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Linguistic research

Acquisition of Noun Inflection in Lithuanian as a Foreign Language: a Qualitative Study

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Abstract: The aim of the research was to investigate how native speakers of Russian, which is a highly complex inflectional language, cope with the acquisition of the similar by structure and complexity Lithuanian language. The subjects were adults of different age and education who learned Lithuanian in Belarus. I analyse errors related to the acquisition of noun case. The errors are divided into formal (acquisition of endings) and conceptual ones (choice of the appropriate case). I shortly compare my results with the results of similar research conducted in Lithuania where the subjects were native speakers of different languages.

The results of the study show that similar errors are typical for native speakers of different languages irrespective of their morphological complexity. A complex inflectional system of a native language is not necessarily beneficial, but it seems to give some advantages for the acquisition of semantic (not syntactic) cases.

Keywords: foreign language acquisition, morphology acquisition, acquisition of cases, Lithuanian as a foreign language, error analysis.

Introduction

The issue of morphology and inflection acquisition of a foreign language still represents both theoretical and practical interest, as it not only allows better understanding how the language is acquired in general but also helps to improve the methodology of teaching (Ellis 1994, Littlewood 2004). The majority of works on this topic are concentrated on studying of morphology acquisition of broadly used languages like Russian, German, Polish (Kempe, MacWhinney 1998, Peirce 2015, Gabrys-Barker 2007), but there are also studies on the material of less common Lithuanian (Ramonienė 2006, Savickienė 2005, Savickienė 2006, Dabašinkienė, Čubajevaitė 2009). The latter four were conducted in Lithuania, and the learners were not grouped by their native languages (they were native speakers of languages both with rich and poor morphology). At the same time, no research was performed on the material of learning Lithuanian outside the language environment or on the material of a more homogeneous group.

The current study was conducted at Minsk State Linguistic University and the language centre "Frakton", Minsk.

The theoretical aim was to investigate how native speakers of the highly complex inflectional language cope with the acquisition of a similar

and genetically close language. Is a complex morphological system of a native language beneficial? Are there any differences in acquisition compared with other researches? It is usually assumed that native speakers of a language with poor morphology who learn a foreign language with complex morphology are "by definition" under unfavourable conditions (Ellis 1994: IV, Peirce 2015: 62). In my view, this assumption might be disputable as:

- a native language with rich morphology has more levels of influence to foreign language acquisition (as similar structures and categories easily affect each other),
- native speakers usually are aware of language complexity but do not know or understand its grammar and morphology systems consciously.

1. Terms and method

The practical research aim was to analyse, classify and explain the students' errors to improve future methodology of teaching. This article uses the term 'acquisition' in a broad sense without making a distinction between it and 'learning' (following Ellis 1985, Gass, Selinker 2008 etc.).

Subjects. Students were adults who learned Lithuanian mostly with practical purposes and as a rule, had no linguistic education. They were native speakers of Russian. The average students' age was 25–35 years students were mostly female. The data from 48 students have been analysed.

Materials. The data consisted of beginner to intermediate students' tests, compositions, homework grammar exercises, small translations from Russian into Lithuanian and of non-systematic teacher's observations since the 2014 year (more than three hundred texts of different size).

Errors related to the acquisition of noun case were of my special interest. The most frequent errors are included into the analysis (by 'the most frequent' I mean the errors which are made constantly, almost every lesson; individual errors or instances of choosing the case "randomly" were ignored). Errors have been monitored during the entire course of study.

In examples of errors provided in sections below, I followed the principles from Dabašinkienė (2009): the errors are highlighted in bold type, the appropriate word form is provided in square brackets, each example has an English translation under it. Choosing examples, I tried to present a full picture of possible errors.

