



Cross Linguistic Influence of an L3 on L1 and L2

Katharine Lammiman

Introduction

In the following research report I am going to explore the cross-linguistic influence (CLI) of an L3 to the L1 and L2. I chose this topic due to its high profile in recent research and as a result of the unique nature of my participant's language use and change. Third language acquisition plays an important role in connecting multilingualism and the field of SLA. More specifically, the interest in third language users has both sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic foundations: from a sociolinguistic perspective, the increasing mobility of the world has resulted in social and educational situations in which learning more than two languages is not exceptional. (Cenoz, 2001:1) Alternatively, from a psycholinguistic perspective, language acquisition research presents specific characteristics derived from the fact that third language learners are experienced learners with a more complex competence than monolinguals. Interestingly, the notion of CLI is a term proposed to include 'such phenomena as "transfer", "interference", "borrowing", and L2-related aspects of language loss' (Sharwood Smith and Kellerman, 1986:1). Through a consideration of CLI and interlanguage interaction, an exploration and analysis of my participant's experiences will be enriched. Thus, through a consideration of the available literature, an interview with a language learner and a subsequent analysis of the data received, I hope to display a report of the CLI/transfer of L3 on the L1 and L2.

Literature Review

Multilingualism is fairly under researched area, however, its increasing importance has led to an increasing popularity among scholars. Significantly, Cook et al. considered the increased 'metalinguistic awareness' of bilinguals over monolinguals. They put this result down to 'the changed state of the L2 user's mind', which would become yet more complex in the case of a multilingual. (Cook et al., 2000:212) This realisation led to an increased interest in multilingualism as figures suggested that it applied to the majority. Moreover, research carried out on CLI has been used predominantly to refer to the transfer from L1 to L2, however, little interest has been generated in the L2 to L1/L3 or L3 to L1/L2 transfer. CLI/transfer is considered implicit in the acquisition of multiple languages; however, due to the lack of L3 specific literature, some of the literature that I will draw from will be specific to the L2- L1 relationship. Despite the wide-ranging influences that an L3 may have on the L1 and L2, I am going to focus on the following: lexical/ language borrowing, language loss and code-blending. I will consider these influences in terms of a number of factors, namely, language distance, length of residence and language status/ recency. Through an exploration of literature in these areas, I hope to go some way in explaining the scope of CLI.

Language distance

Importantly, Kellerman was at the forefront of research proposing that language distance, or 'psychotypology' (referring to the structural differences and similarities between languages) affected and promoted CLI between languages. (Kellerman, 1983) Language distance can be

defined as having an objective and a subjective side respectively: ‘the objective side is called *language typology*, which focuses on classifying languages according to their structural characteristics. *Typological distance* or *closeness* usually goes together with cultural closeness or distance, but there is no one-to-one relationship between the two because culture is generally significantly influenced by geographical distance.’ (Kecskes and Papp, 2000:88) Importantly, Kecskes and Papp examined the ‘cognate relations’ between languages and deduced that connecting words between language groups (e.g. Germanic or Romantic) may aid, but may also hinder language learning. Nonetheless, they summarised that ‘multilingual development is usually longer and more difficult for language learners if their languages and cultures are distant.’ (Kecskes and Papp, 2000:104) Ultimately, ‘psychotypology’ can be seen as central to CLI in multilinguals.

Interlanguage transfer

Importantly, Angelis and Selinker’s (2001) research on the notion *interlanguage transfer* revealed the presence of borrowing. They interviewed two multilingual subjects, where S1 spoke English-Spanish-Italian and S2 was a British man with two interlanguages (Spanish and Italian). Technically, ‘a speaker of three languages (one native and two non-native languages) may potentially mix the components of all his/her language systems, and is faced with the task of keeping his/her languages apart in production...One language is selected, but other languages can be active or latent. Words are chosen from the selected language or from the active language and, as a last resort, from the dormant language.’ (Angelis and Selinker, 2001:45) Nonetheless, they deduced that both participants began to use their Spanish in place of their Italian, as a substitute, when their Italian was not sufficient. This indicates interlanguage ‘borrowing’ and a relationship between active language use (the language status) and proficiency. The relationship between language competency and language usage can be defined as ‘recency’. In addition, Angelis (2005) proposed the ‘association of foreignness’. (2005:11) He suggested that the L2, as non-native, had a more privileged status for lexical transfer with the L3 than the native L1. This suggests that transfer may occur between L2-L3, but may also occur between L3-L2.

