

The Impact of Portuguese on the Study of Third Language Acquisition

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RESPONSES

**Pedagogical Implications of Research
on the Acquisition of Portuguese as a Third Language**

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**The Prospects for Portuguese for Spanish Speakers:
Potentializing Multicompetence**

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Hispania 100.5 (2017): 55–66

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Abstract: Over the last several years, we have been witness to a growing body of work that examines the acquisition of Portuguese as a third language (L3). Here in the United States, Spanish speakers account for 45% of students enrolled in Portuguese classes (Milleret 2012), divided among first language (L1) Spanish speakers, second language (L2) Spanish speakers, and heritage speakers. While these three groups are all speakers of English and Spanish, they differ with respect to the order and context of acquisition of the two languages. In this essay, I propose that access to these three linguistic profiles in Portuguese classes offers a unique opportunity for us to study third language acquisition here in the United States that arguably has not been afforded elsewhere. In L3 acquisition research, a primary interest is in the differences in acquisition processes when comparing learners with a mirror image language pairing (in this case, L1 English/L2 Spanish compared with L1 Spanish/L2 English). More recently, we have also begun to examine how mirror-image groups of sequential bilinguals compare with early bilinguals (in this case, heritage speakers of Spanish). Herein, I review research questions that drive the field and illustrate how we have addressed these questions via examination of L3 Portuguese acquisition.

Keywords: bilingualism/bilinguismo, crosslinguistic influence/influência translinguística, Portuguese/português, second language acquisition/aquisição de segunda língua, third language acquisition/aquisição de terceira língua

1. Introduction

The study of third language (L3) acquisition, while still a nascent field, has seen an appreciable uptick in attention over the last decade and a half. Multilingualism in the world is the rule and not the exception, as evidenced by an estimated 7,097 languages (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2016) distributed among fewer than 200 countries. As Gorter et al. note, this “spread of multilingualism justifies its importance in research” (5). Moreover, it has generally become accepted that the study of L3 acquisition can uniquely inform larger questions of language acquisition that we cannot answer via first language (L1) or second language (L2) acquisition alone. With that said, the majority of research in linguistic approaches to multilingualism has been primarily limited to a European context (see e.g., Rothman, Cabrelli Amaro, and de Bot 2013, for a review). Until very recently, contributions to the study of third language acquisition originating from research conducted in the United States has been minimal, and research from scholars in US universities has primarily focused on the acquisition of English as a third language in European and Asian contexts (see e.g., Flynn, Foley, and Vinnitskaya 2004; Sanz 2000). However, over the last several years we have been witness to a growing body of work that examines the acquisition of Portuguese as an L3 here in the United States. As Milleret (2014) notes, the study of Portuguese is at its “healthiest and most promising point in its history to date” (18), with more than 11,000 students enrolled in post-secondary Portuguese courses between 2006 and 2009 (Furman, Goldberg, and Lusin 2009). She attributes the interest of Spanish speakers as a primary factor responsible for the health of Portuguese language study.

In fact, based on survey data from Milleret (2012), Spanish speakers account for 45% of students enrolled in Portuguese classes. Of these 45%, L1 Spanish speakers account for 13%, heritage Spanish speakers account for 15%, and L2 Spanish speakers account for 17%. While these three groups are all speakers of English and Spanish, they differ from one another with respect to the order and context of acquisition of the two languages.

In this essay, I propose that access to these three linguistic profiles in Portuguese classes offers a unique opportunity for us to study third language acquisition here in the United States that arguably has not been afforded elsewhere. In L3 acquisition research, one of our primary interests is in the differences in acquisition processes when comparing learners with a mirror image language pairing (in this case, L1 English/L2 Spanish compared with L1 Spanish/L2 English). More recently, we have also begun to examine how mirror-image groups of sequential bilinguals compare with early bilinguals (in this case, heritage speakers of Spanish). Herein, I review a set of research questions that currently drive the field and illustrate how we have addressed these questions thus far via examination of L3 Portuguese acquisition in a US context. I then posit how our understanding of these questions can expand moving forward, calling specifically for large-scale longitudinal studies and collaboration across institutions and study abroad programs.

