

Polish as a foreign language at elementary level of instruction: crosslinguistic influences in writing

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ABSTRACT. Being a minority European language, Polish has not attracted the attention of second language research (SLA) very much. Most studies in the area focus on English and other major languages describing variables and process observed in learners' interlanguage development.

This article looks at the language performance of elementary learners of Polish as a foreign language with a view to diagnosing areas of difficulty at the initial stages of language instruction. It is a case study of five learners' written production after a year of intensive language instruction in the controlled conditions of a classroom.

The objective of the study presented here is:

1. to determine the types of error produced in a short translation task at different levels of language (morphosyntactic, lexical)
2. to observe manifestations of crosslinguistic influences between languages the subjects know (interlingual transfer) as well as those related to the language learnt itself (intralingual transfer).

The small sample of texts produced does not allow for any generalized observations and conclusions, however, at the level of elementary competence in any foreign language, as other research shows, the amount of individual variation is not the most significant factor. Thus the incorrect forms produced may testify to some more universally error-prone areas of language.

The value of this kind of analysis lies in this direct application to the teaching of Polish as a synthetic language. The study also demonstrates the fact that communicative teaching has a limited contribution to make in the case of this family of languages. It suggests that overt and explicit teaching of a synthetic language will give a sounder basis for further development of language competence in its communicative dimension.

KEY-WORDS: Polish, intralingual, interlingual, errors, language transfer, formal instruction

0 – Introduction

Present day teaching methodology is still dominated by various forms of the communicative approach (CLT) to foreign language instruction. The need to develop the communicative abilities of non-native speakers of English and the position of English as a *lingua franca* determine the major focus of instructional practices. However, as has been observed over a period of some thirty years now, CLT creates pidginized forms of language performance and the desire to become native-like in the target language seems a long-gone ambition (Gabryś-Barker 2005). The position of native-speaker competence is called into question in the name of some misapplied multiculturalism. English in this way has become a simplified linguistic code, devoid of its peripheral and metaphorical aspects. Does anybody still read Shakespeare in the original for his language, or make the attempt at all? Various international “Englishes” are created to serve the communicative purposes in globalized communities. And in this sense communicative instruction succeeds and survival English courses thrive, irrespective of what we think. Whether we should stick to “good old English” or go for modernized versions will of course be determined by the needs of specific non-native speakers of it. We can only hope that – and I guess there are signs of it happening already for example in the development of the Language Awareness Movement (Van Lier 1995; Thornbury 1997; Arndt, Harvey & Nuttall 2000) and the reintroduction into the classroom of form-focused instruction – a variety of approaches will be adopted.

However, in step with the march of globalization, minority languages have become more potent forces as markers of one’s identity (Ytsma 2000; Lasagabaster 2000; Cenoz & Jessner (Eds.) 2000). Methodologies of foreign language instruction thus have had to become more diversified as what works well for languages such as English may not be effective in the context of teaching typologically distant languages. For obvious reasons, ELT is best developed in terms of the theoretical research carried out into the acquisition/learning of this language and also at the practice level of classroom instruction. Methodologies of teaching minority languages need to attract more attention to avoid uncritical duplication of EFL models in language instruction. One of the most obvious reasons for the need to develop

separate approaches to teaching is the specificity of the language system itself.

While it seems quite an easy task to develop so-called survival English (that is, English at the level of basic communication, in which knowledge of some vocabulary and elementary structures will allow a non-native speaker to communicate), in languages such as Polish there is no such concept as “survival Polish”. As a synthetic language, Polish requires a fairly sound awareness of its basic grammar: it has a complex system of rules for the conjugation of verbs and declension of nouns (not to mention quite a number of exceptions to these rules!). A certain degree of accuracy has to be exercised even at the level of very basic communication.

That is why the major focus of teaching Polish as a foreign language (PFL) at the early stages of instruction is a traditional approach based on explicit knowledge of grammatical rules and their application through deductive teaching. Discovery learning and inductive elicitation are of very limited utility in teaching languages such as Polish and may work effectively only on the level of lexis, where international words, borrowings and words of common origin (mostly Latin and Germanic in the case of the Polish-English combination of languages) allow learners to understand individual lexical items, although not the whole message. (Mańczak-Wohlfeld 2006).

