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Citation style: Iluk Jan. (1999). Transfer as a strategy for filling nominative gaps in L2. W: M. Wysocka, B. Leszkiewicz (red.), "On Language Theory and Practice : in Honour of Janusz Arabski on the Occeacion of His 60 th Birthday. Vol. 1, Language theory and language use" (S. 86-97). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego

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Transfer as a strategy for filling nominative gaps in L2

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1. Introduction

Speaking on a subject, a foreign language user often declares that he does not know a foreign word for a certain designation or he cannot recall it. If there is no opportunity to use a dictionary, he will usually use a verbal description of a designation, paraphrase, synonymous expression, or its negated antonym, provided that he is familiar with them. Strategies for filling nominative gaps depend also on the structure of terms. They can consist of one or several lexical elements, e.g. pupil, primary school, individual course of study. In the case of multiple-element terms, there is also a possibility of transferring them into a foreign language, i.e. a foreign term is formed according to the scheme of the mother tongue one, with its structure as well as number and semantics of its elements maintained. Using this strategy, the speaker will often imply that he is not certain of the usability of such a name and will ask for confirmation of its correctness or providing its right form in the foreign language. In this paper I will discuss the strategies for creating two-element compounds in L2, as their example allows the problems of filling nominative gaps by means of transfer to be illustrated most thoroughly. For this purpose, I will first characterise formal structures of terms in Polish and German languages, their usability and the choice of nominative motive. On this basis I will then establish the possibilities of correct filling of nominative gaps in L2.

2. The formal structure of two-element compound terms and their usability

The relevant feature of two- and multiple-element terms is their structure, which is determined by component categories and formal relationships between them. The components can take the form of lexical or formative morphemes, whereas formal relationships can have syntagmatic character with explicitly expressed syntactic relationship or they can be based on implicit syntactic relationships occurring in compounds or derivatives. In the case of two-element names of syntagmatic character, the syntactic relationships are based on concord or government. Concord occurs in Polish and German terms with an adjective as a component:

(1) *słaba płeć, schwaches Geschlecht* (weaker sex).

Government relationships exist in terms whose defining element is in the form of genitive:

(2) *polityka odprężenia, Politik der Entspannung* (détente policy)

or prepositional phrase:

(3) *prawo do pracy, Recht auf Arbeit* (the right to work).

In compounds, on the other hand,

(4) *dwukropek, Doppelpunkt* (colon)

and derivatives:

(5) *posiadacz, Besitzer* (possessor)

formal syntactic relationships are not expressed in their structure explicitly. In names with formative structure the decisive role play:

— the order of elements in the construction:

(6) *Filmmusik — Musikfilm, Topfblume — Blumentopf,*

— their category (lexical or formative morpheme):

(7) *schenkende Person — Schenker,*

— occasionally also the stress, as is the case with some German compoundverbs:

(8) *übersetzen — über + setzen.*

Usually only one of potentially possible nominative schemes is used to name a denotation. The usable form can be sometimes, e.g. a compound, and sometimes a term of syntagmatic structure, as the following German examples demonstrate:

(9) *Gleichstrom — *gleicher Strom* (direct current).

Sometimes denotations have several names. Synonymous equivalents can differ in many aspects: structure, components, motivation, stylistic marking, etc. For our consideration important are such two-element terms which are different only in their structure. Such names are, e.g.

(10) *lederne Jacke, Jacke aus Leder, Lederjacke* (leather jacket).

To simplify their analysis, we can assume that the same lexical morphemes: *Jacke* and *Leder* occur in the above given terms. The formal difference between them is that in the first case the lexical morpheme *Jacke* is connected with the defined element *Leder* according to the syntactic relationship of concord. The precondition of such a connection is the use of adjectival form of the morpheme *Leder*, i.e. previous introduction of its category transposition. In the second term, the defining element *Leder* is connected with the defined element in accordance with the relationship of government, and in the third one without binding indicators as a defining element in the compound *Lederjacke*. Their designating function and stylistic value are identical, which is why they can be used in identical contexts
Terms that consist of the same lexical morphemes and differ in the formal aspect, do not always fulfil the same designating function, which is illustrated by the following examples from German:

(11) *Gleichgewicht* ≠ *gleiches Gewicht* (balance — the same weight).

