Crosslinguistic Influence as a Problem for the Language Learning Classroom

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Abstract. This paper discusses crosslinguistic influence (CLI), or the various language interaction phenomena that occur in multilingual language systems, and its effects on English language learners’ classroom production. It uses the example of a group of trilingual university students to examine some of the effects of CLI that should be taken into consideration by language teachers. First, the group itself is analyzed sociolinguistically, and it is seen that ethnocultural factors such as nationality exert a strong influence on these students’ language systems. Then, several examples of both written and spoken production are examined in order to show some of the most common ways that CLI manifests in the classroom. These include errors in syntax, morphology, and word order, as well as increased use of hesitations and code-switching. Students themselves, however, are often unaware of these processes, or only recognize them in extreme forms. Thus, the paper ends with some suggestions for classroom methodology designed to increase students’ awareness of CLI.