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ON THE ROLE OF RUSSIAN AS A MEDIATING LANGUAGE BETWEEN ARMENIAN AND ENGLISH

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the intermediary role of Russian while teaching English in a content-based language classroom. Special attention is paid to grammatical, syntactic, and semantic similarities and differences as well as to the use of cognates which impact language performance and may at times cause ambiguities. The paper also addresses some issues of the interconnectedness of language and culture in the contemporary world.

Key words: *intermediary language, multilingual, language competence, intercultural communication, the interconnectedness of language and culture*

Language and culture are so closely interconnected, that learning a new language is impossible without communication with a new culture. In the contemporary world which is highly interconnected both politically and economically, the changes in languages are rather rapid. Culture as well undergoes some changes though they do not take place within quite a long period as the accumulation of experiences and their transfer from generation to generation does not occur in no time. The situation has drastically changed with the arrival of the Internet - with digital media as a source of information and social media platforms as means of creating and sharing content, having direct outreach throughout the world, and promoting instant connectivity.

Acquisition of a new language is not an easy task for adult learners. Unlike the native language which supposes learning reading and writing the acquisition of a new language comes with school-age and it supposes mastering essential grammar and vocabulary. Learning a new language can be basically facilitated if the learning

process is organized in a cultural environment. Today the abundance of audio and video materials with diverse cultural content has promoted shaping the environment in schools, colleges, and higher educational institutions. Hence, their incorporation in language instruction unquestionably facilitates language study and can be one of the motivating factors for students to actively get engaged in learning activities.

Armenia, due to the legacy of the USSR, like all other ex-Soviet countries, is currently bilingual, with Russian still being a spoken language, especially among the descendants of Russian-speaking families. After gaining independence Armenia adopted the policy of nationalization of schools trying to shift the focus from Russian to English as the language of transnational communication and globalization. However, the Russian language has always offered opportunities and served a mediating role between Armenia and different countries of the region and across the territory of the former Soviet Union the part of which it used to be. Russian is still considered to be a transboundary language and it still remains, though not so intensively, the language of fundamental sciences, education, and culture. Moreover, the current influx of native speakers of Russian to Armenia and the expansion of the local community may have a sufficient impact on the language domains. In Armenia as in other post-Soviet countries, the knowledge of Russian is sometimes required for a career promotion as there are big Russian companies operating and new ones being set up. Besides, Russian is one of the languages of international and interstate communication and one of the official languages of the United Nations.

Although Armenian (L1) is the state language used in education, administration, and public life, there are Russian programmes on TV and on the radio being broadcast, as well as a variety of print media available in the country. Public libraries offer a wide range of fiction and professional literature in Russian (L2), which in its turn requires a better command of the Russian language. However, global developments and the spread of the English language (L3) as a social and cultural background of communication have necessitated learning English as one of the primary subjects in the school programme.

However, taking into account the fact that the first acquaintance with a foreign language for Armenians is to some extent via Russian, it is natural that the first projection of the English language is sometimes realized through Russian. Having already accepted some peculiarities of the Russian language, that may at times seem strange to native speakers of other languages, Armenians are more tolerant and ready to accept a completely new way of viewing the world through the prism of the target language. Consequently, the knowledge of L2 (Russian) speakers triggers the adjustment to the culture, traditions, and values of L3 (English). The different use of speech acts in Armenian, Russian and English may illustrate cultural differences between the languages, revealing special cultural norms and traditions.

Nowadays, at institutions of higher education in Armenia content-based

instruction is provided mostly in English and Russian. It is here that Russian starts to influence quite positively the acquisition of the second foreign language, English. As the results of recent studies have demonstrated L2 and L3 learners can have different motivations, and in most cases, they interact and impact each other /Henry, 2010; Wang & Zheng, 2019; Zheng et al., 2019/. Schepens et al. point out in their research that bilingual learners benefit from L2 irrespective of their L1 /Schepens et al., 2016/. Hammarberg & Williams conclude that the process of studying L3 acquisition may be enhanced by the learner's perception of the target language and the process of its acquisition. It can serve as a basis to explore the way how L2 facilitates the learning process. It can be assumed that bilingual language learners have a significant advantage over monolinguals while learning a new language /Hammarberg, Williams, 2009/. Thus, already having a certain command of Russian, learners consciously or unconsciously resort to their knowledge of the language.