2. Acquisition of formal indicators of inflection

The Lithuanian grammar represented by teaching books and the academic grammar of Lithuanian are certainly quite different. The first one is simplified though it remains multi-dimensional and hard for

learners. "Teaching books' noun morphology" is usually described by two genders (masculine and feminine), two numbers (singular and plural), five to twelve declensions, seven cases. In my teaching practice, I prefer representing every separate ending in Nom. sg. as a separate declension as it is visual and simple for learners. Thus, for teaching purposes Lithuanian case paradigm is the following [1] :

Table 1
Lithuanian case paradigm for foreigners

case / decl.	**masculine**					**feminine**			
	singular								
	-as	**-is (-ys)**	**-us**	**-ius**	**-uo**	**-a**	**-ė**	**-is**	sesuo, duktė
Nom.	**-as**	**-is**	**-us**	**-ius**	**-uo**	**-a**	**-ė**	**-is**	**-uo, ė**
Gen.	**-o**	**-io**	**-aus**	**-iaus**	-en-**s**	**-os**	**-ės**	**-ies**	-er-**s**
Dat.	**-ui**	**-iui**	**-ui**	**-iui**	-en-**iui**	**-ai**	**-ei**	**-iai**	-er-**iai**
Acc.	**-ą**	**-į**	**-ų**	**-ių**	-en-**į**	**-ą**	**-ę**	**-į**	-er-**į**
Instr.	**-u**	**-iu**	**-umi**	**-iumi**	-en-**iu**	**-a**	**-e**	**-imi**	-er-**ia**
Loc.	**-e**	**-yje**	**-uje**	**-iuje**	-en-**yje**	**-oje**	**-éje**	**-yje**	-er-**yje**
Voc.	**-e**! / **-ai**!	**-i**! (-y!)	**-au**!	**-iau**!	-en-**ie**!	**-a**!	**-e**!	**-ie**!	-er-**ie**!
	plural								
Nom.	**-ai**	**-iai**	**-ūs**	**-iai**	-en-**ys**	**-os**	**- ės**	**-ys**	-er-**ys**
Gen.	**-ų**	**-ių**	**-ų**	**-ių**	-en-**ų**	**-ų**	**-ių**	**-ų / -ių**	-er-**ų**
Dat.	**-ams**	**-iams**	**-ums**	**-iams**	-en-**ims**	**-oms**	**-ėms**	**-ims**	-er-**ims**
Acc.	**-us**	**-ius**	**-us**	**-ius**	-en-**is**	**-as**	**-es**	**-is**	-er-**is**
Instr.	**-ais**	**-iais**	**-umis**	**-iais**	-en-**imis**	**-omis**	**-ėmis**	**-imis**	-er-**imis**
Loc.	**-uose**	**-iuose**	**-uose**	**-iuose**	-en-**yse**	**-ose**	**-ėse**	**-yse**	-er-**yse**
Voc.	**-ai**!	**-iai**	**-ūs**!	**-iai**!	-en-**ys**!	**-os**!	**-ės**!	**-ys**!	-er-**ys**!

Based on Table 1 we can estimate the complexity of a paradigm. According to Kempe and MacWhinney (1998: 546–549), it is determined by three factors: the number of dimensions, the number of cells, and the uniqueness of the inflections across the paradigm (the closer to zero the inflections-to-cells ratio, the higher the amount of neutralization or syncretism, the more difficult the paradigm is).

Thus, for Lithuanian we have: 3 dimensions (number + case + declension [2]), 126 cells (2 numbers * 7 cases * 9 declensions), and inflections-to-cells ratio of 0.38 (48 unique inflections / 126 cells).

For Russian the complexity of a paradigm is the following (Kempe, MacWhinney 1998: 549): 4 dimensions (number + case + gender + animacy), 72 cells, and inflections-to-cells ratio of 0.21 (15 unique inflections).

As we can, see Russian has one more dimension and lower inflections-to-cells ratio, but at the same time, Lithuanian has a much bigger number of cells, so students have to learn a great number of endings. Thus, both systems are difficult, and it is hard to say exactly which one is more complex.

In this complexity estimation, one important dimension was not mentioned – an accentual class. Accentual classes and declensions are closely connected and actually should not be separated from each other. However, adding one more dimension would significantly increase the number of cells (126*4= 504), perhaps due to this reason, modern

teaching books of Lithuanian do not even try to give any notion of accentuation. Accentuation errors though very frequent, are not discussed in the current work.

The major difficulties learners undergo are caused by a big number of inflections, their homonymy, and the presence of consonant changes accompanying inflection, see examples below.

2.1. Adding two endings to a noun

Learners may have troubles with changing endings. A typical problem is producing nouns with two endings:

(1) **universitet-as-e** [= universitet-e: SG:M:LOC]
'a university'
(2) **draug-as-o** [= draug-o: SG:M:GEN]
'a friend'

Usually the problem is easily resolved, but sometimes it is also encountered at the later stages of the learning process.

