L1 transfer in the acquisition of articles in L2 English by Italian and Serbian native speakers

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Introduction

L1 transfer is one of the most well-studied phenomena in L2 acquisition.

Still, we don't know exactly at which stages of L2 acquisition and in which language domains it operates.

We decided to explore L1 transfer in the acquisition of articles in L2 English by two groups of L2 learners: L1 Serbian and L1 Italian speakers, whose native languages differ in this domain both from English and from one another.

The phenomenon in English, Italian and Serbian

The use of articles with plural nouns in subject position in specific and generic contexts

Generic context

More often than not, roses are red.   **Il più delle volte, rose sono rosse.*

More often than not, **the roses are red.*   *Il più delle volte, **le** rose sono rosse.*

Skoro uvek ruže su crvene.

Specific context

*In this song, **the** roses are red.*   *In questa canzone, **le** rose sono rosse.*

*In this song, roses are red.   **In questa canzone, rose sono rosse.*

U ovoj pesmi ruže su crvene.

Previous findings

Serratrice, Sorace, Filiaci & Baldo (2009)

Five groups of participants:
English–Italian (Italy) children, English–Italian (UK) children, Spanish–Italian children, Italian monolingual adults, English monolingual adults

Finding:
English–Italian children accepted bare plural NPs in subject position with a generic reading In Italian as a grammatical option, especially if their community language was English.

Research question, hypothesis and predictions

Research question

Do native speakers of Italian and Serbian transfer the proprieties of their L1 when acquiring articles in L2 English?

Hypothesis

Yes, they do.

Predictions

Italian native speakers will make more errors in the generic conditions than in the specific conditions.

Serbian native speakers will make a similar amount of errors in both sets of conditions.

Participants

Group	N	Age means		Age of first exposure to Eng.		Proficiency score (%)	
		Range	**Mean**	**Range**	**Mean**	**Range**	**Mean**
English	1	34	34;0	0	0	34.5	34.5
Serbian	4	17-61	39;0	4-19	9.25	23-30	26.5
Italian	4	23-50	34;6	3-14	8;25	27.5-34.5	31.6

Materials

- Background questionnaire
- Proficiency test (cloze test from Miličević, 2007)
- Acceptability judgement task (AJT)

Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5

1 completely unacceptable
2 somewhat unacceptable
3 neither acceptable, nor acceptable
4 somewhat acceptable
5 completely acceptable

In this part, you need to judge the degree to which some English sentences are acceptable on a scale from 1 to 5.

1 stands for *completely unacceptable*, 2 for *somewhat unacceptable*, 3 for *neither unnaceptable, nor acceptable*, 4 for *somewhat acceptable* and 5 for *completely acceptable.*

In this movie, tulips are lovely. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Completely unacceptable	○	○	○	○	○	Completely acceptable

AJT experimental design

2x2 factorial design with 24 sets of sentences distributed in a Latin square design

- Genericity: grammatical vs. ungrammatical

- Specificity: grammatical vs. ungrammatical

24 fillers (distractors)

AJT conditions

1. **Generic grammatical (genG)**

    In general, bananas are yellow.

1. **Generic ungrammatical (genU)**

    *In general, **the** bananas are yellow.*

1. **Specific grammatical (specG)**

    *In this picture, **the** bananas are yellow.*
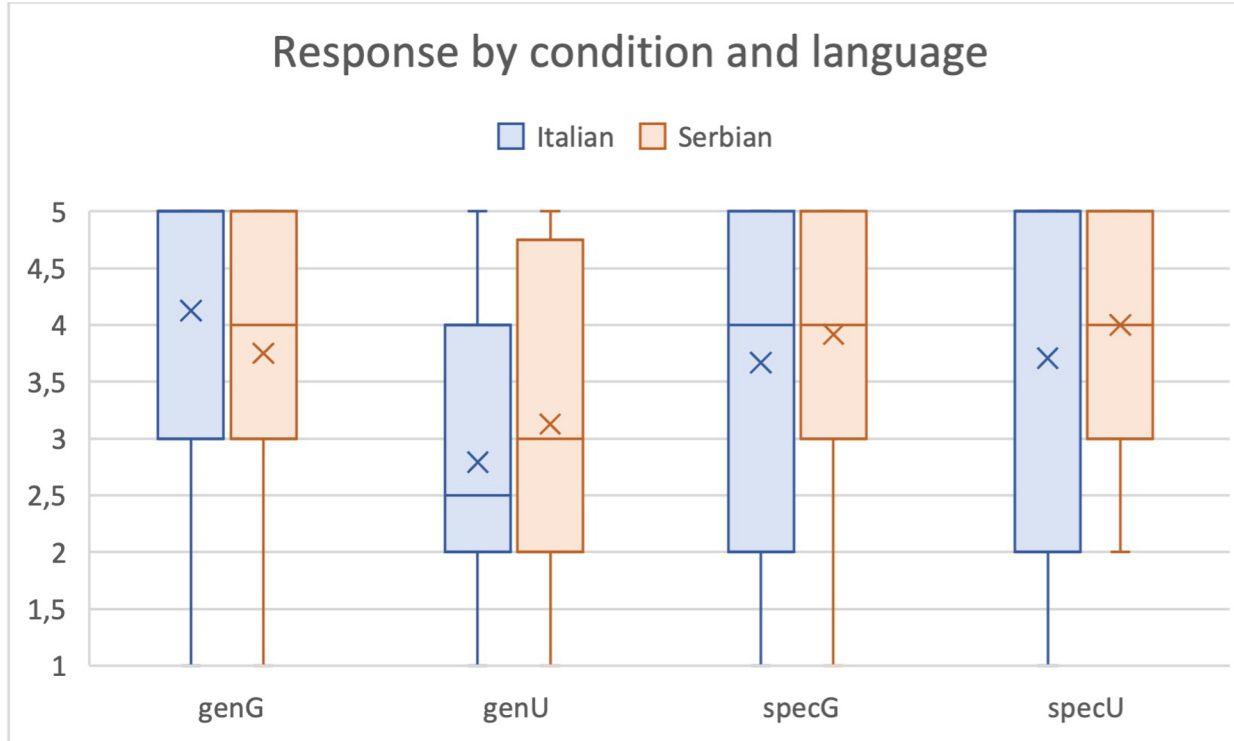
1. **Specific ungrammatical (specU)**

    In this picture, bananas are yellow.

Procedure

The study was implemented via a Google Form.

Participants participated in the study individually on their personal devices.

Results

Response by condition and language

Research question, hypothesis and predictions revisited

Predictions

Italian native speakers will make more errors in the generic conditions than in the specific conditions. ✗

Serbian native speakers will make a similar amount of errors in both sets of conditions. ✗

Research question

Do native speakers of Italian and Serbian transfer the proprieties of their L1 when acquiring articles in L2 English?

Hypothesis = Conclusion

Yes, they do. **?**

Limitations and directions for future research

- Low number of participants (impossibility of generalisation)
- Other L1s in two L1 Italian participants
- Age and education level and profile not controlled
- Cloze test too difficult
- Unbalanced proficiency of the two L1 groups
- Less than optimal experimental conditions (unstable Internet connection, noise)

For optimal results, resolve all the limitations in future administration of the experiment.

QUESTIONS?

SUGGESTIONS?

COMMENTS?