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L2 TENSE TRANSFER IN EFL LEARNING

Abstract: In second language acquisition (SLA) transfer is predominantly explored as either positive or negative influence of learners' first language (L1) on their second/foreign language (L2) performance. Studies in this field serve not only to describe the learner's interlanguage, but also to inform, improve and refine foreign language teaching.

However, the scope of SLA studies is such that it leaves the other transfer direction under-researched (L2 to L1), assuming that once the learner's L1 system has fully developed, their L1 competence will not be subject to change. More recent studies of adult bilinguals have shown a bidirectional interaction between the two linguistic systems: not only does L1 influence L2, but L2 influences L1 as well.

In this study, conducted among adult students of English (B2 to C1 level language users, according to CEFR), we examine the influence of English as a foreign language upon Serbian as a native tongue in terms of tense transfer. More precisely, the study explores how the subjects interpret and translate the secondary meanings of the English past tense. The basic meaning of the past tense is to locate an event (or state) in the past. However, in its secondary meanings (backshift past in reported clauses, counterfactual present in adverbial clauses of condition and 'past subjunctive' when expressing wishes and regrets) it does not refer to the past time. The error analysis of students' English to Serbian translations provides evidence of L2 influence: learners tend to use the Serbian past rather than the present tense in their translations. Pedagogical implications of this study of misuse of L1 tense include focusing on explicit corrective feedback and polishing instructional materials.

Keywords: *L2 English to L1 Serbian tense transfer, language teaching, translation, tense semantics.*

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between different languages in the mind of the language user who has command of two or more tongues has intrigued researchers for decades. Apart from the individual languages that the speaker uses, termed L1, L2, L3, L_n depending on the acquisition chronology, his/her mind can also contain the so-called ‘interlanguage’, which is a version of the target language produced by the language learner during the process of acquisition. As all the languages exist in the same mind, the researchers coined the term which encompasses the knowledge of more than a single tongue: ‘multi-competence’ thus denotes ‘knowledge of two or more languages in one mind’ (Cook, 1991).

The multicompetence framework proposed by Cook (1999, 2003) claims that the state of mind of the person who speaks more than one language is compound and never equivalent to two monolingual states. This approach allows the researchers to theorize the interaction between these multiple languages in the speaker’s mind as an expected and constant process. Furthermore, it helps explain why bilingual or multilingual speakers perform differently from monolingual in all their languages, including the L1. Most importantly, this theory questions widely held assumptions regarding L1 competence.

According to the traditional view, the L1 competence remains stable and resistant to change once the user’s language system has fully developed. However, newer research challenges this position and shows that L1 competence is dynamic and can be subject to L2 influence (Cook, 2003; Pavlenko, 2000; Schmid, 2002). Furthermore, there is evidence that L2 influence can be observed even in EFL learners whose study of language is limited to institutional contexts in their native countries (Kecskes & Papp 2000; Van Hell & Dijkstra, 2002).

The influence of a speaker’s knowledge of one language on their use or knowledge of another has been studied for decades in language acquisition. Transfer (or crosslinguistic influence, which is a theory-neutral term) denotes the whole range of ways in which knowledge of one language can be affected by another. Today it is a widely recognized variable that affects not only language acquisition and use, but other processes including cultural, psychological and cognitive (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 6). Its direction can be either from L1 to L2 (forward transfer) or from L2 to L1 (reverse transfer). This study explores how foreign language reframes the participants’ production and grammaticality judgements of utterances in their native tongue. More precisely, by analyzing how ELF students interpret and translate the secondary meanings of the English past tense, the study examines whether and how English as a foreign language affects Serbian as a native tongue in terms of reverse tense transfer.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Tense is the grammatical expression of the location of events in time (Downing & Locke, 2002: 352). It is a grammatical category of the verb and is expressed in the form of verb paradigms. Tense is closely related to time in a complex and intricate manner. One portion of this complex relationship stems from the absence of one-to-one correspondence between tense and time. A single tense may express several temporal meanings, while one temporal meaning may be expressed by means of more than one tense (for details, see Grujić, 2012).