Diversity in the way grammar works in analytic languages (such as English) as opposed to synthetic languages (such as Polish) points to the need of grammar-focused instruction in the case of the latter.

1 – Crosslinguistic influences between synthetic and analytic languages

Crosslinguistic influence or, as defined by Odlin (1993: 27), language transfer is perceived as:

(...) the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired”. (Odlin 1993: 27)

One of the ways of describing and explaining crosslinguistic influences results from a typological description of languages, which “indicates various structural similarities and differences (...) in its

intricate system of inflections to express gender, number and other categories." (Odlin 1993: 45).

Odlin also points out that typological analysis "allow for a clearer understanding of relations between transfer and developmental sequences" (Odlin 1993: 27). Developmental sequences are more universal in nature stages of acquisition of certain language structures, such as negation for example. They demonstrate the same patterns in L1 acquisition and in L2 learning.

The most fundamental difference between an analytic language such as English and a synthetic language such as Russian and Polish lies in the way grammatical meaning is expressed:

English is an analytic language, in which grammatical meaning is largely expressed through the use of additional words and by changes in word order. Russian [Polish] on the other hand, is a synthetic language, in which the majority of grammatical forms are created through changes in the structure of words, by means of a developed system of prefixes, suffixes and endings.

(Monk & Burak 1994: 121)

By implication, Polish is characterized by a very complex system of declension of both nouns and adjectives and a diversity of conjugation paradigms for different verbs. The morphological richness of Polish is expressed by seven cases employing a variety of inflectional endings which are determined by two factors: the number and gender of the noun.

Also the way tenses function in Polish and English is diametrically different and constitutes a major area of problems for Polish learners of English. With only three tenses (past, present and future), the Polish verb system is based on aspect like the Russian one:

This is the contrast between the actions which are uncompleted (imperfective aspect) and those which are completed (perfective aspect). These contrasts are indicated through affixation. Perfect and progressive forms of verbs, as understood in English, do not exist. (...) there are no auxiliary verbs like *do*, *have* or *will*.

(Monk & Burak 1994: 121)

English makes extensive use of prepositions and prepositional phrases to express functions in a sentence. In Polish it is the suffixes that perform grammatical functions, for example:

nominative: subject, subject predicative,
genitive: modifier,
dative: indirect object (addressee),
accusative: direct object (patient),
 and *instrumental*: subject predicative.

The existence of the declension systems for nouns and adjectives implies that there has to be agreement between a noun and an adjective in terms of gender (*feminine, masculine or neuter*) and declension ending, also depending on which paradigm of declension a given noun belongs to, which is determined by its ending in the nominative case.

Also the fact that grammatical relations expressed by endings denote syntactic roles in a sentence makes Polish a fairly flexible language in terms of word order. English has a fairly rigid basic word order (BWO) of SVO type (Figure 1)

Language	Basic word order	Rigidity
English	SVO	Rigid
Irish	SVO	Rigid
Russian	SVO	Flexible
Polish	SVO	Flexible
Persian	SOV	Rigid
Turkish	SOV	Flexible

FIGURE 1 – Rigidity versus flexibility of BWO (adapted from Odlin 1993: 86)

SVO word order is common among the world's languages and so is SOV (Monk & Burak 1994: 44). However even employing the same basic word order, as is the case with Polish and English, it is the degree of flexibility of a given language that may lead to learning problems resulting in language transfer. A relatively flexible word order in Polish means that Polish as a foreign language (PFL) learners already have problems at the level of comprehension of the message, whereas in the case of EFL learners, the difficulty lies in actual language production.

Table 1 presents the major difficulties of EFL learners with L1 Polish and (one may confidently predict) with other L1 synthetic languages.

