

UDC 801: 811.111: 811.112.2

DOI <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/94-1-38>

Mariia BILOKOPYTOVA,

orcid.org/0000-0003-3817-245X

Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages

Alfred Nobel University

(Dnipro, Ukraine) *bilokopytova.m@duan.edu.ua*

Anna VOLOBOIEVA,

orcid.org/0009-0002-7710-6922

Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages

Alfred Nobel University

(Dnipro, Ukraine) *voloboieva.a@duan.edu.ua*

THE PHENOMENON OF LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING ENGLISH AND GERMAN BY STUDENTS OF NON-PHILOLOGICAL SPECIALTIES

The article investigates the phenomenon of language interference in the process of learning English and German by students of non-philological specialties in the context of contemporary multilingual higher education. The relevance of the study is determined by the increasing prevalence of sequential foreign language acquisition, in which English is mastered as the first foreign language at a relatively high level and often acquires a dominant status, significantly influencing the learning of German as a second foreign language.

The purpose of the article is to provide a theoretical substantiation of the phenomenon of language interference and to identify its typical manifestations in students' German-language speech formed under the influence of English. Particular attention is paid to students of non-philological specialties, whose foreign language learning is professionally oriented and conducted under conditions of limited classroom instruction, reduced contact hours, and insufficient metalinguistic training.

The research is based on methods of linguistic observation, descriptive analysis, and contrastive comparison of the English and German language systems. The empirical material includes samples of students' written and oral speech collected during classroom interaction, professionally oriented tasks, and independent work. The analysis focuses on identifying stable interference patterns and determining the linguistic levels most susceptible to negative transfer.

The results of the study demonstrate that language interference is systematic in nature and largely determined by the dominant role of English as the first foreign language. Interference phenomena are most frequently observed at the grammatical and lexico-semantic levels, particularly in the use of prepositions, pronouns, interrogative constructions, word order, and international vocabulary. It is established that typological proximity between English and German does not eliminate interference but rather reshapes its manifestations, creating both facilitating and inhibiting effects in the process of language acquisition.

The findings substantiate the necessity of applying a contrastive and metalinguistically oriented approach to teaching a second foreign language in higher education, aimed at minimizing negative transfer, enhancing cross-linguistic awareness, and improving the accuracy and normativity of students' foreign language production.

Key words: *language interference, cross-linguistic influence, foreign language learning, second foreign language, English and German, non-philological specialties, negative transfer, multilingualism.*

Марія БІЛОКОПИТОВА,

orcid.org/0000-0003-3817-245X

старший викладач кафедри іноземних мов

Університету імені Альфреда Нобеля

(Дніпро, Україна) *bilokopytova.m@duan.edu.ua*

Анна ВОЛОБОЄВА,

orcid.org/0009-0002-7710-6922

старший викладач кафедри іноземних мов

Університету імені Альфреда Нобеля

(Дніпро, Україна) *voloboieva.a@duan.edu.ua*

ЯВИЩЕ МОВНОЇ ІНТЕРФЕРЕНЦІЇ У ПРОЦЕСІ ВИВЧЕННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ ТА НІМЕЦЬКОЇ МОВ СТУДЕНТАМИ НЕФІЛОЛОГІЧНИХ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТЕЙ

У статті досліджується явище мовної інтерференції у процесі вивчення англійської та німецької мов студентами нефілологічних спеціальностей у контексті сучасної багатомовної вищої освіти. Актуальність

дослідження зумовлена зростанням поширеності послідовного оволодіння іноземними мовами, за якого англійська мова опановується як перша іноземна на відносно високому рівні та часто набуває домінуючого статусу, суттєво впливаючи на засвоєння німецької мови як другої іноземної.

