

## Gradient acceptability and language proficiency as factors in L3 acquisition of syntax

In this talk we would like to report on the results of the first stage of a larger-scale longitudinal study of multilingual acquisition, in which we investigate the interaction between the acquisition of selected syntactic phenomena and language proficiency (for previous related research, see e.g. Westergaard 2021; Puig-Mayenco et al. 2020). We examined L1 Polish speakers with L2 English and L3 Norwegian acquired in an instructed setting. Two multilingual groups of learners, at initial (N=24, mean age 20) and upper-intermediate (N=15, mean age 22) L3 levels participated in this part of the study. The syntactic phenomena selected for investigation involved pronominal binding (cf. Hestvik 1992 for Norwegian, Witkoś et al. 2020 for Polish), as in (1a-c), and the position of adverbs of frequency (2a-c).

- 1a Jan<sub>1/2</sub> znalazłswoje<sub>1</sub> /jego<sub>2</sub> klucze. (Polish)  
Jan found self his keys
- 1b John<sub>1</sub> found his<sub>1/2</sub> keys. (English)
- 1c Jan<sub>1/\*2</sub> fant nøklene sine<sub>1</sub> / hans<sub>2</sub>. (Norwegian)  
Jan found keys self his
- 2a Janek rzadko czyta (%rzadko) e-booki. (Polish)  
Janek seldom reads seldom e-books
- 2b John seldom reads (\*seldom) e-books. (English)
- 2c Øystein (\*sjelden) Leser sjelden e-bøker. (Norwegian)  
Øystein seldom reads seldom e-books

The first type of constructions puts Polish and English (both employing the reflexive possessive for subject orientation) in one group as opposed to English, whereas the second one requires a strict word order in English and Norwegian, but not in Polish. Crucially, both phenomena are characterized by gradient acceptability for the marked conditions (subject orientation of the possessive pronoun *jego* in (1a) and the post-verbal adverb position in (2a)) in Polish, but not in English and Norwegian. The aims of the study were not only to establish the source and nature of cross-linguistic influence, but also to examine the effect of gradient acceptability in L1 on the acquisition of syntactic phenomena in L2/L3 and to observe the correlation between the effects of gradient acceptability and language proficiency of participants.

Three grammaticality judgment tasks (one per language) were administered to each group in separate language blocks (cf. Keating & Jegerski 2015). The experiment design featured certain methodological choices which account for its novelty. First and foremost, partially acceptable judgments have been included to observe their effect on multilingual acquisition. Secondly, a 5-point Likert scale was used instead of a binary forced choice to accommodate the anticipated finer-grained responses. Finally, the data were collected from each of the three languages to fully account for the effect of gradience on the L2 and L3 acquisition.

The data were analyzed using a logistic ordinal regression model. We expected that Polish and Norwegian should pattern together for the first phenomenon (pronominal binding), but English

and Norwegian should be more alike for the second one (word order). Our predictions were not fully substantiated as the results point to a larger, non-facilitative effect of gradient acceptability on the acquisition of the two types of constructions, more evident in the L3 than L2. Higher language proficiency seems to lower the non-facilitative effect of gradient acceptability.

Word count: 494 (limit: 500)

#### References:

- Hestvik, Arild. 1992. LF movement of pronouns and antisubject orientation. *Linguistic Inquiry* 23(4). 557-594.
- Keating, Gregory D. and Jill Jegerski. 2015. Experimental designs in sentence processing research. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (37). 1-32.
- Puig-Mayenco Eloi, Jorge Alonso González, Jason Rothman. 2020. A systematic review of transfer studies in third language acquisition. *Second Language Research* 36(1). 31-64.
- Westergaard, Marit. 2021. Microvariation in multilingual situations: The importance of property-by-property acquisition. *Second Language Research* 37(3). 379-407.
- Witkoś, Jacek, Paulina Łęska, Aleksandra Gogłozka and Dominika Dziubała-Szrejbrowska. 2020. *Bind me tender, bind me do! Dative and accusative arguments as antecedents for reflexives in Polish*. Berlin: Peter Lang.