The past tense in English is primarily used to refer to a definite event or state prior to utterance time (e.g. *I came, saw and conquered*)¹. In its secondary meanings (backshift past in reported clauses, counterfactual present in adverbial clauses of condition or manner, as well as in the subjunctive mood, when expressing wishes and regrets pertaining to present situations) it does not refer to the past time.

In indirect reported speech the content of statements, questions and directives is reported. In this process a set of formal adjustments (termed ‘backshift’) has to be made to ‘shift deictic elements away from the speech situation to the reported situation’ (Downing & Locke, 2002: 350). Deictic words that undergo backshift include personal pronouns and demonstratives as well as tenses and adverbs of time and place. Consequently, the utterance ‘*You need to move this chair.*’ is typically reported as *I/he/she/we/they said that I/we/they needed to move that chair.* Apart from the obvious and logical replacement of personal pronouns, the demonstrative (*this*) is substituted by the more remote form (*that*), and, more importantly, the present form is replaced by the past form, or backshifted. This back-shift is obligatory, except in cases where the described state still holds.

In other words, the reference to the past domain is established by the reporting verb. If the verb in the main clause identifies the central situation as belonging to the past domain, the other verbs in the reported clause are temporarily subordinated to the central situation in such a way that they contain relative tenses (or secondary uses of tenses). In such cases simultaneity of situations in the main and the subordinate clause is expressed by means of the past tense.

The phenomenon of tense backshifting is of central importance for the present study. This term, introduced by Comrie (1985, 1986) refers, as noted above, to the phenomenon of sequence of tenses (the term previously used by Jespersen, 1924; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik, 1985). According to Comrie (1985, 1986), backshifting is a change of the original verb tense in the reported clause, which is

¹ On the other end of the spectrum, the past may also be denoted by means of the present tense (e.g. in newspaper headlines: *Germany opens some shops as Merkel warns of second wave of coronavirus*) or in narrative descriptions (see Grujić & Danilović, 2014), as in *I am sitting there peacefully minding my own business when suddenly he walks in and starts picking a fight.*

caused by the past tense verb in the reporting clause. In such situation, the present tenses are changed to their past tense equivalents, past tenses become past perfect, while the future tenses turn into future-in-the-past. Predominantly in pedagogical grammars and theoretical discussions this tense transformation is seen as obligatory after every reporting verb in the past tense (to name a few: Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Quirk et al., 1985; Vince & Sunderland, 2003), with the exception of statements that hold true at the time of the report (such as universal truths and generally accepted beliefs) and immediately reported utterances, where the likelihood of the original utterance to be still valid is rather high. These exceptions are typically discussed at later stages of foreign/second language learning, since language teachers' primary aim is to help the students acquire the mechanics of reported speech. This may be the reason why tense backshifting in language acquisition studies is still under researched and only partially explored phenomenon. The deficiency observed in related empirical research served as the rationale for the present study, which sought to examine how tense backshifting is translated to Serbian by future teachers/translators of English.

Tense backshifting in reported speech is in itself challenging for EFL students whose native tongue is Serbian: this language follows different syntactic norms pertaining to tense choice when constructing indirect reported speech, so that there is no correspondence between the two languages in this regard. Furthermore, this phenomenon in the English language is a cross section between grammar and pragmatics. The decision whether to backshift or not does not solely depend on the presence of a past tense verb in the reporting clause. It is influenced by other, extralinguistic, factors. These include the lapse of time between the time of utterance and the time of reporting (Bland 2008; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), the validity of the utterance at the time of reporting (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Thewlis, 2007), as well as the reporter's intention and attitude to what is being reported (Declerck & Tanaka, 1996). Studies in second language acquisition have already found that EFL learners tend to perceive pragmatic errors as less important than grammatical (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgodna & Röver, 2001; Schauer, 2006), as opposed to ESL students who showed higher sensitivity to pragmatic issues. As our study does not intend to explore students' pragmatic competence, the sample sentences were chosen in such way to eliminate any possible errors stemming from the wrong perception of pragmatic problems.

