

A CROSS-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper addresses some linguistic, mainly syntactic, phenomena in two typologically different languages (English and Slovak). A cross-linguistic analysis (English –Slovak) attempts to demonstrate similarities and differences between the two. The analysis of selected linguistic phenomena, which focusses on syntactic and semantic aspects, may contribute to their better comprehension by university students studying English and Slovak linguistics.

Key words: *foreign language education, a cross-linguistic analysis, typologically different languages, syntactic analysis, semantic analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Hufeisen –Neuner (2004:16) declare that "in the behaviourist learning theory concept the fundamental assumption with respect to foreign language learning was that there is a strict separation of linguistic inventories of specific languages in a person's memory. The development of "structured coexistence" – *no compounding of linguistic systems, but their co-ordination* (Lado 1964, Brooks 1963) – was the principle for language input, storage and processing during the learning of a foreign language. Mixing the languages during foreign language learning was considered to be a source of error (interference). This led, among other things, to the principle of monolingualism in teaching, i.e. the strict exclusion of the mother tongue from foreign language learning. However, are these assumptions of "unconnected co-existence" of the languages in our memory really true? "

The importance of the use of mother tongue in foreign language education was emphasised in a statement published on the website IATEFL Conference in Aberdeen on 18-20 April 2007. Cook (2007) in this conference declared: "The most important statement was the fact that English teachers tend to take a monolingual approach thus neglecting the importance of translation in the process of teaching English. The ESL classroom cannot follow the motto "One nation, one people, one language", a somewhat overrated statement since it implies that a classroom is a state. Quite contrary to that, the L1, i.e. the mother tongue of the students, should by all means be acknowledged. The importance is highlighted even more by the fact that the students' culture is part of their language and by neglecting their language, the teacher, in a monolingual classroom, neglects their culture which leads to the danger of neglecting their identity as well. What is more, there is no valid database that could confirm the standpoint that the monolingual approach in teaching is the best one. The disregard of the students' mother tongue can in fact demotivate the students and be counterproductive. Therefore, there is neither a scientific nor a pedagogic reason to exclude L1 from the teaching process."

In the submitted paper, we point out that comparison of language phenomena in students' foreign language (English) and students' mother tongue (Slovak) is important. The reason for such comparison is that some linguistic phenomena are universal not only in typologically related languages, but also in typologically distant languages. In this paper, we focus on universal syntactic and semantic features of selected language phenomena in English (students' foreign language) and Slovak (students' mother tongue).

Crucial attention in the paper is devoted to the grammatical realisation of the subject and semantic roles of the subject in these two languages. Furthermore, a complete predication, a minimal clause structure, but also the issues related to the clause patterns and verb complementation types in English and Slovak are discussed.

Moreover, the submitted paper analyses the results of the research conducted among the 2nd year teacher training students of bachelor study. Respondents of the research were the students studying English Language and Literature in combination with the other academic subject at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Trnava University in Trnava, Slovakia. Respondents of the research were asked to complete a questionnaire related to comparison of linguistic phenomena in the English language (respondents' foreign language) and in the Slovak language (respondents' mother tongue) in educational process.

1 SUBJECT IN ENGLISH AND SLOVAK

Clause elements, similarly to other linguistic phenomena, can be characterised by many linguistic features which are similar even in two typologically distant languages. The analysis of all clause elements and their features in the English language and in the Slovak language should require a deeper study, therefore, the submitted paper discusses only selected syntactic and semantic features of the subject, one of the basic clause elements in both compared languages.

1.1 Grammatical realisation of the subject in the English language and in the Slovak language

The subject in English, but also in Slovak, can be expressed by the same grammatical structures. However, some distinctions can be observed in terminology of these two languages. The subject in English is mostly expressed by a simple noun phrase or by a complex noun phrase. A simple noun phrase in English consists only of the head of a noun phrase (a noun or the other word class of a nominal character) without any modifiers, as in *Water is necessary for our life* (LDCE). *Voda je potrebná pre náš život*. A complex noun phrase consists of the head of a noun phrase and pre-modifiers or post-modifiers whose function is to develop the meaning of the head of a noun phrase, as in *The students studying English and German spent last semester in Germany*. *Študenti študujúci angličtinu a nemčinu strávili minulý semester v Nemecku*. The subject in English and Slovak example sentences is realised in the same way.

