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Chapter 8

At the confluence of languages—Language Transfer as a learning strategy

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Much of the current research into language learning and teaching is concerned with the phenomenon referred to as language transfer, especially with its negative effects in terms of second language acquisition and production. The advantages of language transfer, however, have received rather scant attention despite the fact that cross-linguistic influence may be seen as an effective language learning strategy. That is why this paper is to lay emphasis on the positive aspects of foreign languages already known to learners—on the previous knowledge of one's second language that is likely to blaze a trail for both new vocabulary and grammatical structures in other languages. Based on a survey conducted among students, the paper aims to explore the instances of cross-linguistic influence as regards third language learners, as well as to evaluate their level of knowledge concerning language transfer and its didactic application.

Key words: multilingualism, language acquisition, cross-linguistic influence, language learning strategies, language transfer

8.1 Introduction

Much of the current research into language learning and teaching is concerned with the phenomenon referred to as language transfer. Many researchers in the field have already dealt with its causes and effects, offering an extensive literature on bilinguals and suggesting that cross-linguistic influence is an obstacle to successful foreign language acquisition. It is thus frequently described as a highly negative phenomenon giving rise to a number of phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and even pragmatic mistakes. The advantages of language transfer, however,

have received rather scant attention and the fact that cross-linguistic influence can also be seen as an effective language learning strategy, employed both on the conscious and unconscious level, has been largely ignored.

That is why this paper is to lay emphasis on the positive aspects of foreign languages already known to learners—on the previous knowledge of one's second language that is likely to blaze a trail for both new vocabulary and grammatical structures in other languages. The study will address the issue of the multilingual mind, which is the place where various languages meet, having ripple effects in terms of acquisition of new linguistic items. Therefore, based on a survey conducted among students, the paper aims to explore the instances of cross-linguistic influence as regards third language learners, as well as to evaluate their level of knowledge concerning language transfer and its didactic application.

8.2 Deliberations on multilingualism and the multilingual mind

8.2.1 Methodological inquiries

Following the line of thought offered by Otwinowska (2015: 4), multilingualism is not equal to a perfect knowledge of a number of languages, i.e. it is not used to denote native-like competence. Nevertheless, the rejection of this highly idealized concept of a multilingual speaker gives rise to several methodological difficulties, for example with regard to the question concerning the level of proficiency in particular languages required to become a "multilingual" in the full sense of this term.

The problem becomes even more complex when it comes to the knowledge of specific subsystems of a language, as well as when one considers socio-cultural and pragmatic competences acquired mostly, if not exclusively, through contact with native speakers and their culture. That is why an extensive part of research on foreign language acquisition focuses on the pragmatic aspects of communication rather than on pursuing the practically unattainable ideal; Kucharczyk (2015b: 12) uses the term *plurilingual approach* to refer to such a set of tendencies. Parenthetically, it is worth mentioning here that there is a difference between a language user and a language learner; Cook, for instance, opts for the term *L2 user* instead of *L2 learner* since learning a language implies certain language level attainment while using a language does not take into account this level differentiation (Cook 2008). Nevertheless, these terms will be used interchangeably in this paper.

Another methodological difficulty stems from the fact that scholars frequently tend to identify the nature of multilingualism with that of bilingualism. De Angelis (2007: 9) points out how important it is not to mix these concepts:

although many researchers use the above-mentioned terms interchangeably, they seem to ignore the fact that there is a considerable difference between using two language systems and having access to more such systems. The need for ascertaining what makes them different is stressed in many pieces of linguistic research, especially in neuro- and psycholinguistics, due to the dissimilarities with regard to neurobiological and psychological processes involved (Paradis 2004, De Angelis 2007, Widła 2007, Chłopek 2011). The differences in question are in large part related to the phenomenon referred to as language transfer, which will be discussed in the next section.

Interestingly, irrespective of the subfield represented, scholars who examine the phenomenon of multilingualism most often recognize the importance of language transfer as an inherent component of being a multilingual speaker/learner. Having access to several language systems, a language user can possibly develop his multilingual competence and language repertoire because the languages s/he has acquired affect one another, thus helping her/him to see and understand analogous verbal or grammatical structures (Serratrice 2013). This mechanism conduces to the complex interaction between languages, in the course of which they do become interconnected components of a language system in one's mind, giving rise to the phenomenon known as cross-linguistic influence (CLI). This may be observed on various language planes, ranging from orthography to pragmatics (Odlin 2003).

