

Case Errors in the Beginner and Advanced L2 Russian Learners' Writing

Russian language has a rich inflectional morphology where nouns, adjectives, pronouns, numerals, and verbs have various endings. When a learner, whose native language does not have such a rich inflectional system, has to acquire Russian cases, they might experience a problem because they need to learn hundreds of endings (Leaver, Rifkin, & Shekhtman, 2004). Different studies (Rosengrant, 1987, Salimova & Johnson, 2014, Rubenstein, 1995b) show the difficulty of the L2 acquisition of the Russian cases.

Based on previous studies, Rubenstein (1995b) came to the conclusion that no matter what the L1 is, learners mix the endings based on gender, forget to agree adjectives with nouns, and use nominative case instead of other cases. Thompson (1980) and Rubenstein (1995a) claim that the difficulty of acquisition is due to the morphological complexity of these cases as well as case frequency. The less complex a case is and the more frequently a learner encounters it, the faster he/she will acquire it.

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Which cases pose problems for the beginner L2 Russian learners?
2. Which cases pose problems for the advanced L2 Russian learners?

In order to answer these research questions, the essays written by L2 Russian learners during an intensive summer language program will be analyzed. Over the course of two weeks, fifteen beginners wrote four essays each, and ten advanced learners wrote four essays each on the same topics as well.

The obligatory occasion analysis (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) will be used to calculate accuracy scores for the use of the Russian cases in these essays. In such analysis, the number of correct forms is divided by the total number of obligatory contexts multiplied by 100%. The obligatory occasion analysis will help to determine which cases are used correctly, and in which cases learners make mistakes. The analysis of the two groups of learners will show whether the advanced and beginner L2 Russian learners make mistakes in the same case structures.

Based on the previous studies (Rubenstein, 1995b), it is hypothesized that genitive and dative will pose problems for the beginners. However, there are no studies to my knowledge that analyze the error rate in cases for the advanced learners. It is hypothesized that genitive and dative will pose problems for the advanced learners as well.

References

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