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## Recurrent grammatical errors in student Russian-to-English consecutive interpreting / Типичные грамматические ошибки при становлении навыка последовательного перевода

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**Аннотация:** Предметом исследования являются грамматические ошибки при становлении навыка последовательного перевода у студентов бакалавриата. Объектом исследования является эрратологический аспект в процессе обучения устному переводу. Автор подробно рассматривает такие аспекты темы, как различные типы ошибок в последовательном переводе и специфику последовательного перевода как речевой деятельности. Особое внимание уделяется классификации типичных грамматических ошибок в последовательном переводе студентов бакалавриата. Приводятся возможные причины появления грамматических ошибок при становлении навыка последовательного перевода у студентов. Среди основных причин возникновения типичных грамматических ошибок можно выделить как собственно языковые, так и когнитивные причины. Основным выводом проведенного исследования является то, что в процессе обучения последовательному переводу стоит обратить особое внимание студентов на грамматический аспект перевода, а не только на умение владеть переводческой скорописью и навыки презентации. Особым вкладом авторов в исследовании темы является типология наиболее частотных грамматических ошибок при последовательном переводе с русского языка на английский язык. Новизна исследования заключается в выборе объекта исследования, поскольку эрратологический аспект в процессе обучения последовательному переводу не достаточно представлен в теоретическом и практическом освещении как в общей теории перевода, так и в частной теории перевода.

**Ключевые слова:**

переводческие ошибки, анализ ошибок, причины ошибок, последовательный перевод, типология грамматических ошибок, переводческая эрратология, становление навыка перевода, обучение последовательному переводу, грамматический аспект, теория устного перевода

**1 Introduction**

Translation as intellectual activity has been in existence since very early times. Throughout its history, it has played the vital part in shaping human culture nationally and globally. With international collaborations and engagement experiencing an unprecedented growth and becoming more and more diverse today, translation has reached new heights. It lies at the heart of our most innovative activities in culture and business. Much progress has been made in theory and practice of translation and interpreting both in Russia and beyond. Yet gaining a deeper insight into the nature of translating and interpreting processes is much in demand today, particularly translation, particularly interpreting errors have never been accorded full-scale treatment, both in terms of theory and practice.

The goal of this article is, then, to provide a classification of and explain some of the most recurrent interpreting errors made by students in Russian-to-English consecutive

interpreting. Assumingly, the key source of errors in consecutive interpreting is inadequate linguistic competence and performance, i.e. rules, laws, or principles of analogy, i.e. a tendency to analogical transfer, to transfer grammatical patterns specific to a native language into a foreign language. Among other possible sources of grammatical errors in consecutive interpreting are severe time constraints, or its German translation *Zeitnot*, having to select among several possible alternatives (decisions in the course of consecutive interpreting, or language choices), unpredictable syntax, and quick speech motor actions.

The phenomenon of errors had been at the focus of psychology, linguistics, literature studies, and pedagogy long before it became the focus of the error analysis that is primarily concerned with the errors that appear in second language acquisition.

Late 1960s saw the revival of interest to errors and mistakes in foreign language acquisition. At this time, the error analysis theory was established as a theory-based research approach [6; 7; 18]. The causes of errors were revised and were eventually regarded as a valuable source of information to gain a deeper insight into the process of second-language acquisition.

Translation studies, in its turn, has made systematic and objective descriptions of such basic translation concepts as equivalence, translatability, shift, a range of approaches to translation, units of translation, and models of translation to name just a few [2;3]. There was much said and written about translation quality assessment [11], yet less about quality assessment in consecutive interpreting [12], particularly from the perspective of how to make systematic use of the insights into the errors and mistakes in training interpreters [1; 16] and investigating the relation between interpreting and second language acquisition [15]. Interpreting has been treated from the perspective of cognitive studies and psycholinguistic inquiries [9; 10]; from extralinguistic aspects of interpreting and their relations with the quality in interpreting in various settings [8] or methodology in interpreting studies [4].