8.2.2 Cross-linguistic influence

Cross-linguistic influence, also referred to as language transfer, can be roughly defined as "the influence of at least one (inter)language on any other language (or interlanguage)" (Chłopek 2011: 21, translation: Serwotka). The influences in question can be intra- or inter-lingual, depending on whether they occur within a single language system or between two or more different systems, respectively. Languages acquired by a learner affect each other in various dimensions (pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax or even pragmatics), which may lead to either positive or negative results in terms of correctness and appropriateness.

In general, transfer is defined as positive when previous linguistic knowledge leads to successful and correct production in the target language or when the skills already acquired enhance comprehension in a new language; the process can be thus described as receptive transfer. Negative transfer, on the other hand, also referred to as interference, occurs when previous linguistic knowledge appears to be the source of errors in the target language, which suggests that cross-linguistic influence may be perceived as an obstacle to successful foreign language acquisition. The nature of CLI is conditioned by a number of factors, among which one can mention the context, the age of acquisition of particular

languages, along with the levels of proficiency, as well as the typological/genetic relationship between them, or the so-called *psychotypology*—the learner's convictions concerning the relationship and similarity between languages (Otwinowska 2015). A major part of research in second language acquisition has been so far focused on negative manifestations of the phenomenon in question, for they are much easier to observe and describe. However, in the context of contemporary approaches to language education, positive aspects of cross-linguistic influence are more and more often addressed both by linguists and teachers, engendering the application of language transfer as a learning strategy and, thus, leading to a significant number of cognitive benefits to the learner. These will be described in more detail in this paper, after a brief introduction into the domain of multilingual teaching and learning.

8.2.3 Multilingual teaching and learning

Multilingual teaching is based on sensitizing learners to any potential similarities between languages from the very early stage in the education process; correspondences can indeed be found between L1 and L2, as well as between one's second and third or subsequent language. The import of stimulation of language multicompetence development in learners is emphasized by Kucharczyk (2015a), for instance, who adduces four types of pluralistic approach in foreign language didactics, which read as follows:

- intercultural approach, which takes into consideration the socio-cultural factors appurtenant to the languages under scrutiny;
- openness to languages, which aims at rising learners' awareness of language diversity in general terms;
- integrated didactic approach to learning many languages, which makes use of the aspects of languages already known to learners in order to facilitate the process of acquiring another language;
- intercomprehension, which deals with simultaneous teaching two (or more) related languages, exploiting the similarities between them so as to enhance learners' receptive competence.

What is more, there are many advantages flowing from learners' metalinguistic awareness that aid in drawing correspondences between languages (Otwinowska 2015); one of them may be observed in learning strategies pertinent to *cognates* and *internationalisms*, which refer to words of common etymological origin and of international character, similar form, and meaning, respectively. The role of awareness of language learning strategies in language acquisition is an issue not to be neglected in the process of learning since "the very aim of sensitising students to language learning strategies is that they should be capable of managing the learning process on their own in an effective manner" (Studenska 2005: 73, trans-

lation: Stwora). That is why the following part of the paper will address current concepts of transfer and translingual phenomena in language learning strategies.

8.3 Language learning strategies

8.3.1 Theoretical aspects and general classification

The acquisition of new knowledge and skills in terms of language, as well as consolidation of those that have already been acquired, can occur as either conscious or unconscious a phenomenon. As the main spotlight is to be given to language learning strategies, the emphasis will be placed on the application of conscious strategies that benefit from cross-linguistic influence. In this section, the possible use of transfer as a learning strategy will be discussed in the context of the multilingual approach in language teaching and learning.

