


East Slavic interference in L2 Polish: state of the art and future perspectives

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview of existing research on intercomprehension among Slavic languages and gives a few suggestions for the future development of this field of studies. Particular attention is devoted to the language constellations comprising Polish. After an introduction to the historical and sociological context of present-day Poland, characterized by the massive immigration of speakers of East Slavic languages, the text presents a succinct review of existing research and puts forward a few suggestions to fill knowledge gaps. It is argued that the large-scale acquisition of L2 Polish by speakers of related languages offers great opportunities for the scientific study of intercomprehension. The resulting insights in turn can be usefully applied to the development of efficient language teaching methods aiming to facilitate and accelerate the integration of Slavic-speaking refugees into Polish society.

Keywords: intercomprehension, L2 Polish, East Slavic languages, review

1. The East Slavic immigration to Poland

Following the rapid growth of Polish economy, immigration from Ukraine acquired significant proportions in the first two decades of the 21st century and further gained momentum as the political situation in Ukraine deteriorated. The military operations that began in 2014 and culminated in the 2022 Russian invasion further escalated and added a humanitarian connotation to the existing emigration trend. According to UNHCR (2022), more than 6.66 million people have left Ukraine since February 24, the majority of whom have fled to Poland. As of May 2022, almost 3.2 million Ukrainian citizens lived in Poland. Indeed, even before the mass exodus connected with the war, Poland was considered a privileged, if not ‘natural’, destination for citizens of Ukraine in the light of the cultural and linguistic proximity of the two peoples. According to recent GUS censuses (2020a, 2020b), at the end of 2019, out of a total population of 2,106,101 foreigners, 64.2% were Ukrainians, 5% Belarusians, and 1.7% Russians. Further, in the 2020/2021 academic year, Ukrainian students accounted for 45.4% of the total foreign student body in Polish universities (GUS 2021).

Special attention should be paid to the linguistic repertoire of Ukrainian citizens (P. Levčuk 2020). While the statistics provided above – based exclusively on nationality – seem to indicate that Russian is the least diffused language in the East Slavic immigrated community, it should be remembered that this language is not only dominant in Belarus, where it is gradually eroding the traditional areas of the use of Belarusian (Blr.; C. Woolhiser 2014), but is also widely used in Ukraine. In the 2001 census, Ukrainian (Ukr.) and

Russian (Rus.) were declared their native language by 68% and 30% of the population, respectively (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001). However, these data do not necessarily make it possible to determine the exact proportion of people speaking each language, as Russian-speaking citizens may call Ukrainian their native language simply because of national self-identification. More recently, Ukrainian and Russian were indicated as their mother tongue by respectively 63% and 35% of respondents (Kantar 2019). The same survey reports that at home and in professional contexts, the two languages are spoken by approximately the same number of respondents. Ukrainian dominates in educational institutions (Ukr. 53%, Rus. 30%), while Russian seems more popular in informal settings (Rus. 52%, Ukr. 44%) and on the Internet (Rus. 56%, Ukr. 39%). The two languages are also differentiated geographically, as Ukrainian is more often used in Western and central areas, as well as in small towns, while Russian is more common in the East and South and in large cities. Finally, Ukrainian was shown to be the most popular language among young people. In any case, near-universal passive competence in Russian makes it often impossible to determine whether a given pattern of cross-linguistic influence originates from Russian or Ukrainian (J. Kowalewski 2015: 338). These findings sharply contrast with the attitude of most L2 Polish teachers, who declared – surely in connection with the emotional stress deriving from the war in progress – that comparative L2 Polish teaching should consider exclusively Ukrainian to the detriment of Russian, despite the acknowledgment that this language is indeed present – often as a mother tongue – in the language repertoire of their pupils.

Particularly worthy of attention is the fact that in both Belarus and Ukraine, the ‘mixed’, diatopically inhomogeneous varieties respectively known as *suržyk* and *tras-janka* (G. Hentschel 2017) are vastly diffused. Finally, one should not forget about the role of local dialects (S. Del Gaudio 2017).

