

Genericity in the third language: the role of the learner setting

This study investigates how Polish speakers with L2 English acquire genericity in L3 Norwegian in different settings (immersive vs. instructed learning). This line of inquiry examines how different exposure types may impact L3 acquisition. We investigate genericity, a universal property of language, where multilingual learners may encounter difficulties because they need to reassemble the form-to-meaning mappings.

Different types of genericity are considered: *Kind* (1), *Characterizing* (2) (Carlson & Pelletier, 1995), and *Type-denoting* generics (3) (Borthen, 2003).

Polish does not have articles and bare forms denote both generic and non-generic meanings. In English, the bare singular is ungrammatical with count nouns, but the definite singular, indefinite singular, and bare plural can express genericity. Norwegian employs five NP forms to express some type of genericity. Potentially, Polish native speakers could benefit from both of their previously acquired languages to master genericity in Norwegian (Table 1).

Our trilingual participants (L1 Polish–L2 English–L3 Norwegian) resided either in Norway (PolN, $n = 29$) or in Poland (PolP, $n = 28$). Learner groups were also tested in their L2 English. Control groups comprised of Norwegian native speakers ($n = 33$) and native English speakers ($n = 38$).

We used two tasks to assess comprehension of five NP forms: a contextualized acceptability judgment task (AJT) for **singulars** (*definite*, *indefinite*, *bare*) testing distinct generic conditions (1–3), and a truth value judgment task (TVJT) for **plurals** (*definite*, *bare*) testing the contrast between the characterizing and episodic (non-generic) conditions (4).

We fitted *glmer* models for each NP form. The AJT results showed the PolN group recognized the generic contrasts, unlike the PolP participants, who accepted all forms indiscriminately. Both groups accepted bare singular, influenced by their L1. The TVJT results suggest target-like behavior, indicating a good grasp of the distinction. Group comparisons reveal that definite plurals are comprehended better than bare plurals. However, while the PolP group accepted the bare plurals significantly more in characterizing compared to episodic contexts ($p < .05$), the PolN group was not sensitive to this distinction.

The complex results reflect the interplay of form ambiguity, language proficiency, and exposure length. AJT results highlight the form ambiguity effect: the Polish groups revert more strongly to the bare form when confronted with new genericity exponents. Thus, facilitation from form–meaning similarities (Table 1) is to an extent undone by the complexity of Norwegian genericity expressions. The characterizing vs. episodic contrast appears easier to acquire, as the distinction is more categorical than gradient. Interestingly, the PolP group demonstrates more precise use of the definite plural than the PolN group. We attribute this to the instructional setting, which offers more consistent exposure to the written variety of Norwegian (Bokmål) used in the experiment.

In conclusion, while immersive settings can enhance exposure to the nuances of generic meaning, instructional settings may be beneficial for learning how to use a form not attested in the first language. Each setting uniquely supports the acquisition of L3/Ln, underscoring the necessity of educational strategies that leverage the strengths of both settings.

- (1) **Elefantfuglen** er utryddet.
elephant_bird-DET is extinct
- (2) **En sjiraff** har lilla tunge.
one/a giraffe has purple tongue
- (3) Det er sunt å ha **hund**.
it is healthy to have dog

Table 1. Distribution of form-to-meaning mappings in the three languages.

		Def. sg ¹	Indef. sg	Bare. sg	Def. pl	Bare pl.
Polish L1	Kind			√		√
	Characterizing			√		√
	Type-denoting			√		√
English L2	Kind	√	#		#	√
	Characterizing	√	√		#	√
	Type-denoting	#	√		#	√
Norwegian L3	Kind	√	#	#	√	√
	Characterizing	√	√	√	#	√
	Type-denoting	#	~ ²	√	#	~
		N=E≠P	N=E≠P	N=P≠E	N≠E≠P	N=E=P

Notes: Grey shades = unavailable form, # = not generic, √ = generic.

(4) **TVJT context:** Det er en dagligvarebutikk i byen som selger uvanlig frukt og grønnsaker. Mens en banan vanligvis er en gul frukt, er deres bananer blå og de smaker som vaniljeis.

Translation: There is a supermarket in town that sells unusual fruit and vegetables. While the banana is usually a yellow fruit, their bananas are blue, and they taste like vanilla ice cream.

Characterising test items:

Bananer er gule/Bananene er gule.

Bananas are yellow/bananas-DEF are yellow

Episodic test items:

Bananer er blå./Bananene er blå.

Bananas are blue / bananas-DEF are blue

Figure 1: Response (%) for singular forms

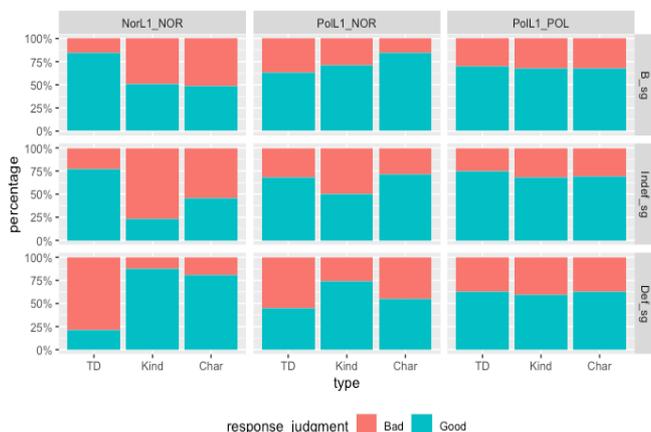
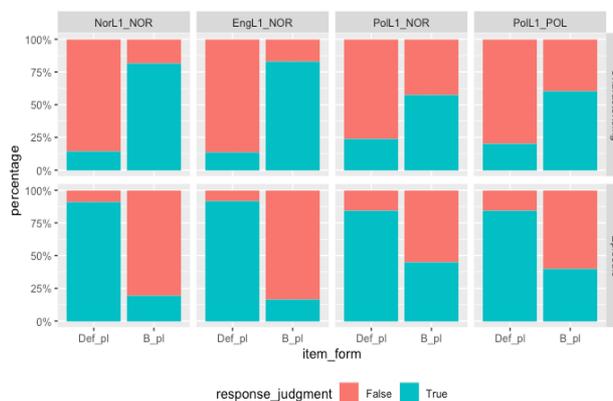


Figure 2: Response (%) for plural forms



REFERENCES

- Borthen, K.** (2003). *Norwegian bare singulars* NTNU-Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Doctoral Dissertation. **Ionin, T., Montrul, S., Kim, J.-H., & Philippov, V.** (2011). Genericity distinctions and the interpretation of determiners in second language acquisition. *Language Acquisition*, 18(4), 242-280. **Ionin, T., Montrul, S., & Santos, H.** (2011). Transfer in L2 and L3 acquisition of generic interpretation. *BULD 35 Proceedings*. **Krifka, M., Pelletier, F. J., Carlson, G. N., ter Meulen, A., Chierchia, G., & Link, G.** (1995). Genericity: an introduction. In G. N. Carlson & F. J. Pelletier (Eds.), *The generic book*. University of Chicago Press. **Schwartz, B. D., & Sprouse, R. A.** (2021). The full transfer/full access model and L3 cognitive states. *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism*, 11(1), 1-29. **Slabakova, R.** (2017). The scalpel model of third language acquisition. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 21(6), 651-665. **Westergaard, M., Mitrofanova, N., Mykhaylyk, R., & Rodina, Y.** (2017). Crosslinguistic influence in the acquisition of a third language: The Linguistic Proximity Model. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 21(6), 666-682.