From the psychological point of view, a strategy may be described as conscious preparation of plans with a view to solving a given problem or attaining a particular objective (Reber 2000: 711). In a similar vein, *language learning strategy* may refer to various techniques applied in order to internalize and use a foreign language better (Studenska 2005); to provide yet another example, Weinstein (1988: 291, cited by Studenska 2005: 24) defines learning strategies as any kinds of thought or behaviour whose purpose is to facilitate information encoding in such a way so as to enhance the integration of knowledge acquired and its later use. Exploring various dimensions of language learning strategies, one can indeed arrive at a significant number of classifications, both general and language specific, which deal with, *inter alia*, cognitive and behavioural aspects of learning. For the purpose of this study, the authors will elaborate on the language learning strategies' division elaborated by Oxford (1990, 2003), with particular emphasis placed upon the issue of language transfer within the proposed classification. In her typology, Oxford (1990: 18) identifies six major groups of learning strategies. She divides them into direct and indirect strategies, i.e. into these concentrated on language itself and these referring to "general management" of the learning process, respectively. Direct strategies encompass as follows: *memory strategies* aiming at successful information storage and retrieval, *cognitive strategies* responsible for receptive and productive skills in a foreign language, and *compensation strategies* applied to maintain successful communication when the learner encounters the so-called "knowledge gaps". When it comes to indirect strategies, Oxford distinguishes between *metacognitive strategies*, whose aim is to control the learning process, *affective strategies*, which are linked to related emotions, and *social strategies* used in in-group learning. Within the above-mentioned classification, one can clearly observe a rich variety of mechanisms applied by

language learners in a wide range of situations: while acquiring new material (e.g. memory strategies), in the process of communication (e.g. compensation strategies), as well as in group learning (e.g. social strategies).

What is more, it should be noted that Oxford further divides these strategies into smaller subgroups, within which she also enumerates specific learning strategies, such as structured reviewing (a memory strategy) or listening to music (an affective strategy). For the purpose of conciseness, the authors will not delve into the detailed structure of the strategy system, limiting their theoretical deliberations to the class referred to as *cognitive strategies*, encompassing, among others, language transfer and contrastive analysis.

8.3.2 Transfer as a language learning strategy in multilingual students

The issue of language transfer, that is, of the application of knowledge of one language to another (Weinreich 1953) in multilingual students constitutes the major focus of this subsection. As the multilingual mind is the place where various languages meet, clash, and interact, language transfer strategy can be defined as innately cognitive. Among the cognitive strategies available, one can mention (1) practising, (2) receiving and sending messages, (3) creating structures for input and output, and, finally, (4) analysing and reasoning (Oxford 1990: 17, Studenska 2005: 34), which is concerned with contrastive analysis of the languages and with transfer as well. Oxford thus identifies language transfer as a cognitive language learning strategy, whose principal function is the "manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner" (Oxford 1990: 43). It means that its application throughout the learning process is supposed to enhance successful production and comprehension in the target language.

Transfer is defined as one of the analysing and reasoning strategies because it is used in order to construct a mental "model" of a given language based on the languages previously learnt or acquired. In her classification, Oxford includes transfer along with contrastive analysis and the authors of this paper are strongly convinced that these two strategies are closely related and often mutually dependent. Contrastive analysis is applied when the learner tries to compare the new language system with the systems s/he is already familiar with. Obviously, more similarities can be observed if there exists a genetic relationship between the source and target language; in such a case, the similarities in question can be objectively defined and described. However, even if languages are not related, one can speak of a relationship between languages as it is subjectively perceived by the learner who can presume that there are certain similarities between any given language systems (Otwinowska 2015).

Taking into consideration all of the above-mentioned aspects, one can state that multilingual teaching can, or even should be, based on the application of

language transfer as a conscious language learning strategy. Nevertheless, the negative manifestations of cross-linguistic influence should also be taken into account in order to prevent interference, which is why multilingual education should also centre on differences between languages in order to avoid over-generalization that gives rise to mistakes in the target language. "A lot of misunderstanding comes from different conceptualisations of some constructs" (Gabryś-Barker 2011: 152) in different languages, which proves that interference may be problematic an issue for L2 and L3 learners and, hence, constitutes a disadvantage to be reckoned with.

In spite of the fact that many researchers in the field of language acquisition claim that CLI should be viewed as an obstacle to successful foreign language acquisition, it is not devoid of advantages. Our position on the issue is that transfer, if conscious and well thought-out, can serve as a compensation strategy and make an important contribution to the development of communication competence in L3 learners. To our minds, sensitizing students to the operation of language transfer could do good for multilingual students, as it would make them aware of both chances and traps connected with CLI. Informing students that this process of creating connections between language systems in one's mind (Oxford 2003) can be used as an effective strategy in learning L3 could possibly result in learners' controlling their own actions in terms of unaided and conscious language acquisition (Studenska 2005, Sośnicki 1963).

Although much more could be said about language transfer here, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal thoroughly with CLI; rather, the authors would like to focus on specific instances of cross-linguistic influence as regards third language learners with the aim of providing a sample that could be used in a conscious L3 learning strategy.