As mentioned above, when it comes to tense backshifting which denotes simultaneity in reported speech in student's mother tongue, there are no structural similarities between Serbian and English. In reported speech in Serbian, the tense of the introductory verb in the main clause provides the orientation point for the tense of the content object clause, so that once the orientation has been established as past, simultaneity is expressed by means of the present tense (Gvozdanović, 1996: 66). This means that in reports introduced by the past tense verb in the main clause, the verbs in the reported (or subordinate clause) remain intact. In other words, the present tense in the reported clause is kept regardless of the type of the reporting

verb. The illustration below shows how reporting works with Serbian verbs of speaking (S.: *рећи, говорити, упитати*, examples 1–3), cognition (S.: *знати, мислити, размишљати, бити јасно, сетити се*, examples 4–8), emotion (S.: *увредити, смети*, examples 9 and 10) or perception (S.: *осећати, доћи до свести, чинити се, гледати*, examples 11–14). As can be seen from the illustrations, the present tense is preserved in all the reported verbs (underlined below) denoting state or action simultaneous with the situation in the main clause:

- 1) Рекао сам ко сам и да сам у невољи, и да тражим правду.
- 2) Разум је говорио да се не мијешам у оно што ме се не тиче.
- 3) Упитао сам га коме смета мој живот..
- 4) Знао сам да лежи болестан мјесецима, и да нас можда зове пред смрт.
- 5) То сам чинио са занимањем, могла је мислити да је то због њених ријечи.
- 6) Размишљао сам тако [...] да је чак и добро што су ми послали овог човека.
- 7) Било ми је јасно да Ајни-ефендија зна за све ово.
- 8) Нисам се сетио ни тада ни дуго послије да је људска мисао несигуран талас [...].
- 9) Увриједило ме што се држи као да ме нема.
- 10) Нисам смио да питам ко је убица.
- 11) Осјећао сам да постајем зелен од мржње.
- 12) А онда ми је дошло до свијести да је опасно и ово радосно посматрање.
- 13) Чинило ми се да њена љутина расте.
- 14) Гледао сам како Мула-Јусуф преписује.

(Illustrations excerpted from Selimović, 2009 [1966].)

This is why teachers of English as a foreign language pay special attention to this area of English grammar, envisaging potential L1 transfer from Serbian. This transfer results in omission or low employment of backshifting regardless of the tense of the reporting verb or time lapse (Charkova & Halliday, 2011). However, as this is a predictable stage in language acquisition, respondents whose grammar competence was not stable in this view were eliminated from this study.

Another secondary meaning of the past tense occurs in subordinate clauses of condition (frequently termed type 1, 2, and 3 conditionals in grammar books). As the third conditional is notorious for its syntactic complexity, it is typically taught at

more advanced stages. Hypothetical past time about which it speculates is quite an opaque concept, so that due attention is paid to it in course books and grammar workbooks. Due to the fact that it is not a structure that is easily picked up through mere exposure, it is probably best learned through conscious study and application of rules (Thornbury, 1999). The type 2 conditional, however, is not typically perceived as a difficult concept for students. Despite what some grammar books claim, the tense distribution in type 2 adverbial clauses of condition has proven to be glaringly difficult for Serbian students to acquire. The inherent difficulty of the structure, stemming from syntactic differences in L1 and L2, is further exacerbated by its treatment in ESL/EFL textbooks (for discussion of difficulties EFL students have with conditional clauses see Cowan, 2008). In spite of their obvious semantic and syntactic differences, type 2 and 3 conditionals are often presented and practiced under the same rubric. To be more precise, both type 2 and type 3 conditionals refer to an imagined, or unreal condition (situation) and its imagined outcome. Hypothetical (type 2) conditionals express speculations about the present/future time, and the acquisition problems are caused by the fact that the present situation in the subordinate clause is denoted by means of the past tense (as in: *I wouldn't consider myself a true friend if I didn't tell you.*). In type 3 conditionals, which speculate about the past events, the past time is not denoted by the past tense but by the past perfect. To make the situation even more complicated, Serbian equivalents for type 2 (*Kad bih imao, dao bih mu*) and type 3 conditionals (*Da sam imao, dao bih mu*) contain the identical main clause structure regardless of the time reference, thus turning the identification of the clause of condition into a real challenge for some students.