Метою статті є теоретичне обґрунтування феномену мовної інтерференції та виявлення її типових проявів у німецькомовному мовленні студентів, сформованому під впливом англійської мови. Особлива увага приділяється студентам нефілологічних спеціальностей, для яких вивчення іноземних мов має професійно орієнтований характер і здійснюється в умовах обмеженого аудиторного часу, скороченої кількості контактних годин та недостатньої сформованої метамовної підготовки.

Дослідження ґрунтується на методах лінгвістичного спостереження, описового аналізу та контрастивного зіставлення мовних систем англійської та німецької мов. Емпіричний матеріал охоплює зразки письмного й усного мовлення студентів, зібрані під час аудиторної роботи, виконання професійно орієнтованих завдань та самостійної діяльності. Аналіз спрямований на виявлення стійких інтерференційних моделей і визначення мовних рівнів, найбільш уразливих до негативного трансферу.

Результати дослідження засвідчують, що мовна інтерференція має системний характер і значною мірою зумовлена домінуючою роллю англійської мови як першої іноземної. Найчастіше інтерференційні явища спостерігаються на граматичному та лексико-семантичному рівнях, зокрема у вживанні прийменників, займенників, питальних конструкцій, порядку слів та інтернаціональної лексики. Встановлено, що типологічна близькість англійської та німецької мов не усуває інтерференції, а радше трансформує її прояви, створюючи як сприятливі, так і гальмівні ефекти у процесі мовного засвоєння.

Отримані результати обґрунтовують необхідність застосування контрастивного та метамовно орієнтованого підходу до навчання другої іноземної мови у закладах вищої освіти з метою мінімізації негативного трансферу, розвитку міжмовної свідомості та підвищення точності й нормативності ініомовного мовлення студентів.

Ключові слова: мовна інтерференція, міжмовний вплив, вивчення іноземних мов, друга іноземна мова, англійська та німецька мови, нефілологічні спеціальності, негативний трансфер, багатомовність.

Problem statement. The growing prevalence of multilingual education in higher education institutions has led to a situation in which students of non-philological specialties are increasingly required to master more than one foreign language within a limited time frame and under conditions of reduced classroom contact hours. In most European educational contexts, English is acquired as the first foreign language and reaches a relatively high level of proficiency, while German is subsequently studied as a second foreign language for professional or academic purposes. This sequential pattern of language learning creates favorable conditions for cross-linguistic interaction, but at the same time intensifies the risk of language interference.

Despite the extensive body of theoretical research devoted to language contact and cross-linguistic influence, insufficient attention has been paid to the specific manifestations of interference arising from English as a dominant first foreign language in the acquisition of German by students of non-philological specialties. Existing studies often focus either on bilingualism involving a native and a foreign language or on learners with philological training, whose heightened metalinguistic awareness and extensive exposure to language systems significantly differentiate them from non-philological learners.

The problem, therefore, lies in the need to identify and systematize typical interference phenomena that occur in the German-language production of students whose linguistic competence is shaped primarily by English and whose foreign language learning

is professionally oriented rather than theoretically grounded. In particular, there is a lack of comprehensive analyses addressing which linguistic levels are most susceptible to negative transfer under these conditions and how the dominance of English influences error patterns in German. Addressing this problem is essential for improving methodological approaches to teaching a second foreign language in higher education and for developing effective strategies aimed at minimizing negative interference while fostering positive transfer.

Analysis of research. In the context of contemporary European higher education, multilingual competence has become a normative educational objective rather than an exceptional achievement. In most educational systems, English is acquired as the first foreign language at an early stage of schooling, while the study of a second foreign language – most frequently German – takes place later and is often oriented toward professional communication. This sequential model of foreign language acquisition creates intensive conditions for cross-linguistic interaction within the learner's cognitive system, thereby increasing the relevance of research into language interference phenomena (Weinreich, 1968; Haugen, 1956).

Language interference is traditionally understood as deviations from the norms of a target language caused by the influence of previously acquired languages. U. Weinreich conceptualized interference as a direct consequence of language contact, emphasizing the speaker as the primary locus of interaction between linguistic systems (Weinreich, 1968: 14–16).