2. Evidence of L2 Ultimate Attainment and a Bilingual Advantage in L3 Acquisition

The question of whether learners are able to acquire properties of an L2 that are not part of the L1 is a core issue in the study of adult language acquisition, and L3 research has shed new light on this question. In studies such as Cabrelli Amaro, Iverson, and Judy (2009) and Iverson (2009, 2010), the study of L3 acquisition at the initial stages has been used as a litmus test to tease apart competing hypotheses that claim that certain grammatical features can(not) be acquired after a so-called critical period. The aforementioned studies examine the initial state of Portuguese in L1 English/L2 Portuguese learners versus L1 English/L2 Spanish/L3 Portuguese learners, with a focus on morphosyntactic properties (e.g., grammatical gender) that are common to Spanish and Portuguese but are not a part of the English grammar. Research of this type has been possible in US universities because, in addition to the 45% of Portuguese students that speak Spanish, 16% of Portuguese students are English monolinguals (Milleret 2012). Cabrelli Amaro et al. (2009) and Iverson (2009, 2010) all show that the L2 Portuguese groups do not have knowledge of the relevant properties, while the L3 Portuguese groups do. They conclude that the relevant properties that are not part of English must be acquirable in adulthood since the source of their appearance in L3 Portuguese at the onset of acquisition could only be traced back to the learners' L2 (Spanish). This type of evidence also brings new insight to the common question of whether bilinguals are better equipped than monolinguals for subsequent language acquisition, at least in terms of the facilitation of specific linguistic experience. Of course, transfer is not always facilitative, and non-facilitative transfer can potentially lead to early fossilization (see e.g. Simões, Carvalho, and Wiedemann 2004). I address this further in the discussion of the role of the language transferred (L1 or L2) in L3 development.

3. Source(s) of Transfer in L3 Acquisition at the Initial Stages

In the previous section, I report on evidence of Spanish transfer to L3 Portuguese by L1 English/L2 Spanish/L3 Portuguese learners. The source of transfer in L3 acquisition is by far the most commonly researched question, particularly in the generative tradition (see e.g., García-Mayo and Rothman 2012, for a review). Its value lies in how it affords the chance to tap into how and why previously acquired linguistic knowledge constricts acquisition of a novel language. While in L2 acquisition there is only one possible transfer source, there are two possible sources in L3 acquisition. By identifying the source of transfer at the initial stages of L3 acquisition, we

can begin to disentangle the numerous factors that contribute to the complex and dynamic nature of transfer. A number of factors have been posited to be the determining variable in L3 initial stages transfer. These include a privileged status 1) for the L1 given its entrenchment (The L1 Transfer Scenario; see, for example, Hermas 2014); and 2) for the L2 due to the similarity in which an L2 and L3 are acquired (The L2 Status Factor; see, for example, Bardel and Falk 2007). Rothman's Typological Primacy Model (TPM; see, for example, Rothman 2015) assumes that the source language is that which is determined by the linguistic parser to be structurally more similar to the L3. While these three proposals assume that one linguistic system is transferred in its entirety, the Cumulative Enhancement Model (Flynn, Foley, and Vinnitskaya 2004) claims that the source of transfer can be from any existing system. Transfer happens in a piecemeal fashion and is predicted to only be facilitative. If there is no facilitative source available, transfer will not occur.

