of misunderstanding is the word “sympathy”, which means compassion in English, whereas in Georgian, the same loan-word means appreciation, liking, favourable attitude to someone.

### **Culture-related typical errors caused by the transfer of the norms of the native speech etiquette:**

It is widely known that, apart from the linguistic competence, the aim of every teacher is to develop the students' communicative competence. The latter embraces social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately (Hymes, 1972:269). Naturally, certain utterances, quite acceptable for Georgian culture, in interactions with foreigners may serve as “face-threatening acts” (Brown and Levinson, 1996:65). Below I will briefly discuss some culture tips that Georgian teachers of English should give their students.

I will start with the forms of address. Numerous textbooks of English contain the rules for using the right register, appropriate forms of address in speaking, letter-writing and so on. Therefore, I will avoid discussion of these issues and just focus on the transfer of Georgian cultural norms regarding the use of caress words in addressing the interlocutor. In an attempt to sound friendly and warm, Georgians frequently address one another using caress words: “გენაცვალე“ /genatsvale/, “შემოგეველე“ /shemogevle /, „შენი ჭირიმე“ /sheni ch'irime/ and so on. An exact translation of these words is impossible, in communication with foreigners, Georgians use the English equivalents like “My dear”, “My darling” etc. In British culture, however, such caress formulae are used only in interactions with family members. In other situations, they are out of place, and may irritate the listener or even sound ironic. The offended listener may even say “do not my-dear me, please!”. Thus, the transfer of the norms of Georgian speech etiquette into English may lead to culture bump and loss of the speaker's face.

Another frequent mistake of Georgian learners is related to phatic communication, namely, the answer to the question “How are you?” This purely phatic greeting is always answered by “Fine, thank you” in English

culture. In a typically Georgian speech situation, the usual answer to this question is “ისე რა“ /ise ra/ the translation of which is “so-so”. According to numerous foreign linguistic informants, they are often confused or even irritated when they hear “so-so” in answer to their question “How are you?” (Goksadze, Demetradze, 2006:55).

Other typical errors related to speech etiquette refer to tabooed expressions. Georgians frequently ask personal questions, even during interactions with the people they have just met. Such a kind of behavior is natural for Georgian phatic communication. However, native speakers of English are embarrassed when hearing questions about their income, age and personal relationships. Another embarrassing question, frequently used by Georgians when meeting an acquaintance in the street is “Where are you going?” In Georgian speech etiquette, the same question „სად მივდიხარ?“ /sad midixar/ is part of phatic communication. This can also be proved by a non-informative typical answer: “არსად, იქით მივდივარ“ /arcade iqit mivdivar/ (“Nowhere, just over there”). However, foreigners perceive this question as interference into their personal affairs. Thus, this phatic question, which performs the function of a greeting in Georgian reality, turns into a face-threatening act during interactions with foreigners.

Special mention should be made of humour and jokes which, on the one hand, serve to establish friendly relationships, but, on the other hand, lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication, as there is probably no phenomenon as language-specific as well as culture-specific as humour. Therefore, Georgian teachers of English should equip their students with certain background knowledge about the national peculiarities of British humour and warn them what kind of jokes they should avoid in order not to embarrass the representatives of a different cultural community.

Georgian teachers of English should also focus on such an important factor as indirectness. To quote A. Miall, “the English never say what they mean, often the exact opposite” (Miall, 1993:19). Thus, Georgian teachers who are willing to develop their students’ communicative competence should give them certain tips on the use of indirect speech acts. I will mention the following situations in this regard: for Georgian speech etiquette it is quite natural to use imperative forms. However, Georgian hosts frequently irritate their English guests by offering their hospitality saying: “Sit down”, “Wash your hands” “Drink some wine” etc. Geoffrey Leech suggests that, given the same propositional content, it is possible to increase the degree of politeness by using a more and more indirect kind of illocution (Leech, 1983: 108). Thus, in order to avoid unpleasant situations, the learners of English should be taught phrases like: “Would you like to sit down?”, “Would you like to wash your hands?”, “Would you care for some wine?” etc.

## Conclusion

It is well known that foreign language acquisition is an extremely difficult task, especially in the case of such different languages as English and Georgian. Naturally, native language interference takes place at all levels of language acquisition and is revealed in various types of errors. Unfortunately, the textbooks created in English-speaking countries cannot reflect the typical errors of Georgian learners, the rules and exercises provided by these textbooks cannot help avoid the errors caused by Georgian-language interference.

The brief list of typical errors offered by this paper is by no means exhaustive. Yet, the errors described in this paper are a sufficient proof of the necessity for the publication and use of textbooks compiled by Georgian authors. Such manuals should contain special notes, culture tips and exercises with the emphasis on the structural, semantic and pragmatic aspects related to typical errors of Georgian learners of English. All this will help avoid the typical errors caused by native language interference.

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