

## **HOMO SAPIENS. HOMO LOQUENS. HOMO ERRANS: (ON ONE WAY OF ERROR PREVENTION IN LANGUAGE USE)**

In the process of learning a foreign language the student is likely to make various mistakes and errors: articulatory (e.g. lengthening of short vowels and, vice versa, shortening of long vowels, violation of intonation patterns, etc.), lexical (known also as «false friends»), semantic (using an inappropriate word from a set of near-synonyms, or superonym instead of hyponym, and vice versa, etc.), grammar (agreement errors, word order violation, phrase structure errors, etc.), i.e. practically at all levels of language.

All possible violations of language norms are usually classified into a) slips, b) mistakes, and c) errors (see, e.g.: [9, 83-84]). Slips, or lapses, can be easily detected and corrected by their author. Among slips they usually distinguish slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, and even of fingers on a keyboard (ibid.), as well as slips of the ear, slips of the eye, and slips of the hand (in sign language) (see: [3, 152]). Mistakes occur when the student is not in a state of ignorance about the definite rule of the target language, but fails to correct his deviance unaided. Errors cannot be self-corrected, as they require further relevant learning to take place before they can be corrected by the student himself (see: [9, ibid]).

There exist dictionaries of errors, with entries organized alphabetically and containing both lexical and grammatical information. Take, for example, [16] – a practical guide to common errors and their correction. Other single-language dictionaries, such as CIDE, contain lists of false friends, fundamentals of gram-

mathematical information, information about word combinatory (complementation) patterns, etc., thus aiming at warning the learners against possible errors.

One of the main causes for the errors, which most if not all students make at various stages of language learning is the first language interference. As J. Harmer puts it, «students who learn English as a second language already have a deep knowledge of at least one other language, and where the first language and English come into contact with each other there are often confusions, which provoke errors in a learner's use of English» [5, 99]. This manifests itself mostly at the lexical and syntactic levels of language. Lexical and grammatical errors, as researchers state, are considered grave ones and sometimes may affect the communication between the speaker and the listener. Cf.: «Even though they do not constitute the only evidence, errors are the data that will most often create problems for students with teachers, employers, and other who can affect careers and lives» [13, 13]. To the most irritating are referred lexical and complementation errors, the least irritating are word order errors and misuse of prepositions. [12] suggest the following «universal hierarchy of errors», namely:

#### **MOST SEVERE LEAST SEVERE**

Lexis > spelling > negation > word order > prepositions > verb forms > concord

Since lexical errors, as we see, are the most severe ones, vocabulary learning must take the central place in language study.

While learning new words, students should be asked to arrange them in groups according to meaning – synonyms, antonyms, lexical fields, etc, on the one hand, and to pay attention to the structures they appear in and their accompanying elements, on the other. The latter is known as the valency potential of a lexical item, or its subcategorization frames. «Teaching the form and meaning of a word without at the same time teaching its subcategorization will distance the student from critical information about how the word really operates in the language» [6, 65]. In other words, the starting point for language acquisition is analyzing the behaviour of words in relation to one another within a sentence, i.e. syntax of words.

*Since the finite-form verb is «the central, pivotal slot in the sentence» [10, 25], it is the valency of the verb that is the inner core of syntax.*

Some linguists identify valency of the verb with its transitivity: «valency (that is, transitivity)...» [2, 177]. R. Hudson describes valency as «the term <... >

used in dependency theory to refer to the particular demand of individual words for modifiers» [8, 120]. In this paper valency of the verb is defined as combinability of the verb with other words in the sentence with various degree of cohesion. On the syntactic level two cardinal types of valency are distinguished – obligatory and optional. An obligatory component of the valency frame of the lexical unit is the one which is semantically and/or structurally absolutely necessary for the linguistic expression of a particular elementary process referred to by the speaker. To obligatory components of the verb valency frame belong the subject (the external argument of the verb), the predicative (or the subjective complement), the object, the verbal complement and the adverbial complement (the internal arguments of the verb). In all cases of their ellipsis obligatory constituents can be either syntagmatically or paradigmatically restored. As to the adverbial modifier, it is non-obligatory for linguistic expression of a particular elementary process, and that is why this type of valency relation is not necessarily realized in grammatically complete constructions.

