Inflection errors in written L2 production in advanced learners of French

Marco Bril, Martine Coene
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands

From a psycholinguistic approach, inflection errors made by L2 learners, can be related to locality: agreement processes which are more local in the sentence are mastered earlier than those that are less local (Processability Theory, Pienemann 1989). Besides locality the (lack of) phonological expression of the inflection morpheme is related to the correctness of written inflections (e.g. Carrasco-Ortiz & Frenck-Mestre 2014). In this study we focus on advanced Dutch L1 – French L2 learners to test this locality and phonological effect in adjectival inflection.

Participants were advanced Dutch L1-French L2 learners and studied French for 6 years at the highest level of Dutch education. The test consisted of a fill-in-the-gap elicitation task covering three conditions: agreement in two lexical categories, in utterances with different syntactic complexity and exhibiting differences in ‘audibility’. Participant’s scores were computed as correctness scores per condition.

The results show that more inflection errors occur as soon as the syntactic domain of adjectival agreement increases. However, no significant effect was found for the ‘audibility’ condition. Based on these findings, we take the effects of locality to be in line with Processability Theory. The fact that no significant effect is found for the ‘audibility’ condition, is in contrast to what has been found for the phonological influence in processing L2 inflectional morphology. Namely, the phonological effect which occurs in processing French inflection, does not in written production of inflection morphemes in L2 French.

References


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