

Acquisition & attrition in multilingual contexts: Crosslinguistic Effects of Structural Similarity (AcqCESS) in Ukrainian-Polish child L2ers

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In this paper, we investigate the effects of bidirectional cross-linguistic influence by multilingual children and present the result of an experimental study of Ukrainian war refugee children in Poland. Our experimental group is Ukrainian children aged 6-12 years (N=76), who have been living in Poland for 4-20 months and acquiring Polish in an immersive context (Polish school or kindergarten). Our control groups are monolingual speakers of the same age (N=30).

We investigate bidirectional CLI effects (from L1 to L2 and from the new L2 to the L1) across two domains: grammatical gender and case, in which Ukrainian and Polish generally display formal and functional similarity, however, with noteworthy differences. Thus, in the marking of animate direct objects in plural (Table 1; ACC=NOM in Polish vs ACC≠NOM in Ukrainian) and the gender of nouns ending in a palatal consonant (Table 2; more likely to be Masculine in Polish, more likely to be Feminine in Ukrainian; see Krajewski 2005; Mitrofanova et al. 2018, 2022; Urek, submitted).

Table 1.

Ukrainian	Polish	Translation
My bačymo bilych kotiv (ACC≠NOM)	My widzimy białe koty (ACC=NOM)	We see white cats
My bačymo bilych ryb (ACC≠NOM)	My widzimy białe ryby (ACC=NOM)	We see white fishes

Table 2.

Polish	Ukrainian	Russian	English
cień M	t'in' F	t'en' F	shadow
ryś M	rys' F	rys' F	lynx
piec M	pic' F	pec' F	oven

To probe into the effects of similarity, we developed two elicited production tasks targeting gender (1) and case (2) in Polish and Ukrainian:

1. children were asked to produce color adjective + noun combinations with a set of nonce nouns ending in palatal consonant (eliciting a gender-marked adjective, paradigm based on Mitrofanova et al. 2018);
2. children were asked to name who they see on the screen (eliciting nouns in ACC case).

Our findings suggest that areas where two closely related languages diverge are more likely to be affected by CLI than areas of structural overlap. Moreover, the effects of CLI appear to be significantly modulated by the age of the learners: more pronounced influence from the new L2 to the L1 in younger children than in older children (cf. Flores, 2020 for similar effects). We discuss the results of the study in light of recent theoretical models of crosslinguistic influence (see Westergaard, 2014, 2021)

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