



THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERLANGUAGE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS DEVELOPMENT IN L2 LEARNERS

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Abstract. The presented research introduces the concept of interlanguage, a key term in the study of second language (L2) acquisition, with particular reference to the teaching of Italian as an L2 to Eastern Slavic speakers, especially Russian native speakers. The concept of interlanguage represented an important theoretical innovation in applied linguistics and has had significant implications for the development of teaching methodologies in the context of language learning. Interlanguage is defined as a dynamic linguistic system that evolves during the process of acquiring a second language. This system consists of linguistic rules that do not fully belong to either the learner's native language (L1) or the target language (L2) but instead form an «intermediate language». In other words, interlanguage is a transitional and mutable state that reflects the learner's incomplete linguistic competence in L2. This intermediate system is characterized by its own rules, which the learner develops through processes of generalization, conscious and unconscious learning, and also through errors. One of the crucial aspects of interlanguage, as discussed in the article, is the phenomenon of «fossilization». This term refers to the process by which some erroneous linguistic structures become stable and permanent in the learner's linguistic system, despite continued exposure to the L2 and attempts at correction. Fossilization represents one of the main challenges in the process of acquiring a second language, as it hinders progress towards complete and fluent competence in the target language. The study also highlights the variability of interlanguage, meaning the learner's ability to use different linguistic forms in various contexts. This phenomenon reflects the complexity of the acquisition process, where L2 learning is not linear and can vary significantly depending on factors such as the communicative context, motivation, linguistic input, and the learner's metalinguistic awareness. Another key theme addressed is the importance of feedback in the learning process. Corrective feedback, which can be explicit or implicit, plays a fundamental role in helping learners recognize and correct their errors, thereby preventing fossilization. However, the quality of the feedback and the way it is provided are crucial: well-calibrated feedback can foster more effective learning, while inadequate or excessive feedback may generate anxiety or confusion, slowing down the acquisition process. The research focuses particularly on the difficulties that Russian-speaking learners encounter when learning Italian. The phonological and grammatical differences between Russian and Italian can lead to frequent errors. For example, the use of articles in Italian, which do not exist in Russian, represents a significant challenge for Russian speakers, as does the conjugation of verbs in Italian tenses, which differ greatly from the Russian verbal system. These errors are not random but arise from the intermediate interlanguage system that learners develop. Understanding these systematic errors and their connection to the learner's L1 allows teachers to intervene more precisely and effectively. Finally, the research discusses the importance of adopting specific teaching strategies to prevent fossilization and promote L2 learning. Among these, communicative activities that provide rich



and diverse input, as well as targeted feedback, play a crucial role in correcting errors without undermining the learner's motivation. Therefore, teachers must be able to adapt to the learner's interlanguage system and offer appropriate support, taking into account the specific difficulties related to their L1. Only through a flexible and aware approach can errors be prevented from becoming ingrained in the learner's linguistic system, allowing for continuous progress towards linguistic competence in L2. In summary, the research emphasizes how recognizing interlanguage and its characteristics, such as fossilization, variability, and the importance of feedback, is fundamental for effective foreign language teaching. Specifically, understanding the phonological and grammatical difficulties faced by Russian-speaking learners of Italian can guide the development of more appropriate and personalized pedagogical strategies, improving teaching effectiveness and fostering greater mastery of L2.

Keywords: foreign languages, L2, Italian, fossilization, interlanguage, Akan'e, speaking skills, written skills.

ВАЖНОСТЬ ИНТЕРЯЗЫКА В ОБУЧЕНИИ ЯЗЫКАМ: АНАЛИЗ ЕГО РАЗВИТИЯ У ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ ВТОРОЙ ЯЗЫК

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Аннотация. Представленный реферат знакомит с концепцией межъязыкового общения, ключевым термином в изучении второго языка (L2), с особым акцентом на преподавание итальянского языка в качестве L2 для восточнославянских языков, особенно для носителей русского языка. Концепция межъязыкового общения представляла собой важное теоретическое новшество в прикладной лингвистике и оказала значительное влияние на разработку методик преподавания в контексте изучения языка. Межъязыковая связь определяется как динамичная лингвистическая система, которая развивается в процессе овладения вторым языком. Эта система состоит из лингвистических правил, которые не полностью относятся ни к родному языку учащегося (L1), ни к языку перевода (L2), но вместо этого образуют «промежуточный язык». Другими словами, межъязыковое общение – это переходное и изменчивое состояние, отражающее неполную лингвистическую компетентность обучающегося на уровне L2. Эта промежуточная система характеризуется своими собственными правилами, которые обучающийся вырабатывает в процессе обобщения, сознательного и бессознательного усвоения, а также путем ошибок. Одним из важнейших аспектов межъязыкового общения, обсуждаемых в статье, является феномен «фоссилизации». Этот термин относится к процессу, посредством которого некоторые ошибочные языковые структуры становятся стабильными и перманентными в языковой системе учащегося несмотря на постоянное воздействие L2 и попытки исправления. Фоссилизация представляет собой одну из главных проблем в процессе овладения вторым языком, поскольку оно препятствует продвижению к полному и беглому владению изучаемым языком. В статье также подчеркивается вариативность межъязыкового общения, означающая способность учащегося использовать различные языковые формы в различных контекстах. Это явление отражает сложность процесса усвоения, при котором обучение на уровне L2 не является линейным и может значительно варьироваться в зависимости от таких факторов, как коммуникативный контекст, мотивация, лингвистический вклад и металингвистическая осведомленность учащегося. Еще одна ключевая тема, которую мы затронули, – важность обратной связи в процессе обучения. Корректирующая обратная связь, которая может быть явной или неявной, играет фундаментальную роль, помогая учащимся распознавать и исправлять свои ошибки, тем самым предотвращая их фоссилизацию. Однако качество обратной связи и способ ее предоставления имеют решающее значение: хорошо выверенная обратная связь может способствовать более эффективному обучению, в то время как неадекватная или чрезмерная обратная связь может вызывать беспокойство или путаницу, замедляя процесс усвоения материала. Особое внимание в статье уделяется трудностям, с которыми сталкиваются русскоязычные учащиеся при изучении итальянского языка. Фонологические и грамматические различия между русским и итальянскими языками могут привести к частым ошибкам. Например, использование артиклей в итальянском языке, которых нет в русском, представляет серьезную проблему