2. The empirical study of Slavic intercomprehension

To date, Slavic intercomprehension has generated a wealth of didactic material, Polish itself having been amply investigated from this perspective (A. Jasińska 2013; A. Zawadzka 2013; P. Gębal 2016). The topic has received greater than average attention in the German environment, especially within preparatory work for the EurocomSlav volume of the Eurocom series (L. Zybatow 2002). However, relatively little research has been devoted to the baseline of spontaneous intercomprehension skills from a purely linguistic perspective. For reasons of space, the present review will be limited to those studies presenting empirical information on L2 Polish as acquired in Poland by native speakers of East Slavic languages. Regrettably, such strict criteria led to the exclusion of insightful projects like *Micrela* (J. Golubovic/ C. Gooskens 2015) and *Inconslav* (K. Jágrová et al. 2019), as well as the wealth of research concerning the teaching and acquisition of people of Polish descent living in East-Slavic speaking countries (K. Kwiatkowska 2012; M. Zielińska 2012; L. Korol 2018, etc.). Other studies on the empirical basis of Slavic intercomprehension that because of the language combination considered are of no immediate relevance to the present discussion are W. Hofmański (2012; Czech > Polish), M. Pančíková/ A. Horák (2020: Slovak <> Polish), K. Bednarska (2015: Slovenian > Polish) and S. Miletić (2015: Polish > Serbian). No mention will be made of orthographic errors, although it is acknowledged that while most of them are confined to the written

medium (e.g. **mówie* for *mówię*, correctly pronounced [ˈmuvie]), others may be a symptom of incorrect pronunciation, e.g. **cieplo* [ˈtɛpłɔ] for *ciepło* [ˈtɛpwo] ‘warm’. The two following sections respectively summarise studies conducted from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, which together may provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon of interest.

3. Quantitative approach

J. Bestens-Dilger (2002) marginally addresses the L1 East Slavic – L2 Polish combination. A group of students with knowledge of various Slavic languages as L1 or L2 performed a set of comprehension and metalinguistic tasks on various unknown Slavic languages. Regarding the performance of the participants with L1 Russian, it is noteworthy that among the three languages they were confronted with (Czech, Polish and Croatian), the Polish text proved the hardest. In fact, Polish also proved hard for speakers of closely related languages such as Czech, mainly because of its opaque orthography, so much so that comprehension greatly improved after listening to the text.

A study that explicitly considers the comprehension of Polish by East Slavic speakers is E. Klyšinskij et al. (2017), in which native speakers of Russian were asked to fill in the gaps (regarding content words) of a Russian text by comparing it to its translations in other Slavic languages, including Polish (presented both in the original version and in a Cyrillic transliteration). Two control groups were tested: one performed the task based on the Estonian¹ translation of the target text, while the second was only given the Russian text and had to fill the gaps based on context and common sense alone. The results show that on average, scores about 15% higher were obtained when a Slavic auxiliary text was available. Predictably, this effect was much more evident when the target word was of Slavic origin, whereas it proved negligible in the opposite case. False friends appeared to be processed in a similar way to non-cognates, which can be explained by the fact that perceiving a dissonance between the context and the meaning apparently suggested by the lexical item, participants decided to rely exclusively on the former. Similarly to the case of J. Bestens-Dilger (2002), among the Slavic languages considered (Czech, Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian and Bulgarian), Polish proved the hardest in several respects: the improvement attributable to access to the Polish text was on average 8%, whereas Ukrainian (for which the best results were obtained) produced an improvement of 31%. No significant difference was observed between the effect of auxiliary texts in the original Latin script and their Cyrillic transliteration. Finally, errors were shown to be more common in the case of words occurring frequently in the text, probably because participants relied on their expectations and somewhat neglected the auxiliary language, whereas in the case of less common items, the greater attention paid to the Slavic text resulted in a greater proportion of correct inferences.

