



The development of L2 figurative language comprehension in L2 learners

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The aim of the study was to investigate how Polish learners of English comprehend and interpret figurative meanings, that is metaphor, irony, understatement and overstatement, on the basis of L2 learners' interpretation of conversational implicatures (Grice 1975). Specifically, it tried to bear out three hypotheses based on the previous research conducted by Taguchi (2005), Colston (1997) and Ewert – Bromberek-Dyzman (2009). The hypotheses were: (1) at the pre-intermediate level L2 learners will show some awareness of figurative language in L2, however, their scores will show tendencies to be attributable to chance but their figurative language comprehension will increase with age and level of proficiency, (2) the rank of the four types of figurative expressions will be the same in all three groups of L2 learners with metaphor being the easiest one and overstatement the most difficult, and (3) the differences between the scores on English and Polish tests will steadily decrease with age and the level of proficiency. Figurative language proficiency was examined by means of an offline multiple choice test in two translated versions each consisting of the same 16 situations followed by a short utterance and four interpretations. The results obtained from *t*-tests for independent samples have borne out the three hypotheses showing that L2 learners develop the comprehension of figurative meaning with the increase in L2 proficiency and that this comprehension might be said to become language-independent at some point. As for the most and least difficult figurative items, the rank has remained the same across all three proficiency groups, with metaphor being the easiest one, followed by irony and understatement, and overstatement turning out to be the most difficult one across all proficiency levels.

References:

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