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# GRAMMATICAL INTERFERENCE IN TEACHING
## *THERE TO BE* CONSTRUCTIONS

## 1. Introduction

In this paper I am going to focus on grammatical interference and its role in the process of language learning. I will present various types of grammatical interference and transfer and then proceed to describing the techniques teachers can use in teaching *there* to students. The next section outlines the ways *there* is introduced and practised in some textbooks. The last part contains the analysis of the experiment conducted among the secondary school students.

## 2. Grammatical interference

Students learning foreign languages encounter a number of problems, especially with the grammar of the language they acquire which they often find difficult, complicated and confusing. One of the reasons for that rests in the differences between the grammar of English and the grammar of their native language.

In Polish environment learning a foreign language usually takes place at schools, universities, courses or private lessons and begins when the learners of it already know Polish – their native language, which they have acquired in natural environment. This fact has the following consequences:

On the one hand, a good command of the native language facilitates foreign language learning since just like the native one it serves as a tool to carry out certain functions: conveying some information to someone, receiving it from someone, expressing various emotional states and making people take certain actions, etc. Moreover, by means of both languages you can state something, agree or disagree with something, convince

someone to something, describe numerous objects and phenomena, do some reasoning and express a number of other notions and semantic categories [Krzeszowski 1984].

On the other hand, learners' cognitive abilities rely on Polish, which means that when learning English they involuntarily apply their mother tongue in the process of interpreting an English sentence, sometimes even (consciously or unconsciously) translating it into Polish. To form an utterance in English they implement an equivalent Polish utterance as a pattern. These procedures are often, though not always, the source of errors and pertain to the early stages of foreign language acquisition. Gradually, as learners proceed with their learning, these errors lessen or even disappear completely.

Making errors is a complementary phenomenon of the process of learning. In fact, second language learning inevitably implies making errors. We say that someone has acquired some knowledge or skill better, when he makes fewer language errors in the area of his discipline and conversely, if someone makes more language errors we are likely to say that he did not acquire a certain part of knowledge or skill sufficiently. Error, therefore, determines in a sense the degree of the acquisition of the specific amount of knowledge or skill. As for making errors between the starting point and the target point of the learning process, the only difference that occurs is that of quantity. The probability of making an error is relatively higher at the beginning of the learning process and it lessens during the learning period. However, the probability of making an error is never reduced to zero. It is impossible to reach a stage that would absolutely exclude making language errors. In general, the phenomenon of error is a natural phenomenon. Just as we can talk about the persistent process of learning, we can talk about the persistent process of making errors. Language learning is a never-ending process and so is the process of making errors [Grucza 1978]. The question is where these errors derive from. Arabski [1979] claims that the influence of the native language on foreign language learning was noticed long ago. Every foreign language teacher was aware of the native language interference (negative transfer) on the acquisition of the foreign language structures. He stresses that the differences between the student's native language and the language being acquired, play a significant role. However, difficulties in the process of foreign language acquisition are caused not only because of the native language interference but because of many other processes. One of the classifications provided by Arabski [1979] is the one in which we learn about three sources of errors:

- redundancy of structures in a foreign language;

(1) He speak English. (instead of *speaks*)

- analogy;

(2) He goed. (he *went*)

- ways and methods of teaching.

The latter group constitutes a variant of the former one. These are the errors made due to the influence of the earlier learnt structures on those being acquired. Their type depends on the order of teaching the foreign structures, for example:

(3) It's a blue. (*It's blue*)

This error is made by transferring the previously taught form (one without the noun) into the construction including the noun: *It's a blue book.*

Komorowska [1980] presents three possible approaches to the problem of error. One of them is students' ignorance. According to L. Newmark and D.A. Reibel all of the errors made by students prove the lack of sufficient linguistic knowledge or linguistic skill. Not knowing what the right form should be like the students use another form, one they know, instead. The only familiar form they know, however, is the one taken from their native language or a foreign form but formed according to the students' native language patterns. Such a view leads to the conclusion that dealing with any errors (interference errors as well) is pointless. In case of such an approach identifying interference with ignorance Komorowska [1980] takes the position that errors, including the interference errors, should be counterreacted by means of suitable methods. She clearly sees the need for taking an interest in the problem of interference.