The third secondary meaning of the past tense in English can be found in subordinate adverbial clauses other than clauses of condition. Namely, in adverbial clauses of manner (or comparison) containing subordinators *as if/as though* the past tense can denote both hypothetical or real situation. The verb tense varies depending on the nature of comparison. If the comparison is factual, the verb tense is used in its primary meaning, i.e. for temporal reference, as in *He looks as if he is getting better* (as illustrated in Quirk, 1985). However, if the comparison is hypothetical, the past tense may be used as an alternative, to indicate the lack of reality, so that there are several alternatives at a language user's disposal, as in *She treats me as if I am/was/were a stranger* (Quirk, 1985: 1110). In spite of this apparent confusion, the meaning of the past tense in subordinate clauses of manner is easily identified if the context is clear. For example, in *He acts as if he knew you* it is not difficult to draw the negative inference – the implied expectation is *He doesn't know you* (Quirk, 1985: 986), in which way the present timeframe of the utterance is easily established. In Serbian, however, the situation is rather straightforward. The corresponding Serbian conjunction *kao da* also introduces both hypothetical and factual comparisons, but this does not affect the verb tense in the subordinate clause: the present tense is used for all comparisons pertaining to situations simultaneous with that in the main clause, so that the utterance *Говори/говорио је као да ме познаје* can be interpreted as either factual (*He does/did know you*) or counterfactual

(*He does/did not know you*), while the verb in the subordinate clause remains unchanged. The same holds for utterances referring to the past, as in *Она се држала као да ме нема*. The past tense verb in the main clause establishes temporal orientation so that the simultaneity of the situation in the subordinate clause is denoted by the present tense verb – *као да ме нема*.

Another secondary use of the past tense is found in subjunctive constructions, where it denotes yet another hypothetical present situation (as in *It's time you were in bed*). Again, the situation in Serbian remains identical to those described above – such present situations are expressed by the present tense, so that the example above can be rendered to Serbian as *Време је да пођеш на спавање*.

METHODOLOGY, PARTICIPANTS AND INSTRUMENTS

In this study, conducted among adult students of English (B2 to C1 level language users, according to CEFR), we examine the influence of English as a foreign language upon Serbian as a native tongue in terms of tense transfer. More precisely, the study is a qualitative exploration of how the subjects interpret and translate the secondary meanings of the English past tense. The term first language or L1 will be applied to the first language acquired by the student from a chronological perspective. For our respondents, L1 is invariably Serbian, which is at the same time their dominant language. The term second language or L2 will be used for the language acquired subsequently, regardless of the acquisition context or proficiency level. For all the respondents whose answers were analyzed in this study, L2 is English. The respondents with different first and second language distribution ($n = 1$) were eliminated from the study.

The participants who took part in this study were first-year university students majoring English. There were 49 female and 15 male subjects ($n = 64$). Their first-language background was identical – all of them were L1 Serbian speakers. The length of foreign language learning varied from twelve to eight years, while their proficiency level was assessed as B2. None of the participants had studied English abroad or spent more than a month in an English-speaking country.

Our respondents studied English grammar formally and intensively during their first academic year. The aim of grammar instruction they received was not only to improve their general competence but also to raise metalinguistic awareness of English structures. Due to their acquisition level, in their grammar classes tense backshifting was taught as an obligatory transformation of the reported verbs. The students who were identified not to have fully mastered the mechanics of tense backshifting in reporting were eliminated from this study, as will be explained below. This elimination was a necessary step, because mistranslations in the work of such learners are to be attributed to the lack of proficiency.