2.2. Adding endings from other declensions or cases

The next examples illustrate difficulties in applying an appropriate declension to a noun (Examples (3), (**4**)) and errors in choosing an appropriate ending (Examples (5), (6):

(3) kavine [= kavinėje: SG:F:LOC]
'a cafe'
(ending from -as declension)
(4) universitetoje [= universitete: SG:M:LOC]
'a university'
(ending from -a declension)
(5) nykštuke [= nykštuk: SG:M:VOC]
'a dwarf'
(6) pirkome tris moliūgams [= moliūgus: PL:M:ACC]

(ending from the dative; according to the learner's explanation he was aware that the accusative was needed).

Confusing declensions and endings is a typical problem at the earlier stages of learning (usually on beginner to A2 level). Some explanations see in p. 4.1.

2.3. Orthographic errors

(7) ambasadoja [= ambasadoje: SG:F:LOC]
'an embassy'
(typical error as in pronunciation -ja and -je sound the same)
(8) akiniu [= akinių: PL:M:GEN]
'glasses'

(typical error as learners need time to begin hearing and understanding the difference between short and long vowels and, therefore, ignore orthography no matter how often they are reminded about it)

(9) gėles [= gėlės: SG:F:GEN]
'a flower'

(10) keturios šakutes [= šakutės: PL:F:NOM]
'four forks'

(ė is typically ignored as a separate letter, even though the difference in pronunciation of ė and e is more evident for learners than just short/long vowel opposition)

(11) svečų [= svečių: PL:M:GEN]
'a guest'

(students usually quickly learn that i is often used to mark soft consonants but may forget about it while writing).

2.4. Consonant changes

(12) stotų [= stočių: PL:F:GEN]
'a station'

(13) vokietiai [= vokiečiai: PL:M:NOM]
'a German'

It is worth noting that in teaching books consonant changes are often represented in separate instances only (if at all) though in Standard Lithuanian the alternation .>*č, d*>*dž* is described by a simple phonetic rule with no exception (it takes place before *-io*, *-iu* (*-ių*, *-iū*), *-ia* (*-ią*)).

3. Overview of case errors

3.1. Nominative case errors

The nominative is generally used for the subject and the noun part of the predicate. Instead of the nominative, learners most often use the genitive or the accusative.

3.1.1 The use of the nominative instead of the accusative (as object case)

(14) Vakare aš paprastai žiūriu televizorius: SG:M:NOM [= televizorių: SG:ACC].
'In the evening I usually watch TV'

This type of error is rather frequent. Students know that the object should be expressed by the accusative or the genitive; they learn which case is governed by a particular verb, but they still make such errors, especially in oral speech. This may be caused by a cognitive overload together with time limitations.

The frequent students' explanation (comments on errors in exercises or compositions) is 'I do not understand the accusative/genitive in Russian'.

Actually, the opposition 'agent – object' is not obvious to Russian students. The problem is deepened by the fact that this opposition in Russian is not always formally expressed (cf. *телевизор* 'TV, Nom. sg. or Acc. sg.'). But even if there is a formal indicator in Russian (cf. *книга* 'a book, Nom. sg.' – *книгу* 'a book, Acc. sg.'), it does not necessarily help:

(15) Sekmadienį aš skaitysiu knyga: SG:F:NOM [= knygą: SG:ACC]
'On Sunday I will read the book'.

3.1.2. The use of the nominative instead of other cases

(16) Mano mama dirba ekonomistė: SG:F:NOM [= ekonomiste: SG:INSTR].
'My mum works as an economist'

This is an occurrence of overgeneralization of the nominative.

3.1.3. The use of other cases instead of the nominative (as subject or predicate)

Sometimes students use the genitive or the accusative instead of the nominative.

(17) Ant stalo yra puoduką: SG:M:ACC [= puodukas: SG:NOM]
'There is a cup on the table'
(18) Mano brolis yra direktorių: SG:M:ACC [= direktorius: SG:NOM]
'My brother is a director'

When explaining the errors, students usually say that they tried to avoid two nominatives in a sentence. Also, this could be a hypercorrection (after many corrections of a wrong nominative).