The second approach to the problem of errors derives from the analysis of failures of the approach (discussed later on) suggesting that interference is the only source of errors. In this approach a single error is not of much interest. The point of interest here is the set of characteristic errors which indicate a particular level of foreign language acquisition and also qualitative changes occurring within this set when transferring to the next, higher stage in the foreign language acquisition. Each of these stages has a certain characteristic set of errors and grammatical rules resulting from the nature of the system learners use at different levels of a foreign language acquisition. Arabski [1979] understands the notion of interlanguage as the language of a learner who is in the process of acquiring a given foreign language. He follows Selinker who defines

interlanguage as "a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a TL norm". One of the most characteristic features of interlanguage is that of erroneous constructions which are the result of five central processes occurring in interlanguage:

- *language transfer* (transference of a learner's native language habits into interlanguage)
- *transfer of training* (transference due to training procedures)
- *strategies of second language learning* (the outcome of a learner's approach to the foreign language material)
- *strategies of second language communication* (the result of a learner's attitude to communication with native speakers of a foreign language)
- *overgeneralization of target language material* (overgeneralization of acquired foreign language rules and semantic features and transference into interlanguage)

Komorowska [1980] concludes that in the case of such an approach to the problem of errors, the source of error is searched for in the processes contributing to the establishment of the set of features which create the product called interlanguage.

The last approach to the issue of errors, most significant for this work, is grammatical interference which triggers a great number of problems. First of all, it is difficult to separate morphological from syntactical and lexical phenomena. Secondly, "there is no limit in principle to the influence which one morphological system may have upon another" [Krzeszowski 1976: 42] According to Krzeszowski [1976] there are some types of grammatical interference:

- transfer of morphemes, that is the use of morphemes of the native language in the foreign language,
- transfer of grammatical relations, that is the use of certain relations present in the native language into the foreign language in which it does not exist (e.g. transfer of Polish word order into some English sentence where such order is non-existing),
- change in the function of a morpheme or category, for instance the use of Present Continuous Tense instead of Present Perfect Continuous Tense:

(4) How long are you reading this book?
   *Jak długo czytasz tę książkę?*

- transfer of obligatory distinctions from the native language to the foreign language which is rare as far as Polish-English relationship is concerned, except for one of the few examples when the plural inflection is added to English adjectives:

(5) John has five *fasts* cars.

   *Jaś ma pięć szybkich samochodów.*

According to Komorowska [1980] interference is not a phenomenon representing the influence of the earlier acquired language skills but the instance of their negative influence. This negative influence must be taken into consideration in relation to the native language, the acquired material in a foreign language and even other foreign languages if they can play a role of additionally influential factor. Komorowska [1980] classifies interference into two categories:

- interlingual interference (the influence of the native language or other foreign languages);
- intralingual interference (the influence within the native language).

Grucza [1978] defines interlingual interference as the incorrect realisation of the foreign language structures owing to the analogy with the native language. We also talk about the interlingual interference in case of errors resulting from the influence of the first foreign language structures on the second foreign language. However, there may occur quite opposite processes in which we observe the interference of the first foreign language on the native language and the second foreign language on the first foreign language, etc. Generally speaking, interlingual interference is the influence through the analogy of the structures of one of the acquired languages, on the realisation of the structures of another acquired language. In the close neighbourhood of the interlingual interference there is intralingual interference which consists in the transferring of the earlier acquired patterns of one and the same language to the structures presently learnt. It is, thus, linguistic realisation through analogy within one language.

