

Genericity in second and third language acquisition
 Plan for the ADIM project- work package 4

Expressing genericity is universal, yet no language has a specific linguistic marker for marking genericity (Krifka & Gerstner, 1987); thus within a language there may be different types of NPs that can express genericity (Lazaridou-Chatzigoga et al., 2015). Whether a sentence has an existential or generic reading is disambiguated by context.

This project aims to investigate whether the universal meaning helps acquire the morphological form in the different languages. There is evidence from L2 (Ionin & Montrul, 2010; Ionin et al., 2013; Snape, 2013; Snape et al., 2013) and L3 studies (Ionin et al., 2015; Ionin et al., 2011) that mappings of previously acquired languages can influence the mappings on the additionally acquired languages. The participants in this project are adult speakers with L1 Polish/L2 English/L3 Norwegian and bilingual Polish-Norwegian adolescents, acquiring English as an L3 in Norwegian schools. The task will test the L2 English and L3 Norwegian of the adult participants and the adolescent’s L3 English.

The available form–meaning combinations are diverse in the three languages, as Norwegian allows five NP forms (Table 1) while Polish lacks articles and in English bare nouns are ungrammatical. This affects how the generic meaning is mapped onto the available forms (Table 2).

The tasks are currently being designed and include acceptability judgment tasks and truth value judgment tasks inspired by previous work by Ionin and colleagues (Ionin et al., 2015; Ionin & Montrul, 2010; Ionin et al., 2013; Ionin et al., 2011). We also plan to include an eye tracking while reading task, for an online measure for the acceptance of the target forms. The structures under investigation will include definite plurals (unavailable in Polish and with divergent generic interpretation in English and Norwegian), bare plurals (ambiguous in Polish and with divergent generic interpretation in English and Norwegian), and bare nouns (similar in Polish and Norwegian but ungrammatical in English). We will also test definiteness as a control condition to check if the participants have acquired the article system of the target language (which they cannot transfer from the Polish L1).

Our prediction is that acquiring genericity is difficult because of the form/meaning overlap between the languages and that we should notice transfer effects from the previously acquired languages on the target language.

	Def sg	Indef sg	Bare sg	Bare Mass	Bare Pl	Def pl
POL	X	X	√	√	√	X
ENG	√	√	X	√	√	√
NOR	√	√	√	√	√	√

Table 1: available forms in the target languages

		Def sg	Indef sg	Bare sg	Bare Pl	Def pl
Polish	Generic			√	√	
	Existential			√	√	
English	Generic	√	X		√	X
	Existential	√	√		X	√
Norwegian	Generic	√	X	√ (Kind)	√	√
	Existential	√	√	X	√	√
Summary		ENG = NOR	ENG = NOR	POL = NOR ≠ ENG	POL = ENG = NOR	ENG ≠ NOR

Table 2: availability of generic reading in the target languages

NB: this is a simplified categorization, the contexts in the test items will distinguish between kind generics, characterizing generics, well-established kinds, and sentential kinds.

References

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