8.3.3 Translingual phenomena on the example of English and French

It is an axiom that translingual phenomena emerge in related languages, i.e. that it is possible to trace words, lexical bundles, or whole grammatical structures which are relevant or correct in more than one language belonging to a given language family. Such a bridge between languages can be observed on the example of English and French, for instance, due to historical interfusions that resulted in numerous related word forms and structures.

When it comes to L2 teaching in Poland, the most common second language acquired by students is English. As a result, the vast majority of Polish learners starting to learn L3 already has some knowledge of one foreign language: the English language. With regard to French, one can see that circa 40% of basic vocabulary items have direct equivalents in English (Widła 2007); such words characterized by the same linguistic derivation are known as *cognates*.

Despite their belonging to different groups within the family of Indo-European languages, English and French thus bear more resemblance to each other than Polish and French, for instance, which is why it seems advisable to teach French in relation to the already known, to a lesser or higher degree, English language. Cross-linguistic similarities can enhance receptive and productive competence in speaking and writing, yet, at the same time, they may also lead to pronunciation or spelling mistakes. By way of example, the following table shows several instances of English and French words whose graphic form is the same for both languages but whose phonological realizations differ:

Table 8.1 Translingual phenomena on the example of English and French – homographs and their pronunciations

Word	English pronunciation (RP)	French pronunciation
attention	[əˈtɛn.ʃən]	[a.tɑ̃.sjɔ̃]
attitude	[ˈætɪˌtjuːd]	[a.ti.tyd]
possible	[ˈpɒsɪbḷ]	[pɔ.sibl] / [po.sibl]
prudence	[ˈpɹuː.dəns]	[pʁy.dɑ̃s]

Moreover, English and French share certain similarities on the grammatical plane. Conditional sentences, for instance, are based on the same pattern that is markedly different from the analogical constructions in Polish. The table below illustrates the usage of the first conditional in English and French, along with its Polish counterpart. To our minds, sensitizing students to this type of resemblance in terms of tense conceptualization can potentially facilitate the process of acquisition of French as a third language (after English as L2).

Table 8.2 Translingual phenomena on the example of English and French – conditional sentences

Language	Conjunction	Tense construction in the subordinate clause	Tense construction in the main clause
English	if	Present Simple	Future Simple
French	si	présent (present)	futur (future)
Polish	jeśli	przyszły (future)	przyszły (future)

8.3.4 Unrelated languages

As already mentioned, multilingual teaching is by no means limited to lexical items; there may appear other parallels when it comes to phonological or grammatical systems in the languages compared. Naturally, related languages tend to include analogous vocabulary items or apply roughly similar patterns of

tense formation but, most surprisingly, the typological proximity of languages is not always a decisive factor here. Ringbom (2007) draws an interesting parallel between Finnish (classified as a Finno-Ugric language) and Swahili (a Bantu language), which share certain similarities regarding morphological processes despite their considerable typological remoteness. Although this type of similitude exists only through psychotypology, it can be used as a cognitive strategy in learning the two languages in question.

8.4 Analysing the survey

8.4.1 Informants and their educational profile

Having discussed multilingualism, language transfer, and the instances of translingual phenomena, the time has come to present the results of a survey conducted among 56 students being L3 learners (32 students of the first, 14 of the second, and 10 of the third grade; collectively, there were 50 females and 6 males). The informants were all students of the University of Silesia between 19 and 22 years of age attending the following courses: Philology: Applied languages (translation programme with English and French); Philology: Applied languages (translation programme with English and Italian); English Philology: Translation programme with German; and English Philology: Teacher's course with German. The students for this study were chosen in accordance with their multilingual profile that matches the objectives of this investigation.

8.4.2 Research context and tools

The study conducted was aimed at accomplishing the following objectives:

a. to explore the instances of cross-linguistic influence as regards third language learners;
b. to evaluate their level of knowledge concerning language transfer and its didactic application.

To this end, an internet survey was designed in Google Docs and sent out to the group of students described above. The informants were asked several types of questions, including general introductory questions (about their sex, age, grade, and course of studies, as well as the foreign languages they know or study), questions about language acquaintance and L3 learning, as well as those relating to language transfer. The questionnaire was prepared so as to elicit responses that would provide revealing insights into the positive aspects of foreign languages already known to the learners in L3 learning.