Interpreting as a complex cognitive activity demands a high level of linguistic competence and performance to ensure quality in consecutive interpreting, especially on the international arena. Figuratively, interpreting errors are words that changed history. To help students achieve proficiency in interpreting, there should be a considerable emphasis placed on achieving proficiency in languages [5].

Most of the articles that deal with assessing the quality in consecutive interpreting are those that are wide in scope. The focus is on the quality of what the interpreter produces in terms of content, language, delivery, interactional competencies, and discourse management. In a wider sense, quality also refers to interpreter reliability, compliance with principles of professional ethics, empathy and trustworthiness [12; 17].

There is much room, nonetheless, for the smaller scale studies dealing with purely linguistic aspect of interpreting, particularly in terms of grammatical categories which may be differently expressed in languages and the way this area of language structure affects decisions in the course of interpreting. In the present article, we provide just such an emphasis.

Originality of the article lies in the fact that there are few works with a focus on error analysis in Russian-to-English consecutive interpreting in Russia. Error analysis in Russian-to-English consecutive interpreting is vitally important as it has pedagogical implications.

While pedagogical implications of our findings are primarily practice-oriented, scientific significance of the article, as we see it, is important for the theory of consecutive interpreting as it lies in the assumption that, in the long-term perspective, our results and findings can make a significant contribution to developing a linguistic typology of interpreting errors in typologically and structurally different languages, i.e. language-specific and language-pair specific errors.

## **2 Methodology**

For a start, we should make a distinguishing explanation of an error and a mistake. A mistake is a minor inaccuracy largely due to the fact that the interpreter is exhausted or overexcited, yet he/she makes an attempt to correct himself/herself (in Russian, it is generally referred to as a slip of the tongue or minor mistake in speech). An error is a recurrent, systematic violation of the rules of the second language, i.e. errors that students regularly make in the process of second language acquisition and do not correct themselves as these errors reflect a certain stage of the process of second language acquisition. The focus of the article is on the errors.

Error typology can be based on the causes of errors and, in this regard, it presupposes examining errors from the psycholinguistic approach. Error typology can reveal learning strategies, stages, and specifics of second language acquisition. The source of errors in the target language (foreign language) can be the form of the source language (mother tongue). The errors that are caused mainly by mother tongue interference are generally referred to as interlingual errors. The second source of the errors is intralingual factors, regardless of the mother tongue. These errors are generally referred to as intralingual errors.

The samples that were scrutinised and analysed for errors were taken from the assessment materials for the course in Consecutive Interpreting and covered the following topics: politics, economics, finance, banking, public relations, health, childcare. The total number of samples is more than one hundred errors. The study involved third-year bachelor's students in 'Cross-Language Communication and Translation: English' at St Petersburg University. Their mother tongue was Russian, while English was the second language. Thus, the target language was a foreign language.

Let us consider errors from a grammatical perspective. Grammar of any language is determined by the typological characteristics of a language. This is what makes languages typologically and structurally different and determines the kind of distinctions between languages. Yet some features tend to be typologically similar or even coexist in different languages. Inevitably, the grammatical system of the language is a factor which influences the way in which we translate or interpret. These differences are at the core of grammatical problems in translation. Since grammar is organised along two main dimensions: morphology and syntax, the grammatical problems in translation arise from lack of equivalence both in morphology and in syntax. Lack of equivalence in morphological and syntactical levels is at the core of translation studies, too. These specific contrasts in the grammatical systems are presupposed by the specifics of the given language [\[20\]](#).

We have analysed more than one hundred of grammatical errors made by students in consecutive interpreting. All errors fall into four groups.

### **2.1 Recurrent interpreting errors in the use of articles**

The first group includes most of the cases and is primarily associated with the errors in the

use of the articles in English. The lack of a definite and indefinite article in the Russian language can cause difficulties in acquiring or using English articles. The Russian language has other means to compensate for the lack of articles as a part of speech and to express its functions. Among these means are other parts of speech and context.

The most recurring errors in the use of articles can be classified according to the type of the article and causes of errors.