However, syntactic terminology related to the grammatical realisation of the subject in English and Slovak is different. According to English grammatical sources of literature, the subject can be expressed by a noun phrase (a noun phrase can be a noun, pronoun, numeral, or the other word class of a nominal character). On the other hand, Pavlovič (2012:32–33) refers that the subject in Slovak can be expressed by a noun (e.g. *Zrak zvlhol šťastím*), by a possessive pronoun (e.g. *Naši ešte svietili*), etc.

However, the subject can be also expressed by a finite clause, e.g. by a nominal relative clause, as in *What I need is a cup of coffee*. *To, čo potrebujem je šálka kávy*. The subject in English can be also expressed by a non-finite clause, e.g. by a nominal infinitive clause, as in *To go there without friends was not a good idea*. *Ísť tam bez priateľov nebola dobrá myšlienka*. Pavlovič (2012:35) declares that the subject in Slovak can be expressed by a finite clause, as in *Kto druhému jamu kope, sám do nej spadne*, but also by a non-finite infinitive structure, as in *Jej najväčšou radosťou bolo slúžiť rómskej komunite*.¹

1.2 Semantic roles of the subject in the English language and in the Slovak language

Semantic roles of clause elements are also universal linguistic phenomena, i.e. semantic roles of clause elements are similar in typologically related languages, but also in typologically distant languages. Similar semantic roles of the subject in English and Slovak are presented in this part of the paper.

¹ Note: The source of example sentences in English is *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online* (LDCE), quoted academic sources of literature, the example sentences of the authoress of the submitted paper. The example sentences in Slovak are equivalents of English example sentences and quoted academic sources of literature.

In both compared languages the subject can have a role of an agent, the initiator of the action denoted by the verb, as in *My father bought me a car. Môj otec mi kúpil auto*. The other semantic role of the subject in both languages is the role of an inanimate causer of an event, as in *The heavy rain caused the accident on the road (LDCE). Prudký dážď spôsobil nehodu na ceste*. Further on, the subject can have a role of an instrument or means used by an agent, as in *Hard study will enable you to get a higher position (LDCE). Usilovné štúdium ti/vám umožní získať vyššiu pozíciu*.

2 A COMPLETE PREDICATION IN ENGLISH AND SLOVAK

A complete predication in English, but also in Slovak, contains only the subject and an intransitive verb, or it can contain the subject, an intransitive verb and an optional clause element. Intransitive verbs *to study, študovať* are completed by an optional adverbial of place in the example sentence *John studies abroad. Ján študuje v zahraničí*.

In this context it should be emphasised that the adverbial of place is an optional clause element only if it is used after intransitive verbs. However, the adverbial of place is an obligatory clause element if it follows a copula verb, as in *Jane's in her room (LDCE). Jana je vo svojej izbe*.

It can be deduced that a complete predication in English, but also in Slovak can consist of two clause elements only if the verb is intransitive. However, if the verb is transitive, a complete predication consists of at least three clause elements in both compared languages (see the example sentences above).

2.1 A minimal clause structure

According to some English, but also Slovak grammatical sources of literature, a minimal clause structure contains the subject and the finite verb phrase in the function of the predicate. However, there is not stated that a verb in a minimal clause structure should be an intransitive verb, i.e. the verb not requiring complementation by the other obligatory clause element. All the other verb classes, except intransitive verbs, require complementation by obligatory clause elements.

In this context, Oravec – Bajžíková (1986:74) declare: "Transitive verbs in Slovak are complemented by an obligatory clause element, by a direct object. Predication without a direct object after transitive verbs is not complete predication, it is defective predication. Thus, a direct object belongs to the nucleus of predication."

