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Typical Mistakes of Georgian Learners of English**

**Irine Demetradze**

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University,  
Tbilisi, Georgia.  
Email: [irinad72@hotmail.com](mailto:irinad72@hotmail.com)

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**Irine Demetradze**

*Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia*

## **The Use of Popular Songs and Films in Overcoming the Typical Mistakes of Georgian Learners of English**

### **ABSTRACT**

The paper focuses on the typical mistakes of Georgian learners of English. The students' errors are usually caused by native language interference. The theoretical framework embraces the works of Lado, 1957; Corder, 1981; Spicher & Sweeney, 2007; Salcedo, 2002; Ludke, 2009 etc. The empirical material is obtained from personal experience of teaching as well as popular media platforms. As English and Georgian are structurally extremely different, the errors of Georgian students are most frequently related to grammar. Based on the longstanding experience of teaching English as a foreign language, the author argues that students easily overcome the problem of native language interference and related frequent errors if they are given examples from the texts of popular songs and films.

Taking into account that songs and films represent authentic, natural language, they serve as an ideal medium for improving pronunciation, learning morphological and syntactic patterns, enriching the vocabulary, improving the students' listening skills and so on. Besides, the lyrics of songs are usually very easily obtainable from Youtube or other media platforms. It is widely discussed that songs facilitate foreign language acquisition. Listening to songs and watching interesting fragments of films is not as time-consuming as reading grammar textbooks, learning the rules and doing exercises. The process is very efficient and enjoyable both for the teacher and the students. Thanks to the refrains of songs, which are repeated several times, certain words and syntactical patterns are firmly fixed in the learner's mind. This is especially important when the teacher tries to help students overcome the typical errors caused by the so-called "negative transfer" i.e. native language interference. The paper analyzes cases when the texts of songs and films have helped overcome issues like: complex object vs direct object, the use of relative pronouns and conjunctions, various types of subordinate clauses, the rules of using *so/such*, conditional sentences of different types and so on. The paper gives recommendations as to which particular song or film is the most efficient in overcoming each of the above-mentioned problems. The author also notes that, in some cases, the lyrics of songs have the opposite effect on the learner, i.e. the grammar and spelling rules are completely ignored in some songs. The paper argues that in such cases teachers should be extremely careful and offer special explanation to students in order to prevent them from making such errors.

**Key Words:** *language interference, typical error, lyrics, film fragment, foreign language teaching.*

### **Introduction**

It is well known that every language speaker has certain linguistic habits i.e. language patterns. When speaking a foreign language, people transfer native language patterns

into the foreign one (Gass, 1979, p.327). In the preface to R. Lado's book „*Linguistics Across Cultures*“, C. Fries notes that native language, new habits are acquired on the background of non-existence of habits, whereas in the process of foreign language acquisition, new habits are opposed to the already existing ones, and this creates difficulties (Lado, 1957, p.1). As every language is a set of habits, acquisition of each new language implies acquisition of new habits. When new habits are similar to those of the native language, learning a new language is facilitated. However, if there is a significant contrast between the patterns of the native language and the foreign one, acquisition of the latter is complicated due to the native language interference (ibid, p.2). It is widely known that similar structures between the native and target languages lead to positive transfer (facilitation), while different structures lead to negative transfer (interference) (Corder, 1981, p.1).

Taking into account the above-mentioned, with regard to the Georgian learners of English, we can conclude the following: since English and Georgian are languages of different families and there are significant differences between the two languages on each level (phonetics, morphology, syntax and vocabulary), it is quite natural that cases of facilitation are rare, if any at all. Hence, the given paper focuses on several interesting cases of interference (negative transfer) that lead to the difficulties and errors of language learners.

## **Methodology**

Using a contrastive method, the paper focuses on the semantic and structural differences between the native and target languages (in our case, English and Georgian). Based on a longstanding experience of teaching English at Tbilisi State University, the author analyzes the successful cases when fragments from famous songs and films have helped the students in the mastering of those words and syntactic patterns that are a frequent source of typical errors.

## **The Importance of Songs in Language Teaching**

According to Larry Lynch, there are 9 reasons why English teachers should use songs in the classroom<sup>1</sup>:

1. Songs almost always contain authentic, natural language;
2. A variety of new vocabulary can be introduced to students through songs;
3. Songs are usually very easily obtainable;
4. Songs can be selected to suit the needs and interests of the students;
5. Grammar and cultural aspects can be introduced through songs;
6. Time length is easily controlled;
7. Students can experience a wide range of accents;
8. Song lyrics can be used in relating to situations of the world around us;
9. Students think songs are natural and fun.

Besides, numerous scholars note that listening to songs in the classroom arouses positive emotions in the learners. This, in its turn, facilitates the process of language acquisition, because the mind is more open to new information in a cheerful and enjoyable environment (Spicher & Sweeney, 2007; Medina, 1993)<sup>2</sup>.

Smith Salcedo notes that, unlike the material learnt from a textbook, the vocabulary and grammatical constructions learnt from a song steadily remain in the learner's mind for a long time, because a song, which consists of melody and lyrics, is frequently repeated in the learner's mind (Salcedo, 2002, p.108).