для носителей русского языка, равно как и спряжение глаголов в итальянских временах, которые сильно отличаются от русской глагольной системы. Эти ошибки не случайны, они обусловлены системой промежуточного уровня владения языком, которую развивают учащиеся. Понимание этих систематических ошибок и их связи с уровнем владения языком L1 учащегося позволяет учителям более точно и эффективно вмешиваться в процесс обучения. Наконец, в статье обсуждается важность принятия специальных стратегий обучения для предотвращения заикливания и стимулирования обучения на уровне L2. Среди них – коммуникативные действия, которые обеспечивают богатый и разнообразный вклад, а также целенаправленную обратную связь, играют решающую роль в исправлении ошибок, не подрывая мотивации учащегося. Учителя должны уметь адаптироваться к межъязыковой системе обучения учащихся и предлагать соответствующую поддержку, принимая во внимание конкретные трудности, связанные с их уровнем владения языком L1. Только благодаря гибкому и осознанному подходу можно предотвратить укоренение ошибок в языковой системе учащегося, что позволит постоянно продвигаться к языковой компетенции в L2.

В качестве итога в статье подчеркивается, что распознавание межъязыкового общения и его характеристик, таких как фоссилизация, вариативность и важность обратной связи, имеет основополагающее значение для эффективного преподавания иностранного языка. В частности, понимание фонологических и грамматических трудностей, с которыми сталкиваются русскоязычные учащиеся, изучающие итальянский язык, может способствовать разработке более подходящих и персонализированных педагогических стратегий, повышению эффективности преподавания и более глубокому овладению языком L2.

Ключевые слова: иностранные языки, изучение второго языка, итальянский, фоссилизация, интерязык, аканье, навыки говорения, навыки письма.

Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition (L2), the concept of interlanguage has become a cornerstone of linguistic research and pedagogy since it was first introduced by Larry Selinker [1; 2] in 1972. This concept is essential to understanding how learners process, acquire, and ultimately use a second language. Interlanguage refers to the interim linguistic system that learners create as they navigate between their native language (L1) and the target language (L2). This system is not a simple mixture of the two languages, but rather a unique and evolving structure that incorporates elements from both L1 and L2, as well as new forms and rules that the learner develops during the language acquisition process.

The importance of interlanguage lies in its dynamic and provisional nature. As learners progress in their understanding of the L2, their interlanguage evolves. It is not a fixed state, but rather a fluid system that changes with continued exposure to the target language, interaction with native speakers, and the application of various language learning strategies. Each learner's interlanguage is unique, shaped by a variety of factors such as their first language, the level of immersion in the L2 environment, their age, motivation, and the type of instructional methods they are exposed to. This variability makes interlanguage a complex yet fascinating phenomenon in the study of second language acquisition.

One of the key features of interlanguage is that it is systematic. While it may appear that learners are making random errors as they attempt to speak the target language, their interlanguage follows an internal logic. Learners often overgeneralize rules from the target language or apply rules from their native language in ways that seem illogical to a fluent speaker of the L2. However, these errors are not arbitrary; they reflect the learner's attempts to construct a coherent linguistic system based on the information available to them. For example, a common error among English learners of Italian is the omission or misuse of articles, as articles function differently in the two languages. These types of errors provide insight into how learners are mentally organizing their language knowledge and can help educators better understand where their students are in the learning process.

The concept of interlanguage also emphasizes the learner's active role in constructing language knowledge. Traditional language learning theories often viewed learners as passive recipients of knowledge, absorbing grammatical rules and vocabulary presented to them by teachers or textbooks. In contrast, the interlanguage model recognizes that learners are active agents in their own language development. They experiment with the target language, make hypotheses about its structure, and test these hypotheses in communicative situations. As they receive feedback from native speakers, teachers, or their own observations of the language environment, they adjust their interlanguage accordingly. This process highlights the importance of interaction and meaningful communication in L2 learning, as it provides learners with the input and feedback they need to refine their language system.

