

Assessing the English competence of young learners in Norwegian schools with a non-Norwegian L1

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Aim of study

- 1) The aim of our study has been to investigate whether having a mother tongue other than Norwegian has an impact on assessors' assessment of the English of pupils in Norwegian schools, and the perceived severity of their errors.
- 2) Conduct preliminary investigations for use in future research

Background

- CORYL (CORpus of Young Learner language)
 - Texts collected in the course of the National Testing of English, written by Norwegian pupils in the 7th, 10th and 11th grade
 - 272 texts (191 564 tokens) from the 7th and 10th grade
 - Annotated for gender and age
 - Manually error annotated
 - <http://clarino.uib.no/korpuskel>

Why manual error annotation/tagging?

- According to Manning (2011) there is a misidentification rate of 270 words for every 10,000 in standard English texts
- «til Jon he i am inn the Big wold i veldig byuttiFul i a big homs and så mye intristing tings» (p101-7, 2005)
- «I can also see a parrot in the cage that hangs from the roof.»

The L1-phrase

We included subjective tags such as «Wrong idiom» (WI), «L1-phrase» (L1P), «L1», and «Nonsensical» (NONSE).

These tags were included because it allows researchers to look for patterns in «subjective data».

L1P and L1 are examples of transfer, or crosslinguistic influence (CLI).

Jarvis (2000, p.246) refers to CLI as a «you-know-it-when-you-see-it phenomenon»

Quick example of a pattern found using the L1 category

Wrong function word (WFU) + L1

53 (54,08%) the

15 (15,31%) so

9 (9,18%) all

6 (6,12%) some

3 (3,06%) self

«the are a snake here [...]»

«Here are the sun all the days.»

Are there implications for teaching, testing and assessment?

Our research question and hypothesis

- Hypothesis: L1-type errors are mostly produced by native speakers of Norwegian, and these errors are easy to interpret by a native speaker of Norwegian, but potentially nonsensical to someone who does not understand Norwegian.
- «And sow com the a bear» (p02-7, 2005)
- If non native speakers of Norwegian produce similar sentences based on their own mother tongue, these could seem nonsensical to a native speaker of Norwegian.
- Would this impact how their English is being assessed by Norwegian teachers?

Method

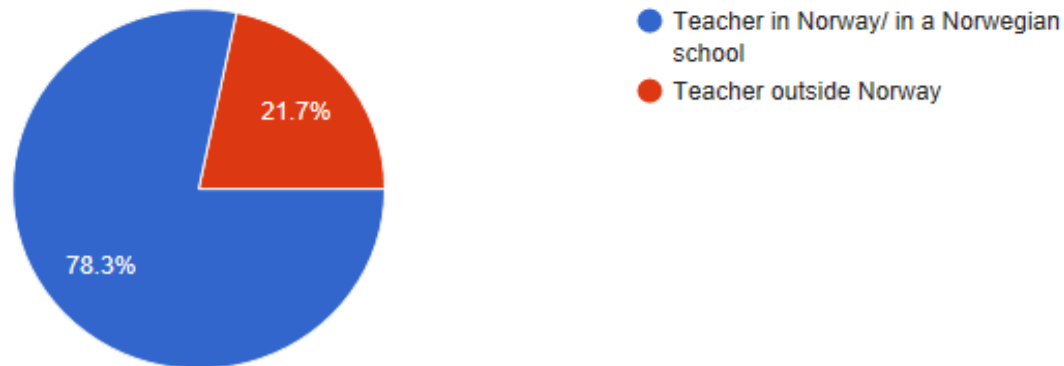
- 69 texts from 7th grade pupils from three separate schools in Bergen
- Two texts were discarded and one disregarded, so we were left with 47 native speakers of Norwegian, and 19 non native speakers.
- The pupils were given the same tasks as the ones used during the National Tests of English in 2005.
- The texts were assigned to levels and half levels on the CEFR by seven raters
- 18 teachers in Norway/in a Norwegian school and a control group of 5 teachers with no knowledge of Norwegian were surveyed.