### 2.1.1 Omitting a definite article

Example 1. *Будущее* этих детей не выглядит светлым. (original)

*Future* of these babies is very sad. (translation)

Generally, we usually use zero article before an abstract noun or a name of an individual person or place. However, in the context the abstract noun *future* is followed by an of-phrase *of these babies*. The postpositional of-phrase makes the reference specific, and we therefore use the definite article. In the process of consecutive interpreting, the interpreter, as we assume, did not take into account the sentence structure and therefore omitted the article.

Example 2. Сейчас *Российское* правительство заявляет, что более не может финансировать из госбюджета государственное здравоохранение. (original)

Now *government* claims that the NHS can't be financed only by *government*. (translation)

We should use the definite article as the concept the word *government* is referring to is repeatedly nominated throughout the vertical context of the sentence, i.e. this noun is meant and it is not new to the interpreter. Additionally, the original text refers to the Russian Government, and as the attributive adjective *Russian* is omitted in the phrase, we should use the definite article before the noun *government*.

### 2.1.2 Omitting an indefinite article

Let us consider the cases when an indefinite article is omitted.

Example 3. Большинство из них мало информированы о путях распространения этой инфекции. (original)

Most of them do not have *precise* information how it's transmitted. (translation)

The indefinite article is omitted before the abstract noun *information*. By using the prepositional attributive adjective *precise* in the attributive phrase with the noun, we define the noun and normally should use the indefinite article. Presumably, the interpreter did not take it into account and subsequently made the error.

The context, both horizontal and vertical, presupposes most cases of errors in the use of article. As the Russian language lacks a grammatical category of article, the errors in the use of article in English can be referred to as interlingual errors.

## 2.2 Recurrent interpreting errors in the use of voice

The second group of grammatical errors is a wrong use of the voice. In translation, as a rule, various means of expressing how the subject of the sentence acts or is acted upon undergo changes and this may result in errors in the use of the voice forms in the target language. In the Russian language, the active constructions are used more often than

passive constructions. Yet, as our study has shown, students tend to use passive constructions in Russian-English consecutive interpreting, particularly in case of rendering reflexive verbs.

### 2.2.1 Use of passive constructions instead of active constructions

Example 4. Именно это является причиной стремительного *распространения* инфекции в городе. (original)

It is the main reason why this disease *is* so quickly *spread* through the city. (translation)

Presumably, the cause of the error is inability to understand the meaning of the original sentence. The interpreter regarded the subject of the sentence as an agent, rather than an object of the happening expressed by the verb. Additionally, what is more plausible, there is a blending of two models in the target language. The first model is *is wide spread*, which is among the most frequently used phrases in English. While the first model refers to a state, the second model *is quickly spreading* describes the happening and is more appropriate for translation. Having these two models in mind as possible translation choices affected the decision in the course of translation. The interpreter, being confronted with a stressful situation, blended two concepts. Consequently, the target text has a passive-like construction, which distorts the original meaning to a degree.

### 2.2.2 Use of the active voice instead of the passive voice

Example 5. На территории страны зарегистрировано 86000 ВИЧ инфицированных. (original)

Now 86,000 HIV positive people *registered* in Russia. (translation)

There may be two ways to explain the cause of the error. In the course of making choices in consecutive interpreting, the interpreter links an infinitive form of the Russian verb *регистрировать* and an infinitive form of the Russian reflexive verb *регистрироваться*. As the Russian and English languages are different in the way in which they express how the subject of the sentence acts or is acted upon, it may result in errors in rendering Russian reflexive verbs into English. For example: *Her hopes realised/his suspicions confirmed* instead of *Her hopes were realised/his suspicions were confirmed*. The other reason of the error is that the subject of the sentence is a multi-word construction, which is not associated with the traditional model of the passive construction in the mind of the interpreter. If the subject of the sentence was more precise, there would be no interpreting error.