3.1.4. The use of the nominative instead of the accusative (for time/duration)

(19) Aš ten dirbau trys: PL:NOM metai: PL:M:NOM [= trejus metus: ACC]
'I worked there for three years'

The problem may be caused by Russian word combinations like *три года / недели / дня* 'three years / weeks / days', which are perceived by students (as they say) as the nominative (being in fact the accusative).

In a long and complicated speech such errors can also be caused by a cognitive load.

3.1.5. The use of the nominative case instead of the genitive

Quantifiers like *daug* ('many, much'), *kiek* ('how much'), *mažai* ('a little'), *šiek tiek* ('some') etc. require the genitive case and plural for countable

nouns. Students have problems with both case and number, whether they know the rule or they do not.

(20) Aš turiu daug draugas: S:M:NOM [= draugų: PL:GEN]
'I have many friends'
(21) Centre yra daug viešbučiai: PL:M:NOM [= viešbučių: PL:GEN]
'In the centre there are a lot of hotels'

Quantifier phrases are structurally the same as in Russian. But this identity appears not to be beneficial.

3.1.6. Nominative case errors: general remarks

The nominative is the best-represented form in memory, it is retrieved faster and thus often used in place of other cases (in particular due to cognitive load and/or time limitations). The overgeneralization can be accompanied by reliance on a native tongue – see cases of the false resemblance of syntactic structures in Examples (14), (19).

Examples like (14), (15), (17) show that case functions of the nominative though identical in Russian are not clear and intuitive for adult learners. Formally such errors can be explained by poor understanding of the functional structure of a sentence. Related errors occur with other cases as well, see Examples (26), (27), p. 3.2.5 etc.

3.2. Genitive case errors

3.2.1. The use of the accusative or the nominative instead of the genitive (negation, absence)

The expression of negation or absence requires the genitive case. Using wrong cases here is quite typical.

(22) Mano vyras nežaidžia krepšinį: SG:M:ACC [= krepšinio: SG:GEN]
'My husband does not play basketball'
(23) Olegas: SG:M:NOM nėra namie [= Olego: SG:GEN]
'Oleg is not at home'

The expression of negation is followed by the next problems:
a) at first learners forget to transform the accusative into the genitive, but after learning the rule they begin to transform any case into the genitive:

(24) Man nepatinka svogūnų: PL:M:GEN [= svogūnai: PL:GEN]
'I do not like onion'
(25) Ne, aš negyvenu Vilniaus: SG:M:GEN [= Vilniuje: SG:LOC]
'No, I do not live in Vilnius'

b) learners do not always understand the difference between the negation of property (the nominative) and negation of presence (the

genitive) with the verb 'to be' in spite of analogies of constructions in Russian (in other words, they do not understand the difference between the predicate and the subject):

(26) Manau, kad ji nėra geros žmonos: SG:F:GEN [= gera žmona: SG:NOM]
'I think she is not a good wife'.

3.2.2. The use of the accusative case instead of the genitive (purpose indication)

(27) Savaitgalį mes visada važiuojame į parduotuvę pirkti maistą: SG:M:ACC [= maisto: SG:GEN]
'At weekends we always go to the shop to buy groceries'

Even if students remember the rule, they do not always correctly define the purpose.
This syntactic role is not intuitive for them.

3.2.3. The use of the accusative/nominative case instead of the genitive (other instances)

In addition to the opposition of negation/affirmation, the genitive and the accusative (the nominative) governed by the same verb regularly express the opposition of whole/part or determined/undetermined. Quite often learners, as they admit, neither easily understand this opposition nor easily recognise situations in which it must be expressed, see Examples (28), (29), (30)

(28) Ar jūs turite vaikus: PL:M:ACC [= vaikų: PL:GEN]?
'Do you have children?'
29) Imk saldainius: PL:M:ACC [= saldainių: PL:GEN
(29) Imk saldainius: PL:M:ACC [= saldainių: PL:GEN]?
'Take (some) sweets'
(30) Ar yra duona: SG:F:NOM [= duonos: SG:GEN]?
'Is there any bread?'

Other errors are associated with verb government (even if it is the same as in Russian), less commonly – with prepositional government.