In the last several years, a series of studies of different profiles of English/Spanish bilinguals acquiring L3 Portuguese has been published, the majority of which supports Rothman's TPM. This is especially true for the domain of morphosyntax. That is, regardless of whether the learners are L1 Spanish speakers, L2 Spanish speakers, or heritage speakers of Spanish, there is evidence of transfer of the Spanish system. This has been found for word order and relative clause attachment preferences (Rothman 2010), object expression (Giancaspro, Halloran, and Iverson 2014; Montrul, Dias, and Santos 2011), adjective placement (Rothman 2011), and raising phenomena (Cabrelli Amaro, Amaro, and Rothman 2015). Considerably less evidence is available for phonology, although Cabrelli Amaro and Rothman (2010) present evidence of Spanish transfer to Portuguese by two heritage speakers and two adult L2 Spanish learners. Preliminary results from a study by Cabrelli Amaro and Pichan (in preparation) largely support these earlier findings, this time with respect to intervocalic stop realization and vowel contrasts in speech production. In spite of the more uniform evidence we have from the domains of syntax and phonology, research from Koike and colleagues suggests that transfer of linguistic patterns to L3 Portuguese that are impacted by sociocultural norms may come from the L1. For example, Koike and Flanzer (2004) found that heritage Spanish speakers implemented Brazilian-like speech acts more than L1 English speakers in written Portuguese, citing commonalities between speech acts in Spanish- and Brazilian Portuguese-speaking communities. However, an examination of oral data using the same data collection instrument (Koike and Palmiere 2011) revealed that there was no clear-cut source of transfer, with only one pragmatic context showing clear transfer from the L1. Additional research is needed to determine the strength of Ringbom's (1986) hypothesis that L2 transfer is form-related, while meaning-related transfer will originate from the L1 (i.e., the learner's dominant language).

4. L3 Development

Given how young the field of third language acquisition is, it is not surprising that much of what we have available to us concerns the initial stages of acquisition, with less research dedicated to development. This could also have to do with the fact that advanced Portuguese courses are not particularly common in the United States, which makes it harder to get data from larger groups at very high levels of proficiency. That said, this is a question of interest to us for a number of reasons, two of which I address here: the role of the language transferred, and the phenomenon of regressive transfer.

4.1 The Role of the Language Transferred in L3 Development

Let us consider that initial stages research has shown that in the case of English/Spanish bilinguals acquiring Portuguese, Spanish is most likely to transfer (and according to the TPM, it is assumed to transfer in its entirety). When full transfer occurs, we know that there will be

facilitative transfer as well as non-facilitative transfer. The learning task is then of course to overcome non-facilitative transfer, which, as is the case in L2 acquisition, can be persistent (see e.g., Carvalho and da Silva, 2006 and Montrul et al. 2011 for evidence of Spanish influence in intermediate Portuguese speakers). A newer line of research examines L3 development to better understand what overcoming transfer looks like for the different bilingual profiles that I discuss here. Cabrelli Amaro and Rothman (2010) hypothesized that non-facilitative transfer in L3 Portuguese might be easier to overcome depending on whether Spanish was acquired in childhood or adulthood. While Hermas (2014) and Slabakova and García-Mayo (2015) have shown that non-facilitative transfer can be overcome in L3 acquisition, it was not known how mirror image groups would compare developmentally after initial non-facilitative transfer. Specifically, it was proposed that L1 Spanish learners take longer than L2 Spanish learners to acquire a property in Portuguese because of L1 versus L2 experience. The length of experience with the L1 is thought to (at least temporarily) impede the mechanisms that drive acquisition. Evidence to support this hypothesis has been found for morphosyntactic elements as well as for reaction time in phonological processing. Cabrelli Amaro, Iverson, Giancaspro, and Halloran (forthcoming) investigated the status of differential object marking in L3 Portuguese, and found that initial stages Portuguese learners still rely on Spanish regardless of whether Spanish is the L1 or L2. However, the L2 Spanish advanced Portuguese learners pattern with the native Portuguese control group while the L1 Spanish advanced Portuguese learners pattern with the initial stages Portuguese learners. In a study of raising across a dative experiencer, Cabrelli Amaro (2015) compares initial stages data from Cabrelli Amaro et al. (2015a) with data from advanced Portuguese learners. Similarly to Cabrelli Amaro et al. (2016), the cross-sectional comparison reveals that the advanced L1 Spanish group is different than the native Portuguese control and the L2 Spanish group, while the L2 Spanish group is not different than the control. In spite of this difference, a comparison of the L1 Spanish initial stages and advanced data reveals a significant difference, which is indicative of progression towards the Portuguese target (albeit at a slower pace than the L2 Spanish group). Finally, Cabrelli Amaro (2015b) presents a similar finding in a study of word-final vowel reduction. While there was no difference found between L1 Spanish and L2 Spanish advanced learners of Portuguese in terms of accuracy in an auditory preference task, L2 Spanish learners selected accurate responses significantly faster than L1 Spanish learners. Taken together, these studies indicate that development of mental representation and processing routines may be slower for learners that transfer their L1.