Moreover, interlanguage is not just a bridge between L1 and L2, but a reflection of the learning process itself. Learners pass through various stages of interlanguage as they gain proficiency in the L2. At the initial stages, the influence of the L1 is often strong, leading to significant errors that reflect L1 interference. As learners become more proficient, their interlanguage begins to resemble the target language more closely, though it may still contain elements that are unique or deviant from standard

L2 usage. This progression is non-linear; learners may experience periods of rapid improvement followed by plateaus or even regression, depending on the complexity of the linguistic structures they are acquiring and the type of input they receive.

The concept of fossilization is particularly relevant here, as it refers to the tendency for certain incorrect forms to become entrenched in the learner's interlanguage, even after years of exposure to the target language. Understanding how and why fossilization occurs is critical for developing strategies to help learners overcome persistent errors and continue progressing towards full proficiency.

From a pedagogical perspective, the interlanguage concept has profound implications for language teaching. It challenges traditional methods that emphasize rote memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary, advocating instead for a more communicative approach that takes into account the learner's evolving linguistic system. Teachers who are aware of interlanguage can tailor their instruction to meet learners where they are in their language development, providing targeted feedback that addresses specific errors without overwhelming students with too much correction at once. For example, instead of simply correcting a learner's mistake, a teacher can guide the learner to understand why the error occurred and how it fits into the broader structure of their interlanguage. This type of responsive teaching not only helps learners correct their mistakes, but also promotes deeper metalinguistic awareness and a better understanding of how language works.

Additionally, the concept of interlanguage highlights the importance of creating a supportive learning environment that encourages experimentation and risk-taking. Since learners are actively testing hypotheses about the target language, they need opportunities to use the language in meaningful ways without fear of making mistakes. Errors should be viewed not as failures, but as natural and necessary steps in the learning process. By fostering an atmosphere of openness and curiosity, teachers can help learners feel more confident in using the target language and more willing to push the boundaries of their interlanguage system.

In conclusion, the concept of interlanguage is a fundamental aspect of second language acquisition that provides valuable insights into how learners acquire and use a new language. It acknowledges the complexity of the learning process, recognizing that learners are active participants in constructing their own language knowledge. By understanding interlanguage, educators can develop more effective teaching practices that are responsive to the individual needs of their students, ultimately making language instruction more efficient and successful. The study of interlanguage continues to shape modern approaches to L2 teaching, emphasizing the importance of flexibility, communication, and learner autonomy in the language classroom.

Literature review

Interlanguage, as a dynamic and transitional linguistic system, plays a critical role in the understanding of how learners develop proficiency in a second language (L2). Selinker's [1; 2] foundational work introduced the concept, emphasizing that interlanguage is not static but evolves progressively as learners receive more linguistic input in the target language. However, this progression is not always linear or guaranteed. One of the most notable challenges in interlanguage development is the phenomenon of fossilization. Fossilization refers to the stabilization

of certain erroneous structures in a learner's interlanguage, making them resistant to further improvement despite continuous exposure to the L2 and formal instruction. This phenomenon can be observed even in highly motivated learners, raising important questions about the limitations of second language learning and the influence of various factors on language acquisition.

Selinker's [1; 2] identification of five central processes—linguistic transfer from L1, transfer of training, learning strategies, communication strategies, and the input received—remains a significant framework for understanding the complexities of interlanguage development. Each of these processes interacts dynamically with the learner's existing knowledge and the linguistic environment, influencing how interlanguage evolves.

Linguistic Transfer from L1 is one of the most prominent processes affecting interlanguage. As learners acquire an L2, they often rely on structures and rules from their first language (L1) to fill gaps in their knowledge of the target language. While this can be beneficial in some instances, it often leads to errors when L1 and L2 have significant grammatical, phonological, or syntactic differences. Odlin [5] explored the role of language transfer in depth, noting that learners frequently import phonetic and grammatical features from their L1 into their L2 production, especially in cases where the languages involved belong to different linguistic families. This is particularly relevant when studying the acquisition of Italian by speakers of Eastern Slavic languages, such as Russian, where structural differences can result in persistent interlanguage errors.

Transfer of Training, another key process, refers to the impact of instructional methods and classroom practices on the learner's interlanguage. If teaching strategies overemphasize certain forms or fail to address crucial aspects of the L2, learners may internalize incorrect rules or oversimplifications. Ellis [3; 4] highlights that the quality and variety of input provided in the classroom setting have significant effects on the learner's interlanguage. For instance, if instruction consistently focuses on simplified grammar rules without exposing learners to more complex syntactic structures, learners' interlanguage may plateau at an intermediate stage, preventing further progression towards native-like competence.

Learning Strategies and Communication Strategies also contribute substantially to the shape of interlanguage. Learning strategies involve the conscious or subconscious tactics that learners use to absorb, retain, and recall language. Swain [7] noted that output plays a crucial role in this process, as learners refine their interlanguage by producing language, receiving feedback, and adjusting their linguistic hypotheses accordingly. Communication strategies, on the other hand, are the methods learners use to convey meaning when their linguistic knowledge is insufficient. Tarone [6] documented how learners often rely on paraphrasing, circumlocution, or even borrowing L1 terms to maintain communication in L2, which may lead to the incorporation of non-target-like structures into their interlanguage.