3.2.4. Incorrect use of modifiers expressed by the genitive

The preposition of the genitive case is not strict (Lithuanian Grammar 2006: 691). However, since students do not encounter reversed word sequence in their practice (in teaching books, while reading news portals or signs and signboards in Lithuania during their trips etc.) they are taught to use the genitive in a preposition.
At first, the common error is in a reversed word order:

(31) Čia portretas mano prosenelio [= Čia mano prosenelio portretas].
'This is a portrait of my grandfather'

Errors in case choice appear later, with an increase of the number of cases – it is necessary to remind that only the genitive can be a modifier to another noun. Instead, learners may use the dative or the accusative.

(32) Ten ji rado raktą broliui: SG:M:DAT [= brolio: SG:GEN raktą].
'There she has found her brother's key'
(33) Berniukas pamatė auksą: SG:M:ACC grandinėlę [= aukso: SG:GEN].
'The boy saw a gold chain'

In the first example, the learner used the dative, as learners often associate this case with belonging (the association itself is not wrong, but learners may use the dative in such structures incorrectly).

The second example shows the general tendency to put both nouns into the same case (not important which one). This tendency cannot be explained by a native language transfer (as it is absent in Russian). However, it is the same as a common error to conjugate both verbs instead of using the second one in the infinitive (e. g. noriu **perku**: 1SG:PRES [= pirkti: INF] 'I want to buy'). Learners sometimes explain both errors with 'I was concentrated on noun/verb endings and on not using them in the nominative/infinitive'. So, the error could be explained by cognitive overload or working memory limitations. Another explanation – impact of agreement of adjectives, especially in cases when the Lithuanian noun corresponds to the Russian adjective.

3.2.5. Errors in numeral combinations

It is hard for adult learners to remember two ways of composing numerals with nouns: using the genitive when a noun is the dependent word or agreeing on a numeral with a noun when the noun is the main word. Learners often use the opposite strategy, and this may be explained by a native language partial transfer. When trying to analyse the word combination structure consciously, learners often fail to understand which word is the main and which is the dependent one.

(34) trys kilogramo: SG:M:GEN [= kilogramai: PL:NOM] obuolių
'three kilos of apples'
(35) dešimt kilogramai: PL:M:NOM [= kilogramų: PL:GEN] bulvių
'ten kilos of potatoes'
(36) pirkau dešimt kilogramus: PL:M:NOM [= kilogramų: PL:GEN] bulvių
'I bought ten kilos of potatoes'

The last example illustrates a tendency to agree a noun with a verb ignoring a governing numeral.

3.3. Dative case errors

The majority of errors is made while expressing the meaning 'for whom', 'for what', as in Lithuanian. Contrary to Russian, there is no preposition 'for' in this meaning, and the dative is never used with prepositions. The preposition *dėl* is commonly used by students instead of the Russian 'для' (apparently due to phonetic similarity [3]).

(37) tai svarbu dėl manęs: 1SG:GEN [= dėl man: 1SG:DAT]
'This is important for me'.

Learners do not always understand the question "(to) whom? to what?" (Examples (38), (39) and also have difficulties with the temporal meaning of the dative (Example (40), especially when choosing between it and the accusative (Example (41).

(38) mokyklų: PL:F:GEN [= mokykloms: PL:DAT] reikia pinigų
'The money is needed for the schools'
(39) brolis: SG:M:NOM [= broliui: SG:DAT] patinka šokti
'Brother likes dancing'.

There are two common strategies:

- trying to put two nouns into the same form (mokyklų – pinigų),
- trying to express a subject with the nominative (as this is a primary function for the latter).

(40) važiuojame į Lietuvą penkias dienas: PL:F:ACC [= penkioms dienoms: PL:DAT]
'We go to Lithuania for five days'
(41) praleidau kaime savaitei: SG:F:DAT [= savaitę: SG:ACC]
'I have spent a week in a village'

Examples (40), (41) show that learners sometimes mix the notion of action duration and its temporal purpose. The error is similar to Example (27) and shows that purpose, as a case meaning is rather hard for adult learners.

3.4. Accusative case errors

Main issues are already described in pp. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3.

The principal difficulty is caused by non-understanding of the notion 'transitivity of a verb', as well as by difficulties in distinguishing the nominative and the accusative in the native language (especially when the endings are neutralized inside a paradigm).