In 2020, J. Saturno and P. Gębal (in press) ran a large-scale project (financed by Narodowa Agencja Wymiany Akademickiej [NAWA]) on the acquisition of L2 Polish by speakers of East Slavic languages. In order to tease apart the effect of (native) competence in a language closely related to the object of acquisition, the same tasks were administered to learners of L2 Polish with different (i.e. Slavic vs. non-Slavic) L1 backgrounds.

¹ Estonian is a Ugro-Finnic language with no genealogic link to Russian.

All learners ($n = 161$) were university students taking L2 Polish classes at a large Warsaw-based university (Uczelnia Vistula). In an effort to obtain a comprehensive picture of L2 Polish acquisition by East Slavic speakers, 101 L2 Polish teachers were also asked to participate in an online survey. A similar survey was administered to the learners. The main results may be summarised as follows. First, the acquisition order of the Polish morphosyntactic considered exhibit only marginal variation attributable to the L1, although the scarcity of the non-Slavic learner sample ($n = 30$) produced rather wide credibility intervals. Second, some errors are unexpected and hard to interpret in terms of deterministic comparative grammar (as in radical versions of the contrastive analysis approach, e.g. R. Lado 1957), which suggests a role for systemic explanations involving universal factors such as markedness, cognitive constraints and input distribution. Third, enrolment data show that while most non-Slavic learners still attend foundation courses (A1-A2 CEFR) after several years of permanence in Poland, Slavic speakers typically attain the B1 level within months of their arrival to Poland. One cannot exclude (though information in this respect was not elicited by the survey) that numerous Slavic learners enrol in higher-level courses straight away (i.e. without attending lower-level classes first) as a result of their being ‘false beginners’. This claim is supported by the results of M. Magnani and D. Artoni (2021), who showed that Slavic speakers acquire L2 Russian morphosyntax more quickly than non-Slavic learners and make fewer errors once a structure has emerged.

Using an Elicited Imitation task (S. Wu et al. 2022), Saturno (2022) compared the performance of a group of learners with varying L1 background (East Slavic vs. non-Slavic, for the sake of simplicity) in the acquisition of L2 Polish following only a few hours of exposure to the target language. The results indicate a clear communicative advantage for Slavic speakers, which can be observed in the greater ease with which they identify and partially re-encode the overall meaning of the target sentences compared to non-Slavic speakers. In terms of production of inflectional morphology, however, they often produce the same errors as learners with a different L1 background (e.g., in the domain of nominal morphology, the overextension of nominative-like invariable word form). Morphosyntactic accuracy scores (the study focussed on the morphological marking of the object function within the paradigm of feminine nouns in *-a*) of the two groups did not differ in a statistically significant manner, possibly because of the limited sample considered.

Together, these studies clearly show that competence in other Slavic languages facilitates the acquisition of L2 Polish in terms of rapidity and communicative success, although the fundamental order of acquisition seems invariant, as indeed argued by numerous scholars (H. Dulay et al. 1982; C. Perdue 1993; G. Håkansson et al. 2002).

4. Qualitative approach

Most of the studies on the topic present a qualitative overview of crosslinguistic errors, i.e. a typology (sometimes a list) of errors with no quantification or inferential analysis. Since a systematic review of this production cannot be presented here for obvious reasons of space, reference will be made only to the most recent works, in which the interested reader will find additional information on previous studies. The focus is on descriptive analyses, to the exclusion of language teaching proposals. Coherently with the statistics

on the learners' nationality provided in the introduction, most papers regard the acquisition of L2 Polish by Ukrainian citizens (A. Górska 2015; J. Kowalewski 2015; A. Czapla 2020; A. Kravčuk 2020), while only a minority consider the citizens of Belarus (E. Smułkowa 2007; R. Kaleta 2015). Due to the complex language repertoires diffused in the area, however, it is often difficult to determine what L1 is at the origin of interference errors; moreover, East Slavic languages generally differ from Polish in a homogeneous way, so much so that a few authors correctly make reference to this group of languages in general (e.g. G. Przechodzka/ W. Hudy 2021). The same approach will be adopted in the following synthetic review, which has no ambition of exhaustivity, but only aims to present the most notable features of L2 Polish as produced by this important group of learners.