8.4.3 Results

The first step was to ask the respondents about the foreign languages they knew or studied. All the informants declared that English was their L2; when it comes to their knowledge of L3, the most popular languages were German (approximately 59%), French (circa 45%), and Italian (around 41%). Next were Spanish (16%) and Russian (almost 11%), which were followed by a relatively low number of other languages like Serbian, Czech, Icelandic, Finnish, and Korean. For this reason, the authors of this study will focus only on the most widely represented languages in the lines to follow.

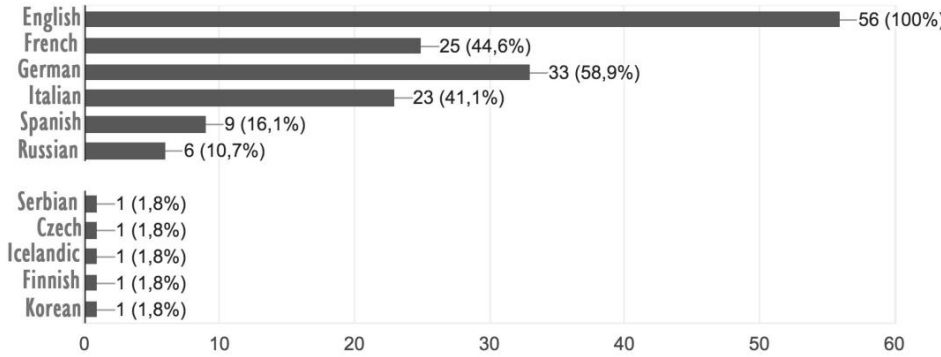

Figure 8.1 Students' responses as to the foreign languages they know or study

Source: Google Docs, *Language transfer – questionnaire for the students of philology* designed by A. Serwotka and A. Stwora.

Subsequently, students were requested to assess their language level for the languages they were currently studying. The bar chart below shows that the vast

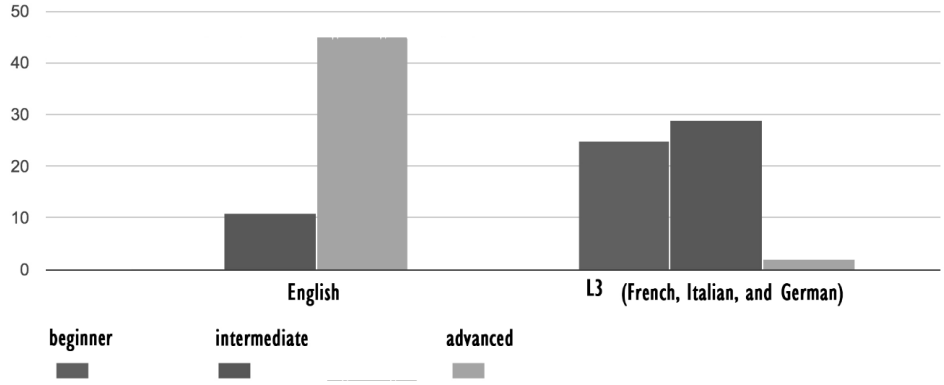

Figure 8.2 Informants' assessment of their language level for their L2 and L3

Source: Google Docs, Serwotka and Stwora.

majority rated their English as advanced while more than half of the informants described their L3 level (French, Italian, and German combined) as either intermediate (29 responses) or beginner (25 responses), with just two respondents claiming that their L3 level was very good (see Figure 8.2). When asked for how long they had studied English, most research participants declared that they had been attending English lessons for 14 or 15 years but average responses range from 11 to 15 years; only a small percentage of respondents claimed that it had been for 6 years. As regards their L3 (French, Italian or German), the main part of informants declared to have studied their L3 for one up to three years (circa 48%). Almost 9% declared to have studied their L3 for 4 and 7 years, 5% for 5 and 8 years, the remainder was marginal.

Upon providing these pieces of information, students were asked several questions concerning their experiences in terms of L3 learning. The first query was *How often do you use your L2 (English) while studying L3 (French, Italian or German)?* The percentage of responses to this question provided by the participants is presented below.