When addressing the notion of grammatical interference it is inevitable to discuss the term *transfer* which is defined as "the extension of a native language habit into the target language with or without the awareness of the learner" [Krzeszowski 1976: 74]. There are two types of transfer: positive (facilitation) or negative (interference). Komorowska [1980] adds to these two types of transfer one more which is a zero transfer. Positive transfer contributes (as the name suggests) to the formation of a grammatical sentence in the foreign language and occurs when the linguistic habit is transferred from the native language. In negative transfer, habits transferred from the native language result in errors in the foreign language (e.g. ungrammatical sentences). Komorowska [1980] distinguishes two types of negative transfer:

- *proactive blockage* (the influence of the earlier skill on the later)
- *retroactive blockage* (the influence of the later skill on the earlier)

Komorowska [1975] claims that considering the possibility of error occurrence in the newly introduced foreign structure we take interest especially in the *proactive blockage* which is either *associatory* or *reproductive*. It is because we are not only interested in those errors occurring in the course of practice exercises but also in errors within the same structure coming out after the practice stage.

Negative transfer can be manifested in various grammatical categories: number, degree, person, gender, questions, negations, modal verbs. Obviously there are other points in English grammar that are difficult in the process of teaching because of complicated rules of usage. These can be modal verbs, the perfect and continuous aspects of English tenses, and articles, for example. In Polish, these distinctions either do not exist or are expressed by totally different media. The notion of definiteness and indefiniteness of nouns in Polish is signalled by means of word order or demonstratives, or is not indicated at all [Krzeszowski 1976].

Harmer [1987] discusses an example of the Spanish learners who find English adjectives troublesome as do English students learning Spanish. If we compare this grammatical category in English and Spanish we will easily observe what type of problems Spanish students may face. In English, adjectives normally come before nouns, not after them, whereas in Spanish the situation is reversed. An additional complication is that English adjectives do not alter when they apply to "masculine" or "feminine" words. In Spanish, however, the adjective changes depending on whether it agrees with the plural or feminine. This difference results in the fact that most students of both languages take a long time to get it right. There are obviously many other examples of grammatical interference like word order for German speakers or the use of the articles for Polish or Japanese students. These contrasts are easier to deal with in a class of students sharing the same mother tongue as teachers will employ some specially designed patterns to introduce a problematic grammatical category. On the other hand, those teaching in multi-lingual classes will find it more challenging to deal with native language interference if they do not know their students' mother tongues.

### 3. *There* in teaching grammar

When teaching English grammar to our students we use certain techniques which involve using such things as: simple drawings, objects and dialogues. They help to encourage our students to use English. Certain techniques are employed for teaching of a particular language

form or function. For example, maps often provide the basis for asking for directions and therefore they are used to introduce this function.

One of the techniques employed when introducing *there* involves objects. You can use them as a way to teach students how to describe shape and function. We bring to class a plant, for example, which we use to introduce structures typical in describing objects. This is a suggestion on how the activity should be conducted:

First of all, you point to the students that one of typical ways to begin a description of an object is to describe its overall design. Secondly, you list structures which are commonly used to do this, such as:

- A plant / is made up of / is composed of / contains / has / three major parts: the roots, stem and leaves, or:
- *There are* three major parts to a plant: the roots, stem and leaves.

In the latter sentence we must make sure to point out to the students that with this structure the subject of the sentence occurs after the verb. In order to do that it is possible to draw a diagram just as the following:

- There ( are )  three major  (parts) to a plant: the roots, stem and leaves.

Having done that, we point to another object and ask the students to describe its parts. For example, we might tell the students to name the major parts of a chair, using *there*:
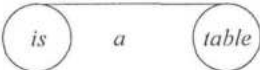
(6) *There are* four legs.

(7) *There is* a seat.

This type of activity could be continued with other classroom objects such as: a clock, desk or book. Objects can be quite an effective way for illustrating such things as demonstrative pronouns, expressions of comparison and *there* as an expletive.

