Askarova, Sh. (2026). Thematic Conditioning of Lexical Interference: Anglicisms in the German Written Production of Uzbek-Speaking Students. *The Delhi University Magazine. Series: The Humanities and the Social Sciences 5*: 147-159.

Thematic Conditioning of Lexical Interference: Anglicisms in the German Written Production of Uzbek-Speaking Students

SHAKHNOZA ASKAROVA[1]

Fergana State University

ABSTRACT

Research on third language acquisition has widely established that the source of lexical transfer is more often a previously acquired foreign language than the native one. Considerably less is known about how such transfer is distributed across the thematic domains of the lexicon. The present article tests the assumption that lexical interference is thematically conditioned, that is, concentrated in those conceptual domains that the speaker acquired through English. The data consist of written assignments in German produced by Uzbek-speaking students for whom English is the language of their degree programme and German is a second foreign language.

Keywords: lexical interference; cross-linguistic influence; third language; L2 status factor; code-switching; semantic specificity; anglicisms; Uzbek; German as a second foreign language; trilingualism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Instructed trilingualism is today not an exception in Uzbekistan but the standard educational trajectory: Uzbek as the native language, English as the first foreign language and German as the second. This configuration is of interest because typological distance within it is distributed unevenly: English and German are genetically related, whereas Uzbek is remote from both typologically and genetically. For this reason such a triad provides a convenient testing ground for competing models of cross-linguistic influence.

[1] PhD in Philology, Associate Professor, Fergana State University, Fergana, Uzbekistan.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1457-0043

In classical contact linguistics, interference is defined as a deviation from the norms of one language in the speech of a bilingual under the influence of another (Weinreich, 1953), and borrowing as a staged process of adaptation of a foreign unit within the recipient system (Haugen, 1950). In current research on language acquisition, the broader and more neutral notion is transfer, which covers both facilitative and non-facilitative effects (Odlin, 1989), together with the term cross-linguistic influence, which emphasises the multidirectionality of such effects (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

The present study adopts the following relationship between these notions: transfer is the superordinate category and interference its particular case, namely the one that results in a deviation from the norm of the target language. The underlying mechanism is identical in both cases — the use of already established representations in building new ones — and only the outcome differs. This distinction is not a terminological formality: it allows one and the same phenomenon to be described in two ways. In our data the form *Musik* in a German text is acquired more rapidly owing to its similarity with English *music* (facilitative transfer), yet the same proximity gives rise to the spelling *Music* with English orthography (interference). Without this distinction the two outcomes would have to be treated as separate processes, whereas both rest on one and the same reliance on perceived similarity.

Our data offer a rarely attainable degree of clarity on this point: among 107 English-language insertions, not a single insertion from the native language was recorded. Uzbek manifests itself differently, namely in calques of the type *Jede Jahreszeit hat ihre eigene Natur* (cf. Uzbek *o‘z tabiati*), where what is borrowed is not material but a pattern of combination. This observation justifies the need to distinguish two roles — that of the language supplying material and that of the language providing structure — which remain indistinguishable in a binary native–target description.

A competing account assigns the decisive role not to the order of acquisition but to typological proximity: the source of transfer is the system structurally closest to the one being acquired (Rothman, 2015), and the influence operates selectively, property by property (Westergaard et al., 2017). It is essential, however, that the choice of source is

governed not by objective proximity but by the similarity perceived by the speaker (Kellerman, 1983; Ringbom, 2007).

In our triad both factors operate in the same direction and therefore cannot be disentangled on lexical evidence: English is simultaneously the first foreign language and the one closest to German. We acknowledge this limitation openly and make no claim to resolve the dispute between the models. The data do, however, allow a different question to be posed, one that neither model answers: how transfer is distributed within the lexicon.

