The acquisition of the Russian noun case paradigm by adult Spanish-Catalan learners

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We report the results of the study on acquisition and development of the noun case paradigm in L2 Russian. Anna Denissenko (UPF, Barcelona) elicited a large number of texts from adult Spanish-Catalan learners, and we selected and digitalized 196 texts by participants with A1-C1 proficiency levels, aged 18-69, and created a database that was used in this study. Russian has six cases, three nominal declensions with subclasses, three genders, and two numbers. A single ending carries information about all these characteristics. We propose that some language-specific grammatical factors, such as ambiguous forms of case endings, multiple endings within one case, verbal government and prepositional government, play a greater role in the acquisition than others.

The only study on the acquisition of the whole Russian case system is Rubinstein (1995). Rubinstein analysed case errors according to the principles of the Error Analysis (EA) framework (Corder, 1981), and concluded that over time the quality of case errors did not change but their quantity did. In our study, we analysed both nouns with case errors (822 forms) and grammatically correct nouns (5980 forms) to avoid the main criticism of the EA framework focusing only on errors. Our results show that the quantity of case errors gradually declines along with the change of their quality. The acquisition of different cases over time can be traced in the distribution of both correct forms and errors. At the beginner level, learners tend to overuse nominative and locative (prepositional) cases and to underuse dative, genitive and instrumental. At the advanced level, the case system of learners shares some patterns with the system of native speakers (Slioussar & Samojlova 2015).

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