Area	Polish learners' of English difficulties	Sample examples of incorrect forms in English
Phonology: Segmentals	No short/long vowels Non-existent sounds Different place and manner of articulation	* <i>ship for sheep</i> * <i>sank you for thank you</i> * <i>sat for set</i>
Suprasegmentals	No diphthongs Less diversified intonation patterns Stress on the penultimate syllable (mostly) Rhythm: strong/weak forms	* <i>Are you going? (flat intonation)</i>
Grammar: Questions Negation Word order Articles Tenses The passive voice Conditionals Reported speech Modal verbs	No inversion, no auxiliaries Double negation (Relatively) flexible No articles No progressive, no perfect tenses No progressive, no perfect forms Different use of tenses, no third conditional No sequence of tenses Confusion: must/have to, can/ may/be able to	* <i>You go to school tomorrow?</i> * <i>I don't know nobody there.</i> * <i>We yesterday went shopping.</i> * <i>I have sister and brother.</i> * <i>They watch TV now.</i> * <i>We live here for twenty years.</i> * <i>My dinner is cooked now.</i> * <i>It will be done by Friday.</i> * <i>If I will be here tomorrow, I will meet you.</i> * <i>He said he will come today.</i> * <i>I mustn't do it now. (Meaning: I don't need to do it now)</i>
Lexis: False friends Confusable words Collocations Idioms	Words similar in form Words in context Multiple meanings Lexical collocations Grammatical collocations (e.g. prepositional) Literal translation	* <i>Actually (At the moment) I am not interested in this</i> * <i>Can you borrow(lend) me this book?</i> * <i>The lock (zip) in my skirt is broken</i> * <i>He leads (runs) a restaurant</i> * <i>He is in (at) home now.</i> * <i>I will tell you straight from the bridge (I will not beat around the bush)</i>
Writing	Phonetic script (e.g. minimal pairs) Punctuation (e.g. in subordinate clauses)	* <i>I saw the ship (sheep) in the field yesterday.</i> * <i>I think, that this is wrong!</i>

TABLE 1 – Difficulties of Polish learners of EFL

The examples of difficulties encountered by Polish learners of English derive largely from the L1 linguistic system at their disposal. It constitutes the major source of cross-linguistic consultations especially at the early stages of language instruction. Some of the errors committed are more serious in their consequences as they may result in a communication breakdown. At the level of phonology, intonation patterns violated may result in incomprehensibility or misunderstanding. At the level of grammar, incorrect word order may bring about confusion.

In the context of PFL instruction, it may be assumed that if the linguistic system is determined to such a great extent by the structure of the words (suffixation) and flexible word order, language instruction will have to take account of this and focus on the above areas of language as the major areas of difficulty.

3 – Presentation of the study

This article describes a case study of five learners of PFL at the elementary level of language competence, who participated in an intensive course of Polish over a period of one academic year. It aims at describing the major areas of difficulty as manifested by errors produced in the students' texts. The presentation of the errors attempts to classify them according to the language sub-systems they refer to show the relative proportions between grammatical versus lexical and other types of error observed and to relate it to the linguistic characteristics of Polish, an example of a synthetic language. Analysis of the data also includes a discussion of the possible sources of errors in relation not only to linguistic systems of L1 (English) and L_n (Polish) in crosslinguistic consultations observed but also to learners' learning background and the strategies used.

The subjects participating in the study were all language students at a department of Slavonic languages, whose language major was Russian, whereas instruction in Polish constituted their minor subject. None of the subjects had any previous exposure to Polish and they were all true beginners. The course they attended consisted of theoretical grammar classes and practical Polish classes mostly carried out in a form of controlled grammatical practice.

The source text used for the purposes of this analysis comes from a written examination administered to the students at the beginners' level at the end of a year of instruction in Polish. It covers the basic vocabulary and grammatical structures which were practised throughout the year in practical Polish classes and theoretical course in Polish linguistics:

In the summer I visited my relatives in Edinburgh. A Polish lady was living with them. Her name is Justyna. She is from Warsaw, but at the moment she is studying English here in Scotland. She arrived in January for six months, and will return in June. During her stay she intends to travel to England, because she has friends in Oxford and Scunthorpe. She speaks English well, but has problems with grammar, and does not understand when people speak too quickly.

