

A new perspective on crosslinguistic influence in L3 acquisition of V2

Verb second (V2) is a typologically rare word order which characterizes all Germanic languages except English which has SVO order. Research on V2 in third language (L3) acquisition provides evidence for simultaneous crosslinguistic influence (CLI) of V2 and non-V2 from both previously acquired languages, L1 and L2 (e.g. Stadt et al. 2020). Except for Angelovska et al. (2023), the studies to date relied exclusively on offline methods. The present study expands the research on this topic by investigating a new language combination (L1 German L2 English L3 Norwegian) and by comparing offline and online data in the form of reaction times (RT). Moreover, we follow Jensen and Westergaard (2023) in focusing on CLI at the initial state of acquisition to isolate CLI from learning effects. We ask (i) whether the ab-initio learners display CLI of V2 from their L1 or non-V2 from their L2, (ii) whether the instruction language of the experiment affects the source of CLI (Castle et al. under review), and (iii) whether reaction times reveal additional patterns not captured by offline methods.

We tested 64 L1 German speakers with L2 English on their performance with Norwegian data, a language they did not know. They were not told that the L3 in the experiment was Norwegian. 30 participants completed the experiment with instructions in German, the other 34 with instructions in English. After acquiring 20 Norwegian vocabulary items (mostly German and/or English cognates), participants completed a sentence production and an acceptability judgement task, allowing us to control for task effects (Puig-Mayenco et al. 2020). The judgement task included the collection of RT data. We focused on adjunct-initial V2 (AVSO) and V3 (ASVO) sentences to disentangle the effect of CLI from German (V2) and English (V3).

The German- and English-instructed group performed similarly across tasks. There were no significant differences between the two groups, thus no effect of instruction language, in either task. In the production task, both groups produced both structures (V2 and V3), and in the judgement task (Figure 1), both groups accepted V2 and V3 structures at rates of 60% and above. There appeared to be a preference for V3 in both tasks, but it was not significant. These data suggest that both the L1 and the L2 are equally accessible as sources of CLI, regardless of language of instruction. However, the RT analysis of sentences judged to be acceptable provided additional insights: While the English-instructed group was significantly faster at accepting V3 than V2 ($\beta = -0.11$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = 0.04$), no significant difference between the word orders was found in the German-instructed group ($\beta = -0.10$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.07$). Moreover, there was a significant difference between the groups, with the English-instructed group displaying faster reaction times than the German-instructed group (both for V2 and V3; V2: $\beta = -0.24$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = 0.01$; V3: $\beta = -0.25$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$).

In line with previous studies, the results of the offline tasks suggest that the learners were influenced by both background languages, leading to the production and acceptance of V2 and V3. The visible but non-significant preference for V3 in the offline tasks emerges more clearly in the reaction times of the English-instructed group who accepted V3 significantly more rapidly than V2. This, taken together with the fact that there was an effect of instruction language in the RT data but not in the offline data, underlines the importance of online measures to reveal more subtle effects of crosslinguistic influence. One possible reason for the V3 preference is CLI from English, which might have been enhanced by the instructional language in the English-instructed group. Under this scenario, however, it remains unclear why CLI from German (V2) was not enhanced in the German-instructed group. A more plausible explanation for the V3 preference might therefore be that V3 is the unmarked and most economical option in terms of syntactic movement (Busterud et al. 2023). Finally, unlike other studies, we found no evidence of a task effect with both groups performing similarly in the production and judgement task.

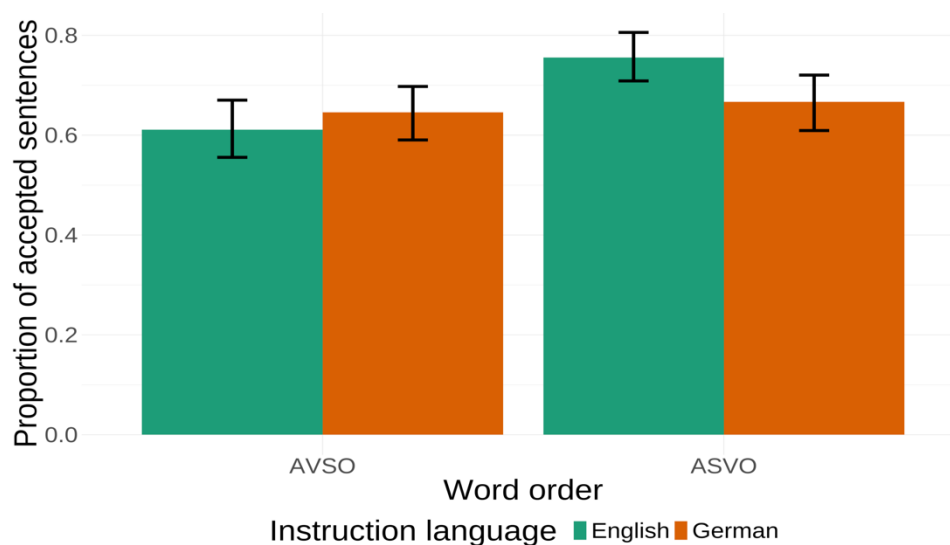


Figure 1. Judgement task results.

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