Lexical borrowing

A close psychotypological distance between the L3 and L2 may incite lexical borrowing, implying that CLI is not exclusive to L1-L2/L2-L1 transfers. Specifically, Ringbom’s 1986 study on Finnish and Swedish multilingual’s examined the data of essays written in English (L3) by Finnish students, with Swedish as a second language. He found a much stronger connection (interlanguage transfer) between Swedish (L2) and English (L3) than between Finnish (L1) and English (L3). Moreover, the experiment showed that lexical borrowing occurs between languages that are *close* (typologically), irrelevant of the order they were learned in. Similarly, Fouser (2001) analysed the relationship between Japanese (L2) and Korean (L3). He focused on the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of communicative competence and reported that learners of Korean felt that their Japanese helped them learn Korean because they are typologically closer to each other than the L1, English. Ultimately, this study shows that the close linguistic distance between L2 and L3 has an affect on both L3 acquisition and cross-linguistic borrowing between the L2 and L3.

Language Loss

Laufer (2001) highlighted the importance of length of residence and the affect of language loss in his study, ‘*The Influence of L2 on L1 Collocation Knowledge and on L1 lexical diversity in free written expression*’. In particular, he proposed that ‘the longer the residence, the less uniform people became in their L1 knowledge. This implies that some other factors

(possibly memory, L1 maintenance, identification with L1 groups etc..) may have become more influential'. (Laufer, 2001:25) More specifically, 'there was a significant difference in lexical richness, i.e. the percentage of frequent and non-frequent words, and also in the number of words that the groups could produce. The percentage of non-frequent words declined as the length of residence increased, as did the number of words in the essays.' (Laufer, 2001:28) Thus, the length of residence was proven to have a considerable affect on the change in the L1. Importantly, although this study focuses on an L2 environment, it may also apply it to the complex L3 environment, in which case, we would see changes in both the use and knowledge of the L1 and the L2.

Equally, Scott Jarvis' research, *'Probing the effects of the L2 on the L1: A Case study'* explored CLI within the context of length of residence. He focused on one person (a bilingual) whose L1 had taken on some characteristics of her L2. Specifically, they 'often incorporate their knowledge of English into their use of Finnish, especially through code-switching, lexical borrowing and lexicosemantic transfer'. (Jarvis, 2001:83) The L2 effects detected were L1 attrition and L1 maintenance. However, he identified that 'L2 induced patterns do not seem to have replaced or led to a deterioration in L1 knowledge, but instead seem to have been added to L1 competence as additional options of expression.' (Jarvis, 2001:101) Ultimately, he concluded that 'Immigrants begin to incorporate L2 influenced options into their L1 knowledge, and eventually discontinue using the original L1-based alternatives. After this, the original L1 based alternatives may even become inaccessible, or lost'. (Jarvis, 2001:101) Despite the specific L2-L1 focus of this study, the investigation of length of residency and usage are applicable to the acquisition and usage of an L3. Therefore, it can be concluded that language proficiency, loss and maintenance- whether of L3/L2/L1- is dependent on language usage and length of residence in a host environment.