Traditionally, verbs are classified into two groups: 1) main verbs, denoting events and/or states, and 2) auxiliary verbs, including «tense» auxiliaries, question and negative forms, verbs of emphasis and substitution, and modal verbs (see, e.g. [14, 94-99]). Verbs of the first group can be further subdivided into object verbs (or monotransitive), two-object verbs (or ditransitive), no-object verbs (or intransitive), including linking, or copular, verbs [ibid.]. Thus, knowledge of grammar of particular verbs helps to avoid possible errors in organizing words within a sentence.

In traditional approaches to language teaching, learners are first taught separate words and their properties, then fundamentals of syntax, and after that they are asked to combine words in a sentence/sentences. A very interesting approach to language teaching was suggested by Sean Devitt of Trinity College, Dublin. The procedures of Devitt's experiment are described by [11, 109]. We have performed the mentioned experiment with junior students of English to test the effectiveness of suggested activity, which proved rather useful. With some amendments and alterations to Devitt's pedagogical experiment, we'll describe the stages of the latter as follows:

a) Students are given a jumble of content words and phrases derived from the authentic text which is their goal. These words are arranged morphologically, i.e. according to the parts of speech they belong to; finite verbs are italicized

or capitalized and are given detailed information as to their subcategorization properties. The learners' first step is to identify any words and phrases they do not know. These are explained to them and their syntactic behaviour is shown.

b) Then the students write each word and phrase on a separate card. On the reverse side of the card they may write the meaning of the word (or phrase) which is new to them.

c) The next step is to sort the words and phrases into overlapping categories of time, place, person and event. This encourages the students to think about possible meaning relationships between the words and phrases.

d) Then the students arrange their cards in a linear sequence and devise a story outline.

e) The students then expand their skeletal discourse into a text – «a procedure that directly exploits the capacity of word meanings to generate sentence structure» [11, 109].

f) The students's story may differ from the original text. Thus it is necessary to give them some hints aiming at bringing the students closer to the authentic text. This can be done by giving the students a jumble of sentences derived from the simplified version of the original text and asking them to arrange the sentences in a proper order.

g) Then the students check up their version with the simplified form of the authentic text and are asked to add more possible details to their story.

h) Finally, the students are shown the authentic text and asked to compare it with their own version.

The suggested activity chain is based on the recognition that «the largest part of language learning is the learning of words and their properties» [11, 114]. In this activity the students learn through communication, trying to make themselves understood, and thus follow the same way in language acquisition as the first language learners – children. Cf.: «Children acquire language by interacting with adult speakers, who provide the critical social context for interaction and linguistic data congruent with those social interaction» [15, 148].

Summing up, we'd like to mention the following things. First, since many of the errors language learners make can be traced to their «incomplete knowledge of subcategorization for a particular item» [7, 89], it is necessary for the learners not only to choose an appropriate word or phrase for their context, but also to know

how these words or phrases are normally used. As A.Hornby puts it, «a word in isolation is a dead word. It comes to life when it occurs in a sentence» [1, V-VI]. Second, since the verb is «the engine of syntactic structure» [11, 117], and «the key to the sentence» [6, 65], and the central component of a clause/sentence, projecting the sentence organization (cf.: «Sentence grammar is to a large degree verb grammar» [6, 69]), language learners should give particular attention to the combinatory potential of the verb both on the lexical and syntactic levels of language. Knowledge of subcategorization information will help the learners to avoid possible errors. Sufficient subcategorization information of lexical items is presented in single-language dictionaries, such as CIDE, and LLA, LEA, complementing each other. While reading the dictionary entries, as well as authentic texts, students will have to take notice of the words and phrases accompanying the verb. Once the learners know the syntax of the verb, its possible lexical environment and dependent syntactic slots, «the rest of their morphosyntax usually falls into place» [6, 59].

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