I-LanD Journal
Identity, Language and Diversity

Chief Editors: Giuditta Caliendo & Maria Cristina Nisco

The role of language typology on L2 acquisition and learning

Introduction: The Role of Language Typology on L2 Acquisition and Learning

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This special issue of the *I-LanD Journal* aims to explore the role of language typology on second language acquisition (SLA) and learning. The contributions to this special issue address the question as to whether and in which ways typological contrasts of languages play a crucial role in how events are expressed in adult second language (L2). In this regard, Slobin (1996), by means of his *Thinking for Speaking* hypothesis, argues that differences across languages predispose native speakers to view and to talk about events differently and this seems to have important consequences in discourse conceptualisation and production even at very advanced levels of L2 proficiency.

Research on typological variation across languages has been conducted for decades and important advances have been made in the domain. For instance, it is well known that Germanic vs Romance native speakers differ in the ways they conceptualise and verbalise events. Consequently, speakers diverge in the preferred perspective selected with respect to conceptual domains such as aspect, time, motion, modality, both at the sentence level (von Stutterheim 2003) and at discourse level (Klein/von Stutterheim 2002; Carroll/Lambert 2006) and this is partly due to the typological properties of languages. Most studies show the challenges adult L2 learners face in restructuring these patterns in the process of acquisition of another language with a different set of patterns. This hard task for learners implies full or partial *crosslinguistic influence* (CLI, cf. McManus 2022 for a more recent overview). The latter, often used interchangeably with *transfer* (cf. Odlin 1989, 2003, 2005), refers to the search for similarities/ differences between one's prior linguistic knowledge (from the L1 or any other previously acquired languages) and learning, knowledge and use of the new language (Jarvis/Pavlenko 2010: 1). CLI is a key component of the L2 learning process, and it seems particularly relevant when learners try to map L2 words into the concepts of their L1. In this sense, SLA can be seen as cognitive restructuring (Hijazo-Gascón 2021: 2), since learners can experience a cognitive dissonance between the L2 lexical items and the L1 notions. The question of whether L1 typological properties may be transferred or not in the L2 discourse has been largely explored for the cognitive domains of time (e.g. von Stutterheim 2003 for ongoingness vs boundness; McManus/ Marsden 2017, Giuliano/Anastasio 2021a for time and aspect) and

I-LanD Journal. The role of language typology on L2 acquisition and learning · n. 2/2022 · eISSN 2532-764X

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space (e.g. Cadierno/Ruiz 2006; Hendriks *et al.* 2008; Carroll *et al.* 2012; Hijazo-Gascón 2021) and, to a lesser extent, for syntax (e.g. Giuliano/Anastasio 2021b). More recently, research has also focused on the co-speech gestures in the expression of events. As such, the literature shows that the ways L2 learners' gestures can reveal how they keep on gesturing as in their L1 rather than in the L2 native-like manner (e.g. Gullberg 2009; Stam 2018, 2023).

In spite of the evident role of inter-typological contrasts during the process of SLA (along with other important variables such as the L2 input exposure, the L2 proficiency level, individual factors) in terms of CLI, there is little research that focuses on the impact of intra-typological variation, i.e. typological differences or similarities between languages of the same type (except for Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2009, 2015; Anastasio 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022). Additionally, the impact of language typology is still far from being fully understood and this is due to several reasons: a) native speakers' preferences go beyond the clear-cut typological classification when encoding the intended message (Slobin 2006; von Stutterheim *et al.* 2009; Beavers *et al.* 2010); b) most studies look at learners with an L1/L2 combination belonging to different genetic and typological families and very few consider the impact of the L1 when the learners' languages in contact are typologically close (except for Benazzo/Andorno 2017; Anastasio 2019, 2021, 2022; Saturno 2020; Hijazo-Gascón 2021) and can, however, lack equivalent form-function categories.

This special issue brings together recent empirical research on inter- and intratypological contrasts and their role on L2 acquisition and learning. Specifically, drawing upon a functional perspective, this special issue aims to add to the SLA field by offering recent empirical studies relying on original data, involving: different types of tasks; quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches; learners at all stages of learning.

