

## L2 Acquisition of English Present Perfect Interpretations

The present study investigates the role of L1 in the L2 acquisition of the present perfect in terms of form and meaning interpretation possibilities. There are certain differences between the form, interpretation, and frequency of the present perfect in English, Standard Modern Greek (SMG), and Cypriot Greek (CG).

Standard Modern Greek (SMG) has two forms, so-called Present Perfect A (formed with the auxiliary verb *eho* 'have' and the perfective participle) and Present Perfect B (*eho* 'have' + adjectival participle for transitive verbs and *ime* 'be'+ adjectival participle for intransitive verbs). In SMG, Present Perfect A is ambiguous between an existential reading and a resultative reading; Present Perfect B can only have the result reading, whereas past tense can have a "definite" reading, an existential reading, or a result reading.

In CG there is no Present Perfect A. Present Perfect B in CG can have only a result reading. The past tense can have the same range of interpretations as in SMG, that is, a "definite" reading, an existential reading, or a result reading. It should be noted that the present perfect is rarely used in CG.

So the possible, expected learning problem of CG-speaking pupils acquiring English could be the use of past tense instead of the existential present perfect, and the use of past time adverbs with the present perfect. Since in CG the existential reading is realized with the help of past tense morphology, and since there are certain adverbial markers for the existential reading (e.g., *potte* 'ever', *kamia fora* 'anytime', *sti zoi mu* 'in my life', *os tora* 'up to now'), one of the questions of the study was to find out which tense the Greek Cypriot pupils learning English use with these adverbials in English.

In English, the present perfect can have both existential and result readings, so one of the goals of the study was to determine whether CG speakers understand the difference between the existential and the result reading in Greek and in English, and whether they transfer from L1 into L2 (i.e. use the past tense instead of the perfect tense with an existential meaning or the past tense with result meaning instead of the result present perfect). To clarify this, diagnostic tests suggested by Agouraki (2006) were used, which are based on the (in)compatibility of certain types of adverbials with existential, result perfect, and simple past.

In total, 398 pupils took part in the research: 117 pupils from seven different Greek-speaking public schools in Cyprus, 111 pupils from three different English-speaking private schools in Cyprus, 156 pupils from six different public schools in Greece, and 14 pupils, native speakers of English, from a British private school in Cyprus, as the control group. The pupils from the primary school were 10-11 years old (105 pupils/26%), the gymnasium pupils were 12-15 years old (120 pupils/30%), and the lyceum pupils were 16-19 years old (173 pupils/44%). According to the school curriculum, both in Cyprus and in Greece, present perfect is introduced for the first time in gymnasium. So some Mainland Greek and Greek Cypriot pupils had just been introduced to the present perfect tense (primary school and gymnasium), while others had years acquaintance with it (lyceum).

The material used in this study consisted of a questionnaire of 23 questions (multiple-choice, yes-no, and open-ended) and two tests. The 23 questions requested the following information (in this order): sex, age, origin, school, class, father's education, mother's education, socioeconomic status of the family, mother-tongue, grade/mark in English at school, grade/mark in Greek at school, years of learning English, knowledge of other languages, attitude towards English culture, reasons for learning English, language difficulty, language of daily use, role of

mother-tongue in English acquisition, friends or relatives speaking English, visiting English-speaking countries, extra lessons in tutor centre, and attitude towards English learning.

The tests consisted of a sentence-picture matching task (SPM) and a cloze task. The SPM task included 27 items: for 20 items pupils needed to choose between simple past and present perfect (e.g. *They have already started their dinner* vs. *They already started their dinner*), while 7 items were distracters, where pupils needed to choose between present simple, present continuous, future simple, and past continuous (e.g. *She is talking on the phone right now* vs. *She talks on the phone right now*). The cloze task included 19 items: for 13 items, pupils needed to choose between simple past and present perfect (e.g. *Julian is so happy. He (won/has won) the first prize.*), and 6 items were distracters, where pupils needed to choose present simple, present continuous, future simple, and past continuous (e.g. *She (is flying/flies) to Spain tomorrow*).

The study tested the role of L2 input in different educational settings, in particular Greece and Cyprus. One of the aims of the study was to compare Cypriot Greek children of similar age educated in public and private schools. The results show that native speakers of English performed better than both non-native groups (CG and SMG). CG pupils from private schools performed best of the non-native groups, as they have more L2 input in comparison to other non-native groups, but CG pupils of the public schools performed worse than the matched group of SMG, which can be explained by the transfer from CG and the difference in meaning and interpretation of the present perfect in CG and SMG. The lyceum and gymnasium pupils performed better than the pupils from primary school.

The data of the present study support the Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse 1994, 1996), according to which transfer from L1 takes place only at the initial stages of L2 acquisition, as the participants with more L2 exposure and years of instruction performed better than L2 beginners and intermediate learners, and there were fewer instances of cross-linguistic interference.

Many factors, such as level of language exposure and language proficiency, input, language of teaching, parents' education and socio-economic status of the family, learner's age, motivation, and so on, influence L2 acquisition and transfer strategies, in particular the acquisition of the English present perfect, the resultative vs. the existential interpretation.

Further research within the framework of the Interpretability Hypothesis (Tsimpli 2003; Hawkins and Hattori 2006), relevant to syntax–semantics and syntax–discourse interfaces, is needed for deeper understanding whether we deal here with transfer from L1 or difficulties in interpretability by L2 learners.

**References:** Agouraki, Y. (2006). The Perfect Category: A Comparison of Standard and Cypriot Greek. *Proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of Modern Greek Dialects and Linguistic Theory*, 42-57. • Tsimpli, I.-M. (2003). Clitics and Determiners in L2 Greek. *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference on Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*, 331-339. • Hawkins, R. & Hattori, H. (2006). Interpretation of English Multiple Wh-Questions by Japanese Speakers: A Missing Uninterpretable Feature Account. *Second Language Research* 22: 269-301. • Schwartz, B.D. & Sprouse, R. (1994). Word Order and Nominative Case in Nonnative Language Acquisition: A Longitudinal Study of (L1 Turkish) German Interlanguage. In T. Hoekstra & B.D. Schwartz (eds.), *Language Acquisition Studies in Generative Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. • Schwartz, B. & R. Sprouse (1996). L2 Cognitive States and the Full Transfer/ Full Access Model. *Second Language Research* 12: 40-72