Subsequent research expanded this view by examining whether prior linguistic knowledge functions predominantly as an obstacle to language acquisition or, conversely, as a source of facilitative transfer (Odlin, 1989; Ringbom, 2007).

Within European and Western linguistics, the phenomenon of interference has been systematically investigated since the mid-twentieth century, particularly with regard to its typological determinants and structural manifestations. Scholars have demonstrated that interference may affect all linguistic levels, including phonetics, morphology, syntax, and lexis, depending on the degree of structural similarity between the languages in contact and the conditions of language use (Haugen, 1956; Thomason, 2001). These findings underscore the multilevel nature of interference and the necessity of comprehensive error analysis in foreign language acquisition (Odlin, 1989; Ringbom, 2007).

Contemporary research emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between systemic interference, which arises from typological differences between languages, and individual interference, which is shaped by learners' cognitive strategies and language-learning experience (Odlin, 1989; Hawkins, 2001). This distinction is particularly relevant in the case of non-philological students, whose foreign language learning is primarily instrumental and characterized by limited instructional time and reduced metalinguistic training.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, interference is interpreted as a result of the simultaneous activation of multiple language systems during speech production. Empirical studies demonstrate that in bilingual and multilingual speakers all known languages remain active even when only one language is used, which creates conditions for competition between linguistic representations (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; de Groot, 2011). The effectiveness of cognitive control and inhibitory mechanisms plays a crucial role in regulating this interaction; insufficient inhibition of a dominant language – particularly at early stages of second foreign language acquisition – significantly increases susceptibility to interference (Ullman, 2005; Bialystok et al., 2012).

Special attention in the literature is devoted to phonetic interference, which is considered one of the most persistent forms of cross-linguistic influence. This persistence is explained by the stability of the articulatory base formed under the influence of previously acquired languages and the limited role of conscious control in phonetic production (Flege, 1995; Thomason, 2001). In the case of English–German contact, differences in grapheme–phoneme correspondence, consonant

devoicing, and articulatory settings frequently result in systematic pronunciation errors.

At the same time, interference processes cannot be fully explained solely by structural differences between languages. A cognitively oriented approach highlights the role of linguistic consciousness and learning experience in shaping both negative interference and positive transfer (de Groot, 2011; Ullman, 2005). Learners with experience in acquiring a first foreign language often demonstrate higher levels of metalinguistic awareness, which enables them to consciously compare language systems and exploit similarities between them (Cook, 2016; De Angelis, 2007).

Positive transfer is particularly evident when the first and second foreign languages are typologically related, as in the case of English and German. Research indicates that English often serves as a direct source of transfer for German learners due to partial lexical overlap, shared orthographic conventions, and similarities in grammatical categories such as articles, modal verbs, and tense structures (Ringbom, 2007; Odlin, 1989). However, typological proximity does not eliminate interference; rather, it reshapes its manifestation, especially at the phonetic and syntactic levels.

Thus, the analysis of contemporary linguistic and psycholinguistic research demonstrates that language interference in the acquisition of German after English is a complex, multilevel, and cognitively conditioned phenomenon. These theoretical insights provide a foundation for identifying typical interference patterns in the German-language production of non-philological students and for developing methodologically grounded strategies aimed at minimizing negative transfer while enhancing positive cross-linguistic influence.

Purpose of the article is to theoretically substantiate and empirically characterize the phenomenon of language interference in the process of learning German as a second foreign language after English by students of non-philological specialties. The study aims to identify the dominant sources and levels of interference caused by English, to determine the linguistic domains most vulnerable to negative transfer, and to analyze typical interference errors occurring in students' German-language speech.

Furthermore, the article seeks to demonstrate the systematic and cognitively conditioned nature of interference processes and to justify the necessity of a contrastive and metalinguistically oriented approach to teaching a second foreign language in a multilingual educational environment. By clarifying the mechanisms of cross-linguistic influence between

English and German, the study aims to contribute to the development of more effective pedagogical strategies that account for the specific needs and learning conditions of non-philological students.