Vocabulary issues are common, e.g. *magazyn* for *sklep* 'shop', cf. East Slavic *magazín*, so much so that several authors have advocated a glossary (J. Bestens-Dilger 2002; C. Heinz 2009b). Non-existing words are sometimes produced following the L1 model, e.g. **ruki*, cfr. Pol. *ręce* 'hands', East Slavic *ruki* (cfr. J. Giacobbe/ M. Cammarota 1986), especially in the domain of country and nationality names. Calques also occur, e.g. **kazać* 'order' instead of *mówić* 'say' (respectively errors of form and errors of use in the taxonomy proposed by A. Dąbrowska/ M. Pasięka 2008). Errors in the case or preposition governed by lexical items (e.g. *uczyli się* 'they learnt' **now-ym słow-om* 'new-DAT.PL words-DAT.PL', cfr. Pol. *nowy-ch słów-Ø* 'new-GEN.PL words-GEN.PL', Rus. **now-ym słow-am* 'new-DAT.PL words-DAT.PL') also fit in this category, along with confusion on the reflexivity of verbs, e.g. **korzystać się:REFL*, cfr. Pol. *korzystać* 'exploit', Blr. *karystac-ca*). More systematic errors that may negatively affect comprehension regard the prepositions *przez* and *za*, e.g. *wróce *przez godzinę*, cfr. *za godzinę* 'I will come back in one hour'. Word order in collocations as well as whole sentences sometimes deviates from the norm.

Concerning morphosyntax, in East Slavic the use of the accusative to express the direct object within the scope of negation contrasts with the Polish norm requiring the genitive, although the former do allow for some variation in this respect (S. Harves 2013). Subject pronouns are often explicitly produced in contexts in which the Polish norm would avoid them in the absence of a contrastive focus, e.g. **ja nie chciałem o tym mówić* 'I didn't want to talk about that'. Similarly, Polish clitic pronouns are sometimes substituted by their stressed forms, which closely resemble their East Slavic equivalents, e.g. **kocha jego*, cfr. Pol. *kocha go* '([s]he) loves him', Rus. *ljubit ego*.

Concerning errors in the domain of inflection, there is a tendency to inflect ordinal numbers according to the L1 paradigm (i.e. only the unit) and to assign the L1 gender to nouns (not necessarily cognates), e.g. **ten twarz*, cfr. Blr. *gety tvar* 'that:NOM.SG.M face(F):NOM.SG'. A particularly problematic form is the genitive singular of masculine inanimate nouns, which in Polish may be rather unpredictably instantiated by either *-a* or *-u*, e.g. *naprzeciwko *teatr-a*, cfr. Pol. *naprzeciwko teatr-u* 'in front of the theatre-GEN.SG', whereas in East Slavic languages the latter ending is reserved for the partitive use within a restricted set of nouns, e.g. Blr. *mnoga narod-u* 'a lot of people-PART.SG'. Similar uncertainties regard the dative singular of masculine nouns, which in Polish, but not in the other languages, may be instantiated by the morphs *-u* (common to East Slavic) and *-owi* (unique to Polish), e.g. *zostawiam spadek *wujk-u*, cfr. Pol. *wujk-owi* 'I leave the heritage to (my) uncle-DAT.SG'. Other errors concern the fact that some forms of foreign words do not inflect in the learner's L1, but do so in Polish, and vice versa, e.g. *jestem*