Below are given concrete examples of typical errors of Georgian learners of English, with quotes from the songs and films which help the learners in the acquisition of English vocabulary and syntactic patterns.

### **Grammatical Errors Caused by Negative Transfer and the Means for Their Prevention:**

#### **1. Complex Object**

Georgian learners of English find it very hard to master the complex object structure.

Although this structure is quite simple, Georgian learners of English transfer the native language pattern into English and, instead of saying *"I want him to read this book"*, they use a more complicated and wrong structure, saying: *"I want that he reads this book"*\* This is a widespread problem not only on the beginner level but also at an advanced level of learning. It should be noted that during the experiment carried out in a group of students of English philology at Tbilisi State University, I asked the students to translate the sentence

„მე ყველაფერს გავაკეთებ იმისთვის, რომ ის ბედნიერი იყოს“ /me qvelafers gavaketeb imistvis rom is bednieri iqos/ (I will do everything for her to be happy). 100% of students translated this sentence as follows: “*I’ll do everything because she will be happy*”\*.

In order to solve the above-mentioned problem, I used a famous film “French Kiss”, namely, I compared two episodes from this film. In the first one, Kevin Kline’s character – Luke –tells Kate (performed by Meg Ryan): „*I want you*“. Kate perceives this phrase as a direct object and is greatly surprised, but Luke continues “*I want you.... to make Charlie suffer*”. Hence, this is a case of complex object. However, in the final episode of the film, Luke realizes he has fallen in love and tells Kate „*I want you*“. This time, Kate thinks that a complex object construction will follow, but Luke says: „*I want you. That’s all*“, i.e. this is a case of direct object. When students are shown these fragments, they easily perceive the difference between the two types of objects and remember how to construct the complex object correctly.

#### **a. Interrogative Constructions**

Acquisition of interrogative constructions represents a problem on each stage of learning. This is due to the fact that, in the Georgian language, interrogative sentences do not require either auxiliary verbs or inversion. In Georgian, general questions differ from affirmative sentences only in intonation. Despite the complexity of the problem, learners of English usually manage to overcome this difficulty on the beginner level. However, later on, another problem arises: according to the rules of English grammar, a question in the object clause does not need any auxiliary verb and is not subject to inversion. This is a major source of errors. Approximately 90% of students say: “*I don’t know where is he*”\*, instead of the correct construction “*I don’t know where he is*”. This problem was easily overcome when the students listened to Nelly Furtado’s famous song “*I’m Like a Bird*”, with numerous repetitions of the phrases: “*I don’t know where my soul is, I don’t know where my home is*”.

#### **b. Relative pronouns**

Georgian learners of English transfer the native language pattern into the target language regarding the construction “*of which*”. The case is that in Georgian the same semantics is expressed by a correlate question word in the genitive case „*რომლის*“

/romlis/. Thus, instead of saying: “*I went to the restaurant, the manager of which was my friend*”, Georgians say: “*I went to the restaurant which’s manager was my friend*”, i.e. due to native language interference, they transfer the Georgian sentence structure into English and put the question word in the genitive case.

Besides, the Georgian relative pronoun „რომელიც“ /romelits/ is used with reference to both animate and inanimate nouns. Therefore, Georgian learners of English often say: “*the man which was looking at me*”\*, instead of the correct form “*the man who was looking at me*”. This problem is easily overcome thanks to Nirvana’s famous song “*The man who sold the world*”.

### c. Misleading Constructions with the Word “That”

Special mention should be made of the word “*That*”, used as a conjunction and a relative pronoun. Above all, we should note punctuation errors: under the influence of Georgian rules of punctuation, students use a comma before the conjunction *that*, because its correlate conjunction „რომ“ /rom/ is preceded by a comma in Georgian. Besides, the Georgian construction „ყველაფერი, რაც“ /qvelaferi rats/ (everything that/all that) is

wrongly translated into English as “*All what*”. Hence, the students say: “*All what I want*”\* instead of the correct form “*All that I want*”. This problem is easily overcome when the students listen to Justin Bieber’s song “*You are all that matters to me*”. The same mistake is made by a vast majority of students regarding the construction “*everything that*”. Once again, under the influence of the native language, Georgian students say “*everything what*”\*. This error is successfully prevented thanks to the song “*Everything that kills me makes me feel alive*”.

### d. Reflexive Pronouns

The Georgian correlate of all the English reflexive pronouns is “თავი“ /tavi/. This word is usually used in the phrases referring to feelings. For instance: „თავი ბედნიერად იგრძნო“ /tavi bednierad igrdzno/ (he/she felt happy). However, transferring the native language pattern into English, Georgian students often say: “*he felt himself happy*”.

However, as soon as I remind the students of James Brown’s song “*I feel good*”, this problem is easily overcome.