Presentation of main material. The practical part of the study was conducted among third- and fourth-year students of non-philological majors, specifically those specializing in Information Technology. All respondents are males residing abroad and studying in a multilingual environment. For these participants, English is the first foreign language (L2), which they actively use in their professional activities, while German is studied as a second foreign language (L3) under conditions of limited classroom hours. The participants' language proficiency levels are as follows:

English: A2–B2;

German: A2–B1.

These conditions establish a conducive environment for the manifestation of cross-linguistic interference, as English serves not only as a means of communication but also as the dominant language of cognition, directly influencing the acquisition of German.

The research material comprised: students' written assignments (short essays, professionally oriented texts, and grammatical exercises); oral responses during classes; and spontaneous speech during dialogues.

Analysis of the students' speech revealed that grammatical and lexical manifestations of interference are the most prevalent, particularly in the use of prepositions, pronouns, and interrogative words. In most cases, English, as the first foreign language, serves as the source of interference.

One of the most frequent types of errors is the mechanical transfer of English prepositional patterns into the German language. Students tend to employ familiar English constructions without considering the specificities of German prepositional government (*Rektion*).

For instance, the following errors were recorded during the speech production process:

Model: *Ich warte für dich* (Derived from English: *wait for*) **Standard German:** *Ich warte auf dich*.

Model: *Ich interessiere mich in Programmierung* (Derived from English: *interested in*) **Standard German:** *Ich interessiere mich für Programmierung*.

Model: *Ich arbeite an einer Firma* (Derived from English: *work at/for a company*) **Standard German:** *Ich arbeite in einer Firma*.

Such errors signify negative transfer from the English language, occurring when a student fails to analyze the German construction as an autonomous system and instead reproduces a previously acquired model.

Equally indicative are the instances of interference in the use of personal and possessive pronouns. Students frequently equate the functions of English pronouns with those of German ones, disregarding the German case system. Typical examples include:

Model: *Das ist für ich* (Calque from English: *for me*) **Standard German:** *Das ist für mich*. (Note: Failure to apply the Accusative case after the preposition 'für' due to the neutral form of the English objective pronoun).

Model: *Er gibt sie ein Buch* (Derived from English: *he gives her a book*) **Standard German:** *Er gibt ihr ein Buch*. (Note: Substitution of the Dative 'ihr' with the Accusative 'sie', reflecting the lack of morphological distinction between Dative and Accusative functions in the English 'her').

Model: *Ich habe mit mein Freund gesprochen* (Derived from English: *with my friend*) **Standard German:** *Ich habe mit meinem Freund gesprochen*. (Note: Omission of the Dative inflection in the possessive pronoun, influenced by the invariant nature of English possessives).

The examples illustrate a disregard for case inflections, a phenomenon typical of speakers whose native or intermediary language possesses a less developed case system. This is particularly evident when English functions as an intermediary language (*interlanguage*), exerting a simplifying influence on the target language's grammatical structure.

A distinct category of errors involves interrogative words and phrases, where students transfer English questioning models without considering German syntactic structures or idiomatic expressions. The most prevalent examples include:

Model: *Was Zeit ist es?* (Derived from English: *What time is it?*) **Standard German:** *Wie spät ist es?* (Note: Lexical interference where the English interrogative pronoun "what" is directly mapped onto "was," ignoring the idiomatic German construction).

Model: *Warum du kommst spät?* (Derived from English: *Why you come late?* – word order) **Standard German:** *Warum kommst du spät?* (Note: Syntactic interference involving the violation of the V2-word order rule in German, influenced by the English declarative-like structure in interrogative sentences).

Model: *Wie viele Jahre bist du?* (Derived from English: *How many years [old] are you?*) **Standard German:** *Wie alt bist du?* (Note: Phraseological interference resulting from the literal translation of the English inquiry regarding age).