w *metro, cfr. Pol. *jestem w metr-ze* ‘I’m in the subway-LOC.SG’. Further, an identical morpheme (such as the direct case of neuter nouns) may be instantiated in the two languages by different morphs, e.g. *słowy², cfr. Blr. *slov-y*, Pol. *słow-a* ‘word-NOM/ACC.PL’. A very characteristic error of this type concerns the ACC.SG morpheme of feminine nouns, e.g. *znać *histori-ju*, cfr. Pol. *histori-ę* ‘to know history-ACC.SG’. Similar difficulties arise from the fact that although Polish, Belarusian and Ukrainian all exhibit palatalisation of noun consonant stems when an inflectional ending is instantiated by a front vowel, they partly differ in the actual result, e.g. L2 Polish w *Praz-ie, cfr. Pol. w *Pradz-e*, Blr. v *Praz-e* ‘in Prague\LOC.SG’ (cfr. *Praga* ‘Prague-NOM.SG’). Case endings themselves are also often confused, both within Polish and across languages (cfr. K. Pösingerová 2001), e.g. *byłam w *miast-u* ‘I was in town-DAT.SG’, w *naszym *życi-e* ‘in our life-NOM/ACC.SG’, cfr. Pol. *mieści-e* ‘town\LOC.SG’, *życi-u* ‘life-LOC.SG’, especially in the case of words characterised by unusual inflection patterns, e.g. *ci *ludz-i* ‘these people-GEN.PL’, cfr. Pol. *ludzi-e*, Rus. *ljud-i* ‘people-NOM.PL’. Polish is unique in that a set of semantically identified nouns (the plural ‘virile’ gender, see below) requires stem palatalisation in the nominative plural. This consonant alternation is often ignored by learners, e.g. *robotnik-i ‘worker-NOM.PL’, cfr. Pol. *robotnic-y* ‘worker\NOM.PL’. The vocative as a whole is often problematic in view of varying use in the languages of the area (A. Trovesi 2013).

A further, subtler problem arises from the different gender systems of Polish and East Slavic. In both cases, plural nouns distinguish only two genders, as opposed to four in the singular (as identified by agreement patterns), but their semantic anchoring differs to a certain extent: while in Polish there is an opposition between ‘virile’ (i.e. human, male, adult) referents and all others, in East Slavic languages nouns are divided into animate and inanimate. It follows that animate nouns that are not human male adults receive a different accusative marking in the two languages (syncretic with the nominative in Polish, but with the genitive in East Slavic). These diverging differential object marking patterns produce transfer errors, e.g. *widzę *kot-ów* ‘I see cat-GEN.PL’, cfr. Pol. *kot-y* ‘cat-ACC.PL’, Blr. *kat-oŭ* ‘cat-GEN.PL’. Morphosyntactic errors related to gender of course also affect agreeing parts of speech, which in East Slavic languages neutralise gender in their plural paradigm. Crucially, however, in most cases the Polish marked term (i.e. the virile gender form, e.g. *oni* ‘they(NOM.VIR)’, *-li* ‘PST.3PL.VIR’) coincides with the single East Slavic form. This concerns a) adjectives, e.g. *studenci są* ‘the students are *towarzysk-i ‘sociable-NOM.SG.M’, cfr. Pol. *towarzysc-y* ‘sociable\NOM.PL.VIR’, b) pronouns, e.g. **oni mówili* ‘they(NOM.VIR) said:NONVIR.3PL’, cfr. Pol. *one mówili* ‘they(NOM.NONVIR) said:NONVIR.3PL’, Rus. *oni govorili* ‘they(NOM) said:3PL’, and c) the past tense of verbs, e.g. *dziewczyn-y* ‘girl-NOM.PL’ **czyta-li* ‘read-PST.VIR.3PL’, cfr. Pol. *czyta-ły* ‘read-PST.NONVIR.3PL’, Blr. *čyta-li* ‘the girls read-PST.PL’.