It should be noted that this song helps in coping with another widespread problem related to adjectives and adverbs: for the Georgian language, it is natural to say: „თავს

კარგად ვგრძნობ“ /tavs kargad vgrdznob/ (literally: “I feel well”), i.e. Georgians use an adverb, while in English adjectives are used in similar constructions. Therefore, the Georgian learners of English tend to say: “*I feel well*”<sup>\*</sup> instead of the correct form “*I feel good*”. Once again, when teaching such constructions, I rely on James Brown’s help.

#### e. Errors Related to the Use of “So” and “Such”

Georgian learners of English are usually given detailed instructions regarding the rules referring to the use of “so” before adjectives only and “such” before adjectives followed by nouns. However, as the Georgian language does not make such distinctions, the use of “so” and “such” still remains a significant problem. In order to cope with this issue, students are asked to compare the lyrics of two famous songs: Joe Cocker’s “You are so beautiful” and Lou Reed’s “It’s such a perfect day”.

#### f. Introductory phrase “As For”/Time Clauses and Conditionals

The Georgian correlate of the English “*As for*” is „რაც შეეხება“ /rats sheekheba/. The problem is that the same Georgian phrase is also a correlate of the English “*what about*”. Hence, Georgian learners often say: “*what about John, he was ill*”<sup>\*</sup>. This error is easily overcome thanks to a well-known film “Cabaret”. In her famous song, Liza Minelli repeats twice: “*And as for me, and as for me, I made my mind up back in Chelsie, when I go, I’ll go like Elsie*”.

Besides, this song helps overcome the problem of using the future tense in clauses beginning with the word “*when*”. In similar time clauses (as well as conditional sentences of Type 1), the Georgian language uses the future tense. Hence, such clauses are a frequent source of errors of Georgian learners of English. Apart from Lisa

Minelli’s song, this problem is prevented with the help of the song “*When I’m sixty-four*” by the Beatles and “*If you go away*” by Frank Sinatra.

#### g. Calques

The Georgian construction „კარგი დროს გატარება“ /kargi dros gatareba/ is often literally translated into English as “*spend a good time*”<sup>\*</sup>, instead of the correct form “*have a good time*”. This widespread error of Georgian students is easily overcome by means of Queen’s popular song “*Don’t stop me now, I’m having such a good time!*”.

#### h. Reinterpretation

Prator and Celce-Murcia mention different types of complexities related to foreign

language acquisition, out of which the most widespread type is “reinterpretation” (Prator & Celce-Murcia, 1979 p.3). In case of reinterpretation, one and the same language unit is perceived differently in the native and target languages. The errors of Georgian students of English are often caused by reinterpretation. For instance, even at the beginner level, the students know what the English word “love” means.

However, they consider the English word “lovely” as a derivative with the same semantics. Hence, they translate this word into Georgian as „საყვარელი“ /saqvareli/ (which is also derived from the root denoting “love” but has the meaning of

“favourite”). It is a frequent case to hear from Georgian students phrases like “my lovely writer”\* (instead of the correct form “my favourite writer”). Apart from explaining the meaning of the word “lovely”, I offer the students to watch the beginning scene from the popular film “My Favourite Lady”, where the word “lovely” is used 14 times by Audrey Hepburn to describe her dreams. Thanks to this vivid context and frequent repetition, the students remember the meaning of this word forever.

### **The Negative Influence of Songs on English Learners**

Despite all the above-mentioned, it should be underlined that the rules of English grammar and punctuation are frequently violated in the lyrics of songs. For instance, for the sake of maintaining the rhythm, Rolling Stones sing “I can’t get no satisfaction” with double negation which is inadmissible for correct English grammar. In his popular song “Hound Dog”, Elvis Presley uses the construction “you was high class”. The lyrics of a famous song by “The Doors” contain the following error: “People are strange when your a stranger”\* (the correct form is: you’re) and so on. In my practice, students have often argued with me when I explain certain rules of grammar and punctuation. They try to prove their arguments based on the lyrics of songs they have found on the internet. Thus, to a certain extent, lyrics of songs also have a negative impact on foreign language acquisition. Yet, this problem is easily overcome by means of correct instructions given by the teacher. In most cases, as we have seen, songs largely assist the teacher in the prevention of typical errors of Georgian learners of English.

## Conclusion

Naturally, mastering of a foreign language is a complicated a time-consuming process, especially when it is a case of such different languages as Georgian and English. Native language interference hampers this process and leads to different morphological, syntactic and lexical mistakes. Unfortunately, the textbooks of English language widely used in Georgia do not focus on the typical errors of Georgian learners of English, and the texts and exercises given in these manuals are not aimed at the prevention of typical errors caused by native language interference. The typical errors of Georgian learners of English and the ways of overcoming these errors discussed in the given paper prove that the process of foreign language teaching can be facilitated by means of listening to fragments from popular songs and watching films in the English language.

## NOTES:

1. Retrieved from: <https://www.eslbase.com/teaching/using-songs-to-teach-efl> (Seen on June 21, 2021).
2. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260229876\\_Teaching\\_foreign\\_languages\\_through\\_songs](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260229876_Teaching_foreign_languages_through_songs) (Seen on June 21, 2021).

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