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Modelling L3 development patterns: Japanese-English bilinguals acquiring Spanish

Our study contributes to the understanding of which intra and extralinguistic factors model L3 developmental trajectories. Recent work suggests that initial stages transfer will play a significant role in modelling the rate at which the acquisition of an L3 will take place, suggesting that linguistic experience in the transferred language modulates the rate at which non-facilitation is overcome (e.g., Cabrelli Amaro et al., 2020; Cabrelli and Iverson, submitted; Puig-Mayenco, et al. 2020). Herein, we precisely test such claim by examining whether language dominance, as measured by the Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong et al., 2012) (amongst some other variables), shapes the rate at which adult Japanese-English bilinguals acquire L3 Spanish and overcome initial non-facilitation with the focus on the interaction between sentential negation ('no' [=NEG]') and Negative Concord Items ('nadie'[=nobody], 'nada'[=nothing]). Our study explores the following two interrelated research questions: (a) does linguistic proximity at the property level (e.g., Westegaard, 2020) override other proposed factors such as holistic structural similarity (Rothman, 2015; Rothman, et al. 2019) for transfer selection at the initial stages of L3 acquisition? and (b) does linguistic experience in the initial transferred representation modulate the rate at which non-facilitation is overcome in L3 acquisition (Cabrelli and Iverson, submitted)?

Our results indicate English-like behavior in the ab initio learners, which we take to suggest that holistic structural similarity overrides linguistic proximity (Rothman, 2015). The developmental data suggest that the interaction between linguistic exposure and the amount of exposure to the L3 modulate the rate at which learners overcome initial non-facilitation. We will discuss the results in relation to current theories of morphosyntactic transfer (e.g., Fallah, et al., 2016; Rothman, 2015; Rothman et al., 2019; Westergaard, 2020) and recent proposals that explicate developmental patterns in L3 acquisition (Cabrelli and Iverson, Submitted).