(Practical Polish examination text: Glasgow University, Slavonic Department, 1992).

At first glance, it is a fairly easy text to translate, however it demonstrates the whole array of linguistically tricky areas for the beginning students of Polish as a foreign language: the ability to use the basic (although not very regular) declension patterns for nouns and conjugation of verbs and Polish tense forms.

4 – Data presentation and its analyses

4.1 – Types of errors (quantitative presentation)

Table 2 is a quantitative presentation of all the errors observed in the texts produced by the subjects. They demonstrate typological differences as well different proportions of errors in different areas of language in which incorrect forms were produced.

Subject	Nr of sentences	Morphosyntactic	Lexical	Writing/spelling	Total nr of errors
1	6,5	13	2	1	16
2	5	4	1	2	7
3	4	8	2	1	11
4	7	12	5	3	20
5	5.5	7	1	3	11
Total	28 (80%)	44 (67%)	11 (17.6%)	10 (15.4%)	65 (100%)

TABLE 2 – Number of errors and their type

4.1.1 – Examples of errors

4.1.1.1 – Data presentation

The translations produced by the students may appear to be full of erroneous forms – as will be demonstrated later on in the presentation and analysis - however, they seem to work well on the level of communicating the message in an intelligible way and it is only their grammatical accuracy that requires corrective feedback. Table 3 presents the correct translation of the examination text and the translations produced by the students. (The language has not been altered in any way). It also points out the main errors that occurred in the translated versions.

English sentence and its correct translation into Polish	Translation into Polish (subjects 1-5)	Examples of errors
<p><i>In the summer I visited my relatives in Edinburgh</i></p> <p>W lecie (latem) odwiedziłem (am) moich krewnych (rodzine) w Edingurgu</p>	<p>1. Latem <i>odwiedzałam</i> (A) swoich krewnych w <i>Edinburgh</i>.(IC)</p> <p>2. Latem odwiedziłem swoich krewnych w <i>Edinburgh</i> (IC)</p> <p>3. W lato <i>wizytowałem</i> (LE) moja rodzinę w Edinburghu.</p> <p>4. W lecie <i>odwiedzałam</i> (A) <i>rodzina</i> (AC) w Edinburghu.</p> <p>5. W lecie <i>ja</i> (R) byłem u <i>mojego</i> (G) <i>rodzina</i> (GC) w Edinburghu.</p>	<p>-Incorrect use of imperfective aspect (A)</p> <p>-no instrumental case ending (IC)</p> <p>-lexical error (LE)</p> <p>-instrumental instead of accusative case (AC)</p> <p>-wrong gender (G)</p>

<p><i>A Polish lady was living with them.</i></p> <p>Mieszkała z nimi Polka.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Polska kobieta</i> (LE) mieszkała u nich. 2. <i>Polska kobieta</i> (LE) mieszkała z nimi. 3. <i>Kobieta polska</i> (LE) z <i>ich</i> (IC) mieszkała.(?) 4. <i>Polska pani</i> (LE) mieszkała z nimi. 5. <i>Polska kobieta</i> (LE) mieszkała z <i>nim</i>. (G) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lexical error (LE) - genitive case instead of instrumental case (IC) - incorrect gender (G)
<p><i>Her name is Justyna.</i></p> <p>Nazywa sie Justyna.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nazywała się Justyna. 2. Nazywa się Justyna. 3. Nazywa się Justyna. 4. Nazywała się Justyna. 5. <i>Ona</i>(R) <i>naziwa</i> (S) się Justyna. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - redundancy of a personal pronoun (R) - spelling: [i] for [y]
<p><i>She is from Warsaw, but at the moment she is studying English here in Scotland.</i></p> <p>Ona jest z Warszawy, ale obecnie (teraz, w tej chwili) studiuje angielski tutaj, w Szkocji.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Ona</i> (R, BE) z <i>Warszawy</i>, ale teraz <i>studiowa angielski język</i> (WO) w <i>Szkocja</i> (IC). 2. <i>Ona</i> z <i>Warszawy</i>, ale na razie <i>studuje</i> język angielski tu w <i>Szkocj</i>(S) 3. Jest z <i>Warszawu</i>(CS), ale teraz <i>studuje</i> (S) język angielski tu w Szkocji. 4. <i>Ona</i> jest z Warszawy, ale teraz <i>ona studiowa angielski język</i> (CS) tutaj w <i>Szkoczi</i>.(S) 5. Jest z <i>Warszawi</i> (S), ale teraz <i>studuje</i>(S) <i>angielskiego</i>(AC) tu w Szkocji. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - redundancy of a personal pronoun (R) - word order (WO) - no copula `be` (BE) - nominative case instead of instrumental (IC) - code-switching from Russian (CS) - German spelling (S) - English spelling: [i] for [y] (S) - genitive case instead of accusative (AC)