The distinction between matrix and embedded languages (Myers-Scotton, 1993) and the typology of code-mixing — insertion, alternation and congruent lexicalisation (Muysken, 2000) — are required here for a purely operational reason: without them, superficially homogeneous "English intrusions" are conflated into a single group. Consider three examples from the corpus. In arbeite als English Lehrerin the English stem is subordinated to the German compounding pattern and retains German grammatical marking; this is hybridisation with the matrix language still in control. In Mein Bruder heißt Mustafo und ist 23 years old an entire English-language block is reproduced with its internal constituent order preserved; this is insertion. In Meine Mutter is Lehrerin and mein Vater ist auch Lehrer the switch affects the copula and the conjunction, that is, elements that are almost identical graphically (is — ist, and — und); this is congruent lexicalisation. The differing nature of these three cases proves decisive for our question: thematic conditioning is conceivable for content words and meaningless for a copula.

The theoretical position central to the present study is formulated in the semantic specificity hypothesis: the units inserted are predominantly those that carry specific, hardly replaceable meaning and are tied to a particular cultural or conceptual domain (Backus, 2001). This is consistent with the distinction between cultural and core borrowings: the former fill a lexical gap and are therefore expected, whereas the latter duplicate an available unit and call for separate explanation (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Applied to our data, the hypothesis holds where a unit is genuinely specific. The form *resin-Art* denotes a craft technique that the student learned about from English-language sources; she does not know a German equivalent and could not know one, since vocabulary of this kind does not occur in an A1 syllabus. The same hypothesis, however,

does not account for the forms *Mother* and *Father*: German *Mutter* and *Vater* belong to the first words of any course and occur in the very same assignments. It is precisely this gap between prediction and observation that constitutes the research problem of the article.

An alternative account is offered by psycholinguistics. Lexical access in multilingual speakers is non-selective: candidates from several languages are activated, and selection is secured by mechanisms of control and inhibition (Dijkstra & van Heuven, 2002; Green, 1998). The degree of activation of the languages varies with the mode of communication (Grosjean, 2001), while the gap between knowing a rule and applying it is explained by the distinction between declarative and procedural memory (Ullman, 2001).

This approach predicts an entirely different distribution of insertions: not across thematic domains but according to frequency and speed of access. The more frequently a word is used, the earlier it is retrieved from memory, and the more likely it is to precede the German equivalent irrespective of topic. A special case is formed by non-intentional switches on function words, which have been described as a distinct type of phenomenon unrelated to lexical deficit (Poulisse & Bongaerts, 1994). The specificity hypothesis and the access models thus yield divergent predictions, and the two can be separated empirically.

In analysing data of this kind one cannot disregard the fact that present-day German itself contains an extensive layer of anglicisms integrated into the norm and into the word-formation system (Onysko, 2007). This is not a theoretical caveat but a genuine procedural problem: the forms Hobby, Shopping and Fitnessstudio in student assignments are outwardly indistinguishable from interference, yet they are normative German words. If they are not excluded, the share of “English influence” will be systematically overestimated in precisely those domains (leisure, sport, digital environment) in which the thematic conditioning hypothesis is tested, and the hypothesis will receive artefactual confirmation.

II. METHODS

The data consist of written progress tests produced by third-year students of philology for whom English is the language of their degree programme and German is studied as a second foreign language. The language profile of the informants is as follows: L1 Uzbek, L2 English, L3 German (at a level corresponding to A1–A2).

Parameter	**Value**
Main subcorpus	69 assignments containing compositions (approx. 100 texts)
Additional subcorpus	14 assignments on the topic “Vorstellung”
Topics	Meine Familie, Zu Hause, Die Jahreszeiten, Meine Freizeit, Mein Hobby, Mein Lieblingstier, Über mich and others
Conditions	classroom setting, without dictionaries
Total number of deviations	602
Of these, English-language insertions	107 (17.8%) in 33 assignments

Table 1. Composition of the corpus

Only written production is analysed. This choice is motivated rather than imposed: written texts preserve traces of self-repair — crossed-out and replaced fragments — which in spoken production are accessible only through dedicated recording and annotation. For testing the third hypothesis this feature is decisive.

The unit of analysis was the English-language insertion, that is, a word form or phrase of English origin used in a German text in place of the normative German unit. Each insertion received two independent tags: a structural type and a thematic group.

