

# Cross-linguistic Influences in the Second Language Lexicon

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**SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION 17**

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# **Cross-linguistic Influences in the Second Language Lexicon**

Edited by

Janusz Arabski

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# **Contributors**

**Janusz Arabski**, University of Silesia, 41-205 Sosnowiec, ul. Żytnia 10 Poland.

**Magdalena Bartłomiejczyk**, University of Silesia, ul. Żytnia 10, 41-205 Sosnowiec, Poland.

**Marcus Callies**, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Englische Sprachwissenschaft, Wilhelm-Röpke-Str. 6 D, 35032 Marburg, Germany.

**Anna Cieślicka**, School of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Al. Niepodległości 4, 61-874 Poznań, Poland.

**Hans W. Dechert**, University of Kassel, Germany.

**Danuta Gabryś-Barker**, University of Silesia, Institute of English, 41-205 Sosnowiec, ul. Żytnia 10, Poland.

**Jolanta Latkowska**, University of Silesia, Ul. Żytnia 10, 41-205 Sosnowiec, Poland.

**Justyna Leśniewska**, English Department, Jagiellonian University, Al. Mickiewicza 9, 31-120 Kraków, Poland.

**Andrzej Łyda**, University of Silesia, Institute of English, ul. Żytnia 10 41-205 Sosnowiec, Poland.

**Elżbieta Mańczak-Wohlfeld**, Jagiellonian University, Home address:, Łobzowska 9/3, PL 31-139 Kraków, Poland.

**Anna Niżegorodcew**, English Department, Jagiellonian University, Al. Mickiewicza 9, 31-120 Kraków, Poland.

**Terence Odlin**, Ohio State University, USA.

**Przemysław Olejniczak**, I Nauczycielskie Kolegium Języków Obcych w Sosnowcu, (English Teacher Training College), ul. Zegadłowicza 1, 41-200 Sosnowiec, Poland.

**Liliana Piasecka**, Opole University, Opole, ul. Oleska 48, Poland.

**Håkan Ringbom**, Åbo Akademi University, Finland.

**Joanna Rokita**, Akademia Pedagogiczna – NKJA, ul. Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland.

**David Singleton**, CLCS, Arts Building, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland.

**Krystyna Warchał**, Institute of English, University of Silesia, Źytunia 10, 41-205 Sosnowiec, Poland.

**Rüdiger Zimmermann**, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Philipps-Universität Marburg, D-35032 Marburg, Germany.



# Preface

This volume consists of a selection of papers analysing the phenomenon of language transfer which results from language contact in bilingual and multilingual language acquisition and learning contexts. The major focus of the volume is on the lexical level of language transfer.

In the first instance, it returns to the debate surrounding the definition of language transfer and contact in Part 1 entitled Language Contact and Language Transfer Revisited – where some of the more theoretical aspects of the subject are discussed.

The first part includes a discussion on the ambiguity of the term ‘transfer’ itself, beyond its meaning as a psycholinguistic concept. Then the relations between language contact and language learning are discussed. This part also includes an original view of contrastive analysis and a discussion on the importance of cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning.

The volume then seeks to illuminate the theoretical discussion by presenting a corpus of data and its analysis at various levels of lexical competence (e.g. formulaic language, collocations, idioms, etc.), which are the product of research findings in various contexts of language use.

Part 2, entitled Language Contact Observed, consists of papers that are corpus based. They present the transfer processes in discourse organisation, the transfer of genre and the use of collocations by language learners as a result of language contact. The theoretical issues of language contact are also present in connection with a study on drug-related loans in Polish and a semantic equivalence study of the international term ‘discussion’.

Part 3 is Lexical Transfer in Language Processing. It consists of five papers. Two empirical works use translation tasks to study interference as a result of L2 acquisition and interference during lexical search processes in L1, L2 and L3. Two others report early L2 acquisition of lexis, concentrating on code-mixing and the role of instructional input in early L2 lexical development. The main theoretical element of the part is the article on lexical transfer which argues that the traditional concept of cross-lexical transfer still remains valid.

The last part, Lexical Transfer in Fixed Expressions, is the methodological continuation of the previous part. It deals with the acquisition and

processing of L2 idioms, phrasal verbs, fixed phrases, collocations, and figurative expressions. The elicitation techniques used by the authors were translation and comprehension tasks. One study deals with translating L1 idioms into L2. Most of the data shows the variety of techniques employed to translate the fixed expressions, including transfer strategies.