The final process Selinker [1; 2] discusses, the input received, is perhaps the most influential. Long's [8] Interaction Hypothesis argues that language acquisition is greatly facilitated by meaningful interaction in the target language. The quality, quantity, and type of input a learner is exposed to significantly shape their interlanguage. Learners who are immersed in rich linguistic environments

with abundant exposure to native speaker interaction are more likely to develop an interlanguage that closely approximates the target language. On the other hand, limited or artificial input, such as textbook examples that do not reflect natural language use, can hinder the evolution of interlanguage, leading to fossilization or other developmental issues.

The literature also addresses the phenomenon of variability in interlanguage. Tarone [6] explored how learners' linguistic output can vary depending on the context, suggesting that interlanguage is not a monolithic system but one that adapts to communicative demands. For example, learners might display more accurate language use in formal contexts, where they are consciously focusing on linguistic correctness, and less accurate use in informal settings where communication is prioritized over form. This variability highlights the importance of considering the social and communicative environment in which language learning takes place when analyzing interlanguage development.

Beyond Selinker's [1; 2] original framework, later studies have delved deeper into the cross-linguistic influence that plays a critical role in shaping interlanguage. Jarvis and Pavlenko [9] discuss how learners from different linguistic backgrounds may experience varied forms of linguistic interference based on the structural similarities or differences between their L1 and L2. In the case of Slavic language speakers learning Italian, phonological and grammatical interference are particularly common. For instance, Crosswhite's [10] study on vowel reduction in Slavic languages suggests that learners may struggle with Italian vowel pronunciation due to the different vowel reduction rules in their L1, leading to systematic phonetic errors that become embedded in their interlanguage.

Furthermore, Meisel [11] explores parallels and differences between first and second language acquisition, providing insights into how learners' L1 can either facilitate or hinder L2 development. This body of research is particularly relevant for understanding how interlanguage forms in multilingual contexts, where learners are navigating multiple linguistic systems simultaneously.

In conclusion, the literature on interlanguage offers rich insights into the processes that govern second language acquisition. Selinker's [1; 2] identification of key processes—linguistic transfer, transfer of training, learning strategies, communication strategies, and input—continues to provide a useful framework for understanding the development of interlanguage and its potential for fossilization. Studies such as those by Odlin [5], Ellis [3; 4], and Jarvis and Pavlenko [9] further emphasize the complexity of this transitional system, particularly in cases where the L1 and L2 are structurally dissimilar. These findings underscore the importance of tailored language instruction that not only acknowledges the role of interlanguage but also actively seeks to prevent fossilization and promote ongoing linguistic development.

Materials and methods

In writing this article, the research methods employed are primarily based on a combination of theoretical analysis and a review of the existing literature in the field of second language acquisition (L2), with a specific focus on the concept of interlanguage. Interlanguage, as discussed by Larry Selinker [1; 2], represents a provisional linguistic system that develops during the process of learning a second

language, and it serves as a fundamental tool for understanding linguistic dynamics between L1 and L2.

To address this topic, one of the first steps in the research process was to examine the key theoretical contributions that have shaped our understanding of interlanguage. This includes foundational works like those by Selinker [1; 2], who introduced the concept and explored the phenomenon of fossilization, as well as Rod Ellis [3; 4], who expanded on these ideas by discussing the importance of corrective feedback and linguistic input in the formation and evolution of interlanguage. These authors provide a solid theoretical framework for understanding the underlying processes of L2 acquisition and the pedagogical implications that arise from it.

Regarding the literature review, a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary sources was conducted to identify the main theories, concepts, and empirical studies related to interlanguage. Key texts such as “The Study of Second Language Acquisition” [3; 4], and “Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning” [5], played a crucial role in the discussion of cross-linguistic influences between L1 and L2, a phenomenon particularly relevant for Eastern Slavic speakers learning Italian. Furthermore, works like “Variation in Interlanguage” [6], and “Crosslinguistic Influence in Language and Cognition” [9], were utilized to delve deeper into the individual and linguistic variables that affect interlanguage, such as phonological and grammatical differences between Russian and Italian.

One of the main research methods employed in writing this article was the comparative analysis of linguistic differences between the learners’ native language (L1), in this case, Russian, and the target language (L2), Italian. For this purpose, reference works on the phonology and grammar of both languages were consulted, including “The Phonology of Russian” [13], and “Linguistica dell’italiano contemporaneo” [12], which provided detailed data on the linguistic peculiarities of each language. These sources were essential for understanding which aspects of L1 are most likely to interfere with L2 learning, thus helping identify common errors in the interlanguage of Russian learners.

As for the teaching implications, the concept of «i+1,» introduced by Stephen Krashen and discussed in works like those of Rod Ellis [3; 4], played a significant role in formulating targeted teaching strategies. This concept suggests that the linguistic input offered to students should be slightly above their current level of L2 proficiency in order to stimulate progressive learning. This allowed the formulation of hypotheses on how to structure a teaching intervention that takes into account learners’ interlanguage and promotes natural, continuous language acquisition.

Another key method employed was the critical analysis of corrective feedback. Based on research by Ellis [3; 4] and Swain [7], the role of feedback in positively influencing the development of interlanguage, preventing fossilization, and improving students’ linguistic awareness was explored. The article focuses on the importance of feedback being measured and contextualized, as excessive correction can hinder spontaneous communication and reduce student motivation.