Such errors demonstrate structural interference, manifesting not only at the lexical level but also at the syntactic level. The analysis reveals that students of non-philological majors frequently transfer English

verbal constructions into German speech, disregarding differences in verbal valency.

Overuse of the verb *machen* as a universal equivalent of the English *to make / to do*:

Ich mache einen Fehler (in contexts where the normative expression is *einen Fehler begehen*).

Calquing of English infinitive constructions:

Ich hoffe zu bekommen eine Antwort (violating the position of the infinitive in German sentences).

As noted in current research, such errors are caused by the fact that English fosters an analytical approach to discourse organization in students, which often conflicts with the syntactic norms of the German language.

Attention in the analyzed studies has been given to articles, as their presence in both English and German often creates a misleading perception among students of a full correspondence between these systems. As a result, the following interference phenomena are observed:

Use of the definite article by analogy with English:

Die Informatik ist wichtig für die Gesellschaft (in a neutral, general sense).

Omission of the article in positions where it is mandatory in German:

Ich habe Projekt abgeschlossen.

The analysis also revealed that IT students often use international vocabulary uncritically, relying on English meanings. Consequently, the following issues arise: semantic shifts, broadening or narrowing of word meanings, and stylistically unjustified use of borrowings. For example:

1. **actual / aktuell**

Das ist die aktuelle Version des Programms. (intended meaning: factual, real). Reason: English *actual* = “real, factual,” whereas German *aktuell* means “current, up-to-date.” Normative variant: *Das ist die tatsächliche Version des Programms.*

2. **eventuell / eventually**

Eventuell werde ich dieses Projekt beenden. (intended meaning: “ultimately”). Reason: English *eventually* ≠ German *eventuell*. Normative variant: *Schließlich / letztendlich werde ich dieses Projekt beenden.*

3. **control / kontrollieren**

Ich kontrolliere den Code über das System. (intended meaning: “to manage, direct”). Reason: English *to control* = “to manage, direct,” whereas German *kontrollieren* = “to check, verify.” Normative variant: *Ich steuere den Code über das System.*

Conclusions. The results of the study indicate that cross-linguistic interference is a systematic and

persistent phenomenon in the process of learning German as a second foreign language by students of non-philological majors, particularly in the field of information technology. The specific characteristics of the linguistic environment in which the respondents operate, as well as the dominant role of English as the primary means of professional and everyday communication, contribute to an intensive negative transfer of linguistic patterns into German speech.

Analysis of students’ written and oral productions revealed that interference most frequently occurs at the grammatical and lexico-semantic levels. Prepositional government, case forms of pronouns, the use of interrogative words, as well as verb valency and word order in complex sentences, proved particularly vulnerable. The identified errors are not random but systematic, reflecting the mechanical transfer of English linguistic structures without consideration of the systemic features of the German language.

A separate group of interference phenomena involves lexico-semantic issues related to the uncritical use of international vocabulary. Equating English and German lexemes based on formal similarity leads to semantic shifts, narrowing or broadening of word meanings, and stylistically unjustified borrowings, negatively affecting the accuracy and normativity of students’ foreign language output.

Attention is drawn to syntactic interference in complex subordinate constructions, where the influence of English is manifested in the copying of direct word order and the violation of predicate position. Such errors reflect the deep-seated nature of interference, associated with the development of an analytical mode of linguistic thinking under the influence of English, which conflicts with the syntactic norms of German.

The findings confirm the positions of contemporary linguodidactic research that, in a multilingual context, English often serves as a mediator in acquiring a second foreign language while simultaneously acting as a primary source of interference errors. This underscores the need for a targeted development of students’ conscious comparative approach to language learning, emphasizing contrastive analysis and the prevention of typical interference phenomena.