## 2.3 Recurrent interpreting errors in the use of tense

The third group of grammatical errors in consecutive interpreting is errors in the use of the tenses. The grammatical category of the tense is a core category in the system of grammatical tenses and aspects. This group of recurring interpreting errors is particularly numerous largely due to the fact that tenses and aspects in Russian and English are different. Among these differences are a number of tenses in English and Russian, a close relationship between the aspect and tense in English (unlike in Russian where only imperfective verbs are used in past, present, or future tenses), and a difference between the time which the tense relates the happening described by the verb and the grammatical tense. For a start, let us analyse a common case where the perfect is used instead of the preterite.

### 2.3.1 Using Present Perfect instead of Past Simple

Example 6. В прошлом году правительство *выделило* 2 миллиона долларов на лекарства, проведение тестирований ... (original)

Last year the government *has given* \$2mln to this sphere. (translation)

Both the source text and target text refer to the same time-scale. Yet we have two arguments, at least, to prove that there is an interpreting error. The Present Perfect Tense generally relates an accomplished happening to time in the present, which seemingly could convey the original. There must be no indication of the definite time of the past in the sentence as the gap between the happening and the moment of speaking may be different. Yet the definite time of the past happening is given here by the past time adverbial *last year*. In other words, the Perfect Aspect cannot be used with adverbials referring to a past point or period of time and in this sentence the time reference is made to the past in the preceding horizontal context. Additionally, the Perfect Aspect cannot be used in narration where the reference is made to a set of the past events [13]. Thus, the Perfect Aspect cannot be used in the vertical context, too. The reason for this error is that the interpreter did not take into account the factor of contextual proximity with the phrase referring to the time in the past and grammar rules of how the Perfect Aspect should be used.

### 2.3.2 Blending the forms of two tenses

Let us move on to the cases of blending the forms of two tenses that refer to the same time-scale.

Example 7. Однако теория оптимизма *остается* не менее привлекательной ... (original)

This theory of optimism *is not stay* less attractive. (translation)

In translation, there is a construction that does not exist in English. Structurally, it resembles the form of the Progressive Aspect and Present Simple Tense. Presumably, the interpreter, when deciding which tense to use, blended the forms of the Present Simple Tense (*does not stay*) and Present Progressive Tense (*is not staying*). On the one hand, the interpreter realised that there was a need to emphasise that the happening that continued over a period should be expressed by the Progressive Aspect, and, on the other hand, the interpreter reckoned that in the context he/she could use the Present Simple Tense as the Simple Tense is the core tense in the system of grammatical tenses and aspects and it is the main way of referring to something which occurs at the present moment (for example, while making comments).

## 2.4 Recurrent interpreting errors in the use of number

The fourth group of interpreting errors comprises errors in the use of the grammatical category of number. There may be several sub-groups depending on the nature of errors and their causes.

### 2.4.1 Using plural instead of singular and vice versa

Example 8. .....трудно предсказать будущее развитие *эпидемии* ... (original)

It is hard to predict the future development of the *epidemics* ... (translation)

The Russian noun *эпидемия* is singular in the Russian language, and in translation the English noun *epidemics* is used in plural. Presumably, the cause of the error is making a

false analogy with such nouns, as *physics*, *acoustics* etc., which are plural, but treated as singular, rather than the context or a minor mistake in speech. Additionally, the cause of the error is stress and severe time constraints in the process of consecutive interpreting. This analogy-based error can be classified as intralingual as there is no influence of the mother tongue.

Another cause of errors in the use of the number can be minor mistakes in speech.

Example 9. Терроризм представляет сегодня главную опасность правам и свободам человека. (original)

Terrorism is the main threat to human rights and *freedom*. (translation)

Both homogenous parts of the sentence in the source text are plural, while the noun *freedom* in the target text is used as singular.

#### 2.4.2 Subject-verb disagreement

Now let us deal with the errors in subject-verb agreement in number

Example 10. ...последствия существующих инфекций очевидны. (original)

...the *consequence* of the current infections *are* obvious. (translation)

This error is that the verb *to be* is used in plural and does not agree with its subject *consequence* that is used in singular. This may be explained by the fact that the verb is contextually close to the noun *infections* that is used in plural.

