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Language Learning Methodology for Adults: A Study of Linguistic Transfer

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Abstract

The purpose of the present research is to bring together the evidence on transfer in adult L2 and L3 language acquisition and investigate the use and the relationship between languages in contact. The role of linguistic transfer (Odlin, 1989) i.e. the imposition of previously learned patterns onto a new learning situation, has a facilitation or inhibition effect on the learner's progress in mastering a new language (L2 or L3). Our findings reveal that the cross-linguistic influence occurs both from the direction of the L2 to the L3 and from the L3 to the L2 (Odlin, 2003; Jarvis and Pavlenko, 2008). In the case of our participants, in the acquisition of L2 as the foreign language, the L3 is the language that they have more contact with its influence is higher than the interferences of their own mother tongues (Devís, 2013). Such a result has important consequences for language teaching; primarily because it informs us about the methods to be used with adult students. Finally, this study and others studies show that transfer can be used as an effective learning strategy in multiple language learning.

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1. Introduction

In multilingual settings students from dozens of ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds learn and use a second and third language especially in the case of immigrant population and speakers of minority languages. Some L2/L3 learners ('L3' referring to any non-native language acquired after one L2) are active bilinguals who use other two languages in everyday life, while others live in a monolingual context and use their

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second language, in this case a foreign language, only occasionally (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011).

In the educational context, school as a complex system must promote the goal that every European knows two other languages in addition to his/her own language (Breidbach, 2003; Gogolin, 2002) and contributes to the construction and negotiation of multidimensional and dynamic identities within different contexts (Kanno, 2003). Multilingual identities are not to be regarded as odd or as an isolated barrier in education seen as an identity formation process, but as an attempt to integrate the personal multicultural and multilingual background of the students into the school curriculum. As Cummins pointed out, the individual's linguistic and cultural knowledge enhances through the contact with many different languages in order to understand the way language works and the function of languages in society (Cummins, 2000a, 2000b).

At present, the increasing arrival of immigrant students in Europe, especially in Spain has obviously transformed all schools. This is the situation all over Spain, but it acquires special relevance in the case of Valencia where the immigrant students are in a context where the language of teaching (Valencian), alongside Spanish is extensively used in education and also different from student's native language (L1). Therefore, in this immersion context they must acquire new languages (L2 and L3) and faced with learning difficulties. The students come to Spain with incredibly heterogeneous experiences – some bring solid academic backgrounds, while others have a history with limited or interrupted schooling. In addition, in bilingual contexts, schooling for immigrant students is complicated by the social, cultural, and emotional adjustment of recent immigrants (López, 2003; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999).

Accessing the prior linguistic knowledge in a specific language can therefore activate further languages one knows by using certain skills and strategies for the acquisition of the L3. An important factor is the multiplicity of possible interactions between the linguistic systems in the multilingual learner's mind (Cenoz, Hufeisen & Jessner, 2001; Hammarberg & Williams, 2009). Until recently, transfer and interference researches have concentrated on the influence of people's native language (L1) on their L2 language performance (Gass, 1996; Odlin, 2003; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). With the increasing number of people who speak more than two languages, the researchers confirmed the special status of the L2 and L3 and found differences in the dynamic interaction of both L1 and L2 with L3 (Jessner, 2008).

Despite being a new field a research, certain areas of language in the third language acquisition (TLA) have already been investigated. This is the case mainly of lexis (Cenoz, 2001; De Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Dewaele, 1998; Hammarberg, 2001; Ringbom, 2001; Tremblay, 2006) and syntax (Bardel & Falk, 2007; Leung, 2006, 2009).

The aim of the present research is to contribute to TLA literature by how multilingual adults work in the acquisition process on two new target languages (TL). In particular, it reports on a study of adults speakers exposed to the L2 (Catalan) language and L3 (Spanish) in the bilingual context of Valencia and on other study developed in Slovakia.

When examining the data of how our participants processed their input, we observed that they used aspects of their prior linguistic knowledge to produce the new languages. The results provide evidence for the important role played by not only the learner's first language (L1) but also their other known languages. This article highlights the importance of knowledge of languages other than one's native language, a new approach to understanding the acquisition of additional languages through analysis of cross-linguistic influence.

2. Background

2.1. *Language learning methodology. Linguistic theories and language teaching*

When approaching the elements that influence the linguistic and communicative education, one must take into account the various disciplines related to the study of the language. Currently, language teaching is not solely based, epistemologically, on the study of the structures that compose the language. The new methodological approaches have incorporated disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology or a pragmatic perspective.

Ultimately, the new methodological change will involve, as we shall see, that the goal of language teaching be to acquire communicative competency and not only grammar or linguistic competency. The new linguistic

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