The interaction between universal processes and cross-linguistic influence in non-native Englishes

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This paper examines the interaction between 'universal processes of SLA' (i.e., general strategies such as simplification or overgeneralization) and cross-linguistic influence (CLI). In the early days of SLA research, acquisitionals and CLI were seen as either/or phenomena, but more recent evidence suggests that they work in conjunction (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008: 192-193). The relationship between universal processes and CLI is not much examined in SLA research, but it has recently become topical in the study of indigenized L2 varieties of English; L2 speakers’ learning strategies are thought to explain similar non-standard features in different L2 varieties, while at the same time variety-specific tendencies exist. Recent research has found parallels between L2 varieties and English as a foreign language learners’ production, which suggests that common processes of SLA operate behind these two forms of non-native English (e.g., Meriläinen & Paulasto, forthc.).

The present study examines evidence for CLI and universal strategies across various learner groups (e.g., Finnish, Swedish, Japanese, Chinese) with data drawn from major learner English corpora (ICLE, LINDSEI). It focuses on three features that are widespread in non-native Englishes: extended use of the progressive form, embedded inversion and omission of prepositions. The findings show that while simplification or overextension of analogy appear to factor behind these features, their higher frequency and distinctive nature amongst those learners who have a 'trigger' in their L1 point to simultaneous CLI effects. The benefits of bringing together perspectives from SLA and language contact/variation research are discussed.

References:


Keywords: universal processes of SLA, learner English, learner corpora, Cross-linguistic influence.