The studies discussed in this section center on differential rates of acquisition driven by age of acquisition and dominance, and assume that the processes involved are unconscious rather than metalinguistic. However, whether learners acquire Spanish in a classroom or naturalistic context may correlate with rate of L3 acquisition. L2 Spanish speakers have been found to count on explicit learning strategies in the L3 Portuguese classroom, while L1 Spanish and heritage Spanish speakers favor implicit strategies (Carvalho and Silva 2006; Child 2017). It would appear that higher metalinguistic awareness helps L2 Spanish learners to overcome non-facilitative surface transfer more quickly (e.g., Johnson 2004) and to capitalize on facilitative transfer of rule-based strategies (e.g., Child 2014). This difference is indicative of the strength of Spanish transfer in L3 Portuguese; these L1 Spanish learners have acquired some of their L2 English in a formal context, but continue to rely on implicit strategies even though they have presumably made use of explicit strategies at some point in the acquisition of their L2.

4.2 Regressive Transfer

Just as existing linguistic systems influence the acquisition of a novel system (in this case, an L3), an L3 can also influence the L1 and L2. The phenomenon of Portuguese regressive transfer to the L1 and/or L2 has been investigated in terms of facilitative and non-facilitative transfer, and evidence of regressive transfer has been found in both systems at varying levels of L3 proficiency.

In his study of mood expression, Child (2014) found that data from L2 Spanish learners acquiring L3 Portuguese, unlike those of their L1 Spanish and heritage speaker counterparts, yielded higher rates of accuracy on a Portuguese task taken after 10 weeks of instruction than the Spanish task that they completed at the L3 initial state. Based on this finding, it is possible to speculate that this learner group's Spanish accuracy score would improve if they were to have completed a Spanish post-test at the 10-week mark. Such an outcome would bolster findings with different language pairings comparing L2 and L3 learners (e.g., Tsang 2015), and points to the possibility that L3 acquisition modulates non-facilitative L1 to L2 transfer. Cabrelli Amaro (2016) focused on non-facilitative regressive transfer and compared two types of English/Spanish bilinguals acquiring L3 Portuguese to determine whether L1 or L2 Spanish systems are more vulnerable to L3 influence, that is, whether the constitution of phonological systems acquired in adulthood is less stable than systems acquired in childhood. Perceptual preferences appeared to remain stable for L1 and L2 Spanish learners. At the individual level, she found evidence of L3 Portuguese reduced vowels in the Spanish productions of L1 Spanish and L2 Spanish speakers at intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency. This is not surprising, given the extensive literature on phonetic/phonological attrition. However, looking at the aggregate means, only the L2 Spanish group produced vowels that were not Spanish-like, evidence of greater instability in speech production patterns in late-acquired systems. Similar findings come from Cabrelli Amaro's (2017) study of raising across a dative experiencer. Testing many of the same learners from Cabrelli Amaro (2016), she shows that L2 Spanish speakers are more accepting of structures that are ungrammatical in Spanish (but grammatical in Portuguese) than L1 Spanish speakers. Thus, while there might be a direct benefit to a previously fossilized L2 in the case of elements that are similar in Spanish and Portuguese but different in English, L2 Spanish speakers might be expected to struggle more to maintain their late-acquired Spanish system than their L1 Spanish counterparts. It remains to be seen how heritage speakers' speech production is affected and the role that Spanish dominance might play in differential stability of the Spanish system.