The survey.

The following sentences are all in some way misformed/erroneous. Rate each sentence, on a scale of 1 to 10, according to how serious you, as a teacher, regard the problem. In some cases there is an extra sentence in brackets, which is there merely to provide context. In these cases, base your rating on the main sentence not in brackets.

This questionnaire will be sent to two groups of recipients. Which group do you belong to?

23 responses



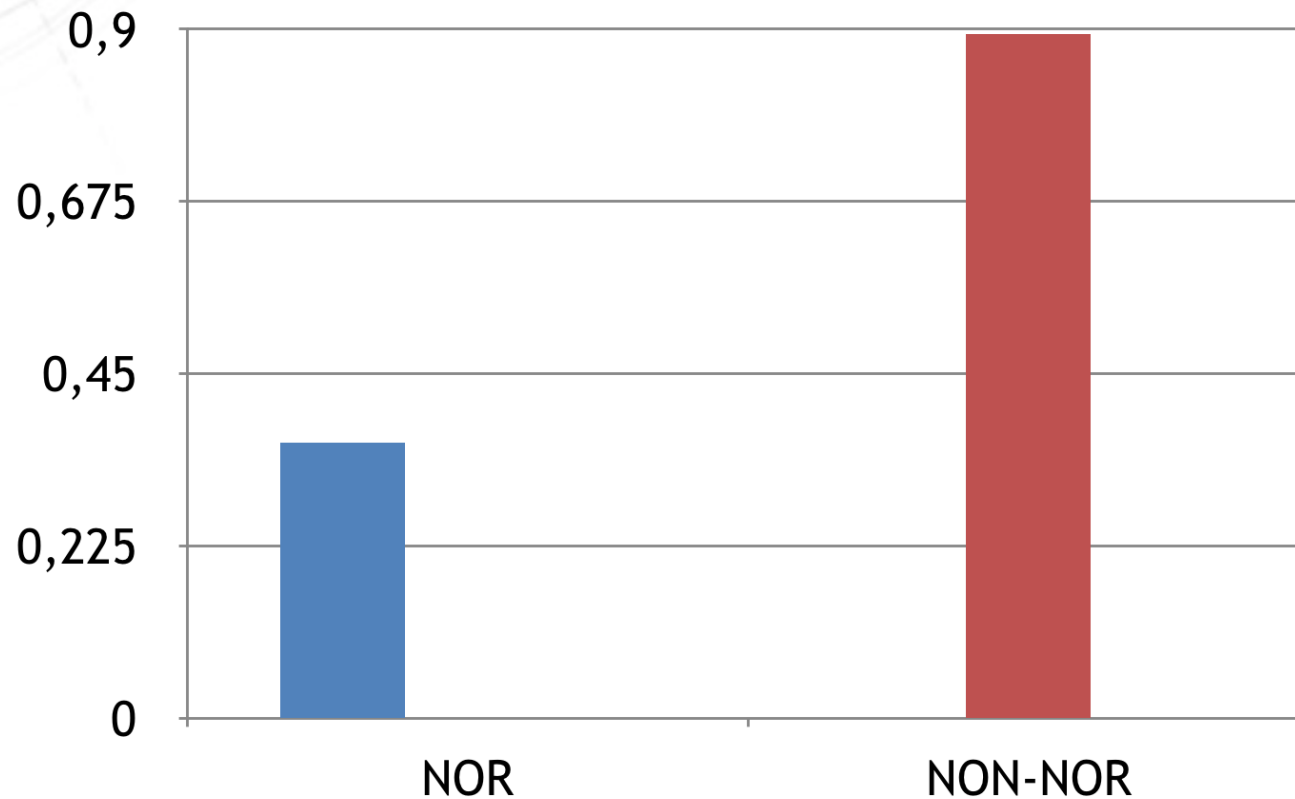
Findings 1: We are surprised

- The non native speakers of Norwegian produced «Norwegianisms», and for the most part they seemingly avoided transfer from their mother tongue.
- Not only did they produce these types of errors, but they were extremely similar to those produced by their native speaker counterparts.
- «I sat to the 911 that i call wrong nummber so they said that I tok fail.» (p426) Native speaker
- «It,s one fail with the treehouse » (p422) - Pupil from Irak
- «the are summer» (p434) Palestinian, «I walk in and see the are messy» (p463) Burmese
- «The are mutsh haigt haus and offis» (Native speaker)
- **«There is a growing body of empirical evidence on the aquisition of third additional languages which is beginning to show that prior non-native linguistic knowledge influences target language production and development to a significant extent [...]» De Angelis (2005)**

Findings 2 – An even greater surprise

