

Generic Noun Phrases in the Third Language

Marta Velnic (NTNU)*; Roumyana Slabakova (University of Southampton and NTNU);
Anne Dahl (NTNU)

Introduction. In this study, we examine the effect of input and previous language knowledge on the acquisition of genericity in L3 Norwegian of Polish native speakers who also speak English. Generic meanings generalize over kinds, expressing a certain amount of regularity (Carlson & Pelletier, 1995); characterizing generics generalize over the prototypical representative of the class (e.g., *Bananas are yellow*) and contrast with episodic sentences. Previous studies have shown that the acquisition of genericity is prone to cross-linguistic effects in the L2 (Ionin, Montrul, Kim, et al., 2011; Snape, 2013; Snape et al., 2013) and in the L3 (Ionin, Montrul, & Santos, 2011; Ionin et al., 2015).

Rationale. We focus on the form to meaning mapping of plural forms. Norwegian and English are compatible: the bare plural (*bananas/bananer*) yields a characterizing reading referring to all/the majority of bananas while the definite plural (*the bananas/bananene*) is appropriate for the episodic reading referring to specific bananas (2,3). Polish does not have articles; thus, the bare noun is ambiguous between the two readings (Table1). We predict that the episodic conditions will be unproblematic for the participants as the use of the bare plural is shared across the three languages. In addition, the Polish native speakers are more likely to accept the bare plural (in appropriate and inappropriate contexts), compared to the bilingual EngN group.

Participants. The trilingual participants resided either in Norway (PolN, n=14) or in Poland (PolP, n=26). Our control groups consisted of Norwegian native speakers (Nor, n=32), and native English speakers residing in Norway (EngN, n=36).

Materials. We used a Truth Value Judgment Task inspired by Ionin and Montrul (2010), distributed online. The participants saw a picture depicting the target NP (1000ms) followed by a written description. They were instructed to read the description (1) after which a summary sentence appeared (2,3) with the subject expressed either as a bare or a definite plural.

Analysis. We fitted *glmer* models for each of the target groups, with response (true vs. false) as the dependent variable and condition (characterizing vs. episodic) and noun form (bare vs. definite) as dependent variables, participant and test item were set as random effects. Additional analyses will be discussed at the conference.

Results. The PolP group demonstrated a clear preference for the bare form, a CLI effect from Polish, although they rejected the definite in the generic condition ($p < .001$). At the same time, they rejected the bare plural in the characterizing condition more than the other groups. Furthermore, this group demonstrated a different pattern in their L2 English, suggesting that the semantic distinction was acquired in English but not transferred to Norwegian. The PolN group were more advanced in understanding the form–meaning mappings, thus evidencing the positive effect of their Norwegian environment. This group also had a stronger grasp of the distinction in English, even though they did not readily reject the definite plural.

Interpretation. Confirming our predictions, our results provide evidence of native language CLI as well as the positive effect of abundant native input.

(1) Example context

NOR: Det er en dagligvarebutikk i byen som selger uvanlig frukt og grønnsaker. Mens en banan vanligvis er en gul frukt, er deres bananer blå og de smaker som vaniljeis.

ENG: There is a supermarket in town that sells unusual fruit and vegetables. While the banana is usually a yellow fruit, their bananas are blue, and they taste like vanilla ice cream.

(2) Generic (green signals acceptable while red stands for unacceptable in the context)

Bananer er gule. /Bananene er gule. Bananas are yellow/The bananas are yellow.

(3) Episodic

Bananer er blå./Bananene er blå. Bananas are blue./The bananas are blue.

Table 1: Overview of meanings and their expressions in Polish, English and Norwegian

Meaning POL ENG NOR Contrasts

Characterizing Bare_pl Bare_pl Bare_pl POL=ENG=NOR Episodic Bare_pl Def_pl Def_pl
POL=ENG=NOR

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