

Oona Pitkänen

MORPHOLOGICAL ERRORS:
Similarities between first and second language learner
errors

ABSTRAKTI

Oona Pitkänen: Morphological errors: Similarities between first and second language learner errors
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Tampereen Yliopisto
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Vieraiden kielten oppimista ja lasten äidinkielen kehitystä on tutkittu jo vuosikymmenten ajan, mutta näiden kahden välinen suhde näyttää vielä olevan vähemmän kartoitettu aihealue. Erityisesti virheet ovat olleet monen tutkijan kiinnostuksen kohteena. Oppijoiden tekemien erilaisten kieliopillisten virheiden tutkiminen sekä niiden syntyyn vaikuttavien syiden ymmärtäminen ovat keskeisiä tutkimuskohteita kielitieteessä, sillä ne muun muassa auttavat paremmin ymmärtämään kielen kehityksen monimutkaista prosessia. Tämä kandidaatintutkielma käsittelee näitä virheitä kielen kehityksessä, painottuen erityisesti morfologisiin virheisiin.

Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, ovatko englantia vieraana kielenään opiskelevien tekemät morfologiset virheet samankaltaisia kuin virheet, joita äidinkielenään englantia puhuvat lapset tekevät kielenkehityksen alkuvaiheessa. Tämän lisäksi tutkimus pyrkii vastaamaan kysymykseen siitä, mitä mahdollisia syitä virheiden takana on. Analyysissa keskitytään perustellusti valittuihin morfeemeihin ja tarkastellaan näitä sekä äidinkielen puhujan että vieraan kielen opiskelijan näkökulmasta.

Taustamateriaalina käytettiin aiempia tutkimuksia lasten kielen kehityksestä, ja tutkimusmateriaalina toimi itse toimittamani tutkimus lukioikäisten englannin opiskelijoiden tekemistä virheistä vapaassa puheessa. Aiempien tutkimusten aineistot käytiin huolellisesti läpi, minkä jälkeen tämän tutkimuksen löydöksiä pystyttiin analysoimaan suhteessa aiempien tutkimusten havaintoihin. Tutkielmaa varten toteutetussa tutkimuksessa materiaali kerättiin osallistumalla lukion englannin puheviestinnän kurssille ja tarkastelemalla oppilaiden kielenkäyttöä mahdollisimman spontaaneissa ryhmäkeskusteluissa sekä etukäteen harjoitelluissa koko luokalle pidettävissä esitelmissä.

Jokseenkin suppeasta materiaalista huolimatta havaitaan, että yhtäläisyyksiä virheiden tekemisessä löytyy paljon huolimatta siitä, onko kyseessä puhujan äidinkieli vai vieras kieli. Myös eroavaisuuksiakin kuitenkin löytyy. Tutkimuksen tuloksien pohjalta vaikuttaa siltä, että erot voivat johtua suomen kielen negatiivisesta siirtovaikutuksesta. Vieraan kielen opiskelijoilla on jo taustatietoa muun muassa toisen kielen kielioppisäännöistä, kun taas puhumaan opettelevat lapset lähtevät täysin eri lähtötilanteesta. Tutkimuksen johtopäätökset ovat suuntaa antavia ja niiden vahvistamiseksi tulisi toimittaa jatkotutkimuksia. Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset kuitenkin osoittavat, että kielen omaksumisen prosessi on osittain samankaltainen riippumatta aiemmin tunnetuista kielistä tai siitä, ettei aiempaa tuntemusta ole.

Avainsanat: language learning, language acquisition, language development, morphology, error analysis

Tämän tutkielman alkuperäisyys on tarkistettu Turnitin Originality Check -palvelussa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Both first language (L1) acquisition and second language (L2) acquisition have been studied for decades, both separately and in relation to one another. Especially the errors made by the learners have been in the center of interest of many researchers. The systematic study of second language acquisition, according to Ellis (1997), is a fairly recent phenomenon that emerged in the 1950s. Ellis (1997) also states that grammar is often the focus of research, rather than pronunciation, word use, or communicative aspects of the language.