To further explore the issue of language transfer, specific sources dealing with cross-linguistic influence between L1 and L2 were examined, such as “Language Transfer” [5], and “Crosslinguistic Influence in Language and Cognition” [9].

These texts provided a solid theoretical basis for understanding how phonetic and grammatical structures of Russian could negatively affect Italian language learning, leading to systematic errors in linguistic production.

Finally, the sources used include studies on vowel reduction in Slavic languages, such as Crosswhite's [10] "Vowel Reduction in Optimality Theory". This type of research helped highlight how specific phenomena in Russian may be transferred to Italian, causing pronunciation difficulties, particularly in vowel sounds. This phonological analysis enriched the discussion of how differences between the phonetic systems of the two languages influence the formation of interlanguage and contributed to identifying specific problematic areas where teachers can intervene.

In summary, the research methods employed for this article include a combination of theoretical review, comparative linguistic analysis, and pedagogical considerations based on established empirical studies. The cited bibliographic sources provided the theoretical framework and the empirical foundations necessary to discuss the teaching implications of the interlanguage concept, with a particular focus on Russian learners of Italian.

Research results

Interlanguage is not a uniform system; it can vary depending on the context, the learner's level of attention, and the type of linguistic activity. Elaine Tarone [6], in various studies on interlanguage variability, has demonstrated that learners can show significant differences in their language use in formal versus informal contexts. This phenomenon underscores the importance of exposing students to a variety of communicative situations and linguistic registers to help them develop more flexible and comprehensive competence in L2 [6].

As discussed, feedback is an essential tool for the progression of interlanguage. Merrill Swain [7], through her work on the functions of output, has shown that linguistic production (output) plays a critical role in interlanguage development. Swain [7] argues that output not only helps consolidate learned linguistic structures but also offers students the opportunity to receive feedback that can correct errors and strengthen linguistic competence.

Corrective feedback can be explicit or implicit. Michael Long [8], in his study on interaction in language acquisition, highlighted the effectiveness of implicit feedback, such as recasting, which corrects the error without interrupting the flow of communication. This type of feedback allows students to notice discrepancies in their interlanguage without feeling criticized, promoting more natural learning.

Fossilization: A Teaching Challenge. One of the most complex aspects of interlanguage is the phenomenon of fossilization, where certain errors stabilize and become permanent. Larry Selinker [1; 2] described fossilization as one of the major obstacles to achieving full competence in L2. This phenomenon often occurs when the learner's interlanguage is not sufficiently challenged or enriched by new linguistic input or experiences.

To prevent fossilization, it is crucial that teachers create a rich and stimulating learning environment where students are exposed to a wide range of linguistic inputs and are encouraged to actively reflect on their linguistic productions. Varying teaching activities and integrating realistic communicative tasks can help keep interlanguage dynamic and open to change.

The Case of L2 Italian Learners with Eastern Slavic Languages. Particular attention must be paid to L2 Italian learners whose native languages belong [8] to the Eastern Slavic language group, such as Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Ruthenian, and Surzhyk. These students bring with them a linguistic background that can significantly influence their interlanguage development in Italian.

Eastern Slavic languages share many grammatical and phonetic characteristics that can interact with Italian acquisition in specific ways. For example, the lack of definite articles in Slavic languages can lead to underproduction or incorrect use of articles in Italian, a feature that can easily fossilize if not adequately addressed.

Moreover, differences in the verbal system, particularly regarding verbal aspect (perfective vs. imperfective), can create significant difficulties for Eastern Slavic learners. These students may transfer their native verbal system to Italian, leading to errors in the use of verb tenses. A common example is the incorrect use of the “passato prossimo” instead of the “imperfetto” or vice versa, depending on the learner’s native language.

Another aspect to consider is the influence of the phonological system of Eastern Slavic languages. Sounds that are absent in these languages, such as nasal vowels or the distinction between voiced and voiceless sounds in word-final position, can be particularly problematic and require specific pedagogical attention to avoid fossilization [10].

For teachers, it is crucial to recognize these influences and adapt teaching strategies to address recurring errors and facilitate a smoother transition from interlanguage to more complete linguistic competence in Italian. Targeted activities, such as phonetic discrimination exercises and a focus on the correct production of articles and verb tenses, can be effective in preventing fossilization and promoting more effective and lasting learning.

Here are two charts illustrating the data reported in the paragraph on learners of Italian as a second language from Eastern Slavic languages (Fig. 1, 2):