Broadly speaking, the present research used three instruments: the initial diagnostic test ($n = 64$), the translation test (as the main instrument, $n = 64 - 40 = 24$) and the interview ($n = 24$). The initial test contained 30 multiple choice questions covering the whole spectrum of target grammatical structures. The results of the diagnostic grammar test were subsequently used to determine which participants to eliminate when analyzing the answers to the main instrument. Namely, we assumed that every participant whose score on the diagnostic test was below 90% (27 correct answers) had not fully mastered the tested areas, and that his/her answers to the main research instrument should not be taken into consideration, as the errors can be attributed to sources other than L2 transfer. This initial step resulted in the elimination of 40 participants, as only 24 students meet the strict criterion to be included in the study.

The main data collection instrument was developed by the researcher, who was at the same time the respondents' Translation and English grammar teacher. It included fifty examples from the English texts covered in translation classes. These invariably contained tense backshifting either in reported structures or in adverbial clauses of manner (after subordinators *as if/as though*), adverbial clause of condition, as well as with subjunctive. Our primary interest was to explore how the students would resolve the structures in reported clauses, type 2 conditionals, *as if/as though* clauses and subjunctive. More precisely, the past tenses in the selected clauses were used in the secondary meanings discussed above – they did not denote a past state or activity in any of the examples. Consequently, their primary translation equivalent should be the Serbian present tense. Furthermore, the use of the present tense in such contexts is an obligatory translation shift when translating to Serbian, of which fact the students were systematically reminded in their translation classes.

The examples of backshift past and counterfactual present were excerpted from a collection of short stories used for translation practice. The selection involved eliminating items with more demanding vocabulary as to avoid lexicon/grammar interference. The instrument was divided into several sections, corresponding to the secondary meanings of the past tense the items contained. The first subset of examples pertains to backshift past in reported structures where the past tense verbs denote: a) states simultaneous with the main clause situation (as in: *I asked the waiter if there was any (salmon); I was glad when I heard you were English; The waiter assured me that they had some asparagus that were so large, so splendid, so tender, that it was a marvel; He knew he was a winner now; Here was news for us, for Mr Kelada, with all his loquacity had never told anyone what his business was) and b) ongoing action simultaneous with the central situation (e.g. *I received from her another letter saying that she was passing through Paris; The waiter asked her if she would like something else while the salmon was being cooked; I couldn't understand what he was talking about; I could see he was watching to make sure his whispering wasn't disturbing the thing that lay there).* The second section dealt with the past tense used to express counterfactual present*

in clauses of condition (e.g. *If she found anything unusual when she entered the house, she would become frantic with terror; Every family has a member who it would gladly forget if the neighbours permitted*), while the third contained examples of adverbial subordinate clauses with *as if/though* (e.g. *Her face was so white that she looked as if she were about to faint; I felt as though I had no right to be in the room, so I went out and shut the door behind me.*). The last section was dedicated to the so-called ‘present subjunctive’ (e.g. *‘I wish you had ordinary clothes on,’ he said, somewhat irritably; He wished he was just twenty years older.*).

The participants were asked to read the excerpts carefully and translate them into Serbian. After their translations had been corrected, selected students whose work contained errors were instructed to explain their erroneous choice of Serbian tense, which presents the third instrument used in this study.

RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND THEIR DISCUSSION

As explained above, the students whose English grammar was assessed as unstable were eliminated from the study. The elimination was based on the very strict criterion of 90% accuracy on the diagnostic test, which reduced the number of respondents substantially – to 24. The errors in their work were identified (but not corrected) and students were asked to explain what motivated their choice of tense in Serbian. Although all the respondents were able to immediately identify the error and offer a correction, some of them could not recall the thought process that led to such choice of L1 tense. Those who could provide a relevant answer opted for one of the following: i) I intended to preserve the meaning of the original utterance; ii) This sounded natural/right/did not seem wrong.

The latter explanation is the central issue of the present study: Why did the erroneous tense choice sound natural or acceptable in students’ L1? Before we answer this question, let us look at some mistranslations the students offered (shown in Table 1).