Over the last years, there has been much research on bilingualism and multilingualism and their impact on the human life and the brain within different fields of study, such as linguistics, psychology, anthropology, neurology, and many interdisciplinary studies as well. Both bilingualism and multilingualism can give a rise to a mixed language. In our case, a sufficient number of Armenian migrant laborers in Russia have intense language contact for quite a long period and when they are back they produce a mixture of the languages sometimes coining slang. The actual internationalization of almost all spheres of life in Armenia promoted younger generations to become multilingual thus avoiding restrictions in communication and enhancing intellectual flexibility and creativity.

The present paper tends to reveal some peculiarities of both positive and negative impact of L1 on the acquisition of L2. So, it is an attempt to analyze the impact of the Russian language on learning English. Our observation is based on the experience of teaching ESP to the students having some background knowledge of Russian.

As it is mentioned above, foreign language learning mostly involves linguistic and cultural aspects. In the process of learning English on both conscious and subconscious levels, bilingual students tend to draw parallels (in grammatical, syntactic, semantic, and cultural fields) with Russian. However, each language is unique with its peculiarities of expression, that is why it is natural that there may arise some difficulties while trying to learn another foreign language.

As H. G. Willan, an English author and journalist, once noted, "You can never understand one language until you understand at least two" /<https://www.edge.org/response-detail/27125/>. This idea is further supported by B. O'Neill, J. Bennet, Ch. Vanier who claim that new language acquisition is often impacted by L2 language experience /O'Neill, Bennet, Vanier, 2010/. Thus, it is impossible to learn a new

language in isolation, without both positive and negative aspects of cross-linguistic influence.

Interestingly, while learning a foreign language the knowledge of more than one language can cause more difficulties when expressing thoughts in the target language, and as V.Marian, A.Shook state this knowledge can increase tip-of-the-tongue states, because, from a communicative standpoint, the perception of a message in one language can be impeded if another language always interferes. This constant linguistic rivalry may hinder the process of learning the language and its performance, nevertheless, there can be a number of cases when the second language mediation facilitates the understanding and acquisition of the third one /Marian, Shook, 2012/.

It is a known fact that L3 adult learners acquire it more easily, in part owing to such valuable advantages over monolinguals as a broader outlook and the ability to accept and understand a new culture more willingly. Being accustomed to the rules of their mother tongue the learners may experience difficulties studying lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonetic structures of the target language /Marian, Shook, 2012/. It is not surprising that monolinguals may make mistakes because they unconsciously connect L1 with L2. It is impossible for them to avoid comparing the grammatical structure and vocabulary of L1 while learning L2. The process may seem even more complicated for bilinguals, for their comparison is threefold: L1-L2-L3 (in our case Armenian → Russian → English), yet, they appear to be more flexible in managing to juggle between the languages they command.

It is essential to take into account both the similarities and differences between L1 and L3, L2 and L3 in the course of language acquisition to make it more effective. Based on their observations learners can make linguistic changes on different levels: grammatical, syntactic, and semantic, and try to work out their own system of mastering a new language. Nevertheless, these kinds of changes may sometimes be unsuccessful and give rise to language errors.

Generally speaking, language errors can be classified according to:

- a. linguistic levels (i.e., pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and style),
- b. form (e.g., omission, insertion, and substitution),
- c. type (systematic errors/errors in competence vs. occasional errors/errors in performance),
- d. cause (e.g., interference, interlanguage),
- e. norm vs. system, and
- f. modality (i.e., level of proficiency in speaking, writing, listening speaking)

[/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Error_analysis_\(linguistics\)/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Error_analysis_(linguistics)).

Even though Armenian, Russian and English belong to the same Indo-European language family, they all represent different groups. English is a Germanic language, Russian is a Slavic language, and Armenian is an independent

branch of the Indo-European language family. As compared to Armenian, Russian has been influenced by European languages, such as Latin, French, Greek, German, Italian, and English to a greater extent. Thus, in terms of learning English Armenians who speak Russian have an advantage over those who do not.

Learning a foreign language starts with learning the alphabet. Teaching English to Armenians is a challenging task, first of all, because of the differences in the alphabets. The Cyrillic (Modern Russian) alphabet differs from the Latin script and they obviously have more similarities compared with the Armenian alphabet. The modern Russian alphabet consists of thirty three letters, and many of them are similar to their English counterparts by either how they look or sound.