Another technique involves simple drawings which provide a good tool for introducing locative-existential *there* (with expressions of location). Here the procedure is less complicated as all you need to do is present the students with a picture and having shown them how to do it ask them to describe it. The description should go as follows:

(8) *In the picture there is a table. There is a radio. There are two chairs next to the table and there is a window behind the table.*

The description of the drawing can be used to point out that with the existential *there*, the verb agrees with the noun that follows the verb. Again this could be done by means of a visual to show the relationship between the verb and the real subject:

(9)  There   ( is )   a   ( table )   .

(10)  There   ( are )   two   ( chairs )   .

In order to provide some more practice with existential *there* one can use pictures with different configuration of objects in it. Besides, you can describe a drawing and have the students identify it. Then get the students to work in pairs, ask one of them to describe one of the pictures and the other one to identify which one they are describing. Drawings employed in this type of activities need not be elaborate. They may include only simple objects which are easy to draw. More important here, is to place one or more of the items in contrasting positions in the picture in order to check the student's comprehension of the expressions of location [McKay 1985][1].

## 4. *There to be* constructions in textbooks

In this section I would like to go over some textbooks used in teaching English and examine what activities are used by their authors to introduce and practise the locative-existential sentences. Another point of interest is to observe what grammatical items are taught preceding and following the introduction of locative-existential sentences.

I shall begin with the textbook *Go! 1* [Elsworth and Rose 1996] which is a primary school course taking students from beginner to pre-intermediate level. The authors begin presenting the grammatical issue: *there is/are,* in the text about a small seaside town. You learn from the text about the location of various attractions, places and buildings. The first stage of the lesson is to present and drill *there is/are* using the classroom situation and then to introduce to the students those pieces of vocabulary which occur in the text and might not be known. The activities used to practise this structure are: true or false sentences (including *there*) as a reading comprehension exercise, writing locative-existential sentences about the picture accompanying the text, covering the picture and asking about the location of things in it (pairwork). The textbook contains fifty chapters altogether and the structure is introduced in the eleventh. The grammatical items preceding it are: plural of *to be: are,* subject pronoun:

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[1] For more ideas look in: Gerngross, Puchta 1992.

*we,* regular plural nouns, possessive adjectives: *our/their,* prepositions: *in, at, next to.* The ones following it are: imperatives, ability: *can/can't, can* questions, *Which...?,* link words: *and/but.*

Another beginner's course for young learners is *Project English 1* [Hutchinson 1985]. The book consists of eight projects. The construction *there is/are* is introduced in the third one. This textbook presents the structure in a slightly different way. The students can see the map of Carnforth District with lakes, rivers, bridges, churches and other buildings. Before they are actually instructed how to use *there is/are* they are taught prepositions: *between, next to, in,* and given some time to practise them. The task designed to practise locative-existential sentences is to make a list of the location of places the students could see on the map. This is done in a competitive manner since the best is the student able to make the longest list. The interrogative and negative forms are drilled in pairs through asking and answering questions about the location of particular shops in Carnforth: *Is there a bookshop in Carnforth? Yes there is. / No there isn't.* Just as in the former textbook, the structure is introduced in the close neighbourhood of *can/can't,* prepositions of place, imperatives and additionally *let's* and *must.*

In *Open Doors* [Whiney 1997], a coursebook for young learners consisting of twelve units, *there is/are* is introduced in the fourth. It is presented in the company of present simple tense: negative and affirmative, countable and uncountable nouns, *some* and *any, would like* + infinitive. The vocabulary area presented in this unit deals with food and drink, and situations in restaurants and supermarkets. The first exercise to be performed by the students involves a copy of a menu with which they are to make up questions and answers like: *Is there any soup today? Yes there is.* Another activity provides the students with the picture of a fridge with various products in it. Their task is again to ask each other some questions (including *there* and *some* or *any*) and answer them. The grammatical items introduced in the coursebook right after this structure are: *can/can't,* imperatives and *have got.*