<p><i>She arrived in January for six months, and will return in June.</i></p> <p>Przyjechała w styczniu na sześć miesięcy, i (ale) wraca (wróci) w czerwcu.</p>	<p>1. <i>Ona</i> (R) <i>przybywała</i> (A) w styczniu na sześć miesięcy i <i>będzie wracała</i> (FT) w czerwcu.</p> <p>2. <i>Ona</i> (R) przyjechała <i>u stycznia</i> (ADV) na sześć <i>miesięców</i> (GC) i wróci <i>czerwca</i> (ADV)</p> <p>3. Przyjechała w <i>Nowym Roku</i> (LA) na sześć <i>miesiące</i> (GC) i <i>będzie wróciła</i> (FT) ...</p> <p>4. <i>Ona przybywała</i> (LE, A) <i>stycznia</i> (ADV) na sześć <i>miesiący</i> (S) i <i>będzie wracać w czerwca</i> (IC).</p> <p>5. <i>Ona</i> (R) przyjechała w styczniu na sześć miesięcy, <i>będzie wróciła</i> (FT) w czerwcu.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - imperfective aspect (A) - incorrect future tense (FT) - adverbial phrase (ADV) - lexical approximation (LA) - nominative case instead of genitive (GC) - genitive case instead of instrumental (IC)
<p><i>During her stay she intends to travel to England, because she has friends in Oxford and Scunthorpe.</i></p> <p>Podczas pobytu (tutaj) zamierza podróżować po Anglii (pojechać do Anglii), ponieważ ma przyjaciół w Oxfordzie i Scunthorpe.</p>	<p>1. Podczas jej <i>pobyta</i> (GC) <i>ona</i> (R) chce pojechać do Anglii, bo ma <i>przyjaciela</i> (AC) w <i>Oxford</i> (IC) a (CS) <i>Scunthorpe</i> (ADV).</p> <p>2. (no translation)</p> <p>3. (no translation)</p> <p>4. <i>Kiedy tutaj</i> (ADV) ona chce <i>iść</i> (LE) do Anglii, <i>dlaczego</i> (LE) ma <i>przyjacieli</i> (AC) w <i>Oxfordzie</i> (S) i <i>w Scunthorpie</i>.</p> <p>5. <i>Ona</i> (R) chce <i>podróżować do</i> (PREP) Anglii, bo <i>ona</i> (R) ma (unfinished)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - incorrect genitive ending (GC) - nominative case instead of accusative (AC) - nominative case instead of instrumental (IC) - redundant use of personal pronoun (R) - incorrect preposition (PREP) - spelling (S) - lexical error (LE)

<p><i>She speaks English well, but has problems with grammar, and does not understand when people speak too quickly.</i></p> <p>Mowi dobrze po angielsku, ale ma problemy z gramatyką i nie rozumie, kiedy ludzie mówią zbyt szybko.</p>	<p>1. <i>Ona</i> (R) <i>mówi dobrze angielski</i> <i>język</i>,(WO,PREP), ale ma trudności z <i>gramatyką</i>.(S)</p> <p>2. (no translation)</p> <p>3. (no translation)</p> <p>4. <i>Ona</i> (R) <i>mówię</i> (S) bardzo dobrze <i>po angielski</i> (IC), ale ma problemy z <i>grammar</i> (CS) i nie rozumie kiedy ludzie mówią <i>trochę</i> <i>bystry</i> (CS).</p> <p>5. (no translation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - redundancy of a personal pronoun (R) - word order (WO) - nominative case instead of instrumental (IC) - incorrect prepositional phrase (PREP) - code switching from English and Russian - spelling (S)
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TABLE 3 – Errors in the translated text

4.2 – Discussion

The errors have already been presented in Tables 2 and 3 according to their typology. Let us have a look then at selected types of error within each of the groups.