The purpose of this study is to find out whether there is a correlation between the errors, more specifically morphological errors, of children whose mother tongue is English, and the errors of young adults who are studying English as a foreign language. The subjects of this study were all upper secondary students whose native language was Finnish. This age group was selected on the one hand because they already have some familiarity with the language and would not produce too many mistakes to the point where they cannot be understood, and on the other hand because they have not yet achieved a master level of the language when the number of errors would be noticeably lower or even nonexistent.

The goal of this research is mainly to find out what type of similarities or differences L1 and L2 learners have but there will also be some analysis about the origin of the errors. I will comment on whether the Finnish language greatly affects the errors made, or if the errors are performed exactly the same way despite the learner's native language, which might indicate that language always develops in a certain way despite the different starting points learners have.

Language development can be divided into five stages, each of which is learned at a different rate: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Brown 1976). This thesis focuses on grammatical errors, more precisely morphological errors, and leaves out these other important parts of language learning. In short, morphology is the study of how word structures are formed and what is their relation to other words. Thus, morphological errors occur when the morphological aspect of grammar is infected. Some previous studies (see, for example, Montrul 2011; Alemán Bañon et al. 2017; Dowens et al. 2010) have tried to find and explain the morphological errors in language learners' written or oral speech, but a comparison between the errors of first and second language learners seems to be a less discovered area.

Different language pairs should also be studied on their own and since I was only able to find few previous studies on the similarities and differences in the way grammar is learned between the Finnish-English language pair I think it is an important area of research. There is a need to better understand the process of language learning and I believe this thesis can be helpful in providing new information on the subject.

As Corder (1967, 167) states, there are many benefits to studying language acquisition and especially the errors made in the process as it provides useful insight into the process for everyone involved: the learner, the instructor, and the researcher. For example, teachers and students are provided with information on how they are or how they should be progressing with the language development. Researchers, for their part, gain valuable knowledge of how a first or a second language is learned with each study that is conducted from a slightly different perspective.

This study is conducted by examining the speech of upper secondary school students as well as examining previous studies on the topic of language acquisition. The hypothesis is that the morphological errors between L1 and L2 learners are not going to be entirely similar due to multiple factors, one being negative language transfer.

First, I will start by reviewing the previous literature in the areas of language acquisition and error analysis. The findings from research on both children's first language development as well as those on second language acquisition will be examined. In addition, the topic of relationship between first and second language acquisition will be covered in the 2nd section. In section 3, I will briefly explain and justify the methods chosen to conduct this study, after which the results are presented and discussed in greater detail in section 4. The final section contains a brief summary of the findings, followed by a conclusion that states whether the hypothesis presented in the previous chapter was correct or not.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. First language acquisition

2.1.1 Children's language development

At the age when children start producing speech, their brain is still developing. The creation of words and phrases, which are needed to begin communicating linguistic meanings, is the first step in a child's language development process (Bavin 2009, 164). Babbling is the first stage of word formation, and it is also when the child works the hardest on the acquisition of phonology (Bavin 2009, 163), which will, of course, continue to develop in the future. By the age of 7-8 children are typically expected to master the majority of linguistic rules (MacRoy-Higgins & Kolker 2017, chapter 3).

Even though children might be understood, they do make several linguistic errors while talking. Some researchers (see, for example, Corder 1967), however, argue that these should not be considered errors since their brain has not developed enough to understand that there are specific rules in the language system that must be followed. For the sake of this thesis, the malforms in the children's speech will be considered errors as they are compared to the errors made by the second language learners.

When the brain eventually develops enough to recognize the existing rules of grammar and syntax the rules are then often applied to areas where they should not go, resulting in the issue of overgeneralization (Bavin 2009). A child may for instance start adding *-ed* to every verb when trying to express past time even though there should not be one with irregular verbs such as *eat* or *run*. With children, there are problems in all the areas of grammar, including for example phonology and syntax, which might lead to incomprehensible sentence structures. This thesis focuses on the morphological errors.

Acquiring morphology can be either an additive or a deconstructivist process (Bavin 2009, 203).

The additive method is more likely in languages with relatively little morphology, such as English,

where the stem of a word and the citation form resemble each other (Bavin 2009, 203). Starting with an uninflected stem (*dance, cat*), the child progressively learns to add morphological markers appropriate to each grammatical category on their own, such as markers of past tense (*danced*) or plurality (*cats*).

