Abstract:

Cross Linguistic Influence in multilinguals: Do dominance and recency play a role?

The literature is divided in terms of whether dominance plays a role for crosslinguistic influence (CLI) in L3A. Several authors have found that dominance is a factor (e.g. Angelovska et al 2023; Fallah & Jabbari 2018), whilst other authors have found that it is not (e.g. Lloyd-Smith et al 2021). Authors have focused on differing areas of language, stages of acquisition, and ages of participant groups. Slabakova's (2017) Scalpel model specifically suggests that factors including language dominance serve to influence the choice of language in terms of CLI, but other models would also allow such factors to play a role, e.g. the Linguistic Proximity Model, which argues that CLI is due to (different strengths of) co-activation of the previously acquired languages (e.g. Westergaard 2021).

This paper focuses on morphosyntactic CLI at the beginning stage of acquisition, the point at which it is posited to have the greatest effect, before input-induced and overt learning has occurred. This design also allows for us to test the effect of recency, a little-investigated factor relevant for all experiments on CLI. Recency in this study is operationalised as the language of *instruction* and the language of the experiment.

Participants are L1 Polish L2 English speakers living in either Poland or the UK, who do not know Norwegian prior to the experiment. They are exposed to thirty-six Norwegian words (with pictures) as many times as desired for memorisation (Figure 1), followed by a picture-sentence matching task (Figure 2). They only proceed to the main experiment if they obtain at least 80% accuracy on the lexical items. The main experiment is a forced-choice judgement task, wherein participants must choose between two sentences in Norwegian using the words they learned – one with Polish-like and the other English-like morphosyntax. The English-like constructions are ditransitives and articles, and the Polish-like constructions are number agreement on adjectives and pronominal semantic gender for inanimate objects (used in some Northern dialects of Norwegian) (Figure 3, 4, 5, 6).

Dominance will be operationalised primarily through an assessment of domains of use, adapted from the Language and Social Background Questionnaire (Anderson 2017) and the Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong, Gertken & Amengual 2012). The results of these questionnaires are assessed as a distribution to avoid an arbitrarily placed median split. Participants are also tested on their performance on the relevant structures in English and Polish.

We predict that participants who are more dominant in Polish will choose the Polish-like constructions, and those who are more dominant in English will choose the English-like constructions. These effects will be mitigated by the recency effect, wherein, for example, Polish-dominant Polish-recency participants are predicted to choose the most Polish-like constructions, followed by Polish-dominant English-recency participants.

The study will shed light on the roles of dominance and recency in CLI for morphosyntax at the initial stages of acquisition.

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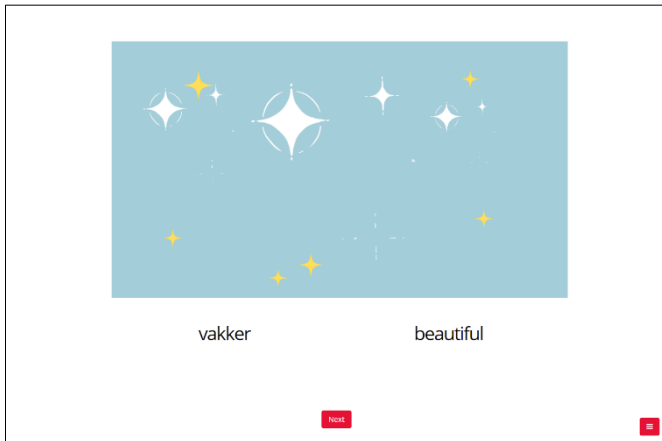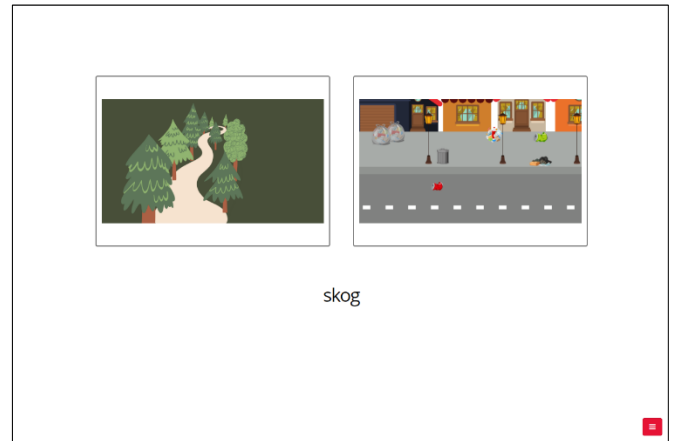
Figures:

Figure 1: Vocabulary exposure

Figure 2: Picture-sentence matching task

Figure 3: Number agreement on adjectives (Polish-like)

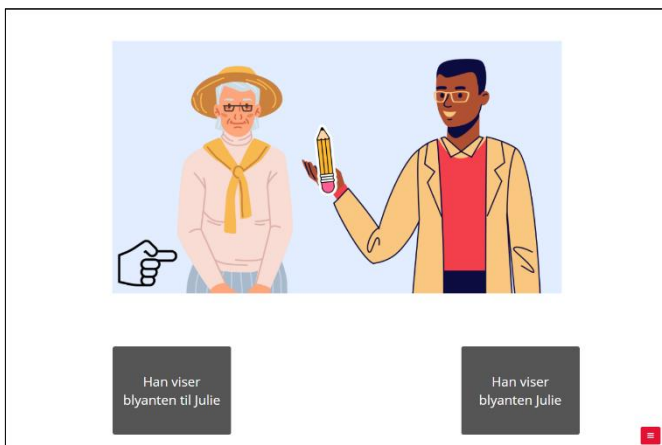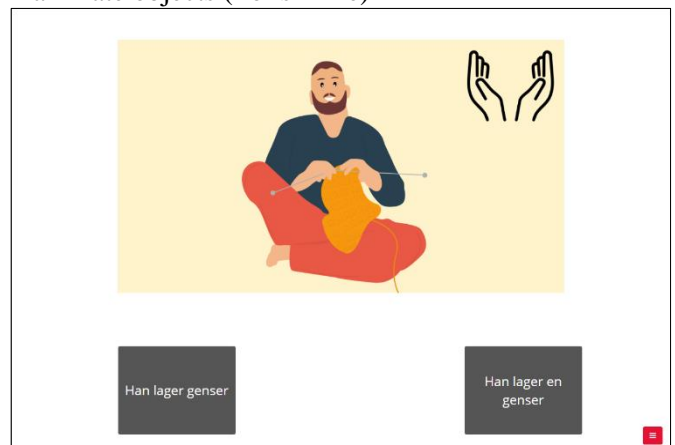Figure 4: Pronominal semantic gender for inanimate objects (Polish-like)

Figure 5: Ditransitives (English-like)

Figure 6: Articles (English-like)