English finite transitive verbs, similarly to Slovak finite transitive verbs, also require one obligatory syntactic position, the position of a direct object. Transitive verbs *to buy, kúpiť; to send, poslať* require semantic complementation by a direct object, e.g. *to buy something, kúpiť niečo; to send something, poslať niečo*. The sentences **My husband bought.² *Môj manžel kúpil. *My brother sent. *Môj brat poslal* are grammatically and semantically defective sentences. Transitive verbs *to buy, kúpiť; to send, poslať* require complementation by a direct object in both compared languages, as in *My husband bought a present. Môj manžel kúpil darček. My brother sent a letter. Môj brat poslal dopis*.

2.2 Verb complementation types and the sentence patterns

"Verb complementation is closely connected to classification of verbs into major verb classes. There are three main verb classes in English: copular verbs, intransitive verbs and transitive verbs. Last verb class is further subdivided into monotransitive, ditransitive and complex transitive verbs. The verb class determines the number and type of other clause elements in a sentence. Each sentence consists of a certain number of clause elements whose presence is obligatory for the sentence to be grammatical (Jančovičová, 2014:131)."

Clause patterns in English consist of:

» the subject and a verb (SV – an intransitive complementation),

- » the subject, a verb and an obligatory adverbial (SVAdv_{obl} – a copular complementation),
- » the subject, a verb and the subject complement (SVC_s – a copular complementation),
- » the subject, a verb and a direct object (SVO_d – a monotransitive complementation),
- » the subject, a verb, an indirect object and a direct object (SVO_iO_d – a ditransitive complementation),
- » the subject, a verb, a direct object and an object complement (SVO_dC_o – a complex transitive complementation),
- » the subject, a verb, a direct object and an obligatory adverbial (SVO_dAdv_{obl} – a complex transitive complementation)

In this part of the paper we introduce some verb complementation types and clause patterns which are the same in English and Slovak. Intransitive verbs occur both in English and Slovak in a clause pattern consisting of the subject and the predicate (SV), as in *My husband is walking. Môj manžel sa prechádza.* Intransitive verbs can also occur in both languages in a clause pattern consisting of the subject, the predicate and an optional adverbial (SVAdv_{opt}), as in *My husband is walking now. Môj manžel sa prechádza teraz.*

Transitive verbs can occur in both languages with a direct object in a clause pattern SVO_d, as in *My sister taught my son. Moja sestra učila môjho syna.* If the verb is followed only by one object, it is a monotransitive complementation. If the verb is followed by an indirect object and a direct object in a clause pattern SVO_iO_d, it is a ditransitive complementation, as in *My sister found our son a flat. Moja sestra našla nášmu synovi byt.* However, there are some distinctions in terminology. The terms monotransitive verbs and ditransitive verbs are used in English grammatical sources of literature, on the other hand, the terms one-object and two-object verbs are used in Slovak grammatical sources of literature.

Copula verb *to be, byť* occur in both languages in a clause pattern consisting of the subject, the predicate and an obligatory adverbial in a clause pattern SVAdv_{obl}, as in *Her children are at school. Jej deti sú v škole.*

It has to be pointed out that the same verb can be used in different contexts as an intransitive verb or as a transitive verb. The verbs *to read, čítať* are intransitive verbs in the example sentences *My brother is reading. Môj brat číta* (SV). In the analysed example sentences the verbs *to read, čítať* do not require complementation by any obligatory clause elements either in English or in Slovak. However, the same verb is a monotransitive, one-object verb in a clause pattern SVO_d, as in *My brother did not read your letter. Môj brat nečítal tvoj/váš dopis* (SVO_d). The verbs *to read, čítať* can be used in both languages as ditransitive, two-object verbs followed by an indirect object and a direct object, as in *Teachers should read children more poetry* (LDCE). *Učiteľia by mali čítať deťom viac poézie* (SVO_iO_d).