- Out of all the «L1p», or Norwegianisms we looked at, 17 were produced by native speakers of Norwegian and 17 by Non-native speakers.
- With every error counted only once, CEFR levels and text length taken into account, we found the results to be comparable. However, in further research any comparison must be made after stricter criteria.

Findings 2 cont.



Relative number of L1p-tags per person

Findings 3

Were there any of the nonsensical sentences, or other types of idiomatically wrong phrases similar to those we expected to find?

Native speakers of Norwegian produced eight such phrases, while Non-Native speakers produced seven.

In the non-native group 4 out of 7 such phrases were produced by Somali pupils.

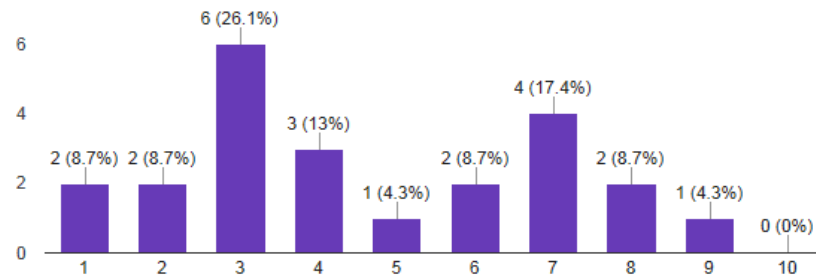
Findings 4 - Our raters and the survey

- CEFR ratings:
 - No difference in agreement between our raters when assessing non native speaker texts, versus native speaker texts.
- 18 Norwegian teachers, and 5 Non Norwegian teachers evaluated sample sentences.
 - Raters have very low overall agreement.
 - There is no discernable difference between the Norwegian teachers and the control group.

Findings 4 Cont - Disagreement.

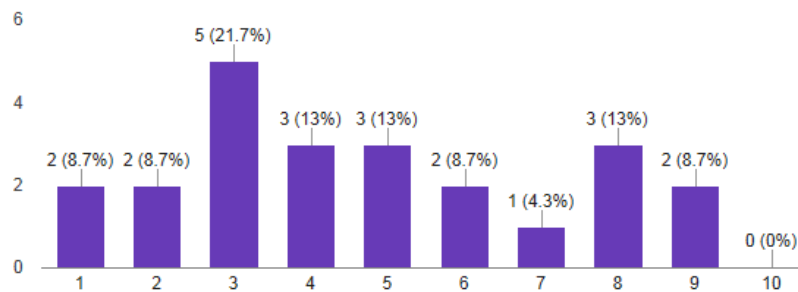
44. "yesterday I was planning going to the walk of fame, but suddently it started splashing down from the skies so i went shopping instedd."

23 responses



5. "One time someone got hit by a rope many times and died at the hospital."