The key themes under focus explore morphological, syntactic, and semantics differences between languages with their consequences for framing events in L1 as well as in L2. In particular, three main domains are investigated: a) affectedness; b) differential object marking; c) space (static and dynamic location events). The data collected represent a diversified selection of L1-L2 pairs: a) learners whose L1 and L2 are typologically and genetically closely-related (Isabel Repiso; Jacopo Saturno); b) learners with an L1-L2 combination considered as typologically distant (Christina Piot, Maria Hellerstedt); c) learners whose L1 and L2 belong to different typological types but present similarities in the linguistic devices for conveying events (Delia Airoldi).

The first paper of this special issue deals with a still underexplored domain in SLA functional approach, i.e. affectedness within Romance languages. Specifically, **Isabel Repiso** examines the syntactic and morphological realisation of affected arguments across two typologically and genetically-related languages, French and Spanish, and in L2 French of Spanish learners (A2-B2 levels of CEFR). The crosslinguistic findings show different morpho-syntactic preferences in French and Spanish productions to mark affectedness. As to L2

results, CLI arises in terms of under/overuse of non-native like use of L2 structures especially at less advanced stage. The author hypothesises that, when confronting to the L2 verbalisation of a universal domain, learners tend to rely on L2 constructions similar to those of the L1 as a strategy to compensate lack of knowledge regarding TL uses.

Jacopo Saturno's contribution also explores the morphosyntax domain, by focusing on the differential object marking in nominal morphology in L2 Polish of East Slavic learners (L1: Belorussian, Russian, Ukrainian) of A1-B1 proficiency (CEFR). By means of a quantitative study, the author confirms that CLI and universal tendencies, such as markedness, may coexist as explanatory factors in the differential object marking in an intercomprehension situation.

The subsequent three papers concern the role of typological diversity in the expression of space in language. **Christina Piot** focuses on multimodality in motion event construal. She first examines how native speakers (French vs Dutch) express the same motion events in their speech and co-speech gestures and then to what extent multimodal and inter-/intralinguistic differences impact performances of CLIL French learners of L2 Dutch (A1-B2 proficiency levels). Participants were recruited in Belgium, whose context is not particularly favourable for monolingual speakers, since it offers three official languages: Flemish/Dutch speaking; Walloon/French speaking; and, to a lesser extent, Ostbelgien German speaking. Analysis of language use and gesture by native speakers shows not only prototypical features of typological classifications, but also patterns which are less typical of their language-category. As for L2 performance, learners have their own thinking-for-speaking pattern which is in-between the French and the Dutch tendencies. Moreover, the study also highlights that gestures give information on event conceptualisation.

With respect to a different language combination, **Delia Airoldi**'s contribution also focuses on the expression of motion. Specifically, the author compares the productions of native speakers of Italian and German to the productions of German learners of L2 Italian (intermediate and advanced) by using different types of stimuli. The aim is to study inter- and intra-linguistic differences between German and Italian and to see whether learners' productions are target-like in L2 motion event construal or still influenced by the L1 patterns.

In the final paper, **Maria Hellerstedt** discusses two types of space: location and caused motion, as described by French and Swedish native speakers and by intermediate and advanced French learners of L2 Swedish. The larger goal is to investigate the semantic components selected to describe static and dynamic location in L2 Swedish, namely by means of posture verbs, and to identify learners' strategies (avoidance, over-using) justifying learners' linguistic choices. On the one hand, the paper shows the developmental trajectory of L2 Swedish learners in the use of posture verbs in spatial events. On the other hand, it highlights traces of CLI and other interlanguage strategies in producing idiomatic posture verbs.

Taken together, the above contributions bring a timely update within the research field of typology and L2 acquisition and learning by

building on and complementing previous literature on the subject. In particular, these papers provide empirical studies on different linguistic domains, while offering new avenues for future research on the issues under investigation in this special issue.

Acknowledgments

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Patrizia Giuliano has taught for almost three years at the Department of Language Sciences at the University of Paris 8 (France), focusing on the acquisition of second languages in "natural environment". Since 2001 she has been teaching Didactics of Modern Languages and Acquisitional Linguistics at the University Federico II in Naples (Department of Humanities), where she holds the position of Associate Professor. Her interests range from the acquisition of Italian as first and second language to linguistic disadvantages of socio-cultural origin and to the acquisition of foreign languages both in natural and institutional environment. She has and has had several collaborations with foreign universities and institutions (University of Bergamo, University of Pavia, University of Paris 8, University of Lille 3, Max-Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft).