Rosalinde T. Stadt: The influence of Dutch (L1) and English (L2) on third language learning: The effects of education, development, and language combinations
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The book under review is a recent doctoral dissertation that was successfully defended at the University of Amsterdam. Chapters 2 through 7 have appeared as articles in professional journals; the introduction and conclusion chapters are new. The hard-copy book is commercially available; the e-version (pdf) can be downloaded from the publisher's website at no cost.

English plays a progressively more substantial role in Dutch society. For most Dutch citizens English functions as a second language. This brings up the question to what extent English as a second language influences learning a third language. However, third language acquisition (L3A) is under-researched. Moreover, L3 investigations that have been done to elucidate transfer from the L1/L2 to L3A have presented contradictory results. The research described in the book targets the respective roles of L1 Dutch and L2 English as sources of syntactic transfer in L3A. The basic question was whether L2 English, in addition to L1 Dutch, plays a role as a background language in L3A and, if so, what characteristics stimulate L2 transfer to the L3.

In the Dutch educational system, English is taught during a few hours per week in the last two forms of primary school (or earlier). English is a compulsory subject in all forms of secondary school, while students have to make a choice whether they take either German or French as a second foreign language (i.e., L3). This offers a testing ground for L3 acquisition research, where the influence of English L2 and Dutch L1 on L3A can be studied. The L3s differ in several important respects from English. German has basically the same word order as Dutch, with the finite verb fixed in second position (the V2 rule) in main clauses. When the main clause begins with a preposed constituent, the subject – which is the default first constituent, moves to the third position, after the finite verb, which structure is ungrammatical in English and French. French is also like English in that it cannot break up the sequence of verbs (auxiliary, modal, participle) by inserting regular abverbs, formed in English by adding the suffix *-ly*; irregular adverbs (such as *never*, *always*, *often*) may break up the verb sequence in English; in French the no-break constraint applies without any exceptions.

The author focuses on a specific group of adolescents to achieve a better understanding of how the background languages are applied in learning a foreign language in Dutch secondary schools. Six empirical studies are presented in which the influence of Dutch (L1) and English (L2) is investigated on L3 acquisition. The studies examine two Dutch educational contexts, various stages of L3 progression, and two L3s (French, German). L1/L2 transfer in L3A is measured amongst students who are in their first four years of secondary school and are

enrolled in either a Dutch/English bilingual stream program or in the mainstream Dutch program. Hence, L1/L2 influence can be tested with students who are exposed to English to miscellaneous degrees and who have diverging L2 and L3 competencies. Besides, the differentiation between two L3s – French and German – allows the authors to compare transfer in two different language combinations while the L1 and L2 are kept constant.

Chapter 1 begins by reviewing the existing literature from the educational perspective, the developmental perspective, and the cross-linguistic perspective. The review reveals that the impact of background languages in secondary school is dynamic, and depends on several factors such as the type of education, the developmental stage, and cross-linguistic influence of the language combination under investigation.

Chapter 2 presents the findings of a grammaticality judgment task (GJT) and concentrates on the acceptance of Dutch XVSO word order and of English Adv-V word order in L3 French in the third-year bilingual stream and mainstream pupils. One of the L3A models, the L2 status factor hypothesis, is tried out by comparing the quantity of XVSO vs Adv-V errors the learners make in L3 French. Arguably, the L2 status factor hypothesis predicts more impact from high-prestige English than from Dutch. This, in all fairness, seems a rather far-fetched (if not a straw man) hypothesis. The student, when confronted with some unusual word order, will obtain positive transfer from any language s/he knows, irrespective of prestige of the language, or time of acquisition.

Chapter 3 ìs a continuation of the previous study. It compares the findings from the third-year learners to recent data from a grammaticality judgment task (GJT) collected amongst mainstream and bilingual stream fourth-year pupils (who are the same individuals and have the same ages as their bilingual peers). Again, the L2 status factor hypothesis is examined by juxtaposing the number of XVSO vs Adv-V judgment errors in L3 French learning. The results reveal a remarkable reduction in errors from year 3 to year 4, to the degree that fourth-year mainstream pupils hardly make any XVSO judgment errors.

In Chapter 4 the researcher(s) examined initial-state learners of French, who at the time of testing were not yet fully enrolled in the bilingual stream programme. Dependent variabes are now the grammaticality judgment (GJT) and a guided-production task (GPT) elicited by XVSO and Adv-V word order errors in French. The first-year students both accept and produce the Dutch XVSO word order in L3 French. Even though in the GJT the L2 did fulfill a role, the first-year students made practically no Adv-V mistakes in the GPT. The massive transfer from the L1 is consistent with the L1 transfer hypothesis (Hermas, 2010). In sum, the findings show that beginning Dutch learners of French rely on their L1 more than on their L2 – even though the latter would offer the advantage of positive transfer.