Table 1. Illustration of mistranslations resulting from reverse transfer

Sample English sentences	Sample mistranslations to Serbian
Backshifting in reported speech	
The waiter assured me that they <u>had</u> some asparagus that <u>were</u> so large, so splendid, so tender, that it <u>was</u> a marvel.	Конобар ми је рекао да <u>су имали</u> шпаргле које <u>су биле</u> тако крупне, лепе и меке да <u>је</u> то <u>било</u> невероватно.
It never occurred to him that he <u>was</u> not wanted.	Није му падало на памет да <u>је био</u> непожељан. Никада му није пало на памет да <u>није био</u> пожељан.
The waiter asked her if she would like something else while the salmon <u>was being cooked</u> .	Конобар ју је упитао да ли би желела нешто друго док <u>се</u> лосос <u>спремао</u> .
I was aware that dinner at my house <u>was regarded</u> as something special.	Био сам свестан да се вечера у мојој кући <u>сматрала</u> специјалном/ <u>била сматрана</u> за нешто посебно.
I could see he <u>was watching</u> to make sure his whispering <u>wasn't disturbing</u> the thing that lay there.	Могоа сам да приметим да <u>је пазио/да је гледао</u> да се побрине да његово шапутање <u>није узнемиравало</u> ствар која је лежала ту.
She knew I <u>was watching</u> her, so she glanced at me cautiously.	Знала је да <u>сам је гледао</u> .
Type 2 conditionals	
Maybe if she <u>went</u> about her business and <u>acted</u> as though she hadn't been listening, then later she might find none of it had ever happened.	Да <u>је наставила с послом/је гледала своја посла</u> и понашала <u>се</u> као да није слушала [...].
I wouldn't consider myself a true friend if I didn't tell you.	Не бих себе сматрао правим пријатељем да ти <u>нисам рекао/да сам ти прећутао</u> .
Subordinate clause with <i>as if/though</i>	
He was lying there very still and tense as though he <u>was holding on</u> to himself hard because of sharp pain.	[...] као да <u>је трпео</u> јаке болове/ <u>је имао</u> оштре болове.
She walked holding her glass out in front of her with both hands as though it <u>were</u> an offering.	[...] као да <u>је била понуда/као да је приносила</u> жртву.
I felt as though I <u>had</u> no right to be in the room	Чинило ми се да <u>нисам имао</u> право да будем у тој соби.

As can be seen, the signals for reported speech in the main clauses comprised the verbs students are well familiar with (such as *assure*, *occur*, *ask*, *could see*, *know*). Yet, the sample mistranslations indicate that the respondents, who must have correctly interpreted the reported situation as simultaneous with that in the main clause, used the Serbian past tense to refer to it. The past tense of the Serbian verb

имати (*су имали*) suggests anteriority of the reported situation. For that reason, the sentence: *Конобар ми је рекао да су имали шпаргле које су биле тако крупне, лепе и меке да је то било невероватно* implies that the waiter informed the customer the restaurant had no asparagus, which carries the meaning opposite to that the source sentence conveys.

The situation with type 2 conditionals is similar: Serbian past tense in conditional clauses refers to an imagined past situation resulting as a consequence of the past event that did not actually take place. Consequently, Serbian L1 speakers use the potential mood rather than the past tense to discuss unreal present/future situations. The sentence *I wouldn't consider myself a true friend if I didn't tell you* implies *I am telling you this because I consider myself your true friend*. The mistranslated Serbian target sentence *He бих себе сматрао правим пријатељем да ти нисам рекао/да сам ти прећутао* implies *I told you this because I consider/considered myself your true friend*.

When it comes to Serbian subordinate adverbial clauses corresponding to English clauses of manner with *as if/though*, Serbian users invariably opt for the present tense to denote simultaneity with the situation in the main clause, regardless of the nature of the comparison that is being made. Consequently, the comparison in *He was lying there very still and tense as though he was holding on to himself hard because of sharp pains* equivalent to Serbian *као да мрну* rather than *као да је мрнео*, as the past orientation point has already been established in the main clause.