Unfortunately, designating-semantic differences of this type do not have any semantic character, which makes their anticipation in L2 difficult.
The above examples reveal that the choice of nominative structure is in some areas relatively free and practically depends on the speaker, in some it is limited to one form, and in other areas there are different forms of terms consisting of the same components, but each of them is connected with a different designating function (different meaning). In the latter case transfer of nominative scheme need not result in creating a formally incorrect name, but it can be a reason for a misunderstanding because of a different meaning not anticipated by a non-native speaker (compare examples (15)—(19)). Therefore, the following factors will have a direct influence on correct filling of a nominative gap in L2:
  1. freedom of choice of nominative structure,
  2. structural equivalence making transfer of L1 term into L2 possible,

3. knowledge of dominant nominative type in L2,
4. knowledge of systematic interlinguistic equivalences,
5. category of term components,
6. knowledge of nominative limitations, especially in the functioning of nominative doublets.

Ad 1&2. Freedom of choice of nominative structure, resulting from alternative nominative possibilities in L2, reduces the danger of creating a structurally incorrect name, as the probability of structural equivalence is proportionate to the number of possible nominative schemes. In the case of interlinguistic structural equivalence transfer of nominative structure from L1 to L2 is possible.

Ad 3. Dominant nominative structure can be established on the basis of productivity and frequency of nominative models. An important contribution is research in the field of word formation, which proves that in German the compound is a dominant nominative structure, while, e.g. in Polish this structural type is definitely less popular.[1]

Ad 4. The comparative studies (J e z i o r s k i, 1983) show that in the case of Polish and German languages relatively stable formal equivalences occur between German compounds and Polish names whose defining element has the form of:

— an adjective

(12) *para wodna* — *Wasserdampf* (steam),

— genitive

(13) *komora serca* — *Herzkammer* (ventricle),

— prepositional phrase, often informing about the purpose of a designation:

(14) *filiżanka do kawy* — *Kaffeetasse* (coffee cup).

The rate of such equivalences was established by L i p c z u k (1981) on the example of German compounds and their Polish equivalents. Per 131 three-element compounds occurring in sport's jargon, 52,7% of Polish equivalents have the structure "noun + adjective" (e.g. *Hauptschiedsrichter* — *sędzia główny*), 25,2% "noun + prepositional group" (e.g. *Finalteilnahme* — *udział w finale*), 13,7% "noun + noun" (e.g. *Niederlagenserie* — *seria porażek*,

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[1] According to research by M. B l i c h a r s k i (1977), there are about 3200 nominative compounds in contemporary Polish. In comparison with German this is an exceptionally small number.

Weltrekordversuch — próba pobicia rekordu świata), 5,3% one word (e.g. *Mittelfeldspieler — pomocnik*), 3,1% syntagmatic word group (e.g. *Weltrekordleistung — wynik będący rekordem świata*). Established frequencies indicate a distinctive dominance of the Polish structure "noun + adjective" as a typical formal equivalent of the German compound.

Such evident structural differences and statistical probability of the occurrence of a certain nominative structure in L2 must be taken into consideration when choosing a strategy for filling nominative gaps. Filling nominative gaps in German in 70—80 cases per 100, provided that Lipczuk's calculations reflect the real structural equivalences, a Pole has to give up a nominative habit developed from his native language and block his inclination to transfer syntagmatic structures, although they are potentially possible in German. The inclination for structural interference must be therefore neutralised through appropriate language training whose aim will be to develop different nominative strategies and to automatise processes of forming and then recalling correct forms of terms in a foreign language.

With dominant types of interlinguistic equivalence as the basis, formation of new nominative strategies will consist in transforming attributional elements in Polish names into nominative defining elements in compounds before their translation into German. In the case of transforming Polish names with attributional element in genitive or in the form of prepositional phrase into German, one must neutralise syntactic binding indicators and move them from postposition to the position before defined element. In the case of terms with adjectival defining element, one must additionally neutralise formative morphemes. The factor which makes this mental operation easier is explicit knowledge of semantic category of adjectives requiring this operation in an almost obligatory manner. In the case of Polish, they are relation adjectives, for which German has no formal equivalents. They must therefore be changed according to the above rule. The second factor promoting the operation is the clarity of formative structure of the native name, which allows quick enough identification of nominal formative base:

(15) *material* **sukienkowy** *— Kleidstoff* (dress fabric).