*Look Ahead* [Hopkins and Potter 1994] is a four-level series for learners of English taking them from the beginner level to the First Certificate preparation. It is divided into fifteen units. As in the previous textbook, the structure *there is/are* is introduced in the fourth one together with *some* and *any,* countable and uncountable nouns, *would like* + infinitive and prepositions: *in, on.* It is also presented with the vocabulary section dealing with food and drink. One of the activities involves a picture with different objects on a table. The students are supposed to look at the things in the picture for one minute, then close the book and make ten sentences about

them beginning: *There is/are some/any...* . Another activity is designed for pairwork. Both students have one picture with the same place but there are some differences to be found. The conversation goes on like this:

(11) A: In your picture, is there any milk on the table?

    B: Yes, there is. In your picture, are there any pears in the bowl?

    A: No, there aren't.

The next grammatical items to come in this particular textbook are: present tense of *have got*, present simple tense (affirmative), prepositions of place: *next to, between* etc., prepositions of time: *at*, questions: *how many* and conjunction: *because*.

The last coursebook to consider is *Wow!1* [Nolasco 1990] which is a three-part course for teenagers. It has got twenty chapters. The issue of locative-existential sentences is dealt with in the ninth unit and again they are introduced in the neighbourhood of *some /any* and prepositions of place: *over, under, round, through* etc. The following unit introduces questions: *how much/many* and words with and without plural forms. *There is/are* is introduced through the drawing of the holiday camp presenting the facilities available: swimming-pool, computer-room, tennis court and many others. The students are supposed to describe the holiday camp to a friend of theirs writing a few sentences like: *There are some tennis courts. There is a gym next to the houses for girls and boys etc.* The interrogative form is practised through the use of flash cards, each presenting one facility. The students ask each other questions and answer them according to the previously introduced drawing of the holiday camp.

More recently published textbooks such as: *Click on* [Evans, O'Sullivan 2000], *Language to go* [Maistre, Lewis 2002], *Adventures* [Wetz 2003] and *Friends* [Skinner, Bogucka 2002] approach the problem of *there to be construction's* instruction quite similarly.

The positive exception to be mentioned could be *Friends* [Skinner, Bogucka 2002], where one can encounter more variety of the exercises in the presentation, practice and production stages of teaching *there to be construction*. Apart from that, the structure in question is quite well contextualised which gives the students the chance to "feel" not only how, but also when the construction should be applied.

Having reviewed this random selection of textbooks there are some conclusions can be drawn . One concerns the grammatical items introduced to the learners before, while and after the introduction of *there*. Here, the authors of the discussed textbooks are quite unanimous (in most of them *there* occurs in the neighbourhood of prepositions, determiners *some* and *any, would like* plus *infinitive*), just as they are about placing

the construction in the overall syllabus of the textbooks in question. It falls approximately on the sixth unit or, to say more generally, in the introductory units of the textbooks. The number of lessons estimated for this grammatical category seems to be quite insufficient as in the case of the textbooks *Open Doors* [Whiney 1997] or *Click on* [Evans, O'Sullivan 2000] which provide short practice exercises without adequate context. Moreover, the construction is not listed among other grammar items in the table of contents of *Open Doors* [Whiney 1997]. This suggests that the status of *there to be* construction seems to be underestimated even though, as will be shown in the subsequent sections of this paper, it presents a great number of problems to Polish learners of English.

