

SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: THE INFLUENCE OF STUDENTS' FIRST FOREIGN LANGUAGE ON LEXICAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Olga Maximova

Dr. Tatiana Maykova

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)

Introduction

A pivotal issue in learning English for Special Purposes (ESP) is subject-specific vocabulary and professional terminology acquisition. This paper is devoted to lexical interference that occurs when ESP is taught as the second foreign language (FL2) to university students studying French or Spanish as their first foreign language (FL1).

The purpose of the work is to identify which language(-s) are the source of interference through analyzing students' errors. The hypotheses of the study are as follows: in case of receptive activity (reading) the language which is closely related to the target language will serve as the source of positive transfer. In productive activity (writing and speaking) lexical interference will arise and play a significant role. The source of interference will be learners' first foreign language. To test the hypotheses, a pilot study was conducted, during which typical lexical errors of Russian-speaking students studying ESP as their second foreign language and French or Spanish as their first foreign language were identified. The control group were students with native Russian language and English as their first foreign language. The research methodology included questionnaires, testing and interviews. The research participants were RUDN University students.

Results

The results of the study confirm the presence of positive transfer and lexical interference in ESP terminology acquisition, the source of which is learners' FL1.

Firstly, the results of reading comprehension test clearly show statistically significant differences in mean time spent by students of the experimental group (A1) and the control group (A2) to complete reading comprehension tasks, but no statistical differences altogether are observed in mean grade points although grade points on reading comprehension of A1 are somewhat higher (see Figure 1).

The results of lexical comprehension test show statistically significant difference between mean grade points of the two groups in Part 1 of the test (fully or partly assimilated cognates) which indicates negative transfer in learners' productive activity (speaking). There is negative lexical interference, the source of which is FL1. In Part 2 of the test (multicomponent terms and international organizations) no statistically significant differences were observed in mean grade points. Thus, we can infer that one of the main "soft targets" of negative lexical transfer in ESP is fully or partially assimilated cognates.

Figure 1. Reading comprehension test

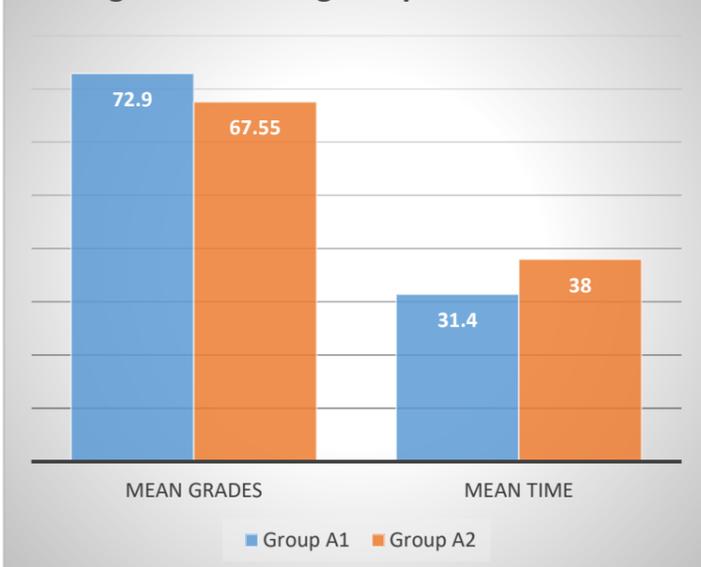
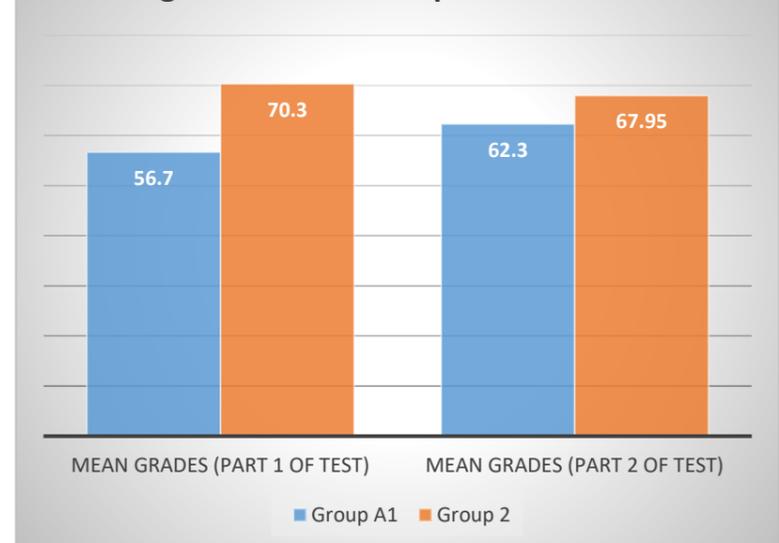


Figure 2. Lexical comprehension test



Conclusion

A special set of learning activities combined with intensive reading practice and innovated pedagogical techniques should be developed to improve lexical skills of multilingual students considering their language experience. The results can be applied in further research of lexical transfer in multilingual environment, to improve pedagogical techniques for lexical skills development in ESP classrooms, textbooks, teaching aids and manuals in FL2 learning.

Research The results of the study confirm positive transfer and negative lexical interference in ESP subject-specific vocabulary and terminology acquisition, the source of which is learners' FL1 (French or Spanish). Learners' typical mistakes are associated with the use of articles, prepositions, adjective order, fully and partially assimilated cognates, depend on their language experience and are due to their first foreign language interference.

This paper has been supported by the RUDN University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.