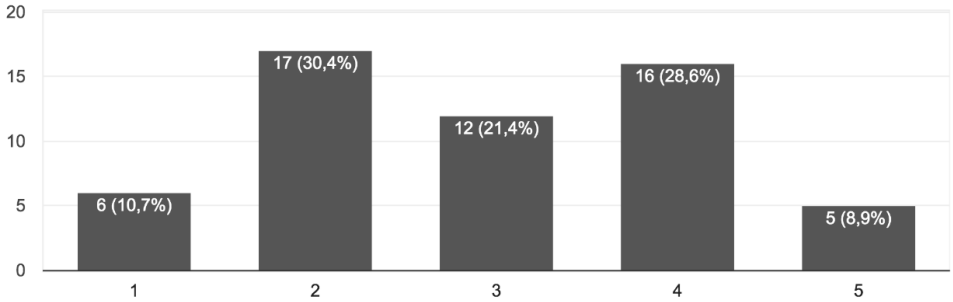

Figure 8.3 How often do you use your L2 (English) while studying L3 (French, Italian or German)? **1** – never, **2** – seldom, **3** – from time to time, **4** – often, **5** – very often

Source: Google Docs, Serwotka and Stwora.

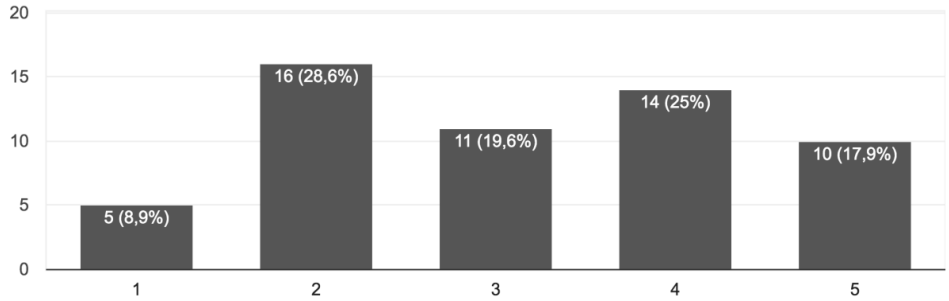

Figure 8.4 How often do you use English while learning vocabulary in L3? **1** – never, **2** – seldom, **3** – from time to time, **4** – often, **5** – very often

Source: Google Docs, Serwotka and Stwora.

Only almost 11% of respondents declared not to use L2 while studying L3; nevertheless, approximately 52% claimed to be occasionally using it, whilst 37% stated that they tend to use English quite frequently. When asked specifically about the frequency of using English while learning vocabulary in L3, the results were much better for the last group, which declared to refer to English on a daily basis (see Figure 8.4).

Moving on to the next issue, the authors of this study decided to enquire about the opinions of the informants on the negative impact of English on learning and/or understanding another foreign language (for instance, through such mistakes as calques or incorrect pronunciation). The results are illustrated in Figure 8.5:

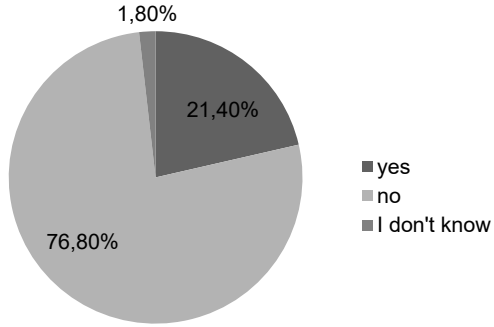

Figure 8.5 Do you think that your knowledge of English can inhibit learning/understanding another foreign language?

Source: Google Docs, Serwotka and Stwora.

As one can see, in general, research participants are not of the opinion that their knowledge of English can potentially inhibit understanding or learning another foreign language. However, the remaining 21% can provide some examples relating to the situations in which their knowledge of English resulted in difficulties in speaking, writing or comprehending L3. These read as follows:

– I encounter problems when it comes to fluent speech production–I tend to use English vocabulary;
– false friends, i.e. words that have a similar form, e.g. 'cold' in English for 'cold' and 'caldo' in Italian for 'hot';
– incorrect spelling;
– incorrect pronunciation, e.g. 'r' in German comes to resemble 'r' in English;
– counting to 10 in two different languages: confusing or substitution of numbers;
– English words are more accessible in my mind;

– I happen to create words in French that resemble their assumed English counterparts in spite of the fact that the proper words in French have different forms;

– pronunciation, especially when it comes to words with many vowels that sound different in Italian;

– confusing tenses and sentence construction.