Janusz Arabski

*Part 1*

***Language Contact and  
Language Transfer Revisited***



## Chapter 1

# On the Ambiguity of the Notion 'Transfer'

HANS W. DECHERT

### Introduction

In the 'Practical Information' provided by the organisers of the conference on 'Language Contact and Language Transfer' a portion of the text reads like this:

The fee [for this conference] is all-inclusive and will be paid at the conference desk. There is a possibility, however, of *transferring* the payment to our bank account earlier, for which the participants will be given an "early bird bonus" [...] Earlier *transfers* must be paid to our bank account at [name of Polish Bank Institute], with additional annotation *SZCYRK-ARABSKI*, by 30 April 2003. The annotation is very important, as this ensures the allocation of the money in the right sub-account. The participants are requested to fax their certificates of account payment to the Institute. (Emphasis through the italicised words is mine)

Since I have not only been interested in being attributed the privileged status of 'early bird', but in the use and meaning of the verb 'to transfer' (transferring) and the noun 'transfer' relevant to this information, I have got involved with this problem relating to the topic of my paper. The following considerations are the result of my investigation through looking at ordinary and etymological dictionaries and G. Fauconnier's (1997) seminal work *Mappings in Thought and Language*.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1961), Vol. XI, 257:

- the verb *to transfer* means to convey or take from one place, person, etc. to another, to transmit, transport, to give or hand from one to another,
- to convey or make over (title, right, or property) by deed or legal process.

(No question, the status 'early bird', according to this entry, could be *transferred* on to me, but that is a different question)

– the noun *transfer* in Law stands for conveyance from one person to another, spec. of shares or stock.

(I have been wondering, of course, whether this legal connotation of the term suggesting an explicit person-to-person exchange of financial property would permit the holder of the annotated sub-account to claim legal possession of the money)

– the act of transferring or fact of being transferred; conveyance or removal from one place, person, etc. to another; transference, transmission.

According to the New Oxford American Dictionary (2001), p. 1797 the connotation between transfer and transference of money is more evident:

– the verb *to transfer* (to trans'fer; to 'transfer: note the transfer of stress shift in modern English) means to move (someone or something) from one place to another. Ex: he would have to transfer to his own account.

– the noun stands for an act of moving something or someone to another place. Ex: a transfer of wealth to the poorer nations.

These entries, to come back to the first possibility of paying the conference fee mentioned in the information, seem to indicate that, appearing at the congress desk in a one-to-one person context I might have said: 'May I transfer the conference fee to you?' The answer most likely would have been: 'When may we expect to receive the money?' My invented statement, in other words, would have indicated an inappropriate linguistic transfer caused by my dictionary studies totally neglecting the inappropriate meaning of the term blended with a different analogical mental space, one of the sources of the ambiguity of the term transfer. Or to put it differently, my question would have been an intralingual pragmatic error, not caused by a crosslinguistic interaction with my primary language, but by a lack of expanding the term's standard meaning to its analogical or figurative meaning.

The second case of payment referred to in the Introduction is much more complicated in that there is no actual or very little person-to-person 'transference' involved, but on both ends and countries of the implicit communication process a large number of bureaucratic business activities between persons and banks, different currencies and dynamic exchange modalities, paper work as well as electronic information exchange, etc. This short outline of the complexity and shortcomings of the recommended kind of payment, quite in accordance with national and international financial vocabulary labelled 'transfer', referring to the early bird solution, may suffice to justify the expansion of the given dictionary meaning of transfer and the underlying ambiguity of the notion.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology (1966: 936) the English verb *to transfer* is related to French *transférer* and to the Latin *transferre*. The basis of the Latin verb is the Greek verb *μεταφέρειν*.

The English noun *metaphor* according to the same dictionary (p. 572) means a figure of speech involving the *transference* of a name to something *analogous*. The figurative meaning of *transfer*, in other words, depends on a relationship or mapping with *analogy* and *metaphor* in a blended mental space. This mapping, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1961: Vol. XI: 257) is already documented in an entry of 1586, referring to Day:

*Metaphora, which is when a word from the proper or right signification is transferred to another neere vnto the meaning,*

or another one of 1883 referring to Murray:

*As the primitive sense (of words) has been ... transferred boldly to figurative and analogical uses.*

Transfer, analogy, and metaphor, historically and etymologically speaking, are candidates to be related to and mapped onto each other in a common mental space of cognition.

## Analogical Transfer

Much of the perennial discussion and disagreement concerning the effects of the processes of intralingual and interlingual interaction in the acquisition of languages, called transfer or interference, seems to be caused by the ambiguity of these terms. This ambiguity is the result of the theoretical, methodological and empirical complexity and the controversial foundation and goals of linguistically oriented transfer research.

A short look at the experimental treatment and discussion of the famous radiation problem within the framework of the problem-solving paradigm, introduced by Duncker (1945) and its later application to transfer research in general may be of particular interest. In his dealing with problem solution phenomena Duncker confronted his subjects with the following problem, among others:

Problem no. 2. Given a human being with an inoperable stomach tumour, and rays which destroy organic tissue at sufficient intensity, by what procedure can one free him of the tumour by these rays and at the same time avoid destroying the healthy tissue which surrounds it? (Quoted from Johnson-Laird & Wason, 1977: 15)