

# Issues in instructed third language acquisition involving German as a first or second foreign language: Introduction

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Issues confronting teachers of German as a first and second foreign language are the focus of the current volume of papers, given at the **Third International Conference on Trilingualism and Third Language Acquisition** in Tralee, Ireland in September 2003. In the contexts of the three studies included here, the teaching of German constitutes instructed third language acquisition.

Although there has been a growing corpus of research recently on third language acquisition, we are still far from understanding all the details of the process of acquisition. Many factors interact in third language acquisition e.g., attitude, motivation, typological factors, L2 factors, and earlier learning experience. Some of these factors are discussed in the three papers set in three different cultural contexts where German is taught: Taiwan, Turkey, Saarbrücken (Germany) and Buc (France).

**Chris Merkelbach's** study shows that the first foreign language that students study in Taiwan, i.e. English, is influential in attitude formation towards third language learning such as German, French or Spanish. The study also shows that teaching styles and methods in the L2 can be an important factor in determining the learning strategies students adopt in the third language learning process. This paper discusses some of the problems tertiary language teachers encounter as a result of poor language teaching at an earlier stage of student language development. Suggestions are made from the point of view of a German teacher on how to minimize the negative influences created by the teaching of English as a second language on further language studies.

**Sofia Stratilaski's** study of code-switching based on oral data elicited from French-German bilingual speakers in two school environments in Saarbrücken (Germany) and Buc (France) focuses on the relationship between social representations of languages and plurilingual competence. She finds that learners' perception of the distance or proximity between languages (psychotypology) is an important predictor of L3-acquisition and use. Significant differences were found in learners' representations of languages in interaction and their respective operation in the construction of linguistic knowledge and skills. The results suggest that representations are a key component in the language acquisition process and are constructed in relation to linguistic systems, probable similarities and differences and possible relationships between them.

The third study conducted in Turkey by **Güray König** looks at the interesting question of attitudes and motivation in the third language, an area that has scarcely been covered in the research on trilingualism to date. This paper is a first attempt to look into trilingualism from a social-psychological perspective in Turkey. Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model is taken as a framework to investigate the orientation, motivation and attitudes of Turkish university students learning a second foreign language voluntarily. The informants of the study are 40 university students who are native speakers of Turkish and are proficient in English. The educational and social orientation, motivation and attitudes of the students are investigated with scales adapted from studies already used in second language acquisition. It shows that trilingual university students have a strong orientation and motivation in and a positive attitude toward learning any second foreign language, including German.

These papers call for reflection and re-examination of current approaches in trilingual pedagogical contexts. Readers are invited to make their own judgements, draw their own conclusions or find inspiration in these studies in the light of their own research and/or teaching experience.

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