## 5. Teaching implications: project description

Learners of the English language often find it difficult to employ the right language items in cases in which locative-existential sentences should be used. As a result they are made up in accordance with equivalent native language constructions. This method, however, does not take them far since sentences so formed are marked with the interference from the native language, in this case Polish. The most common example is the interference of Polish word order with the omission of *there*. Here, for instance, Polish: *Na podłodze jest dywan*, in English will go: *On the floor is carpet* instead of *There is a carpet on the floor*. They also tend to omit the quasi subject *there* and produce the sentences of the following type: *Is a beautiful picture on the wall* or *Aren't any spare chairs in here*. As far as the negation of the copula *be* is concerned it creates an additional confusion. It is so because in Polish translation the negated *there is/ are not* sounds as the negated *have – nie ma,* which can relate either to singular or plural ("Nie ma <u>kwiatów</u>" , "Nie ma <u>dywanu</u> na podłodze"). Polish teachers of English usually provide the students with the Polish translation of the structure: *jest/znajduje się, są/znajdują się*. During the same lesson most learners find it quite simple to comprehend and having been instructed how to perform the tasks, apply it properly. The problem arises after some time when they are not given the straight instruction to use the *there* construction.

### 5.1. Data and methodology

My project involved the secondary school students at pre-intermediate level. The structure *there is/are* had already been introduced to them in

the process of teaching so they were supposed to be familiar with the circumstances in which the construction should be applied. I selected a photograph of a living room. The picture was accompanied by the vocabulary – words describing objects located in that room. My instruction was: *Describe the room using the words provided.* There were thirteen students taking part in the experiment. In the analysis of the results of this experiment, I did not examine the incorrect use of articles, tenses or spelling errors. Those errors were beyond the scope of my study. I examined the papers according to four categories which illustrate the ways my students might describe the location of the objects in the photograph. Those categories were:

1) *there + be + NP + locative phrase*
2) *NP + be + locative phrase*
3) *locative phrase + there +be + NP*
4) *locative phrase + be + NP*

Out of these four categories the most wanted and correct for this particular context is the first one. The fourth is the most evident example of Polish interference. I was also interested to find other structures the students used as a substitute for locative-existential sentences which might also prove how significant the interference of their native language is. The next types of errors I expected to observe were those of typically structural nature, that is: singular form of *be* with the plural form of the noun phrase ( in Polish: *Jest troje ludzi w kolejce* and in English *There are three people in the line* ). My research was conducted to estimate the scale of the problem of Polish language interference in forming the sentences which should mostly consist of the first type of construction presented above. The theoretical hypothesis of my research was that the papers written by my students would abound with the sentences strongly marked with interference, that is constructions of the fourth type and that the percentage of type one, two and three constructions would be considerably low.

### 5.2. Findings

The results of the research are displayed in table 1 and table 2. The first horizontal line in table 1 lists the numbers of papers examined in the experiment. The second line shows the total number of sentences which should have exhibited structures of type one. The number varies in each paper since they were of different length. The subsequent lines present the percentage of each type of construction in relation to the overall number of sentences. Table 2 exhibits more global results. The number

of the sentences in a particular paper was added and the percentage of all the types of constructions counted in relation to this total number of sentences.

Table 1

| PAPERS | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 | P7 | P8 | P9 | P10 | P11 | P12 | P13 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The total number of sentences | 15 | 14 | 17 | 12 | 12 | 16 | 14 | 15 | 17 | 13 | 13 | 15 | 12 |
| Constructions type 1 | 6.6 | 28.5 | 11.7 | 16.6 | 25 | 0 | 28.5 | 46.6 | 23.5 | 15.3 | 0 | 20.0 | 75.0 |
| Constructions type 2 | 12.5 | 7.1 | 11.7 | 16.6 | 8.3 | 12.5 | 0 | 13.3 | 29.4 | 23.0 | 53.8 | 13.3 | 0 |
| Constructions type 3 | 12.5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6.2 | 4.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 20.0 | 25.0 |
| Constructions type 4 | 66.6 | 64.2 | 76.4 | 75.0 | 66.6 | 87.5 | 57.1 | 40.0 | 47.0 | 61.5 | 46.1 | 46.6 | 0 |

Table 2

| The total number of sentences in all papers | 185 |
|---|---|
| Constructions type 1 | 22.16 |
| Constructions type 2 | 15.67 |
| Constructions type 3 | 5.94 |
| Constructions type 4 | 57.29 |