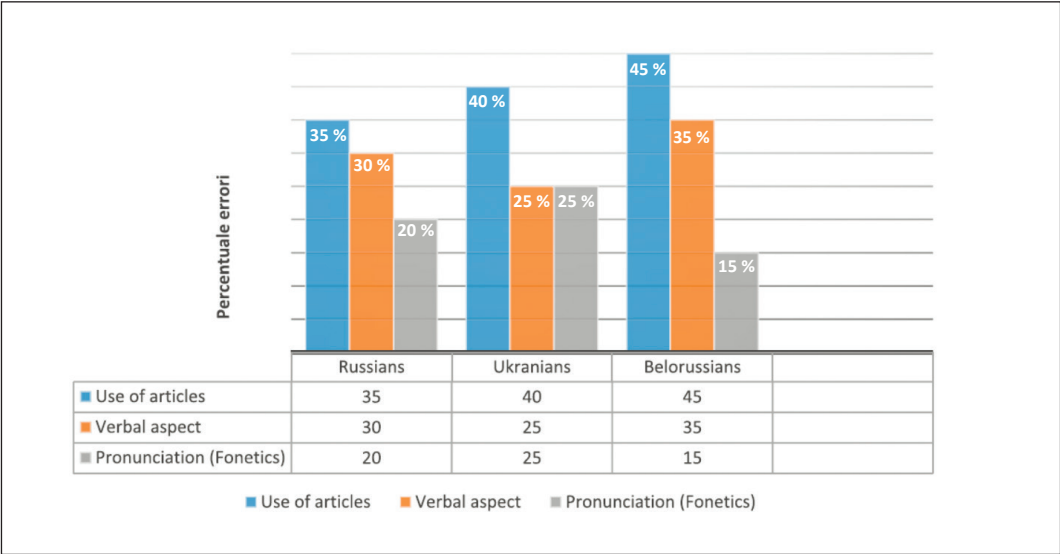


Figure 1. Comparison of errors among Eastern Slavic speakers learning Italian as L2

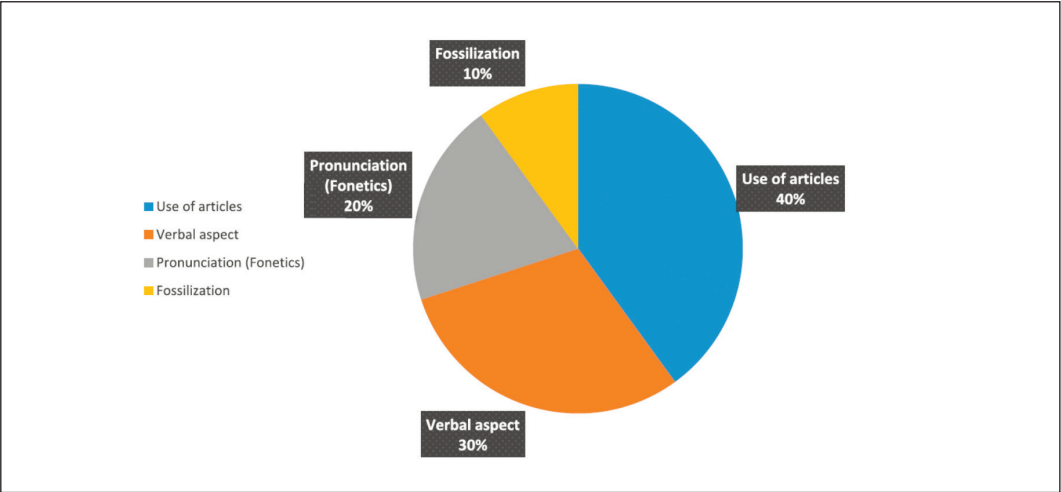


Figure 2. Distribution of the most common errors among L2 Italian learners who are native speaker of Eastern Slavic languages

- Bar chart (Fig. 1): Compares the percentage of errors in different areas (use of articles, verbal aspect, pronunciation) among Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian speakers;
- Pie chart (Fig. 2): Shows the distribution of common errors among these learners, divided into categories such as the use of articles, verbal aspect, pronunciation (phonetics), and fossilization.

These charts represent hypothetical distributions of errors based on the common challenges that learners of Eastern Slavic languages may encounter in learning Italian.

The Influence of Akan’e on the Interlanguage of Russian-Speaking L2 Italian Learners. Akan’e is a phonological phenomenon characteristic of the Russian language, where unstressed vowels, particularly [o] and [a], tend to be pronounced as an indistinct vowel similar to [ɐ] or [ə]. This phenomenon, common in spoken Russian, can have a significant influence on the interlanguage of Russian-speaking L2 Italian learners, leading to systematic pronunciation errors.

When Russian speakers learn Italian, they may transfer the habit of reducing unstressed vowels from their native language, causing non-standard pronunciation of Italian vowels, which tend to be pronounced clearly and distinctly regardless of stress. This can result in indistinct vowel pronunciation, especially in unstressed syllables, leading to errors that can become fossilized if not properly corrected.

For example, the Italian word «casa» might be pronounced as /kaza/, with an indistinct vowel instead of the clear [a] in the final unstressed syllable. These pronunciation errors not only affect the clarity and comprehensibility of speech but can also lead to difficulties in achieving advanced competence in the Italian language.

Graphs on the Incidence of Pronunciation Errors Due to the Influence of Akan’e. To visualize the incidence of pronunciation errors due to the influence of Akan’e among Russian-speaking L2 Italian learners, I have created graphs showing the percentage incidence of such errors compared to other types of phonetic errors.