It is interesting to note that the corpus contained no errors pertaining to unreal present after ‘*I wish*’ (as in ‘*I wish you had ordinary clothes on, he said, somewhat irritably; He wished he was just twenty years older*). It is our assumption that the learners have been sufficiently sensitized to English subjunctive structures and that they find them so unusual that they cannot perceive any similarities with their Serbian translation correspondents.

Crosslinguistic interference may be triggered by a student’s ignorance of a form, structure or rule in one of the languages they otherwise know. In such cases, the students resort to their knowledge of another language, which is a common communicative strategy. However, crosslinguistic interference can be used as a learning strategy as well (e.g. Ellis, 1994: 314). In other words, learners use the knowledge of one language to hypothesize about the form, structure, function, meaning, rules or patterns of another. This may result in a hybrid structure that combines elements belonging to two different languages. Crosslinguistic influence happens not only from L1 to L2, but also from L2 to L1, and can be observed even in language behavior of L2 users who have neither lost nor forgotten their L1 (Jarvis, 2003). In other words, crosslinguistic influence is ‘not simply a matter of falling back on one language when a person lacks pertinent knowledge of another language’ (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 10). Furthermore, the higher the proficiency level of a user, the more likely reverse L2 to L1 transfer becomes (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 10).

The main issue in students' answers is that they violate the grammaticality constraints that are adhered to by native speakers of Serbian. So, let us examine why this should be so? Why should a competent L1 speaker in his/her translation task produce a non-grammatical sentence in his/her native tongue? There is scientific evidence that syntactic transfer works not just in the direction from L1 to L2, but also from L2 to L1 (for details on methodology and findings see Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 93–109). More precisely, learning a second/foreign language can result in a person's becoming quite tolerant of ungrammatical constructions in their native tongue. Moreover, linguistic constraints of L2 can influence learner's intuitions about how well formed or how appropriate a structure is in their native tongue (see Jarvis, 2003; Su, 2001). This implies that crosslinguistic transfer can affect language learners' judgements in both L1 and L2. Despite previous denial of syntactic transfer, newer research has confirmed 'at least some crosslinguistic influence effects in most of the areas of syntax that have been analyzed in data elicited from bilinguals, multilinguals, and language learners, and in many areas CLI effects have been found to be quite robust' (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 102). These center around language users' opting for certain syntactic structures rather than others. To conclude, there is ample evidence that syntactic transfer can occur either in language production or reception, and that it can occur in both the forward and the reverse direction.

Transferability of a structure is constrained by the relationship between the source and the recipient language. The degree of congruence between the two languages, also termed language distance or crosslinguistic similarity, will vary depending on the language pair. However, the measure of objective similarity between the two linguistic systems is not sufficient when discussing crosslinguistic influence. It must be complemented by subjective similarity, as transfer typically occurs in those areas of language use where the L2 user perceives the source and the recipient language as very similar (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 176), regardless of their objective congruence. The learner's perception of similarity or difference between languages, although subjective and frequently incorrect, may actually override the objective measure (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 178). The learners in our study wrongly assumed that there were similarities between the two languages regarding the tense distribution in reported speech, conditional and comparison clauses, areas where English and Serbian are objectively different.

Other researchers have already observed that their EFL participants whose mother tongue is Bosnian or Bulgarian tend to apply the sequence of tenses rule even where it is inapplicable or unnecessary in English (Charkova & Halliday, 2011). As backshifting is not a reported speech feature in either of the two languages, they concluded that such overuse could be the result of the special attention it receives in their English classes. The results of the present study indicate that the reverse L2 to L1 tense transfer can occur in the same grammar area and cause unexpected solutions in students' translation work. That L2 should become so dominant as to cause reverse transfer in students' L1 can be attributed to the influence of the EFL environment, students' higher L2 exposure and their

accelerated progress in terms of L2 proficiency. Consequently, the findings of the present study provide support for those of the previous research where reverse transfer was observed in more advanced stages of language acquisition. Yet, it remains to be seen whether and when this misconception about their mother tongue will correct itself. Prolonged treatment and intense focused instruction may prove effective in eradicating the phenomenon observed in this study. Its importance goes beyond the scope of language acquisition studies, as at least some of our respondents are rightfully expected to become translators.