By contrast, when asked *Do you think that your knowledge of English can facilitate learning/understanding another foreign language?* the majority of respondents take a positive attitude towards English, as illustrated by the pie chart below:

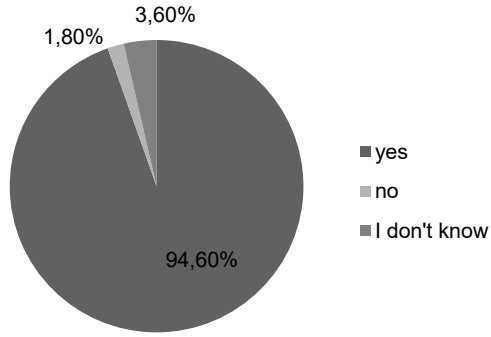

Figure 8.6 Do you think that your knowledge of English can facilitate learning/understanding another foreign language?

Source: Google Docs, Serwotka and Stwora.

Again, the participants were very eager to share their thoughts on some specific examples of the situations in which their knowledge of English resulted in the facilitation of speaking, writing or comprehending L3; a selection of their responses is provided below:

– many words in English come from Latin, which results in some similarities to Italian; many times my knowledge of Italian facilitated comprehension of the English language and *vice versa* because I can guess the word's meaning in Italian based on the English counterpart;

– when it comes to English and French, many vocabulary items are similar–there are many resemblances between English and French, which is why they are easy to remember;

– when I forget a word in Italian, I think of the English word with the same meaning and, if they happen to sound similar, I recall the Italian counterpart;

– similar vocabulary items; associating new vocabulary in L3 with similar words in English (L2);

– it is easier to understand tense constructions if you compare them to their English counterparts;

– similarities between words in English and my L3 help me to remember words in the latter;

– some words in German come from English and, thus, are already familiar to me;

– finding differences between languages helps in language learning;

– studying French is easier thanks to similar vocabulary, which facilitates translation;

– many words in French have their direct English counterparts that mean the same thing, e.g. as regards certain verbs and adjectives;

– sometimes it is more useful to base on English grammar while trying to understand grammar in L3;

– knowing English is important because it may come in handy when it comes to tenses or aspects which are different from those in Polish;

– by association, I learn two words in two languages at the same time based on similar structures;

– I often translate words and sentences into English instead of Polish because there are more resemblances between English and my L3 in terms of tenses or sentence construction;

– I use the patterns known from English tenses to learn those in French.

It is evident that a large proportion of respondents value English as a tool in learning their L3. Thus, the authors of this research wanted to find out whether using L2 during the acquisition or comprehension of L3 is their own technique or whether their were instructed or inspired to do so beforehand by their L3 teachers. That is why the informants were asked the question about the frequency of their teachers' referring to examples in English while teaching L3 in order to point out to similarities between languages.

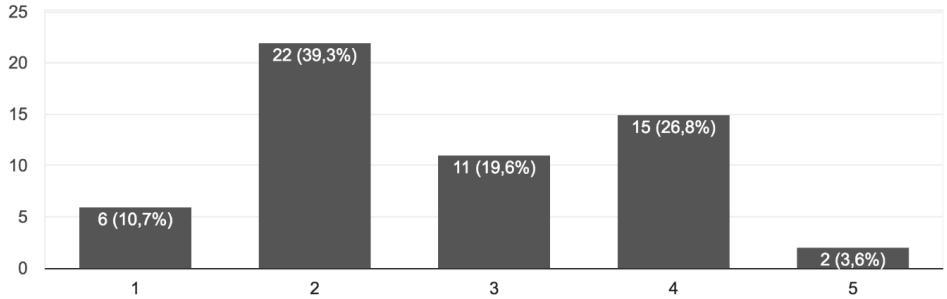

Figure 8.7 The frequency of teachers' referring to examples in English while teaching L3 in order to point out to similarities between languages

1 – never, **2** – seldom, **3** – from time to time, **4** – often, **5** – very often

Source: Google Docs, Serwotka and Stwora.

It turns out that it is not very common for L3 teachers to touch upon correspondences between the languages known to their students: only 30% of teachers are reported to do so routinely. Simultaneously, as follows from the survey conducted, 91% of students believe that it makes sense to refer to English during a course in another foreign language and 71% declare that they would like their L3 teachers to refer to examples in L2 or draw comparisons between languages as a rule.

Taking the above-mentioned into consideration, the authors' assumption concerning the potential of the positive influence of language transfer stands corroboration. Yet, in spite of the fact that the informants who took part in the study were aware of the process, they turned out to be unable to name it: approximately 84% of them were not familiar with the notion of language transfer (see Figure 8.8). Perhaps if they were, they could learn much more about the advantages (and disadvantages) of language transfer and, thus, improve their results in terms of conscious and planned foreign language learning process.