GRAMMATICAL ERRORS (67%)

The difficulty of grammar is mostly determined by three major variables: the complexity of form, meaning and the mapping of the form onto meaning (DeKeyser 2005: 1). Here the variable relating to form itself is the most significant factor. Even if syntactic structures are well internalized, the morphology appears to be much harder to acquire (both in L1 and L2 learning contexts), and, what is more, they are often not acquired simultaneously (DeKeyser 2005: 7).

The dominance of grammatical incorrectness manifested by the proportion of errors in different areas of language (Table 2) reflects the complexity of a synthetic language at the morphosyntactic level. These difficulties operate at the level of sentence structure (word order errors), syntactic functions expressed by incorrect declension endings, the use of tenses (especially future) and also the use of prepositions in adverbial phrases. The use of redundant personal pronoun (e.g. *ona*

– *she*) marks the subjects as non-native speakers of Polish (or at least not very stylistically correct ones), although it cannot be considered as wholly grammatically incorrect. What is most significant is that in the majority of sentence translations the confusion appears at the level of the selection of appropriate declension endings and the inappropriate use of aspect (a preference for an incorrect use of imperfective).

a. Aspect

As mentioned earlier, Polish verbs are used in two aspect forms: imperfective and perfective. The perfective aspect of verbs indicates a finished action and is not used in the present tense. It is formed by the prefix and thus is structurally more complex for a learner. The imperfective aspect relates to an action that is unfinished, lasted for some period of time or happened periodically (repeatedly).

In PFL instruction, verbs are usually presented in both their aspects. Furthermore, sometimes verbs have different forms for each of the aspects, for example, the verb *to speak*:

Imperfective aspect – *mowić*, perfective – *powiedzieć* (Kucharczyk 1995:28).

In the translation of the study text, the sentence

In summer I visited my relatives in Edingurgh

became

Latem odwiedzałam moja rodzinę w Edinburgu,

which ultimately means: *In summer I was visiting my family in Edinburgh from time to time.*

Here the use of imperfective changes the meaning of the sentence (and actually the whole text). This aspectual error seems to be made consistently by all the subjects in the study.

Also in the use of the future tense, imperfective aspect seems to be the dominant choice and as a result erroneous forms are produced in the construction of this tense by almost all the subjects. There was only one correct translation of the future form received in the data: *She will return* translated as *Wroci*.

The renderings offered by the remaining translations all use a compound construction with “to be” used in Polish in the case of imperfective aspects of verbs and as such it corresponds:

(...) to the English future continuous tense, and refers to actions of duration, which will habitually repeat in the future, or about which the completion is not known ("I will be speaking for 20 minutes"; "I will be going to school next year", "I will work on my paper tomorrow"

(Kucharczyk 1995: 31)

As a consequence of the incorrect use of imperfective, we get such forms as: (...) **bedzie wracala*, **bedzie wrocila*, **bedzie wracac*, which indicate continuity of the finished action.

b. Declension endings

There is a certain regularity observed in the way incorrect endings are chosen by the subjects. Apart from the fact that nominative endings dominate in cases when other declension suffixes should appear, the most commonly confused are:

- the nominative case used instead of the instrumental and genitive cases,

for example: *in Edinburgh* rendered as: **w Edinburgh*, instead of *w Edingurghu* (N→I)

in Scotland – **w Szkocja*, instead of *w Szkocji* (N→I)

for six months – **na szesc miesiace*, instead of *na szesc miesiecy* (N→AC)

- the genitive case instead of accusative:

for example: *She is studying English* rendered as: **studiuje angielskiego* instead of

angielski (G→AC)

What is interesting about the latter case (G→AC) however is that even native speakers tend to occasionally confuse the use of accusative endings with genitive endings. For PFL learners additionally the fact that in negative constructions the genitive is used instead of the accusative case makes the distinction between these two inflectional endings even more marked and thus difficult to learn productively.