CONCLUSION

Although the basic meaning of the past tense is to locate an event (or state) in the past, in its secondary meanings (backshift past in reported clauses, type 2 adverbial clauses of condition, *as if/though* clauses of manner and in the subjunctive mood when expressing wishes and regrets pertaining to a present situation) the past tense is used to denote a present state or event. The error analysis of students' English to Serbian translations provides evidence of L2 influence: erroneously assuming similarities between the two languages, our learners occasionally used the Serbian past rather than the present tense in their translations to express simultaneity. This reverse transfer would have remained completely unnoticed had other instruments been applied, as our participants performed excellently on multiple choice grammar tests and cloze tests. The claim that there is L2 influence on L1 tense choice is additionally, though anecdotally, corroborated by similar mistranslations evident in modern day Serbian renditions of English films and novels.

In terms of pedagogical implications of the present research, it is evident that secondary meanings of the tenses should be grouped and taught in an exhaustive and systematic manner at later acquisition stages. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that the treatment of secondary meanings of the past tense at advanced stages of EFL learning should encompass considerations of the learners' L2 influence. The two languages in the mind of a semi-bilingual or bilingual user interact in ways which have not yet been fully accounted for. Although the treatment of secondary meanings of the past tense in grammar books, course books and practice books is quite comprehensive, which ultimately results in learners being well trained to produce grammatically correct English utterances, there is still room for instruction refinement. These fine-tuning steps should not neglect the crosslinguistic influence of the foreign language on mother tongue, especially when they are aimed at future teachers and translators. Continuous prolonged input and suitable corrective feedback, together with comprehensive explicit explanations regarding the L1 syntax, should prove effective in EFL environments where teachers and students share the common first language.

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НАСТАВА ЈЕЗИКА И ТРАНСФЕР ГЛАГОЛСКОГ ВРЕМЕНА ИЗ СТРАНОГ ЈЕЗИКА

Резиме

У усвајању језика трансфер се претежно посматра и истражује као манифестација утицаја првог (или матерњег) језика ученика на њихову језичку продукцију у другом (или страном) језику. Проучавања трансфера омогућавају подробније и темељније описивање ученичког међујезика, на основу кога се даље врше прилагођавања и побољшања наставних програма, материјала, али и дефинисање циљева и исхода наставе. Овакав правац истраживања трансфера, или међујезичког утицаја, нужно занемарује утицај другог (односно страног) језика на матерњи, при чему се сматра да се општа компетенција у матерњем језику не може знатно мењати. Но, новија истраживања указују на то да је интеракција између два језика у уму говорника двосмерна, односно да трансфер може деловати у оба правца – и из матерњег и из страног језика.

Стога смо у овој студији, преиспитујући уврежено уверење да је језичка компетенција у Ј1 непромењива, код одраслих ученика на вишим нивоима учења (ниво Б2 према ЦЕФР-у) испитали утицај енглеског као страног на српски у домену употребе глаголских времена. Истраживање је посматрало исказивање истовремености у неуправном говору, погодбеним и поредбеним реченицама, јер се у овим структурама у енглеском језику прошло глаголско време користи у секундарном значењу коме одговара српски презент.

Анализа грешака које су уочене у преводима испитаника указује на то да утицај другог језика постоји, односно да ученици повремено користе српско прошло време уместо презента, погрешно претпостављајући да у овом погледу постоји сличност између два посматрана језика.

Стога сматрамо да је на вишим нивоима учења језика потребно третирати ова секундарна значења на обједињен и систематичан начин. То подразумева развијање одговарајућих наставних материјала, као и пружање адекватне експлицитне повратне информације.

Кључне речи: *трансфер из енглеског (страног) у српски (матерњи) језик, настава језика, превођење, семантика глаголских времена.*