Example 11. Проституция и наркомания являются основными причинами резкого роста заболеваемости СПИДом... (original)

Prostitution and *drugs addiction* are the main reasons of the sharp increase of the number of HIV positive... (translation)

In this case, the interpreter fails to recognise the part of the speech. The word *drug* is part of the attributive phrase *drug addiction* and can be referred to as an adjective. Yet it was not taken into account in consecutive interpreting. Thus, the word *drug* cannot be used in plural as there is no number agreement in form of adjectives with nouns in English.

### 3 Results and discussion

The present article identified and explained some of the most recurrent errors in Russian-to-English consecutive interpreting made by students. All errors fall into four groups. Among them are: errors in the use of articles; errors in the use of tenses; errors in the use of voice; and errors in the use of number. The main sources of errors are extra-linguistics factors (psychological or cognitive factors), e.g. severe time constraints, analogical transfer; and linguistic factors, i.e. intralingual (i.e. inadequate linguistic competence and performance) and interlingual (i.e. influence of the mother tongue).

The errors of the use of articles take up 40% in Russian-to-English consecutive interpreting in the corpus of our study. It is the largest proportion of all the errors. This may partly be due to a lack of the grammatical category of articles in the Russian language and inevitably they can be the key 'problem triggers' (the term of Gile) for students in consecutive interpreting. The errors in the use of voice account for 25%, which is a relatively large number. Voice can certainly be a problem trigger. Although the grammatical category of voice is present both in Russian and English, the relation between the subject and the verb

may be as well different in these languages as they may be differences in how they depict a situation and the logical relation between the agent, verb, and object. Errors in the use of tenses are the third largest group in the corpus (20%). Errors in the use of number account for roughly 15% of all errors. The source of these errors is mostly the immediate linguistic context.

Supposedly, the key reason behind most of interpreting errors is a tendency to analogical transfer. In other words, this is primarily due to inadequate linguistic competence and performance, apart from psychological or cognitive factors, i.e. nervousness, cognitive saturation, as overwhelming number of errors are largely due to interlingual and intralingual sources, i.e. linguistic contextual factors, a lack of grammatical categories in the target language or differences in grammatical functions or language specific means of expressing grammatical categories that coexist in the source and target languages. Yet this linguistic factor of interpreting errors can be explained by psycholinguistic reasons. When it comes to decision making and problem solving, we rely on our past experience [19], or when it comes to language choices, we rely on our mother tongue. Here, our assumption that the key source of errors is linguistic in nature can be proved by the fact that the findings of comparative studies of interpreting errors from English to French, German, and Japanese suggest that there are more errors in the Japanese renderings than German or French renderings [9]. Japanese and English are typologically different languages. Language specific idiosyncrasies are inevitably a relevant factor in interpreting.

In this regard, our results and findings are in agreement with those received by the Chinese researchers. Yet their corpus of samples also includes errors in logical relationship and use of nouns. This can be explained by the fact that English and Chinese are typologically different languages [1]. The Indonesian researcher reports that the most recurrent error made by Indonesian students in consecutive interpreting is additions that are largely due to problems in interpretation of the message to render in the target language. Yet psychological reasons, i. e. nervousness, is ranked first among possible sources of errors. Lack of language proficiency comes second [14].

Interpreting error analysis in typologically different languages and their causes can contribute to a linguistic typology of language-specific and language-pair specific interpreting errors and improving methodological issues in training interpreters.

#### **4 Conclusion**

Having analysed the most recurrent grammatical errors in student Russian-To-English consecutive interpreting, we can conclude that there should be a considerable emphasis placed on the grammatical aspect in teaching consecutive interpreting, rather than on equipping students with note-taking and presentation skills. Hopefully, it may serve as a convincing argument for students to become more concentrated on ensuring quality in consecutive interpreting, rather than merely on rendering the content of the source text.