5. Moving Forward via Longitudinal Investigation

Although I would argue that the evidence regarding initial stages transfer is quite convincing for the language triad discussed herein, there is still a lot of ground to cover in order to have a holistic view of the processes that comprise third language acquisition. Via longitudinal investigation, we can cover a lot of this ground and improve upon methodological shortcomings while doing so.

Existing developmental data come from a cross-section of learners. While cross-sectional data are logistically more feasible to collect than longitudinal data, cross-sectional data are less than ideal in third language acquisition research. Even when we control our participant pools so that they are as similar as possible across proficiency levels (and across studies), inter-learner variation is virtually impossible to control for. Relatedly, we face the challenge of establishing the composition of each learner's L3 initial state; if we want to have a better picture of the L3 developmental path, we need to know what each learner's L1 and L2 looked like prior to Portuguese exposure. In studies such as Cabrelli Amaro (2016) and Cabrelli Amaro et al. (2015), the authors assume that the L3 learners had acquired the structures under investigation in both their L1 and L2. This assumption is based on independent L3 initial stages data; the intermediate and advanced L3 learners that are tested are not the same learners as the L3 initial stages learners that they are compared to. It is therefore possible that some of the intermediate or advanced learners had not acquired the structure in the L2, or perhaps that the structure in their L1 has undergone modification due to L2 influence. Many of the L3 studies discussed in this essay were designed so that the phenomenon that is tested presents similarly in Portuguese and English but differently in Spanish. Thus, if an intermediate or advanced L2 Spanish learner appears to

have converged on the Portuguese target, it is possible that the learner transferred Spanish, but that they had never acquired the phenomenon under investigation (thereby relying on English). Cabrelli Amaro (2013) warns of this in her report of a longitudinal L3 case study. She follows a near-native L2 Spanish speaker, collecting Spanish data at the L3 initial state before exposure to Portuguese. She finds that prior to exposure, the speaker had only partially converged on the Spanish vocalic target even though he met the global criteria to be considered a near-native speaker. We therefore cannot assume that learners that are considered near-native have all of the same linguistic patterns as a native speaker or even a separate group of initial stages L3 learners. In a longitudinal investigation, we can use each learner as his or her own control. We can follow them from the onset of L3 acquisition throughout development towards L3 target-like convergence, and we can observe potential regressive transfer to the L1 and/or L2. We can examine each of the questions outlined in this essay for individual learners and present a holistic account of what L3 acquisition looks like for learners from each of the three profiles. Another benefit of longitudinal investigation is that we are not limited to examining near-native speakers of the L2 (or non-dominant language, in the case of most heritage speakers). We can examine the effect of proficiency in transfer patterns and determine whether learners must acquire a specific level of proficiency in order for transfer to occur, whether L3 competence is affected by proficiency in existing languages, and whether less-developed systems will be more susceptible to regressive influence than systems that are native-like. None of these questions have been investigated for the language triad described here.

6. Conclusion

In this first part of the twenty-first century, the investigation of L3 Portuguese has made a valuable contribution to the theoretical and empirical foundations of third language acquisition. We have begun to understand how English-Spanish bilinguals (differentially) employ their existing linguistic systems when learning Portuguese, and how Portuguese (differentially) interacts with these learners' English and Spanish systems. The potential to improve upon this mark is very high, but there is no doubt that the call made here for large-scale longitudinal research is a tall order. To realize the goal of modeling L3 development, collaboration between institutions will be paramount. Specifically, joint efforts between programs that offer a Portuguese minor or major (typically doctoral institutions, as noted by Milleret 2012) will allow us to follow students across multiple semesters of study. In addition, we can work with university-affiliated and private study abroad programs in Brazil and stateside immersion programs such as the Portuguese School at Middlebury College to observe learners over time in different contexts of acquisition, comparing the interaction of linguistic systems in a classroom versus immersion setting. We can also follow learners between settings. For example, we can examine learners in an immersion setting and then determine how persistent any observed Portuguese effects on existing systems are once the learner leaves the immersion setting. It will be of interest to follow learners like these more closely to determine the rate at which influence decreases, as well as the rate at which the L3 attrites (see Bardovi-Harlig and Stringer 2010, for a review of attrition of languages acquired in adulthood).