LEXICAL ERRORS (17.6%)

The lexical errors highlighted in Table 3 appear to be

- lexical collocations such as **polska pani*, **polska kobieta*,

- examples of language transfer from L1 English: **wizytowac* from *to visit*, instead of *to stay*

- grammatical collocations (incorrect prepositions): * *podrozowac do Anglii* (to travel to England) instead of *podrozowac po Anglii*
- code switching from L1: (...) **ma problemy z grammar*
- code switching from another foreign language (Russian): **angielski jazyk for jezyk*
*angielski – English language, *bystro for szybko- quickly*

The above-mentioned examples derive from the subjects' falling back on their language competences, be it in their mother tongue or other foreign languages at their disposal.

However there are also examples of language which reflect transfer of learning and various other learning strategies used. Examples of these that might be quoted here are:

- lexical approximation: use of **Przyjechala w Nowym Roku* (She arrived in New Year)
 instead of *Przyjechala w styczniu* (She arrived in January)
- overgeneralization: redundancy of instrumental ending for some proper names ,
 e.g. (...) *w Scunthorpie* instead of (...) *w Scunthorp*.

WRITING (15.4%)

The degree of incorrectness observed in the written version of the text is even less significant than it is in the case of lexical errors. The inaccuracies produced derive mostly from the resemblance of the sounds in the native language and their realization in script. A couple of examples offered in the data are:

- phonetic transfer from L1 (English): *Ona naziwa sie.* (nazywa) [i] for [y]; (...) *ma trudnosci z gramatiki* (gramatyki): [i] for [y]
- phonetic transfer from another foreign language (German): *Szkoczi* (Szkocji): [z] for [c]

One of the most consistently made errors is the use of hard [d] instead of soft [d´], as in *studuje* instead of *studiuje*. This results from the fact that a large number of Polish consonants appear as either hard or soft, which is reflected in their place of articulation (the tongue touching the palate). In script, they are either followed by [i], as in: *bialy, dzien, w sklepie, wiem* or an additional graphic symbol is used, as in: *kon, jesc, szukac, lodz* (Kucharczyk 1995: 2)

5 – Final comments: interlingual *versus* intralingual transfer

The text used as a sample for this analysis does not allow for a more elaborate commentary on writing difficulties or experimentation with the language at the level of communicating ideas by the beginning learners of Polish. It constitutes a controlled type of language task focusing on language accuracy more than on anything else, with a view to predicting areas of difficulty. Hence the major focus is on the grammar of the texts produced. This is of course also justified by the fact that we are observing learners at their beginning level of language competence in Polish. However even such a short text and the way the subjects coped with the task of translating it allows us to conclude that PFL instruction has to become more oriented towards the morphosyntactic level of language and especially the following two areas of grammar: aspect and declension patterns. Whereas the former entails more explicit discussion of the concept of perfective versus imperfective, the latter means a lot of memorization to internalize correct declension endings, as there is no logical explanation for the declension systems, to say nothing of numerous exceptions to the declension paradigms. We may assume that the initial stages in teaching PFL have to be carried out in a very traditional way of controlled practice, with the need to develop explicit language awareness in the learners and to develop their ability to apply grammatical rules.

The data obtained in the study also demonstrates that cross-linguistic influences and especially those resulting in negative transfer (interference) - which are often considered the main source of language difficulty at the beginning levels of a learning process - do not seem to feature prominently in this case. They are observed more at the level of lexical correctness than grammatical. The difficulty of Polish grammar and the learners' perception of this difficulty result in more examples of intralingual transfer than interlingual - even though the subjects are competent users not only of their L1 but also other foreign languages (Russian, German). The perception of language distance and an incomplete knowledge of the rules and exceptions (not infrequent in Polish) make learners fall back on various strategies such as over-generalization or overproduction to make up for their deficiencies in competence.

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