3 METHOD

3.1 The aim of the pedagogical research

The aim of the pedagogical research conducted by a questionnaire method is to obtain and evaluate respondents' data related to their opinions on teaching English syntax (SYEL) in the academic year 2014/2015. Specific emphasis, in accordance with the topic of the submitted paper, is devoted to the issues of comparison of linguistic phenomena in English (respondents' foreign language) and Slovak (respondents' mother tongue) in educational process. Moreover, crucial attention is devoted to the data evaluation of respondents' theoretical and practical knowledge of selected syntactic phenomena in typologically distant languages (English and Slovak).

3.2 The research sample

The research sample consisted of the students of bachelor study who attended the course of English syntax (SYEL) at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Trnava University in Trnava in the academic year 2014/2015. The pedagogical research was conducted in April 2015 at the Department of English Language and Literature. The research sample consisted of 50 respondents, the students of the SYEL course in the academic year 2014/2015.

The students of the Faculty of Education in Trnava can study English Language and Literature in the following study combinations: English Language and Literature – Slovak Language and Literature (EL – SL), English Language and Literature – German Language and Literature (EL – GL), English Language and Literature – Ethics (EL – ET), English Language and Literature – Fine Arts (EL – FA), English Language and Literature – Mathematics (EL – M), English Language and Literature – IT Studies (EL – IT) and English Language and Literature – Chemistry (EL – CH).

The number of respondents participating in the research as well as their study combinations are shown in Tab. 3.1.

Study combinations	Number of respondents	Number of respondents in %
EL– SL	15	30
EL – GL	3	6
EL – ET	13	26
EL – FA	5	10
EL –M	3	6
EL – IT	8	16
EL – CH	3	6
Total: 7	Total: 50	Total: 100%

Tab. 3.1 Respondents of the pedagogical research

3.3 The structure of a questionnaire

A questionnaire seemed to be the most appropriate method of obtaining necessary data from respondents. 50 respondents who attended the course of SYEL at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education in Trnava, in the academic year 2014/2015 participated in the pedagogical research. Respondents of the pedagogical research were asked to complete a questionnaire (anonymously) consisting of 9 questions included into three thematic areas. 3 questions were closed questions (questions 1-3) and 6 questions were open questions (questions 4-9).

Thematic area	Question type	Question number
1. Respondents' opinions on comparison of linguistic phenomena in typologically distant languages (EL – SL)	closed	1, 2, 3
2. Respondents' knowledge of selected syntactic phenomena in typologically distant languages (EL – SL)	opened	4, 5, 6, 7

3. Respondents' opinions on the teaching process of the SYEL course	opened	8, 9
Total: 3 thematic areas		Total: 3 closed questions, 6 opened questions

Tab. 3.2 The structure of a questionnaire

In closed questions to thematic area 1 (questions 1, 3), respondents were asked to select 1 response from the following items: a) I strongly agree, b) I agree, c) I disagree, d) I do not judge. In closed questions to thematic area 1 (question 2) respondents selected 1 response from the following items: a) definitely yes, b) probably yes, c) I do not know, d) probably not, e) definitely not. The questions to thematic area 2 (questions 4, 5, 6, 7) and the questions to thematic area 3 (questions 8, 9) were open questions, i.e. respondents did not select responses from the offered items, but they responded verbally.

3.4 The data evaluation

The data obtained from respondents' questionnaire were subsequently analysed and evaluated. The data evaluation of thematic area 1 (closed questions) as well as the data evaluation of thematic area 2 (open questions) are illustrated in tables in percentage terms. The most frequent respondents' answers to thematic area 3 (open questions) are presented in tables without percentage terms because respondents' answers were varied.

3.4.1 The data evaluation of thematic area 1

In closed questions to thematic area 1, we tried to find out respondents' opinions on comparison of linguistic phenomena in typologically distant languages (EL – SL). Respondents were asked to answer the following 3 questions:

Q 1 Did the teacher of the English syntax course create appropriate conditions for comparison of selected linguistic phenomena in the English and Slovak languages?

Q 2 Did the teacher of the English syntax course point out linguistic phenomena which are universal, i.e. similar in the English and Slovak languages?

Q 3 What is your opinion on comparison of selected linguistic phenomena in the English language and in the Slovak language? Choose the item that best describes your opinion.