Ultimately, a clearer understanding of the nature of transfer to an L3 and L3 developmental patterns will have direct implications for Portuguese classroom practice. The more we understand about the nature of the existing knowledge that learners rely on and how the learners' Spanish and Portuguese systems interact throughout development, the more efficient and effective our curricula can be. While we have seen evidence of common threads in the three learner profiles, we also see a number of differences that indicate a need for differentiated instruction in order to accommodate late sequential and early bilinguals that share the same classroom. Innovations in

pedagogical practices will in turn inform the questions of L3 acquisition that I have elaborated on herein, propelling a valuable reciprocal relationship that will advance the field.

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Response 1 to “The Impact of Portuguese on the Study of Third Language Acquisition”



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Keywords: bilingualism/bilinguismo, differentiated instruction/instrução diferenciada, pedagogy/pedagogia, Portuguese/português, Spanish/español, third language acquisition/aquisição de terceira língua

Without question, the presence in Portuguese classes of a large number of Spanish speakers offers a fruitful field for research on L3 acquisition. From an applied linguistics perspective, this research suggests important implications for the teaching of Portuguese to Spanish speakers, as briefly discussed by Jennifer Cabrelli Amaro in the last paragraph of her essay. I would like to expand on that discussion by focusing on several specific research findings mentioned by Cabrelli Amaro and their implications for the teaching of Portuguese to speakers of Spanish.

Offer Separate Portuguese Courses for Spanish Speakers

The most obvious pedagogical implication of research on L3 acquisition of Portuguese is that Spanish speakers benefit from Portuguese classes that are tailored to their needs. Cabrelli Amaro cites research suggesting that bilinguals are better equipped than monolinguals for subsequent language acquisition, and that L3 learners of Portuguese are able to transfer morphosyntactic properties of Spanish. These findings lend empirical support to the popular knowledge that Spanish speakers learn Portuguese more quickly and efficiently than do monolingual English speakers. In light of this evidence, it stands to reason that Spanish speakers merit separate Portuguese classes and curriculum.

Unfortunately, the majority of institutions that offer Portuguese programs do not yet offer separate courses for Spanish speakers, despite the fact that these students comprise 45% or more of enrollments in Portuguese courses. In a survey of Portuguese programs in the United States, of 107 institutions that completed the survey, only 50 offered separate beginning-level Portuguese courses for Spanish speakers, and only 24 offered intermediate-level courses for these students (see Bateman 2014).

Adopt a Contrastive Approach

Bateman’s (2014) study also found that most textbooks used for teaching Portuguese to Spanish speakers in the United States are designed for monolingual speakers of English. Spanish speakers using these materials are left on their own to develop mental representations of the similarities and differences between Portuguese and Spanish, which the three groups of Spanish speakers—L1 speakers, L2 speakers, and heritage speakers—may not be equally equipped to do.

Cabrelli Amaro cites multiple studies suggesting that L1 and heritage speakers of Spanish take longer to overcome non-facilitative transfer when learning Portuguese than do learners who acquired Spanish as adults. Conversely, L2 learners of Spanish seem to suffer more from regressive transfer from Portuguese, making it more difficult for them to maintain their late-acquired Spanish system. I would suggest that all three groups of learners could benefit from an approach that explicitly compares and contrasts the morphosyntactic, lexical, and phonological elements of the two languages.

Although the value of contrastive analysis has been debated by linguists, such an approach appears to benefit Spanish speakers learning Portuguese. For example, in a survey of 72 students enrolled in a Spanish for Portuguese speakers course, Child (2013) found that all three groups of students wanted more time devoted to grammar and pronunciation, with explicit attention to both similarities and differences between the two languages. Child suggests that this type of contrastive approach can build metalinguistic awareness that helps learners overcome non-facilitative transfer.