3.5. Instrumental case errors

The instrumental as a rule causes fewer troubles. The most forgettable for learners is the instrumental case with verbs of motion, in spite of the

fact that in Russian similar word combinations are possible (cf. *лететь самолетом* 'go by plane'):

Sometimes it is not obvious for learners that something is an instrument (especially when in Russian prepositional phrases for that meaning are used):

(42) Į namus važiuoju ant: PREP autobuso: SG:M:GEN [= ant autobusu: SG:INSTR]

'I go home by bus'

(43) Jeigu norite nueti į biblioteka, pirmiasia eikite po:PREP prospektą: SG:M:ACC [= po prospektu: SG:INSTR]

'If you want to go to the library, first go along the prospect'.

Sometimes it is not obvious for learners that something is an instrument (especially when in Russian prepositional phrases for that meaning are used):

(44) Visiems vaikams patinka žaisti į: PREP kompiuterį: SG:M:ACC [= į kompiuteriu: SG:INSTR]

'All children like playing computer (games)'.

Instead of the instrumental, learners tend to use prepositional phrases. This can be a native language transfer result.

3.6. Locative case errors

The main difficulty is caused by the vague differentiation in questions 'where' and 'to where'. The problem is deepened by the fact that in Lithuanian these questions sound the same (*kur*), but in Russian they do not (cf. *где, куда*), and also by the fact that the Russian preposition . is used in both location and direction meanings. In contrast, its Lithuanian analogue . is used in direction meaning only. Therefore, there is a regular confusion of combinations like 'in Vilnius' (the locative) and 'to Vilnius' (a preposition with the accusative). Learners often forget that the locative is never used with prepositions.

(45) Mano seneliai gyvena .: PREP **kaimą**: SG:M:ACC [= į kaime: SG:LOC]

'My grandparents live in a village'

(46) Sekmadienį einu **parduotuvėje**: SG:F:LOC [= į: PREP parduotuvę: SG:ACC]

'On Sunday I go to the shop'

There are attempts to use the locative in a temporal meaning instead of the Lithuanian accusative (clearly, due to Russian constructions):

(47) **Vasaryje**: SG:M:LOC planuoju daugiau sportuoti [= vasarį: SG:ACC]

'I am planning to do more sports in February'.

This error may arise at later stages of studying Lithuanian – when students just start learning the accusative in a temporal meaning, they do not usually make such an overgeneralization.

3.7. Preliminary findings

3.7.1. Used syntactic structures

Syntactic structures used by learners can be represented in a following way (Table 2):

The data demonstrate that, though learners certainly are impacted by their native language grammar, they also often produce structures that are impossible for both native and foreign language. Among possible reasons are overgeneralization, working memory limitations, problems with understanding of syntactic relationships within a phrase or a sentence.

Table 2

Syntactic structures used by learners

Type	Examples	Other examples
structures borrowed from a native language	trys **kilogramo**: SG:GEN, cf. *три килограмма*: SG:GEN (34); **ant**: PREP **autobuso**: GEN, cf. *на*: PREP *автобусе*: GEN (42); **vasaryje**: LOC, cf. *в феврале*: LOC (47)	(22), (27), (28), (29), (30), (31), (37), (43), (44)
"false" native language structures	žiūriu **televizorius**: SG:NOM, cf. *смотрю телевизор*: SG:ACC perceived as SG:NOM (14); dirbau **trys metai**: NOM, cf. *(я)работал три года*: ACC perceived as NOM (19)	
structures impossible in both languages	skaitysiu **knyga**: NOM, cf. *буду читать* "книга: NOM (15); daug **draugas**: S:NOM, cf. *много* "друг: S:NOM (20); **mokyklų**:GEN reikia pinigų, cf. "школ:GEN *нужны деньги* (38)	(17), (16), (18), (21), (23)–(26), (32), (33), (34), (35), (36), (39), (40), (41), (45), (46)

3.7.2. Syntax versus semantics

Learners are more successful in producing correct phrases or sentences when they clearly understand case meanings and when such meanings exist in their native language: learners have fewer troubles in using the dative and the instrumental when their meanings in Russian and Lithuanian are identical.

At the same time, cases with abstract, purely or partly syntactic, meanings are hard for adults even if completely the same in their native language. The accusative and the genitive are much less intuitive and easy in comparison with the dative and the instrumental.

4. Comparison with research by Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė

Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė (2009) analysed errors made by students from a range of countries: Austria, Columbia, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the USA. Their students learned Lithuanian in a language environment, i.e. were able to learn a lot just from oral speech.