Study combination	EL-SL	EL-GL	EL-ET	EL-FA	EL-M	AJ-IT	EL-CH
Answers to question 1	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I strongly agree	100	100	92.3	80	100	75	100
I agree	0	0	7.7	20	0	25	0
I disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
I do not judge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Answers to question 2							
definitely yes	100	100	100	100	66.7	62.5	100

probably yes	0	0	0	0	33.3	37.5	0
I do not know	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
probably not	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
definitely not	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Answers to question 3							
I strongly agree	100	100	46.1	20	66.7	0	0
I agree	0	0	38.5	40	0	25	66.7
I disagree	0	0	0	0	33.3	25	33.3
I do not judge	0	0	15.4	40	0	50	0

Tab. 3.3 The data evaluation of thematic area 1

As it can be observed in Tab. 3.3, the most frequent respondents' answer to question 1 was the answer *I strongly agree*. None of the respondents selected an item *I disagree* or *I do not judge*. To sum it up, majority of respondents declared that the teacher of the English syntax course created appropriate conditions for comparison of selected linguistic phenomena in the English and Slovak languages.

As it is demonstrated in Tab. 3.3, the most frequent respondents' answer to question 2 was the answer *definitely yes*. None of the respondents selected items *I do not know*, *probably not*, *definitely not*. To sum it up, the research demonstrated that the teacher of the English syntax course created appropriate conditions for comparison of selected linguistic phenomena in the English and Slovak languages.

Respondents' answers to question 3 varied, as it is illustrated in Tab. 3.3. The answer *I strongly agree* was chosen by 100% of EL – SL students and 100% of EL – GL students. On the other hand, 33.3% of EL – M students, 25% of EL – IT students and 33.3 % of EL – CH students did not agree with comparison of selected linguistic phenomena in English and Slovak.

3.4.2 The data evaluation of thematic area 2

Open questions in thematic area 2 (questions 4, 5 listed below) were aimed at respondents' knowledge of selected syntactic phenomena in typologically distant languages (EL – SL).

Q 4 Semantic roles of clause elements are similar in the English and Slovak languages. Write the sentence examples with the same semantic role of a direct object in these two languages (1 sentence example for the English language and 1 sentence example for the Slovak language).

Q 5 Compound clause elements have similar syntactic features and structures in the English and Slovak languages. Write the sentence examples with whichever compound clause element in these two languages (1 sentence example for the English language and 1 sentence example for the Slovak language).

Study combination		EL-SL	EL-GL	EL-ET	EL-FA	EL-M	EL-IT	EL-CH
Answers to question 4		%	%	%	%	%	%	%
correct	correct answer in EL and SL	86.7	66.7	84.6	40	33.3	25	66.7
correct;	correct answer in EL,	13.3	33.3	15.4	40	33.3	37.5	33.3

incorrect	incorrect answer or no answer in SL							
incorrect	incorrect answer or no answer in EL and SL	0	0	0	20	33.3	37.5	0
Answers to question 5								
correct	correct answer in EL and SL	100	100	77	60	66.7	37.5	66.7
correct; incorrect	correct answer in EL, incorrect answer or no answer in SL	0	0	23	40	33.3	25	33.3
incorrect	incorrect answer or no answer in EL and SL	0	0	0	0	0	37.5	0

Tab. 3.4 The data evaluation of thematic area 2 (questions 4, 5)

As can be observed in Tab. 3.4 (thematic area 2, questions 4, 5), the best results were achieved by the students of the following study combinations: EL – SL, EL – GL, EL –ET. On the other hand, the least successful were the students of these study combinations: EL – IT, EL – M.

The other 2 open questions in a questionnaire (thematic area 2, questions 6, 7) were also aimed at respondents' knowledge of selected syntactic phenomena in typologically distant languages (EL – SL).

Q 6 Write the sentence examples for a clause pattern in which an obligatory adverbial follows a copula verb (1 sentence example for the English language and 1 sentence example for the Slovak language).