Teach Language Learning Strategies

A related issue is students' use of language learning strategies. According to studies summarized by Cabrelli Amaro, L2 Spanish speakers appear to possess a greater degree of metalinguistic awareness than do L1 and heritage speakers of Spanish, allowing them to make greater explicit use of strategies for learning Portuguese. Native Spanish speakers, and especially heritage speakers who may have never formally studied either Spanish or English, may benefit from instruction on language learning strategies. Such instruction may help these learners to capitalize on facilitative transfer from Spanish and to overcome non-facilitative transfer.

Teach Sociocultural Aspects of Language

As Cabrelli Amaro points out, research demonstrating that heritage Spanish speakers implement Brazilian-like speech acts more than L1 English speakers do suggests that transfer of linguistic patterns that are impacted by sociocultural norms may come from the L1. It stands to reason, then, that L1 Spanish speakers may benefit from Portuguese instruction linking language with its sociocultural context.

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Response 2 to “The Impact of Portuguese on the Study of Third Language Acquisition”



The Prospects for Portuguese for Spanish Speakers: Potentializing Multicompetence

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Keywords: multicompetence/multicompetência, Portuguese/português, Portuguese for Spanish speakers/português para falantes de espanhol, third language acquisition/aquisição de uma terceira língua, trilingualism/trilinguismo

How much have we progressed in the area of Portuguese for Spanish speakers (PSS) in the United States? The essay provides a thorough examination of previous research, raising issues of linguistic multicompetence also relevant to the field of third language acquisition (TLA). It dialogues with other research being done in Europe and elsewhere (see Aronin and Hufeisen 2009: 4; Cenoz, Hufeisen, and Jessner 2001: 2–3; De Angelis 2007: 10; Lindqvist and Bardel 2010: 87; Ó Laoire 2005: 82, and the role of language transfer in the learning process. PSS in the United States exists since the 1970s, gaining increased attention in the United States in the last decade with the support of associations such as AATSP and ACTFL, and conferences specifically tailored to the field (Carvalho 2013: 1).

The author of the article proposes this particular context in the United States as a unique research setting where we encounter Spanish bilinguals, Spanish heritage learners, and English-speakers who learned Spanish as an L2. Rather than focusing on language teaching, the article successfully summarizes main acquisition theories, such as the role of interlanguage transfer, typology, recency, and proficiency of the L1 and L2 as factors that impact L3 learning, and consequently useful to PSS. Also relevant is the order and age of acquisition of the second and third language, as well as the role of metalinguistic awareness to their L3 learning process.

As we know, transfer is a prominent question guiding current research in both TLA and PSS, and a better understanding of the process will allow us to design programs that capitalize on the strengths and address weaknesses of learning a similar language appropriately (Åkerberg 2002: 1–2). I am glad to see a growing concern with this developing field, thus creating this discussion on how to implement a curriculum tailored appropriately to this subgroup of students.

Our main concern when discussing the teaching of similar languages should be on the attention given to form in a contextualized manner, in order to address negative and positive transfer (which is not completely addressed in TLA or SLAT in general) (Carvalho, Luna Freire, and Silva 2010: 73). We need to understand these processes in order to better prepare courses, focusing on language that is relevant to their linguistic background and helping students overcome interlanguage faster. This is particularly visible when the author discusses the need for collaboration for a large-scale longitudinal research, and for more dialogue about the impact of pedagogical practices and L3 acquisition.

Ultimately, the repercussions of this research will create a better understanding of the learners' acquisition processes, and improved pedagogical practices, including for the learning of other

Romance languages. The need to study subsequent language development is evident, and how these theories impacts high intermediate and advanced students (Cabrelli Amaro, Flynn, and Rothman 2012: 5) because, as mentioned by the author, most of the research currently available is being done at the beginner levels.

Other concerns, perhaps not mentioned but of equal importance is the maintenance of such an enrolment growth that we have recently experienced in the United States, thinking of program development as we worry about the shrinking numbers in the humanities in general. Would other possibilities exist to collaborate with different departments to become more visible and stronger, and thus continue to boost our presence in academic institutions? Also, how do we capitalize on these Spanish-speaking students and motivate them to add a third language to their linguistic repertoire?

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