My students are all from Belarus, their native language is Russian and they do not learn Lithuanian in a language environment, nor are they taught by a native speaker.

The comparison of errors was not the main purpose of my research, but some similarities and differences are worth mentioning.

4.1. Common errors and similar explanation

- the accusative (as object case),
- the accusative (for time/duration),
- the genitive of negation.

Regarding the last point, I find the next observation interesting: "As in some languages (Latvian or German, for instance), the noun case does not change after a negative verb Latvian and German students do not change it when speaking Lithuanian either. It should be noted, however, that even though in Polish like in the Lithuanian language the noun case does change after negation of the verb, the same error is as typical in Polish students' L2 performance as in that of the Latvians or Germans." (Dabašinkienė, Čubajevaitė 2009: 55).

This is an important note, as, from my observations, a native language does not always help learners (see e.g. p. 3.7.1). Learners do not notice similarities since they do not actually know their native language. At the same time, they often rely on other foreign languages (consciously or not). As the most common foreign language in Belarus is English, learners often tend to compare Lithuanian grammar to English one, not to the Russian one.

Another common error (see Example (39) is the incorrect use of the verb *patikti* ('to like'). As well as in Russian (*нравиться*), the verb needs the dative for the subject and the nominative for the object. This similarity does not help to avoid errors. The problem might be caused by the fact that the verb "differs from most of other Lithuanian verbs" (Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė 2009: 53).

The next common error is an incorrect use of the locative for time instead of the accusative. Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė notice, "errors of this type are typical of Polish and Latvian students" as in these languages, the locative is used to express time (2009: 56). I would add that errors of this type are typical of Russian students as well. There might be an unconscious influence of a native language.

Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė also observe that students rather cannot think about several aspects like prepositional control and noun agreement in one sentence (2009: 59). I observe a similar problem as well.

Finally, I would like to comment on the inappropriate use of declension paradigms, in particular on gender errors. One observation made by Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė is an impact of a native language on a noun gender in Lithuanian (2009: 61). They explain the impact by a translation strategy. My students also make similar errors, e.g. change *darbas* ('job', masc., cf. *работа*, fem.) into **darba*. I would agree that the error is caused by a translation strategy, though other reasons (overgeneralization, hypercorrection, cognitive load) are also possible, as students sometimes mark the Lithuanian nouns with Russian gender even without conscious translating from Russian, and as such, errors occur when the gender in both languages is the same.

4.2. Common errors but different explanation

Three types of errors are also common, but my experience differs:

- the use of the nominative case instead of the genitive of quantifiers,
- the use of the locative to express direction,
- the use of the prepositional phrase with į 'to' instead of the locative.

Regarding the first type of errors, Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė claim, "rather often students use the nominative if they do not know this rule" (2009: 52). In my experience, learners tend to use the nominative after quantifiers irrespective of whether they know the rule or not.

For the use of the locative to express direction Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė, propose two reasons: overgeneralisation and the influence of a native language (2009: 56). From my point of view (see p. 3.6), Russian learners do not extend the meaning of the locative but translate word by word Russian prepositional phrases starting from .. In addition, some learners explain that it is hard for them to differentiate location from the direction.

The influence of a native language Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė propose for Latvians, as in Latvian direction can be expressed by the locative. However, in Latvian, there are also prepositional phrases to express direction. In addition, Latvians often speak Russian, and in the Russian language, the direction is never expressed by the locative.

The third type of errors is related to the second one: students mix the locative and the prepositional phrases, especially those with . 'to'. Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė relate the problem to the fact that "The locative is not frequently used and has one main function, that is, to express the meaning of being inside. Other ways of expressing space, location and direction are prepositional constructions." (2009: 60). Indeed, in a corpus, the locative is the rarest case [4], but in teaching books, it is frequent (students have a lot of input and exercises on it), and it is the first case students learn. This is why I would not explain the error in this way. In addition, the researchers believe that Latvian students could make these errors under the impact of Russian (2009: 60). In my opinion, such an explanation somehow contradicts their point on the impact of Latvian while using the locative to express direction, as it is not clear why in one situation the Latvian language has an impact, but in another (related) situation, the Russian language has an impact. As for Russian students, I believe that the problem is still caused by word-by-word translations and weak differentiation of location and direction.

