This paper addresses the question of whether language dominance determines the source of transfer between two previously acquired languages in non-native adult additive multilingual acquisition. To do so, we investigate the processing of sentential negation in L3 English by Catalan/Spanish biliguals.

Catalan and Spanish show variation in the co-occurrence of the Sentential Negative Marker (SNM) and Negative Concord Items (NCIs) in pre-verbal position. It is impossible in Spanish (1) and optional in Catalan (2) (Déprez, et al., 2015); English Negative Quantifiers (NQ) pattern like Spanish NCIs in pre-verbal position (3).

(1) *Nadie no vino
(2) Ningú (no) va venir
(3) *Nobody didn’t come

Twenty-seven learners of L3 English tested at the true initial stage of L3 acquisition and twenty-two English native speakers (NS) completed a Self-Paced Reading experiment. The NNSs were divided according to their dominant language: Catalan (CatD, n14) or Spanish (SpD, n13). We hypothesised two scenarios:

a) Dominance = a deterministic factor for transfer selection: the Differential Reaction Times (DRT) on condition NQ+SNM will differ

b) Dominance ≠ a factor: the DRTs will not differ

The results show that both groups process NQ+SNM similarly: DRTs>Critical Region (24ms-2ms), Post-Critical Region 3 (38ms-28ms) and Final Region (74ms-35ms). A Mann-whinney test showed that there were no significant differences (CR-U=55, p=.84; PR3-U=52, p=.695; FR-U=39, p=.601) when comparing the NNS groups (CatD*SpD).

We conclude that these learners transfer the syntactic representation of one of the two systems (Catalan) in line with the Typological Primacy Model (Rothman, 2011) and that language dominance does not seem to be a factor that trumps structural similarity when determining the source of L3 transfer.

References:


Keywords: Catalan/Spanish, L3/Ln acquisition, Negative Quantifiers, Source of transfer, TPM.