

Spatial configuration and construal in L2 English

The connection between language learning and spatial cognition constitutes an important concern in the acquisition of English as a L2. Languages establish different semantic categories for the expression of similar space relations (Bowerman, 1996) and learners seem to find it difficult to face this conceptual variation across languages (Carroll, 1997, Coventry et al. 2011). The present study focuses on the possible influence of L1 transfer on the way speakers of Danish and Spanish structure the English prepositions “in”, “on” and “at” in L2 English. Four groups of subjects participated in the study, three groups of native speakers, English monolingual speakers (n=19), Danish monolingual speakers (n=20) and Spanish monolingual speakers (n=20), and two groups of learners, namely, Danish (n=15) and Spanish (n=21) speakers studying English as a L2. Two tasks were used for the data collection: a picture-description task and a fill-in the gaps. Four separate statistical measures were used to analyse the performance of the different groups. The discussion deals with the following issues: (a) the possible occurrence of transfer in Danish and Spanish learners of English as a L2 in their performance in the L2 when compared with English native speakers (b) the differences in the L2 performance between the Danish and Spanish speakers. The results shed light on what differences there are between the native speakers of the three languages and whether the use of prepositions in English as a L2 follows the same patterns as those of their respective L1s.

Bowerman, M. (1996) The origins of children’s spatial semantic categories : cognitive versus linguistic determinants. In Gumperz, J. and Levinson, S. *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (pp 145-176)

Carroll, M. (1997) Changing place in English and German:language-specific preferences in the conceptualization of spatial relations. In Nuyts, J. and Pederson, E. *Language, culture and cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (pp.137-161)

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