Ad 5. It is especially difficult to fill nominative gaps in L2 when a formative morpheme is a component of L1 term, because it expresses designating function in a more abstract way than the lexical morpheme, cp.:

(16) *osoba stawiająca wniosek — wnioskodawca,*

(17) *die einen Antrag stellende* **Person** *— Antragsteller.*

The degree of difficulty in the formation of a correct name in L2 depends in such cases on:

a. degree of abstractness of formative morphemes,

b. type and range of interlinguistic equivalence,

c. necessity to change a derivative element into a suitable lexical morpheme.

This kind of nominative problems can be illustrated by the example of Polish names for alcoholic drinks and their equivalents in German. Some Polish names are derivatives with -ówka, whose base informs what material was used for producing the alcohol, e.g. żytniówka, cytrynówka, wiśniówka, etc. Translating the above names of alcohols into German, one must replace the morpheme -ówka with a lexical morpheme, because there is no such morpheme in German. Because of its clear function in Polish, it is not difficult to assign a lexical equivalent in L2 to it. Thus, wiśniówka is translated as *Kirschschnaps or *Kirschwodka, similarly bananówka as *Bananenschnaps or *Bananenwodka. The used strategy is ineffective, though, because when filling a nominative gap in this area, one must additionally differentiate in German between sweet and dry alcohols. Thus, if the name of an alcohol implies the feature "sweet" plus a certain flavour, the morpheme -ówka has to be translated as Likör, so that the correct names are Kirschlikör and Bananenlikör. If, on the other hand, wiśniówka is not a sweet alcoholic drink and it contains more alcohol, its equivalent name in the German language is Kirschwasser or Kirschgeist. Therefore, on the basis of categorial meaning of the suffix -ówka it is absolutely impossible to assign lexical morphemes Wasser or Geist to it, because there is no seme "alcohol" in their semantic structure (cp. Langenscheidts Großwörterbuch DaF, 1993: 383, 1099). In such situations, an additional condition for term correctness is the knowledge of qualities of designations and their direct influence on nomenclature in the foreign language. A foreigner does not usually possess such detailed knowledge. Another factor which impedes the use of the compensation strategy consisting in the replacement of the derivative morpheme -ówka by the lexical morpheme -wasser is the particular character of this equivalence. There are no other names of alcoholic drinks with the component -wasser in which the defining element would be a name of a fruit from which the alcohol was made. Thus the generalisation of this equivalence creates the danger of forming incorrect names: *Bananenwasser, *Orangen-wasser, *Zitronenwasser.[2]

Ad 6. Establishing the existing limitations in the use of certain nominative structures is an extremely difficult matter because of their arbitrary character and existing interlinguistic differences. Nevertheless, even regularities

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[2] The compound Goldwasser has a different semantics of the defining element than the analysed names.

of a rather general character can be of some help. Such a regularity can be e.g. an observation that in the case of structural doublets consisting of the same lexical morphemes, names of composite or derivative character are often technical terms with precisely defined meaning, whereas names of syntagmatic character have a much wider designating range. A convincing example can be a German name *Blaulicht*, which is used to denote an alarm signal used by vehicles privileged in road traffic, which by the way is blue in colour. However, any light blue in colour is called by a syntagmatic group *blaues Licht*. Another example is a Polish compound *gwiazdozbiór*, which is the name of only such a group of stars which has conventionally stated boundaries.

3. The influence of nominative motive on the correctness of filling a nominative gap in L2

A further factor determining the correctness of an L2 term is the right choice of nominative motive, which in comparison with L1 can be identical, partly different or completely different. The differences can refer to a defining element, a defined element, or both elements at once. The examples of terms in which the choice of nominative motive is different in a defining element:

(18) *światła* **pozycyjne** — ***Positions****licht* — **Stand***licht* (parking lights).

The differences in names (18) are that in the Polish term the nominative motive is signalising the position, e.g. of a vehicle, while in the German name it is the fact of stopping (standing). In the case when foreign names have doublets with a similar designating function it may turn out that from the point of view of the Polish language one name has a similar and another one a different nominative motive, as is illustrated by the German and Polish names below:

(19) **kwaśne** *mleko* — **Sauer***milch* — **Dick***milch* (soured milk).