Error analysis in student consecutive interpreting can make a positive contribution into the practice of training interpreters as it reveals what problems students meet with in the process of training, and is also meant to discuss on the possibility of avoiding the errors through adequate training. In this regard, analysing errors and their sources are the key to gain a deeper insight into second language acquisition and training interpreters, too. Additionally, such works on error analysis can make valuable contributions in a typology of interpreting errors in typologically different languages.

As grammar can be seen as a set of rules which determine what kind of information has to be made explicit in utterances, among the promising areas for further research, as we can see it, in terms grammatical errors in the process of student consecutive interpreting may be identifying and explaining those errors relating to organising information, textual cohesion, logical relations, discourse parameters, i.e. tenor, register, and mode.

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## **Результаты процедуры рецензирования статьи**

*В связи с политикой двойного слепого рецензирования личность рецензента не раскрывается.*

*Со списком рецензентов издательства можно ознакомиться [здесь](#).*

Представленная на рассмотрение статья «Типичные грамматические ошибки при становлении навыка последовательного перевода», предлагаемая к публикации в журнале «Litera», представленная на английском языке, несомненно, является актуальной, ввиду востребованности более глубокого исследования природы процессов письменного и устно-переводческого перевода, в частности переводческих ошибок, которым никогда не уделялось полномасштабного внимания, как с точки зрения теории, так и практики.

Цель рецензируемой статьи состоит в том, чтобы дать классификацию и объяснение некоторых наиболее часто встречающихся ошибок при устном переводе, допускаемых студентами при последовательном переводе с русского на английский.

Актуальность статьи заключается в том, что в России существует немного работ, посвященных анализу ошибок при последовательном переводе с русского на английский. Анализ ошибок при последовательном переводе с русского на английский важен, поскольку имеет методологическое значение для качественной подготовки будущих профессионалов в языковых вузах.

Отметим наличие сравнительно небольшого количества исследований по данной тематике в отечественном языкознании. Статья является новаторской, одной из первых в российской лингвистике, посвященной исследованию подобной проблематики. В статье представлена методология исследования, выбор которой вполне адекватен целям и задачам работы. Автор обращается, в том числе, к различным методам для подтверждения выдвинутой гипотезы. Используются следующие методы исследования: логико-семантический анализ, герменевтический и сравнительно-сопоставительный методы. Данная работа выполнена профессионально, с соблюдением основных канонов научного исследования.

Слабой стороной исследования является практический материал. Так, неясен практический материал исследования, было бы проведено статистическое исследование проблематики. Автор не приводит данных о языковом корпусе, отобранном для проведения исследования. На каких принципах был отобран материал и насколько он актуален в современных реалиях?

Исследование выполнено в русле современных научных подходов, работа состоит из введения, содержащего постановку проблемы, основной части, традиционно начинающуюся с обзора теоретических источников и научных направлений, исследовательскую и заключительную, в которой представлены выводы, полученные автором. Отметим, что выводы, представленные в заключении статьи, не в полной мере отображают проведенное исследование. Выводы требуют усиления.

Библиография статьи насчитывает всего 20 источников, из которых 18 зарубежные труды, а только 2 - на русском языке. Считаем, что обращение к исследованиям отечественных ученых, несомненно, обогатило бы работу. К сожалению, в статье отсутствуют ссылки на фундаментальные работы, такие как монографии, кандидатские и докторские диссертации. Высказанные замечания не являются существенными и не

умалют общее положительное впечатление от рецензируемой работы. Работа является новаторской, представляющей авторское видение решения рассматриваемого вопроса и может иметь логическое продолжение в дальнейших исследованиях. Практическая значимость исследования заключается в возможности использования его результатов в процессе преподавания вузовских курсов по теории перевода, а также в практической подготовке переводчиков. Статья, несомненно, будет полезна широкому кругу лиц, филологам, магистрантам и аспирантам профильных вузов. Статья «Типичные грамматические ошибки при становлении навыка последовательного перевода» может быть рекомендована к публикации в научном журнале.