In the late 1970s, Roger Brown (1976) studied the language development of three children and created a model of five stages, each of which serves their own purpose in a child's language development. Children begin with one or two-word utterances, which over time evolve into more complex grammatical structures. These stages provide a basis for predicting and understanding how morphology and syntax typically develop with children whose first language is English.

However, while for example stage 1 is mostly dedicated to semantic and syntactic areas and in stage 4 complex sentence types begin to occur, Brown (1976) mentions that the development is not as static as it seems when looking at the stages. For example, the development of semantic processes continues beyond the given stage. Another important note is that despite the order of acquisition being approximately the same, every child develops language at their own pace. In Brown's (1976, 271) study one of the children went through all the stages from 1 to 5 before the age of 2.4 years while one of them took 4 years to complete all of them.

Brown's (1976, 271;408) study shows that no child has these morphological abilities when they first start talking, and that, as stated earlier, the rate of acquisition will vary a lot among children. The study, however, proves that the order in which the morphemes are acquired is mostly the same with all children: present progressive, regular plural, irregular past tense, possessive 's, uncontractible copula, past regular, regular third-person present tense, uncontractible auxiliary and finally contractible copula and auxiliary (Brown 1976, 274). This was also proved by the study of J. de Villiers and P. de Villiers in 1973 (Hoff 2019, 180). According to the presented order, among children with normal language development, the acquisition of correct noun morphology comes before the acquisition of correct verb morphology.

2.1.2 Theories of L1 development

Language development studies still continue today, but at this time, there are a few generally accepted theories. There are many components such as cognitive, social, and environmental factors that affect language acquisition. In the 1950s, Noam Chomsky proposed the Universal Grammar theory arguing that when children learn their first language, they rely on their innate knowledge of language and grammar rules to produce expression (Ellis 1997, 67). This linguistic model essentially implies that a child will figure out the important rules for a language on their own merely when exposed to it.

Behavioristic theory approaches language acquisition by seeing it as learned behavior. The theory was developed by B. F. Skinner who believed that when hearing language, children begin to associate it with for instance a specific item or activity (MacRoy-Higgins & Kolker 2017, chapter 3). The cognitive approach is closely related to Skinner's theory. It was introduced by Jean Piaget who analyzed language acquisition to be a learned skill instead of behavior (MacRoy-Higgins & Kolker 2017, chapter 3).

The fourth approach suggests that language learning depends on social interactions. According to this sociocultural approach the language acquisition process develops as children interact with other people who have more advanced language skills (Levey 2019, 34).

2.2. Second language acquisition

2.2.1 Error analysis

Errors are a natural and an inevitable part of every language development and it has been studied by many (see, for example, Khansir 2012; Richards 1980; Corder 1967). The term error however has been under a debate. Corder (1967, 166-167) divides errors into two categories: competence errors and performance errors, which he also refers to as mistakes. Competence errors are the more serious ones since they are systematic and represent the speaker's lack of knowledge and competence (Corder 1967, 166-167). On the other hand, performance errors, or mistakes, are merely so-called

unsystematic slips of the tongue, where the speaker knows the rule but fails to produce a proper utterance due to, for instance, a short-term memory loss or a physical state such as tiredness (Corder 1967, 166). Performance errors are not significant to the language learning process as they are random and do not reveal information about the speaker's ability to utilize the previously learned language systems.

There exist several theories on the ways in which errors are committed by language learners. Ellis (1997, 18) suggests either categorizing errors by the inflected grammatical categories (verbs, nouns etc.) or dividing errors according to the "ways in which the learner's utterance differs from the reconstructed target-language utterances". Corder (1973) proposes that there are four main processes of error formation: omission (removing a required element), addition (adding an incorrect element), substitution (using an incorrect element instead of the correct one), and permutation (arranging the elements incorrectly).

Errors can also be divided according to which part of the sentence they affect. Burt and Kiparsky (1972) introduced a way of dividing errors into global and local errors. Local errors affect specific constituents such as articles, prepositions, and noun and verb inflections, but when they occur, they do not interrupt communication or comprehension of what has been said. Contrarily, global errors affect the overall structure and may disrupt the whole meaning of an utterance.