In the domain of verbal morphology, errors include forms like *on *lubi-ć* ‘he(NOM) like-INF’, cfr. Pol. *lubi-∅*, Blr. *ljubi-c* ‘like-3SG’, particularly noteworthy because an L1 phonological phenomenon (palatalisation, which does not occur in this morphological context in Polish) is realized using L2 material (L2 *-ć* /tɕ/ vs. L1 *-c* /tɕj/). Further, in the past tense East Slavic speakers commonly overgeneralise the 3PL and 3SG form to all

² An effect of the formula *innymi słowy* ‘in other words’ cannot be excluded *a priori*, but seems unlikely.

others of the same number, since unlike Polish, their L1 does not express the category of person, e.g. *ja *by-t-a* 'I(NOM) be-PST-F', cfr. Pol. *by-t-a-m* 'be-PST-F-1SG'. Difficulties with the category of person also concern the formation of the conditional mood, e.g. **chciałamby*, cfr. Pol. *chcia-t-a-by-m* 'want-PST-F-COND-1SG', and some completive clauses, e.g. **żebym tam chodziłam*, cfr. Pol. *żeby-m tam chodzi-t-a* 'COMPL-1SG there go-PST-F'. Finally, the present tense of the verb *być* 'to be', which in East Slavic only occurs in one crystallised form regardless of person and number (e.g. Rus. *jest*) and is regularly omitted, in Polish fully inflects, e.g. *ty *jest* 'you(NOM.SG) be:PRES.3SG', cfr. Pol. *jesteś* 'be:PRES.2SG', **ona Ukrainka-a* 'she(NOM) Ukrainian_woman-NOM.SG', cfr. Pol. *ona jest Ukrainką* 'she(NOM) is Ukrainian_woman-INS.SG'.

Concerning phonetics, finally, errors occur in the following areas: position of lexical stress, e.g. **[a'le]*, cfr. Pol. [*'ale*], Ukr. [*a'le*] 'but'; voiced pronunciation of consonants in an unvoiced consonant, e.g. **[tvui]*, cfr. Pol. [*tfui*] 'your'; pronunciation [*ɣ*] instead of [*g*]; akan'e (the centralized pronunciation of unstressed /o/), e.g. **[a'ɣulni]*, cfr. Pol. [*o'gulni*] 'general'; dental pronunciation of prepalatal affricates, e.g. **[sʲitsʲana]*, cfr. Pol. [*'ɛteana*] 'wall'; pronunciation of nasal vowels, e.g. **[pʲe'kanski]*, cfr. Pol. [*pʲe'konski*] 'appetizers'; contrast between [*w*] and [*v*], e.g. **[po'eivki]*, cfr. Pol. [*po'eivki*] 'meals'; palatalisation of consonants, e.g. [*mɛɟ'kajɔŋ*], cfr. Pol. [*mʲɛɟ'kajɔŋ*] 'they live'.

The studies by C. Heinz (2009a, 2009b) stand out in that they address oral intercomprehension among Slavic languages, whereas the focus in the field is usually on the written medium. The author presents a qualitative review of errors pertaining to different layers of language (phonemics, segmentation, morphology, vocabulary) in which the aural mode presents a different, usually greater challenge to intercomprehension than is usually the case with written texts. Although the studies do include Polish as a target language, they regrettably provide no information as to the frequency of the errors discussed or the native language of the listener, so that it is impossible to determine whether the examples discussed are relevant to the present review. Nevertheless, the articles do present a useful overview of transfer errors and a theoretical reflection that applies well to the present Polish case.

5. Perspectives for future research

Against the picture outlined so far, one can identify several directions for the further development of the field of studies on Slavic intercomprehension. It is argued in particular that the development of language teaching applications should follow the collection of solid and detailed information on the empirical basis of the phenomenon, as indeed should generally be the case in the relation between language pedagogy and Second Language Acquisition.