Code	**Structural type**	**Criterion**
T1	Single-word insertion	an English content word without morphological adaptation

Code	Structural type	Criterion
T2	Function word	copula, conjunction, numeral, connective adverb
T3	Hybrid	English stem with German morphology or with a German compound constituent
T4	Phrase or sentence	two or more words with English constituent order preserved

Table 2. Coding scheme for structural types

Thematic groups were established inductively rather than a priori, on the basis of the referential domain of the units attested: kinship and home; evaluative and descriptive adjectives; leisure and the digital environment; study and the degree programme; and function words as a group without referential anchoring.

Three classes of phenomena were excluded from the count. First, units that have entered the norm of German (Hobby, Shopping, Fitnessstudio, Computer): their use does not constitute a deviation, and including them would systematically inflate the share of the "English" domains (Onysko, 2007). Second, purely orthographic errors without cross-linguistic motivation (Muter, imer). Third, intralingual overgeneralisations of the type mein Hause (a reanalysis of the fixed expression zu Hause), which are unrelated to either background language.

Traces of self-repair were recorded separately: for each insertion it was noted whether the writer had crossed it out or replaced it. Coding was carried out by a single researcher, and no inter-coder agreement coefficient was therefore calculated; this limitation is taken into account in the interpretation. Tokens were counted exhaustively, whereas the thematic distribution (Table 4) reports distinct units (types): given the modest size of the corpus, token frequencies within individual groups are strongly skewed by single assignments in which one unit recurs many times.

III. RESULTS

English-language insertions amounted to 107 instances (17.8% of all deviations) and occurred in 33 of the 69 assignments, that is, in almost half of the informants. Not a single insertion from Uzbek was recorded.

Type	Examples	Characteristics
Single-word insertion	beautiful, cozy, happy, fresh, important, parents, Mother, Father, lunch	the German frame is preserved
Function word	is (for ist), and, two	systematic in four assignments
Hybrid	learnen, Bedzimmer, Hauswife, Bloomen, English Lehrerin	English stem with German marking
Phrase or sentence	There are meine bedroom, washroom, hall; We live in a flat; und ist 23 years old	alternation of languages within a text

Table 3. Structural types of English-language insertions

A separate group is formed by the spacing of German compounds on the English pattern of multi-word naming units: *computer spiele, lieblings jahreszeit, Familie tradition, sommer zeit*. This is not a lexical substitution but the transfer of a word-formation pattern, which shows that the German compound is construed by the writer as a phrase.

The distribution obtained is not the one predicted by the semantic specificity hypothesis. Specific units such as *resin-Art* do occur in the corpus, but they are isolated. The bulk of the material falls into two groups for which a lexical gap is ruled out.

Group	Attested units	German equivalent in the A1 syllabus
Kinship and home	Mother, Father, parents, Family, Fatter, Hauswife, Bedzimmer, lunch	yes, all of them
Evaluative adjectives	beautiful, comfortable, cozy, happy, fresh, hot, important	yes, most of them
Leisure and digital environment	shopping, YouTube, resin-Art, Music, Nature	partly
Study and degree programme	English, Literature, University, learnen	yes
Function words	is, and, two, also	yes

Table 4. Thematic groups and the availability of a German equivalent

The final column of Table 4 is essential for the interpretation: the forms *Mutter*, *Vater*, *Eltern*, *schön* and *wichtig* belong to the active vocabulary of the first semester and occur in the very assignments in which their English counterparts are attested. One and the same assignment contains both *Meine Mutter ist Lehrerin* and *koche zusammen meiner Mother das Mittagessen*. What is at issue, therefore, is not ignorance of the equivalent but competition between two simultaneously available units.

Content words are in a number of assignments crossed out and replaced by German ones (informants 1 and 3). Function words present the opposite picture: of the eight instances of *is* for *ist* and the three instances of *and* for *und*, not one was corrected. The difference cannot be attributed to the salience of the error: *is* and *ist* differ by a single letter, and it is precisely this proximity that renders the switch imperceptible to the writer.