Besides identifying the types of errors, the source of them has also been a topic of interest among researchers. There are errors, such as omission or overgeneralization, that can happen with any language learner regardless of their L1 (Ellis 1997, 19). Richards (1980) calls these mistakes intralingual errors. The other type of errors, interlingual errors, on the other hand, are caused by the reflection and interference of the knowledge learners have of their L1. These are also called transfer errors (Ellis 1997, 19).

Richards (1980) divides errors based on the reasons behind them into four categories which are overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules and false concepts hypothesized. When overgeneralizing, the learner constructs a similar structure based on the experience of other structures in the language (Richards 1980, 174-175). It often happens with verbs, especially when trying to express past time. At some point the learner is taught that adding an *-ed* at the end of a verb means it is now expressing a moment before this one. It is then common that the learner tries to apply this rule to irregular verbs as well even though they have different rules. Ignorance of rule restrictions is comparable to generalization of similar structures as the learner is again relying on previously acquired rules and fails to observe the existing rule restrictions in the new situation (Richards 1980, 175-177).

Incomplete application of rules arises when the learner does not apply the correct form of rules in a correct manner (Richards 1980, 177-178). For example, they may try to express a question by only adding a question word to the statement form and so fail to produce an acceptable sentence since in English an auxiliary verb is normally needed in questions. While the first three categories dealt with somehow failing at obeying a rule, the last category stems from lack of comprehension. According to false concept hypothesis, the learners misinterpret the learnt rules and fail to understand the characteristics of the target language (Richards 1980, 178-181).

2.2.2 Theories of L2 development

While Brown (1976) proved that the acquisition order of morphemes is relatively the same for the learners of first language, Ellis (1997, 22) suggests that it could be true of second language learners as well. However, he also states that there have been studies that have found that the acquisition order might somewhat vary according to the learner's L1. The found differences have nevertheless been minor.

The term interlanguage was first introduced by Larry Selinker in the 1970s. This concept is based on the idea that each learner has their own unique linguistic system, known as interlanguage

(Selinker 1972). Interlanguage is different from both the learners' mother tongue and the target language. However, it is vaguely based on the first language. In their brain, learners create a set of grammar rules that are open to outside influence, and they reorganize and construct the rules by adding or removing knowledge as they learn more complex rules (Selinker 1972).

Researchers have not been able to find an agreement as to whether the Universal Grammar discussed earlier (chapter 2.1.2) could also be accessed by second language learners. Those believing in the theory of complete access believe that each language has its own set of settings and that when learning a new one, the learner switches to the L2 setting (Ellis 1997, 69). Some researchers, however, believe that L1 and L2 acquisition are fundamentally different, and that second language learners rely on general learning strategies instead of accessing Universal Grammar (Ellis 1997, 69). In between of these hypotheses is a theory of partial or dual access according to which the learners either have access to one part of the Universal Grammar but not another or that learners take advantage of both Universal Grammar and general learning strategies (Ellis 1997, 69).

Learning a new language is not always unequivocal. Sometimes the learners can even stop showing progression with specific grammatical structures and continue to use the incorrect ones because they have not developed the correct features (Ellis 1997, 29). This phenomenon is called fossilization but despite its name it is not always a permanent situation (Brown 2006, 270).

3. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this thesis is to first investigate what type of morphological errors the Finnish upper secondary school students make and then compare them to those of English-speaking children. From the data, possible similarities or dissimilarities will then be examined and also the reasons behind them shortly commented. The focus is on the grammatical errors and no attention is paid to for instance struggles with pronunciation.

3.1. Collection of data

The part of children's language development will be based on the previous literature and studies on the subject. There will be examples from multiple sources which will all be analyzed in detail. I will compare the sources to one another and attempt to find the most suitable ones for my thesis. I will search for different types of errors that exist, give examples of them, and also comment on the reasons behind them.

For the other part there will be an empirical study, which is a classroom study of upper secondary school students. All the participants have been learning English since 3rd grade which makes it their 10th year of studying English. They all speak Finnish as their first language. They are also learning Swedish, and some of them speak other languages such as Russian or French as well. In this research the positive or negative effects of other languages besides Finnish and English will not be taken into consideration. The subjects of the study were told what the purpose of the research was. No personal information was collected, but in case one of them revealed something personal in their speech, they were all assured that anything they said would not be identifiable in the study. At any point, all of them had the choice to withdraw from the study if they so wanted.

