

The acquisition of L2 Polish by East Slavic speakers – sociological and linguistic aspects

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The recent development of Polish economy has attracted into the country a great number of speakers of East Slavic languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian), which are fairly close to Polish in terms of both grammar and lexicon. Therefore, one could expect the acquisition of L2 Polish to be affected by significant L1 transfer, both negative (Hopp et al. 2019; Yu & Odlin 2016; Peukert 2015; Morett & Macwhinney 2013) and positive (Bardel 2006; Jamet 2009; Heinz 2009; Marx & Mehlhorn 2010), so much so that acquisition may be dominated by intercomprehension, i.e. the possibility of achieving effective communication in a language that was never studied explicitly but is similar to another known language in one's repertoire (Reichert 2013; Golubovic & Gooskens 2015; Jágrová et al. 2019; Labbé 2019). The consequences on acquisition outcome are not clear, extreme scenarios ranging from effortless mastery to fossilisation. Additionally, numerous East Slavic migrants attend formal Polish classes, where they often pose a challenge to established didactic approaches.

In order to adequately describe the acquisition process in such a context, sociological information is essential to understand learners' purposes, motivations and expectations, while empirical linguistic data are needed to document their interlanguage and demystify common lay views on L1 transfer.

The paper presents the initial results of a project that adopts this approach to describe the acquisition of L2 Polish by East Slavic speakers, with the long-term objective to make language teaching more consistent with the natural learning path of this group and thus facilitate language acquisition and ultimately integration into Polish society.

Sociological information was collected through two questionnaires, respectively administered to large samples of L2 Polish learners and teachers. Learners were asked to describe the socio-psychological context of L2 Polish acquisition, including such topics as learning objectives, motivation, linguistic repertoire etc. They were also asked to self-assess their competence in a set of L2 Polish skills and to evaluate the existing language teaching resources and approaches in light of their specific linguistic repertoire. L2 Polish instructors were asked a similar set of questions, so that different perspectives on the same phenomenon can be juxtaposed.

Linguistic data were collected through an Elicited Imitation task (Erlam 2006; Van Moere 2012; Spada et al. 2015; Baten & Cornillie 2019), a task known for approximating spontaneous speech while retaining good control onto target structures (in the present case, a set of morphosyntactic features that differ between Polish and East Slavic languages). The analysis of learner output makes it possible to accurately describe the interlanguage, highlighting both the effects of transfer and the traces of creative elaboration (Perdue 1993).

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