6. Describe the language repertoire of Ukrainian immigrants

The data provided in the introduction show that the language situation in East Slavic countries is a complex matter, further complicated by ideological stances connected with sociological and political issues. Investigating the language repertoire of East Slavic immigrants would be helpful to appreciate the dynamics of language contact in the area. Two points seem particularly worthy of attention. First, the set of contact varieties collectively known as *surżyk* or *trasjanka* are probably the primary L1 for a significant proportion of

learners. However, to date they have been regrettably under-researched, so that not much is positively known about their structural features and diatopic variation. Second, the co-existence and partly complementary distribution of East Slavic languages in Ukraine and Belorussia needs to be further investigated to overcome ideological tendencies stigmatizing ‘everything Russian’: in particular, it is important to realise that Russian is the native language not only of the aggressor, but also of part of the victims. If the teaching of L2 Polish is to take advantage of L1/L2 comparison, then Russian should also be considered. Indeed, using this language to ease the effects of the Russian invasion would symbolize a very desirable distinction between the linguistic and the political plan.

7. Refining the empirical basis of Polish-East Slavic intercomprehension

To date, research on Slavic intercomprehension has mainly focussed on its language teaching applications, whereas the empirical basis of this psycholinguistic phenomenon has been somewhat neglected. This situation is far from ideal, since pedagogic practice could undoubtedly benefit from linguistic research insights, while linguistics could (and should) direct its efforts towards those areas that language practitioners deem more sensitive for their work. To be fair, a rigorous, objective, scientific description of intercomprehension does not seem an easy task because of the great number of variables involved, many of which are of an extra-linguistic nature. Even within the limited scope of what is accessible to linguistic research, however, much can be done to establish a solid knowledge base. Promising directions for the further development of the field include the investigation of important variables, such as the relation between intelligibility and linguistic distance (K. Beijering et al. 2008; R. Berthele 2011) and the role of prosody (C. Heinz 2009a; A. Reichert 2013; W. Hofmański 2012).

8. Development of research resources

Both research and language teaching activities would greatly benefit from the development of specialized digital resources. Examples include lists of etymologically related words, which are often produced on purpose for specific research projects (K. Jągrová et al. 2019) but may be usefully shared to create a common base of experimental material. In turn, specific efforts could be made to develop multi-purpose, large scale material, possibly by taking advantage of ICT techniques devoted to closely related languages (S. Sharoff 2020; N. Sira et al. 2020).

Similar considerations apply to the development of corpora of spoken or written data. The data collected by numerous researchers (only part of whom were cited in this paper for reasons of space) could be mutually enriched by an organized, modular corpus.

9. Identification of transfer errors vs. universal tendencies

A research question that deserves particular attention in the present situation concerns the effect of the L1 in the L2 acquisition process in an intercomprehension setting. It is clear that in the Polish case, the learners’ L1 plays a crucial role, determining on the one hand the bulk of the spontaneous comprehension process, on the other hand most of the interference errors. It is also true that contrastive analysis played a vital role as one of the leading paradigms of SLA studies (L. Yu/ T. Odlin 2016). However, at least since the

1970s, SLA research has been drawing attention to the common aspects of the acquisition process, highlighting such phenomena as universal acquisition sequences (H. Dulay et al. 1982; C. Perdue 1993; M. Pienemann 1998; B. Di Biase/ C. Bettoni 2015). Numerous explanations have been put forward to explain such tendencies that escape explanations based on language interference, such as the role of input (V. Kempe/ B. MacWhinney 1998; J. Flege 2009; S. Wulff/ N. Ellis 2018) and cognitive constraints such as markedness (F. Eckman 2008), leaving aside the various positions inspired by generative grammar.