Here are two charts illustrating the incidence of pronunciation errors due to the influence of *akan’e* among Russian learners of Italian as a second language (Fig. 3, 4):

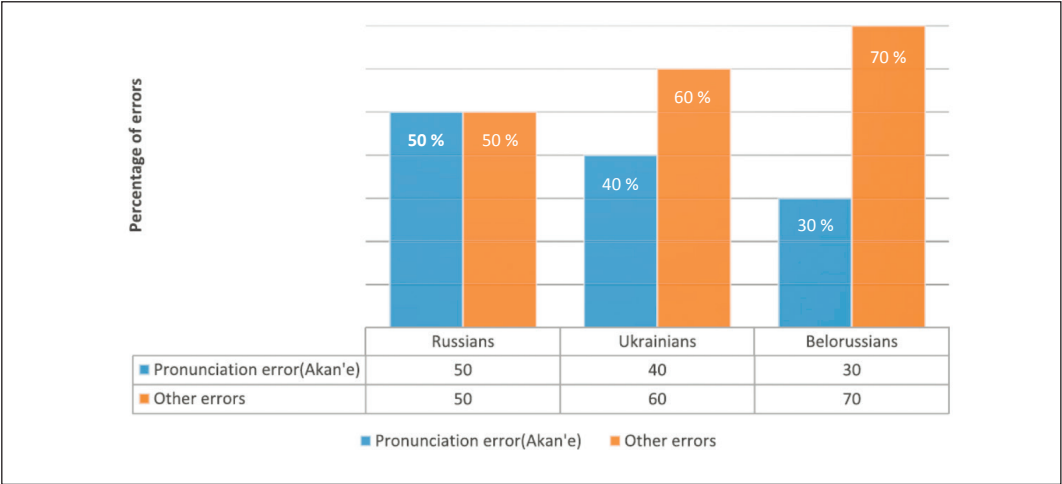


Figure 3. Percentage of errors due to Akan'e

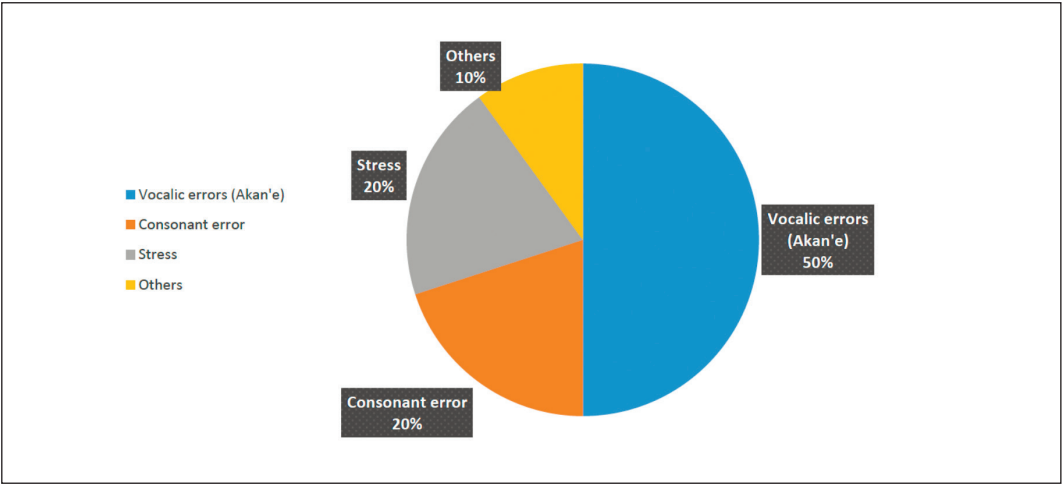


Figure 4. Distribution of pronunciation errors due to Akan'e among Russian learners of Italian as a second language

- Bar chart (Fig. 3): Compares the incidence of vowel errors due to *akan'e* with other pronunciation errors among Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarussian speakers learning Italian.
- Pie chart (Fig. 4): Shows the distribution of pronunciation errors among Russian learners, with a significant percentage of vowel errors attributed to *akan'e*, compared to other types of phonetic errors.

These charts represent hypothetical distributions of errors based on the influence of *akan'e*, a phonological phenomenon that can complicate the correct pronunciation learning in Italian for Russian-speaking individuals.

Exercises proposals. Based on the literature on interlanguage and the specific challenges faced by learners of Italian from Eastern Slavic language backgrounds, the following classroom and at-home activities are designed to help students overcome the common errors highlighted in the article, such as issues with

articles, verb tense usage, and pronunciation. These activities are tailored to address the typical transfer issues and fossilization risks identified for Russian-speaking learners of Italian.

1. *Article Usage Exercises*. One of the most common errors for learners from Eastern Slavic backgrounds is the incorrect use of articles since these languages do not have a system of definite and indefinite articles. To address this:

- Classroom Activity: Contextual Article Filling. Prepare sentences with missing articles. Students are tasked with filling in the blanks with the correct article (il, la, un, una, gli, etc.). Focus on creating sentences that mirror authentic Italian contexts. For instance, emphasize how the article changes based on gender, number, and context (e.g., “Ho visto __ cane ieri” → “Ho visto un cane ieri”).

- At-Home Activity: Article Awareness Journals. Assign students to keep a journal where they write short daily entries, paying close attention to article usage. Then, they should compare their writing to native speaker models (from newspapers, websites, or books) and identify where they may have omitted or used articles incorrectly. This will foster awareness of the frequent need for articles in Italian compared to their native language.