Due to the scarcity of inflections in English (-s and -ed for tense forms, -s for formation of plural forms of nouns as well as infixes, such as *tooth-teeth*) the fixed word order in English is of paramount importance in recognizing the connection of words in a sentence and serves as a grammatical indicator. As the redistribution of words may change the meaning of the sentence the fixed word order in English is a means of expressing grammatical categories unlike Russian and Armenian, which are inflected languages. Moreover, both the Russian and Armenian languages offer a rather flexible word order. Though SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OSV and OVS are the six grammatically correct options of word order that the Russian language allows, the dominant one SVO corresponds to the fixed word order of the English language structure. Besides, according to R. Jakobson only the order SVO is stylistically neutral /Jakobson, 1966/.

Another benefit of knowing Russian is to avoid some spelling mistakes in English, due to the borrowings. The borrowed words from English mostly preserve their spelling in Russian, while Armenian dictates its own spelling rules. For instance, preserving the duplicated consonants in the recipient language is conditioned by the phonetic, etymological, and semantic reasons /Турко, 2015/. This can be illustrated by the following examples: professional – профессионал – պրոֆեսիոնալ, million – миллион – միլիոն, dollar – доллар – դոլար. On the other hand, there are cases when loanwordss from English do not preserve their spelling in Russian and they can become a cause of common mistakes. This can probably be best shown in the following examples: blogger – блогер, leasing – лизинг – սերֆինգ, etc.

Overall, the grammatical category of gender contributes to the alleviation of who or what is referred to. Many languages possess this category and classify nouns as masculine, feminine, and neuter. The Russian language has all the mentioned genders. Although inflectional categories of gender for objects and abstract notions are not present in modern English, it still differentiates masculine, feminine, and neuter pronouns (he, she, it) which refer to humans. Armenian has no such differentiation and this leads to frequent errors.

Yet, in cases of possessive pronouns, Russian is at disadvantage. There are two types of possessive pronouns both in Armenian and English: weak or possessive adjectives and strong or absolute. For instance, *This is my bag. The bag is mine.* Սա իմ պայուսակն է: Այս պայուսակն իմն է: As we can see both the position and the type of the possessive pronouns are changed. Russian, on the other hand, has only one type but with four different forms and as they have to agree with the nouns, they modify in gender and number (мой, моя, мое, мои). Thus, the only modification that is made in the pair of sentences *Это моя сумка. Эта сумка моя.* is just in the position.

The category of number is typical of demonstrative pronouns both in Russian and English unlike Armenian. For instance, *this – these (этом – ему), that – those (там – те),* as compared with Armenian *այս* and *այն*. Anyway, Russian demonstrative pronouns also possess the category of gender, which neither English nor Armenian do.

Unlike Armenian, some nouns are used only in plural both in Russian and English. They comprise pair nouns denoting things made of two parts, which are the same, e.g. *glasses – очки – ակնոց, pants, trousers – брюки – փափափ, scissors – ножницы – մկրափ, tights – колготки – զրիզազրիզա*. The fact that these nouns require verbs in plural is yet another problem for Armenian learners. Nevertheless, some nouns which are always plural in Russian (*сани – sledge, sleigh, часы – watch, clock, etc.*) do not have their equivalent plurals in English.

One of the most common mistakes in English made by Russian speakers is the omission of definite and indefinite articles, as such a category does not exist in Russian. Although Armenian does not have a special part of speech called the article, the category of definiteness or indefiniteness can be identified by means of an ending (*ը* or *ն*) added to the main form of the noun. Not always, but very often this fact helps Armenian speakers of English to avoid mistakes.

While grammar is finite and it is possible to learn all the grammar rules, vocabulary is endless, and it is hardly possible to learn all the words existing in a language. As H. Ringbom /1982/ emphasizes phonological and semantic similarities as an important factor for students to learn new vocabulary more easily, drawing parallels between L2 and L3. For some learners, translation equivalence is a means to memorize new words. According to some linguists, however, learners avoid using words the semantic equivalence of which they cannot find in their mother tongue.