The difference between them is that in (19) the nominative motive in Polish is the feature "sour" and in German it is either the feature "sour" or the feature "thick". The examples of names which are different in the choice of nominative motive in the defined element:

(20) *stan surowy* — ***Roh****stand* — **Roh***bau* (unfinished condition).

In (20) the nominative motive in the Polish name is "state" and in the German name *Bau* (building). The examples of names which are different in the choice of nominative motive in the defined and defining elements:

(21) *światła odblaskowe — Katzenaugen* (reflective lights).

In (21) the nominative motives in the Polish language are "light" and "reflection", and in German they are "cat" and "eyes".

Because the choice of nominative motive is stabilised in every language, it must be taken into consideration at every attempt to fill a nominative gap in L2. The danger of interference in this field is considerable, as it is absolutely impossible to predict different nominative motives of the equivalent names in a foreign language on the basis of the mother tongue. The author's observations indicate that the inclination to transfer the native nominative motive depends on the designating range of one of the elements of a two-element name. If it is wide, which is shown by, e.g. numerous collocations of the component, a foreign language user will have practically no objections to the possibility of transfer of the native nominative motive (I l u k, 1990: 87). An example to illustrate this problem can be the name *pole karne* (penalty area), which is used to denote that part of a field where stricter rules of the game are in operation. The word *pole* (field) forms in Polish many collocations of the nominal type, e.g. *pole bitwy* (battle-field), *pole magnetyczne* (magnetic field), *pole wyścigowe* (racecourse), *pole lodowe* (ice-field), *pole minowe* (minefield), *pole żagla* (sail area), etc. Similarly, its equivalent in German *Feld* forms a great many collocations of nominal type, e.g. *Weizenfeld, Fußballfeld, Magnetfeld, Spielfeld, Schlachfeld*, etc. The above hypothesis is proven by many examples of incorrect names in the German language, whose error lies in the transfer of nominative motive from L1 to L2, and, as a result, the use of a wrong lexical morpheme:

(22) *pole karne — *Straffeld —* the correct name is: *Strafraum* (penalty area).

Another factor encouraging a speaker to transfer a nominative motive is its obvious character from the point of view of mother tongue logic, resulting from semantic relations between elements (components) of a two-element name. These relations can inform, e.g. about the purpose of a designation, being made of a certain material, place of its occurrence, its external and internal features, etc.:

(23) *olej napędowy — *Antriebsöl — Dieselöl* (diesel oil).

Yet another factor promoting transfer of a nominative motive is a group of foreign names created on motives identical with those in L1. An example can

be a name *zegar stojący* (grandfather clock), which by analogy to *Stehlampe* or *Stehkragen* is usually translated as **Stehuhr*. The correct name is *Standuhr*. Further examples illustrating incorrect choice of nominative motive strengthened by interlinguistic analogy:

(24) *dyplom mistrzowski* (master craftsman's certificate) — **Meisterdiplom* — *Meisterbrief*, although there is *Diplomprüfung* or *Meisterprüfung*.

Another factor with strong interference is a different number of nominal motives in L1 and L2 shown in the surface structure of a name. The examples of names different in the number of nominative motives are:

(25) *lekarz pogotowia ratunkowego* — *Notarzt* (ambulance officer),

(26) *zawartość alkoholu we krwi* — *Alkoholspiegel, Blutalkohol* (percentage of alcohol in blood).

The difference is that in the surface structure of German names there are no components: in (25) *pogotowie* (ambulance) and (26) *krew* (blood) or *zawartość* (content). Forming such names in L2 one must neutralise one of the defining components of a native term, and the remaining ones transform into a compound. Opposite relations are also possible, i.e. a Polish name can consist of two components, while its German equivalent of three:

(27) *pomocnik* — *Mittelfeldspieler* (helper).

The difference is that an additional element must be inserted in the surface structure of German names: in (27) *Mittelfeld* (middle of the field).