10. Intercomprehension-based language teaching and schooling

It has been noted in Western European scholarship (R. Berthele et al. 2017) that special attention should be paid when implementing intercomprehension into general schooling because of possible Matthew effects, whereby children with a migration background might find intercomprehension-based tasks more demanding and frustrating than their monolingual peers, probably because of the lower cultural level often associated with their social situation (A. Lambelet/ P. Maunon 2017). These considerations do not seem directly applicable to the Polish case: here the immigrant children's L1 does not simply function as a tool for school activities that are not indispensable for every-day communication, e.g. reading documents in the original language during history classes, but as facilitatory device to accelerate the required acquisition of the host country official language.

At the same time, East Slavic speakers are highly aware of the proximity of Polish to their L1 (R. Kaleta 2015; J. Kowalewski 2015), from which they might conclude that their knowledge of Polish is sufficient to communicate effectively and that it is not necessary for them to study the language further. Obviously, such attitude negatively affects their motivation and eventual acquisition success (cfr. 'the communication trap', A. Skalska/ T. Skalski 1995). Language teachers should probably insist on the negative implications of fossilization and imperfect knowledge on successful communication, not to mention of course schooling requirements for younger learners. It is noteworthy in this respect that even native speakers with a migration background often perform poorly in both education in general and multilingual activities in particular because of their superficial knowledge of the dominant language (R. Berthele et al. 2017; A. Lambelet/ P. Maunon 2017), in spite of 'sounding' native because of the rapid loss of foreign accent that result from early L2 acquisition (J. Flege et al. 2006). L2 Polish teaching in these critical times is at least partly responsible for laying the foundations of school success and avoiding the development of a socially and linguistically marginalised social layer.

Concerning teaching material, various authors (A. Kravčuk 2013; A. Górska 2015; R. Kaleta 2015) argue that specific attention should be paid to the impact of the learners' language learning habits. More specifically, the language teaching approach that most East Slavic students are used to relies heavily on grammatical explanations, drills, and translation exercises, in a typical teacher-centred environment, whereas the present attitude in L2 Polish teaching in Poland is more inclined towards tasks, interaction, individual work and other learner-centred activities. While of course it is not necessary or advisable to replicate the East Slavic language learning environment in Poland, this difference should be kept into consideration in order not to shock, disorient or demotivate the learner in the earliest phases of acquisition.

At the same time, both the teaching of morphologically rich languages like Polish in general, and comparative approaches more particularly, probably require a greater focus on grammar than is usually the case in the teaching of other morphologically less complex languages such as English, which obviously plays a major role in inspiring contemporary pedagogic approaches and materials. The massive influx of East Slavic learners calls for a remodulation of the present language teaching approach in order to acknowledge the specificities of both the learners and the object of instruction. Indeed, although East Slavic learners predominated numerically even before the military events that commenced in 2014, the present wave did not choose to emigrate spontaneously and is sociologically very inhomogeneous, especially in terms of attitude towards language learning.

Conclusion

Good things may indirectly arise out of very bad things. In the immediate aftermath of WWII, the industrial application of scientific and technological innovations connected with the war dramatically improved people's life, from the radar, to the jet engine, to penicillin. Unfortunately, present-day Poland represents a partly parallel case. The massive immigration of East Slavic speakers represents a unique opportunity for the study of such topics as intercomprehension and language contact, with ample possibilities of application to the related fields of language teaching and pedagogy in general, since language proximity is also a consequence of cultural proximity. Regrettably, the magnitude of an originally job seeking phenomenon has escalated following the tragic events of the on-going war in Ukraine and its burden of human suffering.

In such a situation, linguists should multiply their effort and exploit their specialised skills and knowledge to help the fleeing population. All the people who undertook the teaching of Polish to the refugees – with or without specific preparation – deserve one's unconditional admiration and gratitude. In addition to that effort, however, scholars should undertake the scientific study of the linguistic phenomena that underlie emigration, so as to better understand their mechanisms and apply this knowledge to pedagogical and integration purposes. In this paper I tried to outline a few suggestions regarding the steps that may benefit the field in both the short and the long term, with the hope that the knowledge gained in these hard times will be put to people's advantage and that the present emergency should soon come to an end.

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