

Differential Object Marking in the L2 Polish of East Slavic Learners: Transfer and Universal Tendencies

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Abstract

The present paper discusses several possible accounts of L2 errors arising in a contact situation in which the target language (Polish) is very closely related to the learner's L1 (East Slavic: Belorussian, Russian, Ukrainian). Although L1/ L2 proximity often leads to attribute most or all errors to cross-linguistic interference, it will be shown that explanations based on universal tendencies are also viable, as indeed long suggested by detractors of the contrastive analysis approach. Because of the peculiar learning environment created by the possibility of mutual intelligibility between Polish and East Slavic, the reflection is framed within research on the psycholinguistic aspects of intercomprehension.

The analysis will focus on the morphological marking of a subset of nouns that in the plural engage in slightly diverging differential object marking patterns in Polish and East Slavic. The paper presents the results of a large-scale, quantitative-oriented experiment, whose findings are discussed in connection with previous non-quantitative research in order to provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

Keywords

L2 Polish, East Slavic, cross-linguistic interference, contrastive analysis, markedness, differential object marking