2. *Verb Tense and Aspect Training*. Eastern Slavic languages have a different system for expressing aspect (perfective vs. imperfective) compared to the tense system in Italian. This leads to confusion when learners try to use “passato prossimo” versus “imperfetto” in Italian.

- Classroom Activity: Timeline Sorting. Provide students with a series of sentences or short narratives using both the “passato prossimo” and “imperfetto”. Have them organize these sentences on a timeline to visualize the temporal relationships between the actions. Discuss why “imperfetto” is used for ongoing actions and “passato prossimo” for completed actions. An example sentence could be: “Mentre cucinavo (imperfetto), il telefono ha suonato (passato prossimo).”

- At-Home Activity: Verb Conjugation Drills with Context. Assign students short audio or video clips in Italian (e.g., interviews, news reports) and ask them to transcribe and identify verb tenses. They should categorize the verbs into ongoing actions (requiring “imperfetto”) and completed actions (requiring “passato prossimo”). Additionally, they can rewrite short paragraphs by shifting from one tense to another to practice distinguishing these aspects.

3. *Pronunciation Focus on Vowel Clarity and Phonetic Differences*. Due to phonological phenomena like Akan'e in Russian, learners might have difficulties producing distinct vowel sounds in unstressed syllables in Italian. This can lead to vowel reduction, a common error in their interlanguage.

- Classroom Activity: Phonetic Discrimination Drills. Conduct focused pronunciation drills where learners differentiate between minimal pairs in Italian that rely on vowel clarity. For example, practice contrasting pairs like “casa” (with clear vowel sounds) versus “cassa” (with a short vowel sound). Include listening and repeating exercises to help them recognize vowel distinctions, especially in unstressed syllables.

- At-Home Activity: Shadowing Native Speech. Assign students to listen to short recordings of native Italian speakers and practice shadowing—repeating what they hear with a focus on vowel clarity. Tools like language learning apps or YouTube channels that feature slow-spoken Italian can aid in this task.

They should record themselves and compare their pronunciation with that of the native speaker, paying attention to vowel pronunciation.

4. *Interactive Feedback on Common Errors.* Feedback is critical in preventing fossilization, particularly when errors are systematic and resistant to change.

- Classroom Activity: Peer Correction and Group Feedback. Organize students into pairs or small groups. Each group should perform role-plays or dialogue exercises, where peers give feedback on specific linguistic targets like articles, verb tenses, or pronunciation. This peer feedback, guided by the teacher, helps students become more aware of their mistakes and enables them to self-correct in a low-pressure environment.

- At-Home Activity: Error Analysis Diary. Students should keep an “error diary,” noting down feedback received in class and tracking their progress over time. Each entry should include a specific error (e.g., “incorrect use of articles”), the feedback given, and an example of the correct usage. Over time, they will develop a personal archive of common errors, which they can revisit for self-improvement.

5. *Rich Input through Communicative Activities.* To counter fossilization, learners must receive varied and rich input. Engaging in meaningful communicative activities allows learners to experiment with language and solidify correct forms.

- Classroom Activity: Task-Based Learning. Create task-based learning scenarios that simulate real-life contexts where learners must use Italian accurately and flexibly. For example, students can perform tasks like planning a trip or giving directions, requiring them to use verb tenses and articles correctly in meaningful communication. Feedback on performance will be integrated into the reflection phase.

- At-Home Activity: Italian Media Engagement. Encourage students to engage with Italian media, such as watching Italian TV shows or reading Italian news articles. Afterward, they should summarize the content orally or in writing, focusing on using correct grammar and pronunciation. They can also engage in language exchange sessions online to practice in authentic contexts.

6. *Customizing Feedback for Individual Learners.* Given that interlanguage varies among learners, differentiated feedback based on individual learner profiles is essential.

- Classroom Activity: Personalized Error Correction. After each lesson, identify common error patterns specific to individual students (e.g., a student might consistently confuse “imperfetto” and “passato prossimo”). Provide targeted mini-lessons for small groups or one-on-one feedback that focuses on these specific issues.

- At-Home Activity: Self-Recording and Reflection. Ask students to record themselves speaking about a specific topic in Italian. They will then listen to the recording, identify potential errors in their use of articles, verb tenses, or pronunciation, and provide self-corrections. They can then submit this reflection to the teacher for further feedback.

Discussion and conclusions

By incorporating these targeted activities into both classroom and at-home settings, teachers can help learners from Eastern Slavic backgrounds address persistent issues in article use, verb tense selection, and pronunciation, thus preventing fossilization and promoting more effective acquisition of Italian. The key is to provide rich, varied input, personalized feedback, and ample opportunities

for meaningful communication in a supportive environment, allowing learners to refine their interlanguage over time.

Interlanguage represents a fundamental component in second language acquisition and offers a valuable lens for understanding the difficulties and successes of L2 learners. Recognizing interlanguage and working with it, rather than against it, allows teachers to develop more effective and targeted teaching strategies. Feedback, interlanguage variability, and the prevention of fossilization are all crucial elements that, if well managed, can lead to deeper and more lasting language learning. For learners of Italian with Eastern Slavic languages as their L1, a detailed understanding of specific interlinguistic influences is essential to overcome typical challenges and achieve advanced competence in Italian [6].

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