The figures presented in the tables show that among those thirteen papers examined, only Paper 13 contained more than 50%, that is 75% of correctly used constructions of type 1. The paper included 0% of type 2 and type 4 constructions, that is those which did not have *there* in them. Additionally, it included 25% of type 3 constructions. This is the best result in comparison to all the rest papers. Some examples of the sentences from this paper are:

(12) There are some pictures on the wall over the fireplace. (type 1)
There's a lamp on the left side of the room. (type 1)
There are three big windows in the background. (type 1)
In the background there are some plants. (type 3)
In the middle of the room there is a big dog which is laying on the rug. (type 3)

The next is Paper 8 which contained 46.6% of correct constructions. However, the paper is not free from the incorrect constructions of type 4, strongly marked with the interference. There are 40% of those structures, which is nearly as many as the correct ones. Some examples of this type of sentences are:

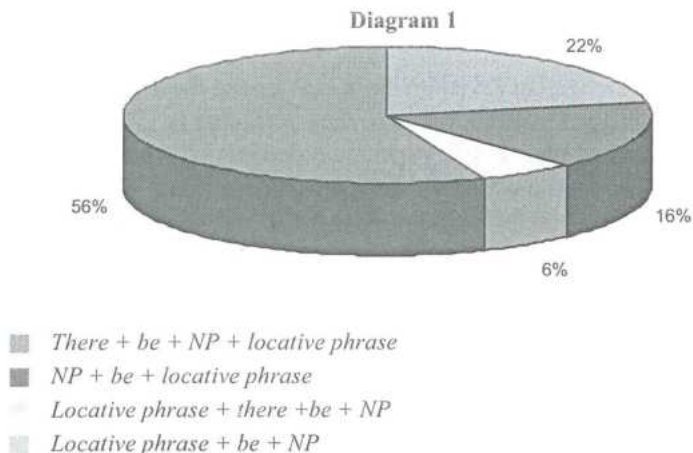(13) Next to a television is a stereo.
   By the window is a sofa.
   Between sofa and cabinet is a chair.
   Behind the window are trees.

There are also some papers which contain 28.5% (Paper 7), 25% (Paper 5) and 20% (Paper 12) of type one constructions. However, even those are full of the undesirable structures (on average 50 %). Nevertheless, the most depressing messages come from those papers which present the sole 6.6% of correct sentences (Paper 1) or even as bad as 0% (Paper 6 and Paper 11) with the wrong sentences reaching respectively 66.6%, 87.5% and 46.1%. Let me now quote a short fragment of Paper 6 whose author is most affected by the interference:

(14) On the picture are many things. In the foreground is armchair. An armchair is next to a dog. On a the fire is a mirror. Near a fire is a cabinet. On a cabinet is a television. On the wall is two pictures. The big blue sofa is next to a chair. On top of a sofa are two books.

The global results presented in table 2 clearly show that the percentage of incorrectly used structures definitely outweighs that of those used correctly. Below I present diagram 1 which helps us to visualise the results observed in the analysis of the thirteen papers.

**Diagram 1**



22%

16%

6%

56%

   ▨ *There + be + NP + locative phrase*
   ▪ *NP + be + locative phrase*
   *Locative phrase + there + be + NP*
   ▨ *Locative phrase + be + NP*

Some of the papers exhibited other types of errors which are also an outcome of grammatical interference. Papers 9 and 3, for example, contain the errors of disagreement between plural noun phrases and singular form of verb *be* (example 15):

(15) There is some pictures.                                   (Paper 9)
    There is a some woods in a fireplace.        (Paper 9)
    There is a lot of pictures.                    (Paper 3)

### 5.3. Evaluation of the results

The assumption made before conducting the experiment was that the mechanisms of grammatical interference would be a hindrance in producing the sentences consisting of: *there + be + N P + a locative phrase*. The hypothesis was that the students would search for other types of sentences to describe the location of the objects in the living room and the tool they would use in this search would be their native language.