Russian has a lot of adopted words from English, cognates, which may serve as learning tools for students. Besides there are a number of Russified words (*adapt – адаптировать; publish – публиковать, etc.*). Westernization and the development of technology have also contributed to the enrichment of Russian

vocabulary with English words, which have acquired universal usage (*television – телевизор, computer – компьютер, internet – интернет*, etc.). In Armenian, on the other hand, there is a tendency to translate all the above-mentioned words (*television – հեռուստացույց, computer – համակարգիչ, internet – համացանց*, etc.). Nevertheless, due to the borrowings of Russian from English, in Armenia a beginner bilingual learner of English may find out that he or she already possesses quite an extensive English word stock.

On a larger scale, the use of cognates contributes to promoting competence for successful intercultural communication, which is the final goal of language learning for both teachers and learners. The cognates that are present in English and Russian are usually of common origin, borrowed from French, German, or Latin. Recently a steady influx of English words into the Russian language has been recorded specifically in the fields of trade and business, computing, and politics. Due to the fact that they possess the same meaning in both languages, their usage has become quite natural and widespread.

Nonetheless, wide usage of cognates might sometimes be ambiguous, if not a misleading one. Second foreign language learners can experience problems with false cognates between two foreign languages /Marian, Shook, 2012/. In the course of using borrowed words, some changes in their meanings may occur, thus, adjusting to the concepts of the other language. This process is hard to either predict or control. The loan may lead to an extension or narrowing of the original meaning. And it is here that learners experience some misunderstanding while dealing with the so-called false friends that exist in the foreign language (*prospect, intelligent, magazine, artist, accurate, novel, mark, family*, etc.). Another distinctive feature of borrowings in the Russian language is the replacement of already existing Russian terms with the English ones or their coexistence in a wide range of areas of our life. This can be illustrated in a number of cases like *форма одежды – дрескод – dresscode, спутник – сателит – satellite, убийца – киллер – killer*, etc. They by all means contribute to the extension of the vocabulary of English.

So, it is a hard fact that the number of people around the world becoming “transnational” has increased recently due to globalization and learning English as the dominant international language is of vital importance. However, in the case of many Armenians the Russian language still continues to serve a mediating role in the transmission of world values. Thus, mastering multiple languages and the use of identities has become the first priority. Our role as teachers of English is to assist and support students in developing their multicultural abilities via their bilingualism. This advantage is even more evident with students studying International Relations, Political Science and Diplomacy - spheres the main word stock of which has universal application.

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Ի. ԲՈՒՌՆԱԶՅԱՆ, Լ. ԲՈՍՏԱՆՋՅԱՆ, Ա. ՊԱՊՈՅԱՆ – Ռուսերենի՝ որպես միջնորդ լեզվի դերը հայերենի և անգլերենի միջև. – Հոդվածի նպատակն է վերլուծել ռուսերենի՝ որպես միջնորդ լեզվի աղդեցությունը նոր ուսումնասիրվող օտար լեզվի վրա՝ բովանդակահեն դասընթացի շրջանակներում: Հոդվածում հաստիկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում քերականական, շարահյուսական և իմաստաբանական այն նմանություններին, որոնք նպաստում են օտար լեզվի ընկալմանը և արագ յուրացմանը: Հետազոտության մեջ հեղինակները նաև ներկայացրել են մի շարք նույնարմատ բառերի վերլուծություն: Հատկանշական է սակայն, որ վերոհիշյալ բառերը կարող են երկակի ընկալման պատճառ հանդիսանալ: Հեղինակները նաև անդրադառնում են ժամանակակից աշխարհում՝ լեզվի և մշակույթի փոխկապակցվածության որոշ հարցերի:

Բանալի բառեր. միջնորդ լեզու, բազմալեզու, լեզվական կարողություն, միջմշակութային հաղորդակցություն, լեզվի և մշակույթի փոխկապակցվածություն

И. БУРНАЗЯН, Л. БОСТАНДЖЯН, А. ПАПОЯН – О роли русского как языка посредника между армянским и английским. – Данная статья посвящена анализу роли русского языка как посредника при обучении английскому языку в высших учебных заведениях. Особое внимание в работе уделяется грамматическим, синтаксическим и семантическим сходствам и различиям, которые влияют на процесс овладения языком. Авторами исследования представлен анализ некоторых однокоренных слов, которые могут способствовать усвоению языка и в то же время стать причиной двойного восприятия. В статье также затрагиваются общие вопросы взаимосвязанности языка и культуры в современном мире.

Ключевые слова: язык посредник, многоязычный, языковая компетенция, межкультурная коммуникация, взаимосвязанность языка и культуры

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