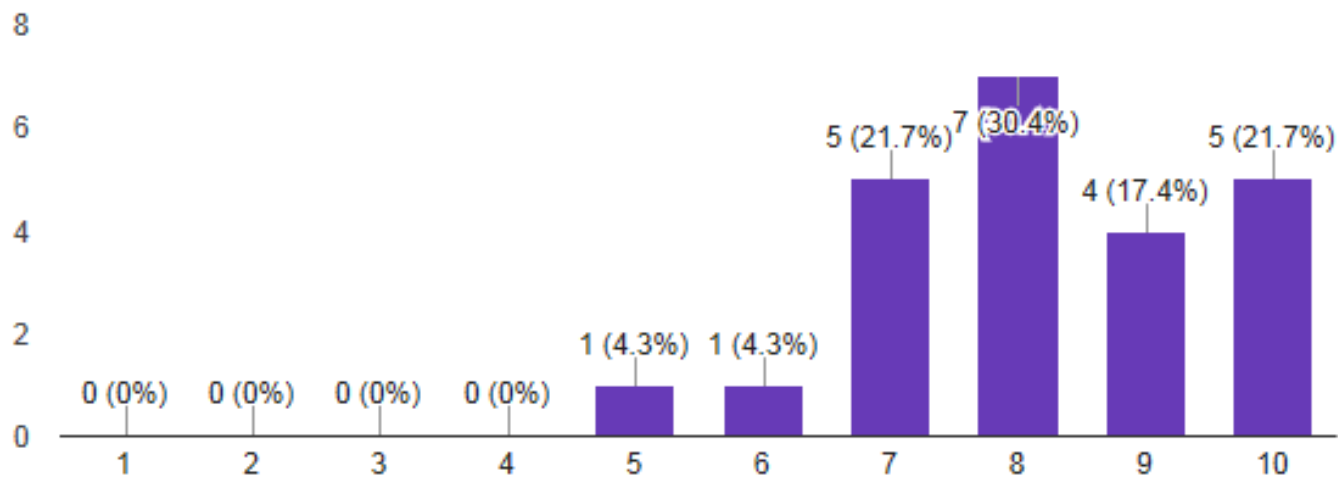
23 responses



Findings 4 Cont –Agreement

28. "I sat to the 911 that i call wrong nummber so they said that I tok fail."

23 responses



Conclusions

- Our findings seem to indicate that non native speakers produce «Norwegianisms» similar to those of their native speaker counterparts, perhaps even more frequently.
- The survey is flawed and the raters show low agreement.
- We have found no evidence that the English of non native speakers of Norwegian is being assessed differently. However, if further research shows that they in fact produce a larger number of structures affected by transfer from Norwegian than their native speaker counterparts, this might have an impact on how their English is being assessed.

Further research 1

- Changing the names of two tags in our corpus from L1P and L1 to NORP and NOR to reflect what we learned from this study.
- A second survey should be conducted.
- A larger number of texts should be collected and analyzed, and in the future we will be requesting information about mother tongue when asking schools to submit written material for Coryl.
- A classroom study should perhaps be performed, and interviews with teachers should be conducted in order to try to establish whether or not transfer from Norwegian and other error types affect assessment and teaching.
- We will encourage students and researchers to use our data to investigate similar questions.

Further research 2

We will be looking into possible causes behind transfer from Norwegian L2.

Several underlying causes have been proposed, and are cited in recent articles on the topic.

- [...] psychotypology, that is, the perceived distance between the languages, and the “L2 factor” i.e. perceiving a language as ‘foreign’ non-native to the learner (Aronin & Hufeisen 2009, p6)
- De Angelis (2005) suggest that L1 transfer may be blocked by “perception of correctness” and “association of foreignness”

References

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- De Angelis, G (2005) Multilingualism and Non-native lexical Transfer: An Identification Problem, *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 2.1,1-25,DOI:10.1080/17501220508668374
- Aronin, L. (Ed) & Hufeisen, B. (Ed). (2009) *The Exploration of Multilingualism: Development of research on L3, multilingualism and multiple language acquisition (Vol 6)*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company