Q 7 Write the sentence examples of a compound sentence in which two or more clauses are joined syndetically (1 sentence example for the English language and 1 sentence example for the Slovak language).

In this context we should emphasise that one of the aims of the SYEL course is to point out that some linguistic phenomena are universal both in typologically related languages, but also in typologically distant languages.

Study combination		EL- SL	EL-GL	EL-ET	EL-FA	EL-M	EL-IT	EL-CH
Answers to question 6								
correct	correct answer in EL and SL	86.7	66.7	84.6	60	66.7	50	100
correct; incorrect	correct answer in EL, incorrect answer or no answer in SL	13.3	33.3	15.4	20	33.3	25	0
incorrect	incorrect answer or no answer in EL and SL	0	0	0	20	0	25	0
Answers to question 7								

correct	correct answer in EL and SL	100	100	84.6	40	33.3	25	100
correct; incorrect	correct answer in EL, incorrect answer or no answer in SL	0	0	15.4	40	66.7	37.5	0
incorrect	incorrect answer or no answer in EL and SL	0	0	0	20	0	37.5	0

Tab. 3.5 The data evaluation of thematic area 2 (questions 6, 7)

As it is illustrated in Tab. 3.5 (thematic area 2, questions 6, 7), the best results were achieved by the students of these study combinations: EL – CH, EL – SL, EL – ET and EL – GL. On the other hand, the students of EL – FA and the students of EL – IT achieved the worst results – an incorrect answer or no answer in both languages were indicated only in these two study combinations.

3.4.3 The data evaluation of thematic area 3

Questions 8, 9 in thematic area 3 were aimed at evaluation of the SYEL course:

Q 8 Express openly your opinions on the course of English syntax. Specify what you liked (if there was something you liked) in the SYEL course.

Q 9 Express openly your critical comments on the course of English syntax. Specify what you did not like in the SYEL course, suggest recommendations for improvement of educational process.

Respondents' answers to open questions 8, 9 (thematic area 3) were varied. Therefore, it was not possible to evaluate them in percentage terms. The most frequent respondents' answers to questions 8, 9 are presented in Tab. 3.6.

Evaluation of the SYEL course	
Positive evaluation of the SYEL course	explanation of the course topics, the teacher's approach to students, seminar discussions, interaction of theory and practice, a number of additional creative tasks and exercises, comparison of linguistic phenomena in English and Slovak
Negative evaluation of the SYEL course, recommendations for improvement of educational process	necessity of increased time allowance for the subject, written assignments, I liked the course, therefore, I have no suggestions for its improvement, blank column

Tab. 3.6 Summary of the most frequent answers to thematic area 3

4 CONCLUSION

Firstly, the paper focused on some universal linguistic phenomena in typologically distant languages, namely in the English language and in the Slovak language. It was emphasised that comparison of selected linguistic phenomena in English (respondents' foreign language) and Slovak (respondents' mother tongue) can contribute to their better comprehension by university teacher training students studying English Language and Literature in combination with the other academic subject.

Secondly, crucial attention was devoted to the analysis of selected linguistic phenomena which have similar linguistic characteristics and uses not only in typologically related languages, but also in typologically distant languages, namely the grammatical realisation of the subject and semantic roles of the subject in English and Slovak. Furthermore, a complete predication, a minimal clause structure, but also the issues related to clause patterns and verb complementation types in English and Slovak were discussed.

Thirdly, the paper analysed the results of the research conducted among the 2nd year teacher training students of bachelor study. Respondents of the research were the students studying English Language and Literature in combination with the other academic subject at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Trnava University in Trnava, Slovakia. Respondents of the research were asked to complete a questionnaire related to comparison of linguistic phenomena in English (respondents' foreign language) and Slovak (respondents' mother tongue) in a teaching process.

Lastly, the data obtained from respondents' questionnaire were analysed and evaluated. The data evaluation of thematic area 1 (closed questions) as well as the data evaluation of thematic area 2 (open questions) were illustrated in tables in percentage terms. The most frequent respondents' answers to thematic area 3 (open questions) were presented in the paper without percentage terms because respondents' answers were varied.

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