Having analysed the results of the project I can state that the assumption is confirmed by the students' papers. They show that the constructions of type 1 and 3, those including *there,* were least frequently in use. This proves that grammatical interference plays an extremely significant role here since the prevailing number (more than 50%) of students were affected by the fact that the Polish language does not have any similar constructions requiring the use of the quasi subject. The outcome results in the figures representing a large number of students (57.29% and 15.57% respectively) whose papers contained mostly sentences of type 4: *locative phrase + be + N P* and type 2: *N P + be + locative phrase*. The presence of sentences of type four are the most evident results of the direct translation of Polish sentences into English. They are, therefore, strongly characterised by interference. Let me present some examples of Polish equivalents of the English sentences as they occur in the papers with the desirable, correct sentences teachers expect their students to produce in the type of exercise used in the experiment. The examples will be displayed in clusters of three to illustrate the effect of interference.

(16) Polish:     *Za fotelem jest kominek.*
    Paper 3:    *Behind the armchair is a fireplace.*
    Should be:    *There is a fireplace behind the armchair.*
(17) Polish:     *Na stole jest telefon.*
    Paper 1:    *On the table is a telephone.*
    Should be:    *There is a telephone on the table.*
(18) Polish:     *Na ścianie są fotografie.*
    Paper 2:    *On the wall are two photos.*
    Should be:    *There are two photos on the wall.*

The number of the next type of constructions (type 2) also supports the claim that interference is an obstacle in learning English. The result of 15.67 % brings us to a conclusion that the use of the quasi subject *there* was not firmly enough internalised in the students' central processor and it affected their performance in the kind of sentences they were supposed to produce in this task. They tended to select the word order that excluded the use of the quasi *there*. Paper 11 contains 53.3 % of such sentences which indicates how susceptible the student must be to the effect of interference. The fragment of this work reads as follows:

(19) A stereo is next to sofa. A telephone is on the table. A plant is next to lamp. A mirror is over the fire. [...] A dog is on the rug. Next to mirror are four photos. A armchair is in front of fire.

The constructions of type 3 were, not surprisingly, in the minority in the examined papers. In fact, they make up 5.94% of all the other constructions used. I did not observe the occurrence of them in as many as eight papers. The examples can be seen below:

(20) On the sofa there are some newspapers. Behind the sofa, in the background there is a window. (Paper 1)
(21) In the centre there is a dog, sitting on the rug. Over this fire there is a mirror. (Paper 12)

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the experiment and examples presented in the last section of this paper, the hypothesis that grammatical interference causes students great problems in forming locative-existential sentences seems very adequate. The final conclusion is that the learners indeed find it complicated to form sentences according to the English word order rather than Polish.

When looking at the ways this grammatical problem is introduced to students in the sample of course books discussed earlier in this paper, the debatable seems to be the number of lessons or activities meant for practising the locative-existential sentences as well as the lack of any activities which would allow the students to visualise the structural difference between the use of this construction in Polish and English.

Another interesting comment worth mentioning and made by Celce-Murcia [in Miller 1997] about the approach used in teaching existential *there* constructions, is that in a great number of publications (also the ones discussed in this paper) they are taught with reference to what is visible in physical context and presented at sentence-level only, disregarding their discourse function. Such presentation gives the learners a very partial picture of this construction in written discourse.

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## ROLA INTERFERENCJI GRAMATYCZNEJ W NAUCZANIU KONSTRUKCJI *THERE* TO *BE*

### Streszczenie

Głównym celem pracy jest omówienie zagadnienia interferencji gramatycznej w nauczaniu konstrukcji *there to be* oraz określenie statusu tego problemu w nauczaniu języka angielskiego w ogóle. Autorka formułuje teoretyczną hipotezę dotyczącą badania przeprowadzonego wśród grupy uczniów polskich liceów. Zaprezentowano uzyskane dane, przeanalizowano je, co doprowadziło do wyciągnięcia ostatecznych wniosków oraz przedstawienia zaleceń.