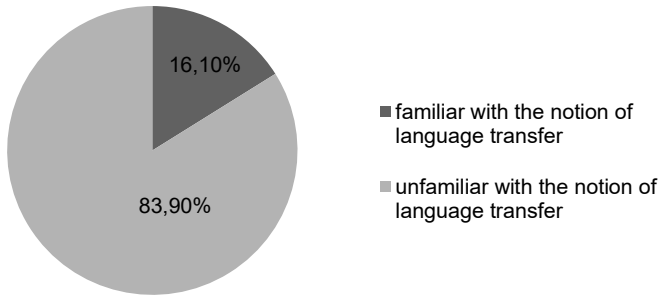

Figure 8.8 The percentage of students familiar (dark grey) and unfamiliar (light grey) with the notion of language transfer

Source: Google Docs, Serwotka and Stwora.

The group that was familiar with the notion of language transfer declared to know it from lectures at the university (70%) or from the Internet (30%); no one claimed to have encountered it in a book, article or during any pre-university education. Requested to define language transfer briefly, the group that was able to do so answered as follows:

Language transfer is:
- the influence of one language on the perception of another;
- the influence of one language on one's learning of another;
- the influence of one language on another;
- the influence of one's knowledge of L1 or L2 on his perception/production of L2 or L3, respectively;
- the mutual influence of languages on each other;

– an aid to learning Ln that rests on imposing patterns from a foreign language already known to the speaker;
– a transfer of patterns from one language to another;
– the influence of L1 on our learning and perception of a foreign language one studies.

8.5 Conclusions and pragmatic implications

The observations herein included are only certain observable tendencies as regards language transfer and its potential application as a conscious learning strategy. However, on the basis of the data gathered, it is possible to present several concluding remarks on an active approach to L3 learning enhanced by CLI. There are two steps that practically stem from two approaches proposed by the Common European Framework (European Commission 2012): openness to languages and integrated didactic approach. First of all, multilingual students should be made aware of any relevant resemblances and dissimilarities between the languages that they are acquiring, as well as of metalinguistic concepts used to describe the phenomena in question. Students would therefore be able to perceive certain regularities and notice exceptions at any level.

Secondly, as one can observe, references to English (the students' second language) during L3 courses are quite rare and students are not satisfied with their number and frequency, as they claim that comparisons between English and the other language system may prove useful. The relatively low number of inter-lingual references may be caused by certain context-related factors and, particularly, by the fact that a significant part of pre-university language teachers in Poland is familiar only with Polish and their target language, while their knowledge of English tends to be very limited. The students' answers to the survey clearly demonstrate that, in the academic context, it is no longer possible to adapt language teaching methods and content to the learners' linguistic background since, nowadays, at almost every level of education, one can choose between a number of foreign languages. As a result, students who start their university education possess very differentiated language skills and knowledge related to various languages.

Simultaneously, the institutions of higher education in Poland tend to propose numerous attractive language combinations but there is only a faint possibility that language tutors will be familiar with exactly the same languages as their students are, which makes it difficult to identify and correct errors resulting from interference, as well as to refer to the learners' previous knowledge of other languages. That is why, as far as didactic implications are concerned, the authors propose using distance-learning methods in order to enhance positive transfer and reduce negative CLI. Courses could be created in order to address

specific difficulties faced by learners in a given context and attract their attention to grammatical and lexical similarities between language systems so as to enhance their productive and receptive skills (an example of such a course has been described in Serwotka 2016). Such e-learning language courses could be adjusted to learners' needs and preferences, to the context of teaching/learning, and to the languages taught, while the very content could be freely modified and expanded, thus encouraging further use of language transfer as a learning strategy.

The results presented above demonstrate that a very small percentage of students are familiar with the notion of language transfer, which clearly shows that this incredibly important issue in language learning is frequently neglected during L3 courses. To the authors' minds, and from the didactic standpoint, it is more than necessary to stress the utility of language transfer and the positive aspect of one's previous linguistic knowledge; yet the results of the study show that there is still room for improvement in terms of both theoretical and practical aspects of language transfer in L3 teaching. It is therefore to be remembered that students should be sensitized to the fact that languages are not separated in the learner's mind, but rather come together, forming one's multilingual competence.

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