4.3 Differences

In this subsection, I would like to mention some differences between my experience and the research by Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė.

The researchers claim that learners "do not find any difficulties in using the nominative case to denote the subject in a sentence" (2009: 50). In my practice, such difficulties occur, see p. 3.1.3.

The next difference is that "one of the most typical errors that we noticed was the use of the genitive instead of other cases in reference to the object" (Dabašinkienė, Čubajevaitė 2009: 53). In my practice, this error occurs, but it is not typical at all. Learners rather forget to transform the accusative into the genitive (see p. 3.2). There are also differences in the use of the dative. Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė argue, "as the semantics of the dative is not as clear as that of the nominative or genitive, it takes more time to learn and acquire the subtleties of its use" (2009: 54). For Russian learners, the semantics of the dative is not usually hard (see pp. 3.3, 3.7.2).

Moreover, learners often say that the use of the dative and the instrumental is much clearer to them than the use of the genitive and the accusative. However, the use of the dative, which corresponds to Russian *для кого\чего* ('for whom/what'), is not so easy. Learners experience a lack of *для* ('for') and forget that there is no such preposition in Lithuanian.

I also find it interesting that "the construction with the preposition *už* ('behind, for') is most often used incorrectly instead of just the dative case" (Dabašinkienė, Čubajevaitė 2009: 56). As mentioned above (p. 3.3), Russian learners tend to incorrectly use the preposition *dėl* 'on, for, of' (or just ask "how to say *для*?").

4.4. General remarks

In conclusion, Dabašinkienė and Čubajevaitė claim "students often rely on their native tongue and apply the translation model as a learning strategy" (2009: 62). I believe these factors impact the learning process, but we need to take into account other things.

Firstly, students do not always understand their own language (and therefore, they cannot always consciously rely on it). Secondly, other foreign languages have a considerable impact as well as irrespective of the extent of similarity between them and Lithuanian. Finally, students do not apply the translation model every time, otherwise, they (Russian students) would never make the next frequent errors: not using the infinitive after verbs, not using "self" correctly (despite the absolutely same principles in Russian), using the nominative instead of the accusative (when the endings are not neutralized inside a paradigm), making simple sentences with impossible (in both languages) word order (see also p. 3.7.1).

In addition, I believe that the translation model as a learning strategy can be useful, as the translation from a native language into a foreign language (controlled by a teacher) often demonstrates similarities and differences between them. I would say that translations can interfere the language acquisition, but there are other interfering factors, such as unconscious application of a native grammar and impact of earlier studied languages.

Conclusions

A big amount of inflections and a variety of factors influencing the choice of a case usually result in a considerable amount of errors made by learners. The described errors are typical for native speakers of other languages both with poor and rich morphology. Thereby, a traditional view that a complex morphological system of a native language might be beneficial for learners is not supported. Returning to the theoretical questions raised in Introduction, I would answer them so: a) a complex morphological system of a native language is not unconditionally beneficial, b) differences in acquisition compared with other researches are not essential. I suppose that while studying the morphology of foreign language adult learners go through similar learning stages, and these stages do not so strongly depend on their native language and its morphological complexity. A more detailed and comprehensive description of a revealed pattern of acquisition could be a perspective for further research.

Adult learners are rarely able to build a foreign language grammar system intuitively (at least outside the language environment). Examples of used by adult learners' syntactic structures show that adults often produce impossible sentences not only for L2 but also for L1. The success of acquiring grammar undoubtedly depends on the learners' understanding of the hierarchy relations within a word phrase and a sentence.

According to my observations, semantic cases (like the dative or the instrumental) are easier for adult learners compared with syntactic ones (like the accusative). I would assume that a native language can give advantages for the acquisition of semantic cases but not of syntactic ones.

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Notes

1 1. I ignore long/short and hard/soft stem oppositions except for -us/-ius. In other cases learners are taught that generally they should preserve stem consonant hardness/softness. 2. Masc. nouns like vagis 'a thief', žvėris 'a beast' are not included into the system as learners are confused if there are presented. Also, learners do not encounter these nouns in teaching books for a long period of time.

2 Gender is not mentioned as it is totally covered by declension.

3 Dėl and для have a tight semantic similarity (when dėl means ради 'for one's sake') but learners do not know this meaning.

4 About 6% from the total number of word forms, estimated on the basis of DLKMŽ 2011.