The course I participated in was an oral course, which meant the students spent a lot of time talking. I participated in 6 of their lessons, 4 of which were held in person and 2 online via Discord. I actively listened to students' presentations or different types of group exercises. I did not conduct an interview as I wanted their speech to be as natural as possible. Notes were made on laptop and on

paper and later written out after the lessons. The notes were then sorted into groups: errors related to nouns separated from errors related to verbs and finally divided into even more defined subcategories. Sometimes when reviewing the notes, I realized the type of error was unsuitable for the study or the student had not in fact made a mistake after all and that item was deleted from the data. I also recognize the problem of missing some of the errors produced, since no one's speech was recorded, and I could not go back and re-listen what had been said. However, the students generally had fairly high-level English skills which made it relatively easy to notice the errors.

Taking into consideration that there were 11 students, all of whom had fairly good English skills, and the fact that I listened to them for six 90-minute lessons, the number of morphological errors in their speech was relatively low. During the research of six lessons, I picked up 47 suitable morphological errors in total. Only on few occasions either the pronunciation or just the overall word order was too incomprehensible, meaning there were so many mistakes it could not be understood whether the morphological elements such as verb inflections were in fact correct or not.

The results of the classroom study are divided into sections according to the error type and then compared to children's first language development to see whether there are any similarities between the two.

3.2. Selection of data

Morphology as a whole is a wide subject, and hence some narrowing of the topic had to be done.

The study will focus only on a selection of bound morphemes: regular and irregular past tense, third-person singular, copula and auxiliary *be*, present progressive -ing, plural -s and possessive 's.

Free morphemes such as lexical morphemes or prepositions are not included because the topic would be too broad and those should be examined in their entirety.

I have also chosen not to include the mistakes that the students made but immediately corrected themselves. For example, one of the sentences heard was "A president need – needs to know what's

good for...” The immediate correction made it clear it was only a slip of tongue and not exactly a grammatical error.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In his study, Brown (1976, 411) realized that in the beginning all the 14 grammatical morphemes which he was studying were missing from the children's speech. They then first began to appear in mandatory contexts on occasion, and after some variation, they were finally consistently present in those obligatory contexts. Considering that native children are not particularly taught the form, meaning, or context of morphemes, those children developing in a typical way are good at acquiring inflectional morphology (Bavin 2009, 264). Inflectional morphemes are morphemes that add some type of grammatical information to words without changing their meaning or grammatical category (Hoff 2019, 173).

Unlike with children, all of the morphemes examined in this study were expressed by the students at some point meaning none of them was fully missing. In the following chapters I will present some of the mistakes made. I will start by displaying and correcting the mistakes heard and follow by analyzing and comparing them to children's speech.

4.1 Verb Morphology

Out of 47 morphological errors in total, 34 were in the category of verb morphology. This study concentrates on the following subcategories: regular and irregular past tense, third person singular, copula and auxiliary be and present progressive.

4.1.1 Regular and irregular past tense

Total number of errors: 19

Examples of errors that occurred in the students' speech:

- 1) I would have like to continue [Correction: I would have liked to continue]
- 2) She has graduate three years ago [Correction: She has graduated three years ago]
- 3) I have catch many of them [Correction: I have caught many of them]
- 4) We maked our own rules [Correction: We made our own rules]

5) And then I take my bag and ran away [Correction: And then I took my bag and ran away]

Children usually learn the irregular past tense before the regular past tense (Brown 1976). Some of the irregular verbs that occur early in child speech are *came, fell, broke, sat* and *went* (Brown 1976, 260). However, many children encounter drawbacks, which means that when they realize that there is actually a set rule for expressing past time, they start overgeneralizing and may use the regular form where there should be an irregular one (Pinker 1984; Levey 2019), for example *goed* instead of *went*. They might also form an utterance combining both the regular and irregular form such as *broked* instead of *broke*. These forms such as *broked* and even *wented* are possible if the child sees *broke* and *went* as the stem of the word (Clark 2003, chapter 8). Gradually children realize the system of there being a rule and then exceptions to that rule and begin producing both irregular and regular verb forms in correct places. That is called U-shaped development (Oates & Grayson, 169).