Future research prospects include the development of methodological models for teaching a second foreign language to students of technical specialties, considering the dominant influence of English, as well as the creation of specialized teaching materials aimed at minimizing cross-linguistic interference under conditions of limited classroom time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bialystok E., Craik F. I. M., Luk G. Bilingualism: Consequences for mind and brain. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. 2012. Vol. 16, No. 4. P. 240–250.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2012.03.001>
2. Cook V. *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. 5th ed. London: Routledge, 2016. 344 p.
3. De Angelis G. *Third or Additional Language Acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007. 224 p.
4. de Groot A. M. B. *Language and Cognition in Bilinguals and Multilinguals*. New York: Psychology Press, 2011. 280 p.
5. Ellis R. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 512 p.
6. Flege J. E. Second language speech learning: Theory, findings, and problems. In: *Speech Perception and Linguistic Experience*. Timonium, MD: York Press, 1995. P. 233–277.
7. Flege J. E., Bohn O.-S. The role of phonetic category formation in second language speech learning. *Journal of Phonetics*. 2021. Vol. 88. Article 101072.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wocn.2021.101072>
8. Haugen E. *Bilingualism in the Americas: A Bibliography and Research Guide*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1956. 159 p.
9. Hawkins R. *Second Language Syntax: A Generative Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. 256 p.
10. Jarvis S., Pavlenko A. *Crosslinguistic Influence in Language and Cognition*. New York: Routledge, 2008. 304 p.
11. Odlin T. *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. 224 p.
12. Ringbom H. *Cross-Linguistic Similarity in Foreign Language Learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007. 143 p.
13. Thomason S. G. *Language Contact: An Introduction*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001. 270 p.
14. Ullman M. T. A cognitive neuroscience perspective on second language acquisition: the declarative/procedural model. In: *Mind and Context in Adult Second Language Acquisition*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005. P. 141–178.
15. Weinreich U. *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*. The Hague: Mouton, 1968. 196 p.

REFERENCES

1. Bialystok E., Craik F. I. M., Luk G. (2012) Bilingualism: Consequences for mind and brain. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 240–250.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2012.03.001>
2. Cook V. (2016) *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. 5th ed., Routledge, London, 344 p.
3. De Angelis G. (2007) *Third or Additional Language Acquisition*. Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, 224 p.
4. de Groot A. M. B. (2011) *Language and Cognition in Bilinguals and Multilinguals*. Psychology Press, New York, 280 p.
5. Ellis R. (2008) *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 512 p.
6. Flege J. E. (1995) Second language speech learning: Theory, findings, and problems. In: *Speech Perception and Linguistic Experience*, York Press, Timonium, MD, pp. 233–277.
7. Flege J. E., Bohn O.-S. (2021) The role of phonetic category formation in second language speech learning. *Journal of Phonetics*, Vol. 88, Article 101072.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wocn.2021.101072>
8. Haugen E. (1956) *Bilingualism in the Americas: A Bibliography and Research Guide*. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 159 p.
9. Hawkins R. (2001) *Second Language Syntax: A Generative Introduction*. Blackwell, Oxford, 256 p.
10. Jarvis S., Pavlenko A. (2008) *Crosslinguistic Influence in Language and Cognition*. Routledge, New York, 304 p.
11. Odlin T. (1989) *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 224 p.
12. Ringbom H. (2007) *Cross-Linguistic Similarity in Foreign Language Learning*. Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, 143 p.
13. Thomason S. G. (2001) *Language Contact: An Introduction*. Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, 270 p.
14. Ullman M. T. (2005) A cognitive neuroscience perspective on second language acquisition: the declarative/procedural model. In: *Mind and Context in Adult Second Language Acquisition*, Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC, pp. 141–178.
15. Weinreich U. (1968) *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*. Mouton, The Hague, 196 p.

Дата першого надходження рукопису до видання: 28.11.2025

Дата прийнятого до друку рукопису після рецензування: 19.11.2025

Дата публікації: 31.12.2025