Operations of this type are often hindered by a necessity to change a nominative motive in one of the name components. In (26) the component *zawartość* (content) must be substituted with an ambiguous lexeme *Spiegel* (mirror), which in compounds with names of substances in a human organism means "level". In (27) nominal motive "help" has to be changed into *Mittelfeld* (middle of the field). Because of the individual character of this type of interlinguistic equivalence, the probability of forming correct names only on the basis of native nominal schemes is practically equal to zero. Every attempt to transfer them leads to creation of names incorrect in every respect.

In some situations a foreign language user may have objections to the possibility of transferring a nominative motive from L1 to L2. In such cases he tries to adjust a different motive. Other L2 names with that element serve as some help in the choosing of nominative motive. Thus, if the German language user is not familiar with the name *Standuhr*, which is a compound with the

verbal defining element, but he knows expressions like *Wanduhr*, *Turmuhr*, *Bahnhofsuhr*, which are compounds with nominal defining element indicating the place of occurrence of the designation, he translates the Polish name *zegar stojący* through conscious structural-semantic analogy into *Bodenuhr*, *Zimmeruhr*, *Schrankuhr* or *Kastenuhr*, in which the correct verbal element is replaced with a suitable nominal element, or he transfers the Polish syntactic structure adding an appropriate adverbial of time to it: *die **auf dem Boden** stehende Uhr.*

Doubts about the possibility of transferring nominative motive from L1 to L2 can also result from realisation of metaphorical use of one of the name's components. The examples of Polish names in which one of the components is used metaphorically are *bramka samobójcza* (own goal), *ślepy zaułek* (blind alley), *martwa natura* (still life). Thus, if a German user has doubts about the usability of a transferred name because of the metaphorical character of a component, he will try to replace the "suspicious" component with a different one, which conveys its metaphorical meaning in an explicit way. In order to do it, he will usually use syntagmatic structures in which syntactic relations are expressed clearly:

(28) *bramka samobójcza* (own goal) — instead of *Eigentor* or *Selbsttor* — **eigen geschossenes Tor.*

The above analysis demonstrates that the correctness of names and their correct understanding are determined also by the correct choice of nominative motives. The difficulty of the choice depends of course on the range of interlinguistic equivalence. 100% chance of appropriate choice of nominative motives in L2 exists only in the cases when the choice of motives in L1 is identical. In all other situations one must be prepared for incorrect choice of nominative motive, which can be a reason for considerable communication difficulties. The understanding of transferred two-element names, whose equivalent in L2 has a completely different configuration of nominative motives, is impossible without explanatory comments (cp. example 21). Difficult to understand are names in which a nominative motive was transferred in the defined element, because it leads to unintentional change of the name's designating function. Incorrectly chosen defined element indicates an entirely different designation. The least confusing in L2 are names whose error consists in the wrong choice of defined element, because in this way a feature differentiating a specific designation receives a wrong name.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of language material demonstrated the possibility of using transfer as a strategy for filling nominative gaps in L2. It has a wide application in the case of multi-element names. The condition for its reliability is full equivalence of the components and structure of names. In the case of systematic structural differences and nominal motives there is a possibility of its appropriate modification.

The above considerations produce also conclusions about the complexity of necessary cognitive operations which accompany the transfer of names from L1 into L2. The operations may concern only the formal structure of names, the change of their component categories, their number, or nominative motive. Sometimes these operations must be performed simultaneously, which has direct influence not only on the final nominal result in L2, but also on the necessary cognitive effort.

The formal-semantic similarities and differences discussed above must also have influence on the easiness of remembering names in L2, their permanent storage in memory and their correct retrieval. The least effort is needed in the case of names with full equivalence or systematic differences. The degree of difficulty will rise proportionately to the number of differences between the name in L1 and L2. Also in the case of singular relations the formation of a correct name in L2 on the basis of L1 nominative scheme is rather unlikely.

The above considerations suggest also the following practical conclusions:

1. Within semantisation more attention should be paid to the character of differences between equivalent names in L1 and L2 and regularity of the occurrence of certain differences should be indicated.

2. Automatised and correctly used nominative habits have positive influence on speaking fluency, which can be disturbed by increased cognitive effort to fill a nominative gap or to retrieve a correct name from memory.

3. Thus, intensive language training will be needed in the case of names which in comparison with their L1 equivalents present various kinds of differences. For this purpose suitable exercises are necessary to help the L2 user form and fix new nominative habits and learn the range of their correct application.

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