The overgeneralization error was not common among the students perhaps because Finnish schools put a lot of emphasis on irregular verbs. There were few instances (see example 4), but most of the times when students made mistakes with the past tense, they only used the base form in the place of a past participle form regardless of whether it was supposed to be a regular or an irregular one.

The fifth example correlates with Ellis' (1997, 19) suggestion that most, if not all learners go through a stage where they replace the past tense form with the simple form of the verb. Examples 1-3 have a present perfect verb construction in which the main verb's past participle form has been replaced with the base form.

Ellis (1997, 24) claims that usually when L2 learners have problems with verbs and marking the past tense it is most often with verbs that refer to states (*be, want, deserve* etc.) and less frequently with verbs that refer to activities (*laugh, plan, sleep* etc.). Verbs referring to events (*break, begin, hit* etc.) are the easiest to get right even though errors occur sometimes with them as well. When

analyzing all the errors the subjects of this study made with past tense marking, there was no clear correlation with this proposition. The students made errors with all three types of verbs with no significant differences in the frequencies.

4.1.2 Third person singular

Total number of errors: 13

Examples of errors that occurred in the students' speech:

- 1) It collect all the plastic [Correction: It collects all the plastic]
- 2) It's mean that [Correction: It means that]
- 3) I usually prefer packets that takes up less space [Correction: I usually prefer packets that take up less space]
- 4) Straws gets caught in turtles' noses [Correction: Straws get caught in turtles' noses]

According to Bavin (2009, 263), the missing 3rd person singular *-s* is a common English child utterance. The child might say for example "Dad go outside" instead of "Dad goes outside". This is a case of omission since there are important and required elements of the sentence missing.

The subjects of this study produced same type of omission errors. In example 1, the subject of the sentence is a singular entity "it" and thus should activate the *-s* at the end of the verb. However, this was not the only type of error the students produced in the use of *-s*, the marker of third person singular. In example 2, there is an *-s* in the sentence but the learner has used it in a faulty manner and actually added it to the subject and produced a contracted form of "it is". This indicates that the speaker is in fact aware of there being a rule of adding an *-s* whenever the subject is singular. By adding the *-s* to the noun instead of the verb, they, however, fail in applying the correct form of rules in a correct manner and thus produce a grammatically incorrect sentence.

In examples 3 and 4, the speaker has added an *-s* at the end of the verb even though the subjects of the sentences are plural in which case there should be no specific marker in the verb. The speaker may be aware of an existing rule of adding an *-s* at the end of some verbs and either ignores the restrictions of that rule or they may have altogether failed to understand the rule's main concept of it being applied only to sentences with a third person singular subject.

4.1.3 Copula *be*

Total number of errors: 0

Brown (1976, 262) states that Noun + Noun utterances are common in child language and should usually be interpreted as sentences lacking a copula, meaning when a child says “you mom” it means “you are mom” or that “Sarah friend” means “Sarah is a friend”.

This type of error was not produced by the students during my research. In English, every finite sentence needs a verb to carry the tense (Burt & Kiparsky 1972, 15). Thus, even if the sentence “She beautiful” already has all the meaningful elements, there must be a tense carrier which in this case is the verb *be*. If L2 learners have trouble with copula or auxiliary *be*, it is most likely that they omit it the same way children do.

According to Burt and Kiparsky (1972, 32), the omission issue stems from the fact that some languages do not always have to have a tense carrier, or the tense can be expressed without a verbal predicate. The Finnish language, however, is similar to English in this case, meaning sentences like “She is beautiful” or “They are excited” cannot be expressed without the Finnish *olla*-verb. This is perhaps why the students had no trouble with copula *be*.

4.1.4 Present progressive *-ing*

Total number of errors: 2

Examples of errors that occurred in the students' speech:

- 1) I always trying to do better [Correction: I am always trying to do better]

2) And now they doing it even more [Correction: And now they are doing it even more]

The progressive aspect of the verb is formed by combining a specific form of *be* with the present participial form of the sentence's next verbal word (Burt and Kiparsky 1972, 31). Errors with present progressive are closely related to errors discussed in the previous chapter, the omission of copula *be*.

In his study, Brown (1976) found that at first all the children expressed progressive by *-ing* alone, without the auxiliary *be*, meaning they would produce sentences such as "Mom cooking" and "You playing" instead of "Mom is cooking" and "You are playing".