In the dictations, ten instances were recorded in which a German acoustic sequence was recognised through the English lexicon: *vor dem → for them, auf → of* (*Hause of gaben*), and the heading *Diktat of*. This result matters because it demonstrates

that competition between lexicons operates not only in production but also in perception, where no communicative need for substitution arises at all.

IV. DISCUSSION

The bulk of the insertions falls on vocabulary for which the German equivalent is demonstrably known. The argument here is a stringent one: one and the same assignment contains *Meine Mutter ist Lehrerin* alongside *meiner Mother*. A lexical gap is ruled out, and semantic specificity explains nothing: *Mother* possesses neither cultural specificity nor any conceptual advantage over *Mutter*.

An explanation is offered by models of lexical access. Under non-selective access, candidates from two lexicons compete and the more highly activated one prevails (Dijkstra & van Heuven, 2002; Green, 1998). For students of philology, English is the language of the degree programme and involves an incomparably greater amount of practice, so that its units are retrieved more rapidly even where the German equivalent has been acquired. It is telling that the words replaced are precisely the high-frequency ones — kinship terms and evaluative adjectives — that is, the most highly automatised layer of the lexicon in any language.

This result runs counter to the prediction that core borrowings are less frequent than cultural ones (Myers-Scotton, 1993). The contradiction is, however, only apparent: that prediction was formulated for stable community bilingualism, whereas what is described here is an interlanguage at an early stage of acquisition (Selinker, 1972), in which a stable imbalance in activation carries different weight. It is therefore advisable to distinguish two mechanisms: thematically conditioned interference, in which the insertion compensates for knowledge the speaker lacks, and frequency-conditioned interference, in which the insertion outstrips knowledge the speaker already possesses.

The distribution of self-repairs supports the third hypothesis. A content-word insertion at least occasionally enters the writer’s attentional focus, whereas a switch on the copula or the conjunction never does. This is consistent with accounts of non-intentional switching on function elements (Poulisse & Bongaerts, 1994) and with the

treatment of congruent lexicalisation (Muysken, 2000): the boundary between codes is permeable precisely where the forms almost coincide.

Here the typological proximity of English and German emerges as a complicating rather than a facilitating factor, a finding that refines the general claim concerning the role of perceived similarity (Kellerman, 1983; Ringbom, 2007). Similarity accelerates access to content words, yet the same similarity conceals from the speaker the fact that a code boundary has been crossed on function words.

The complete absence of insertions from the native language alongside 107 English-language ones is consistent with the L2 status factor (De Angelis, 2007; Hammarberg, 2001; Williams & Hammarberg, 1998). The present data do not, however, permit this factor to be disentangled from typological proximity (Rothman, 2015; Westergaard et al., 2017): in this triad English is at once the first foreign language and the one closest to German. Separating the two factors would require a control group with a different first foreign language, such as French or Russian.

It is also worth noting that Uzbek is not absent from the data but manifests itself differently, namely in semantic calques. From this follows a general conclusion concerning the division of donor roles: English supplies the material, while Uzbek supplies the pattern according to which units are combined. In a binary native–target design this division is in principle unobservable.

The results should be regarded as a tendency rather than an established regularity. The principal limitations are as follows: a single genre and a single point in time; the absence of an independent measure of proficiency in either foreign language; coding by a single researcher; and considerable variation between assignments, as a result of which mean values conceal individual differences.

V. CONCLUSION

Lexical interference in the German written production of Uzbek-speaking trilinguals is only partly thematically conditioned. The analysis carried out permits four conclusions.

First, the role of lexical donor in the triad under study is performed exclusively by English; the native language participates in production in a different way, namely through semantic calques, supplying not material but a pattern for combining it.

Second, two mechanisms should be distinguished within the body of English-language insertions. Thematically conditioned interference arises where the concept was acquired through English and the speaker has no German equivalent at his or her disposal. Frequency-conditioned interference arises where the equivalent is known but loses the competition to a more highly activated candidate.

Third, switching on function words fits neither of these types and constitutes a class of its own, diagnosable by the absence of self-repairs.