Chapter 5 describes a cross-sectional study which examines the predicted increase of the influence of the English Adv-V word order on French from first to

third-year bilingual stream and mainstream pupils. Furthermore, the relationship is investigated between the students' L2 proficiency and the impact of the L2 on L3 French in both third-year groups: a component that in preceding studies has been recognized as strongly associated with an intensified L2 impression in L3A (Jaensch, 2009a, b). Nevertheless, L2 exposure and L2 proficiency are correlated; therefore, the connection between the two features in L3A is obscure and on many occasions not disentangled to an adequate degree in L3 investigation. The learners in the secondary school where the research was done receive distinct contents of L2 exposure in the daily school context and have varying L2 proficiencies subjecting to discrete differences. On this account, the context of the study paves the way to peruse the bond between the two variables. Subsequently, the impact of English is evaluated through the guided production task (GPT).

Chapter 6 reports on a longitudinal study. The same learners from the bilingual stream are tested three times over a two-year period. The findings show a large L1 transfer in the initial stages and a reduction of Dutch dominance relatively swiftly after the onset of L3 acquisition. Although in year 2 and year 3, several judgment XVSO errors are still made, the reduction is extreme and learners hardly make any XVSO guided production errors. Despite the improved L3 proficiency, the influence of L2 English remains constant throughout the years. Meanwhile, the results indicate an upward trend in the guided production data regarding the number of Adv-V errors.

Chapter 7 illustrates the role of L1 transfer and L2 transfer in connection with two different L3s, that is, German and French. The authors compare the number of English Adv-V errors in German and in French with the GJT and the GPT in third-year bilingual stream learners. A dominance of L2 over L1 was found for L3 French, but not for acquiring a different L3, i.e., German. The findings of this study manifest that L2 English possesses a crucially marginal function in L3 German. The authors argue that this is presumably a consequence of the key role of Dutch in L3 German.

Chapter 8 ends the book with a discussion about the time of exploiting background languages Dutch (L1) and English (L2) in L3A by secondary school pupils. The author argues that taking a different perspective is fundamental in illustrating L1/L2 transfer in L3A. A predilection for either L1 Dutch or L2 English as background languages is contingent on the method of instruction the L3 learner is subjected to, the developmental phase the L3 learner is in, as well as the language combination subject to investigate. Accordingly, the three attitudes create a constructive input to the comprehension of third language learning in secondary school pupils. In a broader sense, the consolidated statistics show that taking aspects of L3 acquisition is substantial. On the one hand, L3 investigation in secondary schools would be less comprehensive without taking into account the (non-) bilingual educational context of the L3 learner, bearing in mind that components such as L2 (vs L1) exposure impact the application of background

languages. On the other hand, the developmental phase of the L3 learner gives the impression of being significant as a consequence of the taking advantage of background languages. Ultimately, language pairings influence the method by which background languages are exploited.

I end this review with a few critical remarks.

In this dissertation, there is basically just one language combination at stake, i.e., Dutch as the native language L1, English as the L2 (the two streams do not differ very much; the English curriculum is the same, only the bilingual stream uses English also in other classes); the L3 is always French – the single occasion where German is the L3 cannot be taken seriously as a competitor because German has basically the same word order as Dutch.

It seems as if the authors are not aware of the fact that as L3 progresses, L2 progresses (and possibly L1 Dutch also) as well, since English remains a compulsory subject throughout secondary school.

A third weakness of this work is the rather haphazard choice of groups, languages, and test moments. This is done on the basis of opportunity, rather than according to a well-designed plan. Also, the choice of experimental tasks is quite limited. One task has students judge the grammaticality of French sentences (location of the finite verb), the other task, which is called a production task, is really also a grammaticality judgment task: the student has to fill in one word in one of two pregiven positions. So, the student can compare the two possible versions, and decide which version is grammatical and which one is not. A complication is that some conditions are tested in a longitudinal design (i.e. in real-time), while others are tested cross-sectionally (i.e., in apparent time).

A methodological problem with the research is that it is impossible in the Netherlands to find a control group of students with no exposure to English as the L2. It would have been preferable if there had been a control group with only L1 Dutch, and no other background language, which would allow a more direct comparison of the acquisition of German by Dutch adolescents with and without an L2.

An interesting aspect of the last experiment is that the students also took the test in the L2. The students had an L2 error rate of 10% in year 1, which increased to 21% error in year 3/4. This is strange (possibly the test was more difficult in year 3/4) but at least it shows that the students in the bilingual immersion group did not do any better than the control students in the traditional curriculum.

References

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