The errors produced by the students were similar. Both of the errors found in the students' speech were in sentences that had an adverb (*always & even more*) which may have somehow confused the speaker and finally cause omission of *-ing*. The progressive, according to Burt and Kiparsky (1972, 31), is easier to master than the past tense because there are no irregular inflections. A verb's present participial form is always created by adding *-ing* to the stem. When using the present progressive, there are two probable issues: either the learner forgets the auxiliary *be* or leaves off the *-ing*. The issue is more frequently with *be* than with *-ing* (Burt and Kiparsky 1972, 31). This was the case in this study as well since there were no cases of students leaving off the *-ing* while speaking. There were not many errors to begin with, as out of 34 errors in verb morphology, only two were with present progressive.

4.2 Noun morphology

Noun morphology was the smaller category with only 9 errors in the students' speech. This research concentrates on plurals and possessives.

4.2.1 Plural -s

Total number of errors: 9

Examples of errors that occurred in the students' speech:

- 1) I like working with child[s] [Correction: I like working with children]
- 2) Stop throwing garbage[s] [Correction: Stop throwing garbage]
- 3) I was the best man in my brother's wedding[s] last year [Correction: I was the best man in my brother's wedding last year]
- 4) First you check in and then go through custom [Correction: First you check in and then go through customs]
- 5) We only caught two salmon[s] [Correction: We only caught two salmon]

The previously discussed overgeneralization problem also happens with plurals. When learning that adding *-s* at the end of a word implies that there is more than one, a child normally applies it to irregular plurals as well by saying for example *tooths* or *mans* instead of teeth and men (Hoff 2019, 195). As with past tense, the U-shaped development (see chapter 4.1.1) is common with plurals as well.

The same logic is also true with the errors the students made. When producing errors with the plural *-s* the most common error with 5 instances was to overgeneralize the rule and produce words such as *child[s]* or *salmon[s]*. Another type of error was adding an *-s* to uncountable nouns that should actually not get any marker of plurality. For instance, in example 2, the student produces the incorrect form *garbage[s]* perhaps because when translated into Finnish, the noun garbage means "jäte" or "roska" which are not uncountable ones in Finnish and in fact have a normal plural.

Besides uncountable nouns, students also added an *-s* to nouns that are singular in English (example 3). This error can be explained by looking at Finnish grammar where wedding is a plural noun. For that reason, the student might feel the need to express plurality in some way.

Fourth type of error was omission where the student failed to produce any sign of marker for a plural when there in fact was a need for that. This can also be explained by the interference of the students' mother tongue. In Finnish, customs in the meaning of "a place at an airport where the travelers' bags are examined" is translated as "tulli" which is a singular noun.

4.2.2 Possessive 's

Total number of errors: 0

Brown (1976) gives one example of where this type of error occurs with children. If the child is asked "Whose toy is this?" the most likely answer is in the form of "daddy" which will be interpreted by the hearer as "daddy 's". This is again an omission error since the required 's is missing from the sentence.

In the early stages of language development children usually produce two-word utterances (see chapter 2.1.2). It was previously stated that often these two-word utterances may be interpreted as lacking a copula. Another way of understanding said utterances can be interpreting that they are lacking a preposition or in this case the possessive 's. Common two-word utterances might for instance be "daddy car" or "mommy sock" while the child also points at mommy's sock on the floor which helps the hearer to interpret the sentences as "daddy's car" or "mommy's sock".

There were no errors of this type in the students' speech. This could be due to the fact that Finnish also has the genitive case, so the students rely on their mother tongue and are aware that some marker is needed to show possession in these types of sentences.

4.3 Further Analysis

In conclusion, there were quite a few similarities in the morphological errors made by both L1 and L2 learners, which suggests new languages in general are learned in a similar way at least on some level. However, while L2 learners have the same issues with morphemes that L1 learners have, second language learners seem to also have additional problems. When learning their first language,

children have no background information on languages and are essentially starting from nothing. L2 learners, Finnish upper secondary school students in this case, already have knowledge of another language which, depending on the situation, can either have a negative or a positive effect.

Two of the morpheme categories examined had no errors produced by the students: copula *be* and possessive *-s*. This indicates that these certain grammatical features, and the rules that apply to them, have already been learned. It is highly probable that in the beginning of L2 learning there were some issues with these concepts as well.