Fourth, in analysing English-language insertions in German specifically, units that have entered the norm of German must be excluded. Without this procedure the thematic conditioning hypothesis receives artefactual confirmation.

The pedagogical implication is that the two mechanisms call for different solutions. Thematically conditioned insertions are eliminated by expanding vocabulary in the relevant domains, whereas frequency-conditioned ones call for tasks that separate competing units and for self-checking of the finished text: the student knows the required word but fails to retrieve it in time.

Further research may proceed in three directions: expanding the corpus to include spoken production; introducing a control group with a different first foreign language, which would allow the L2 status factor to be disentangled from typological proximity; and testing the access-speed hypothesis by experimental means, namely through naming tasks with reaction-time measurement.

REFERENCES

Backus, A. (2001). The role of semantic specificity in insertional codeswitching: Evidence from Dutch–Turkish. In R. Jacobson (Ed.), *Codeswitching worldwide II* (pp. 125–154). Mouton de Gruyter.

Cenoz, J. (2001). The effect of linguistic distance, L2 status and age on cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition. In J. Cenoz, B. Hufeisen, & U. Jessner (Eds.), *Cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition* (pp. 8–20). Multilingual Matters.

De Angelis, G. (2007). *Third or additional language acquisition*. Multilingual Matters.

Dijkstra, T., & van Heuven, W. J. B. (2002). The architecture of the bilingual word recognition system: From identification to decision. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 5*(3), 175–197.

Færch, C., & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1983). *Strategies in interlanguage communication*. Longman.

Green, D. W. (1998). Mental control of the bilingual lexico-semantic system. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 1*(2), 67–81.

Grosjean, F. (2001). The bilingual's language modes. In J. Nicol (Ed.), *One mind, two languages: Bilingual language processing* (pp. 1–22). Blackwell.

Hammarberg, B. (2001). Roles of L1 and L2 in L3 production and acquisition. In J. Cenoz, B. Hufeisen, & U. Jessner (Eds.), *Cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition* (pp. 21–41). Multilingual Matters.

Haugen, E. (1950). The analysis of linguistic borrowing. *Language, 26*(2), 210–231.

Jarvis, S., & Pavlenko, A. (2008). *Crosslinguistic influence in language and cognition*. Routledge.

Kellerman, E. (1983). Now you see it, now you don't. In S. Gass & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Language transfer in language learning* (pp. 112–134). Newbury House.

Muysken, P. (2000). *Bilingual speech: A typology of code-mixing*. Cambridge University Press.

Myers-Scotton, C. (1993). *Duelling languages: Grammatical structure in codeswitching*. Clarendon Press.

Odlin, T. (1989). *Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning*. Cambridge University Press.

Onysko, A. (2007). *Anglicisms in German: Borrowing, lexical productivity, and written codeswitching*. Walter de Gruyter.

Poulisse, N., & Bongaerts, T. (1994). First language use in second language production. *Applied Linguistics, 15*(1), 36–57.

Ringbom, H. (2007). *Cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning*. Multilingual Matters.

Rothman, J. (2015). Linguistic and cognitive motivations for the Typological Primacy Model (TPM) of third language (L3) transfer. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 19*(2), 179–190.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 10*(3), 209–231.

Ullman, M. T. (2001). The neural basis of lexicon and grammar in first and second language: The declarative/procedural model. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 4*(2), 105–122.

Weinreich, U. (1953). *Languages in contact: Findings and problems*. Linguistic Circle of New York.

Westergaard, M., Mitrofanova, N., Mykhaylyk, R., & Rodina, Y. (2017). Crosslinguistic influence in the acquisition of a third language: The Linguistic Proximity Model. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 21*(6), 666–682.

Williams, S., & Hammarberg, B. (1998). Language switches in L3 production: Implications for a polyglot speaking model. *Applied Linguistics, 19*(3), 295–333.

Zokirov, M. T. (2007). *Lingvistik interferensiya va uning o‘zbek-tojik bilingvizmida namoyon bo‘lishi* [Candidate of Sciences dissertation abstract, in Uzbek].