Classroom corpus data and research on initial development of l2 inflectional morphology

Recent studies suggest that the emergence of grammatical forms and form-meaning mapping may already take place in novice L2 learner varieties (e.g. Carroll 2013, Carroll & Widjaja 2013, Hinz et al. 2013, Rast et al. 2014). While it is generally agreed on that learning inflectional morphology is a particularly struggling task, since it requires a great amount of time and cognitive effort on the part of the learner (e.g. Larsen-Freeman 1997, 2010), little is still known on what factors may prompt a beginner learner to notice or make use of inflectional markers during the first hours of language exposure.

This exploratory study compares the effects of two types of input exposure on the learners' production of nominal morphology in initial L2 learning. The data analysed were gathered during two experimental sessions of Polish course organised in Paris within the VILLA pan-European project "Varieties of Initial Learners in Language Acquisition controlled classroom input and elementary forms of linguistic organisation"[1]. The employment of a natural target language – the highly inflected Polish language - and the total control over the input provided in the form of a language course to experiment participants were the major novelties of the project (Dimroth et al. 2013, Latos et al. 2016).

The Villa classroom sessions were recorded and filmed. Subsequently, the whole oral input provided by the teacher, a native speaker of Polish, was transcribed in the CHAT[2] format. The classroom corpus database can thus be used to measure token temporal distribution and frequency in the input as well as to asses other distributional or qualitative properties of TL data. Such a methodology makes it possible to evaluate and compare, for instance, the frequency and other distributional properties of words, inflectional endings and syntactic structures in the classroom input.

Two groups of French learners took part in a 14-hour Polish course. The first group was exposed to a Meaning-based (MB) input which did not contain any overt focus on TL formal properties. The Form-based (FB) input, provided to the second experimental group, overtly focused on morphological variation occurring in specific syntactic contexts. At the end of the course, all participants verbally interacted with a native speaker of Polish during a Route Direction task.

The analyses were conducted with respect to two factors: (i) the input parameters the two learner groups were exposed to and (ii) the variation of inflectional endings in the learners' oral productions, elicited during the Route Direction task. The results suggest that input enhancement has an effect not only on learning gains but on the input distributional properties as well. Specifically, the FB input enhancement has been demonstrated to influence distributional characteristics of the input, contributing to the increase of its morphosyntactic diversification and to a more homogenous distribution of formal cues during the classroom exposure. Such a "collateral" effect observed in the FB instruction opens an interesting debate on the role of manipulation of linguistic data and its impact on second language guided learning.

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[1] *Project site: http://villa.cnrs.fr/en*
[2] *Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts (CHILDES).*

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