Looking back at the morpheme acquisition order presented by Brown (1976) (present progressive, regular plural, irregular past tense, possessive 's, uncontractible copula, past regular, regular third-person present tense, uncontractible auxiliary and finally contractible copula and auxiliary, respectively) we can see that both of the error categories that were nonexistent in the students' speech were somewhere in the middle of the sequence. If the students' language development was progressing in the same order as children's, the areas where no errors occurred should be those in the beginning of the list such as concepts of present progressive, regular plural and irregular past tense.

At times, the low number of errors was unanticipated. There were expected to be more errors with for instance the present progressive, since the Finnish language has no similar structure and thus one could assume for it to be a difficult thing to master. The total error quantity could have, however, been greater as well. If there are grammatical constructs of which the learner is not sure how to use properly, they might use a technique called avoidance (Ellis 1997, 51), which is also an example of negative transfer. There is a possibility that the subjects of this study avoided concepts difficult for them whenever possible because they were not confident enough to use them and instead tried to express the same in a different way.

Avoiding errors in, for example, the use of the present progressive, might be easy by using the simple present but some of the basic elements of language such as past tense or plural cannot really be expressed in other ways. This may be the reason these categories have a greater number of errors in them since they cannot as easily be avoided in natural speech.

Whenever children make linguistic errors, they are typically omissions of function words or overgeneralizations of rules. In her book, Hoff (2019, 179) evaluates the reasons behind omitting inflectional morphemes. According to her, inflectional morphemes carry some meaning but less than the nouns, verbs, and adjectives in the utterance, which may be the reason why they are often forgotten or left out in the early language development process. The more important objective of both L1 and L2 learners seems to be able to communicate their thoughts and to be understood by other people they interact with. Thus, they feel like elements that are not essential to meaning can be left out.

One thing to take into consideration when interpreting the results of this study is the question of if the errors produced are not errors after all but mistakes as Corder (1967) called them. All the grammatical structures discussed in this thesis have been taught at some point during earlier schoolyears, which suggests that at least some part of these malforms could only be slips of tongue. If we were to analyze the errors made by each person individually, we could determine whether the student actually knows the specific rule of grammar or if the errors are systematic, which entails that the learning process is not over. Still, although the students of this research are all supposed to have learned the rules at school, the malforms might still be actual errors. There can be several different reasons behind it including faulty teaching or learner's own motivational aspects or comprehension abilities.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the morphological development of both L1 and L2 learners. The aim was to observe what type of morphological errors language learners make when learning a new language whether it is their first or second language. Furthermore, the purpose was also to analyze and comment on the reasons behind those errors.

The hypothesis presented in the beginning predicted that the morphological errors between L1 and L2 learners would not be entirely similar. The study showed that the produced errors between L1 and L2 learners were similar but not exactly the same which proves the initial hypothesis to be correct.

Out of the 6 morphemes studied, children had issues with all of them. There were two categories where the students did not produce any errors, which may indicate that they either never had problems with those concepts to begin with or that they have already learned and mastered those specific grammatical elements of the English language. In the remaining 4 morpheme categories, whatever type of errors children made, the students also made. For example, with past tense children had a problem with overgeneralizing the regular rule and so did the students. Besides the shared errors, second language learners had additional problems that did not exist in child language, which were mostly due to negative transfer of their mother tongue.

Results of this study are only preliminary and the conclusions that can be made on the data are not very extensive. Based on these results, any profound statements cannot be made because the collected data on the L2 learners was quite narrow.

For better to prove the results, there is a need to take a further look into some individuals and their progression in the L2 learning, preferably over a longer period of time. In studies about children's language development, the researcher has usually examined the development of the speech of one or only a few children over a longer time period. The research on students' speech was essentially

conducted only in a period of two weeks, which is why any thorough conclusions cannot really be made about for instance the order of acquisition.

I believe in the future it would also be more beneficial to study the L2 development of a little younger children. Even though the upper secondary school students were not masters of the language, they were perhaps slightly too advanced. Since children are being observed at the beginning steps of their language learning, the counterparts, L2 learners, should be in similar situation for better to compare results.

6. WORKS CITED

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