Code-blending

Porte considered code blending between the L2 and L1. She examined L1 attrition in an L2 environment, which she later described as L1 erosion. Specifically, 'deviance was found mainly in the lexicon where L2 nouns and nominal groups were inserted into an L1 syntactic environment'. (Porte, 2001:109) In addition, she found code-blending of 'spontaneous expressions of linguistic invention more akin to language play between knowledgeable friends, than to unseen, incipient effects on L1 attrition, distinctively English sounds were attached to typical Spanish endings.' (Porte, 2001:116) This included the addition of L2 verb/noun endings onto L1 words and code-blending L2 words into L1 syntax. Essentially, Porte proved that code blending took place as a result of CLI of L2 on the L1. Again, this could be applied to the acquisition of an L3, in which L3 language play affects both the L1 and L2. Balcom (2003) also explored the influence of code-switching, focusing on middle constructions as an area through which CLI may occur. Ultimately, there are other factors such as motivation, context of use, and proficiency that may affect the transfer between languages, however, these research papers present a wide enough scope of CLI and will aid my analysis of the interview.

Methodology

The participating learner

Gender: Female

Nationality: British

Current status: Undergraduate at Nottingham University, doing Economics with Spanish and Portuguese, currently on a year abroad

Target Language: Portuguese (L3)

I chose my participant on the basis that she is a very unique case study. Her language learning history is very interesting: her first language (mother tongue) is English; she has been exposed to Spanish since birth and is fluent (her family have a house in Spain which they visit for 6 weeks every summer); she learnt Portuguese at university and is native-like after only 3 years of learning, which exposes her highly motivated attitude to language learning. Below is a more detailed history of her L2 and L3:

Spanish (L2)

- Began picking up words passively from the earliest she can remember during summers in Spanish, making friends with Spanish people from her village.
- Began learning Spanish at school at 12/13, did GCSE early and A level Spanish.
- Carried on studying Spanish at University
- Currently on a year abroad spending 6 months at Spanish University, speaking both Spanish and English with her fellow students
- She continues to keep in touch with Spanish friends from her local village via email, skype, phone and blackberry messenger.

Portuguese (L3)

- Began studying Portuguese at University (2 years).
- Spent a month in Lisbon, doing a language course and living with Portuguese people.
- She recently returned from 6 months in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, living with Portuguese people and speaking very little English.
- Still in contact, via email, skype and Blackberry Messenger with Brazillian Portuguese friends.

The Interview Schedule

Prior to the interview I spent some time sourcing and researching my chosen subject area, which has received very little attention. I wanted to investigate not only the affects of her L3 on her L2 and L1, but specific examples that would bring stronger evidence of the changes. Then I looked into ways of carrying out the interview: I wanted to avoid leading the answers so opted to ask open questions. I came up with six ‘grand tour’ questions, to allow ‘maximum flexibility to follow the interviewee in unpredictable directions, with only minimal interference from the research agenda.’ (Dornyei, 2007) In essence, although I covered all the questions intended, the order and direction that I asked them adapted as the interview progressed. I let my interviewee deviate and expand on insights; therefore the order and relevance of some of the material may be questioned. Nevertheless, I feel that by allowing certain deviation provided some of the most stimulating and significant information. I made sure that I summarised my aim and expectations of the interview in my opening statement and ended the interview by recapping the main points and allowing my interviewee to add her own final summary.

The procedures used

Prior to the interview, we have both had a keen interest in language learning and have already discussed a number of language learning topics. Coincidentally, after returning from Brazil the participant notified me of the changed nature of her English and I proposed the basics of my research project. By giving her time to think about the subject I believe I increased the opportunity of meaningful and rich material.

The interview took place on the 26/04/10, it was completed over Skype and recorded on a voice recorder; this was a result of my interviewee studying abroad in Granada, Spain. For the most part, it ran smoothly, however an issue did arise when within the first minute of the conversation the reception cut out. Although this disrupted the flow of the conversation, we were only covering her language learning history so no real insights were interrupted and luckily, this did not occur again. Overall, I believe that, with the complex topic in mind, my questions and my interviewee's answers produced very insightful data. The interview transcript is provided as an appendix to this study and all quotations from the interview included in the analysis below have been taken from this source.

Analysis of the interview data

Portuguese (L3) influence on Spanish (L2)

Language distance

The interaction between the participant's L3 (Portuguese) and L2 (Spanish) became a central topic of conversation. She first observed the language distance between Spanish and Portuguese and Spanish's subsequent influence on her Portuguese. She described: 'I think once you've learnt one romantic language, learning others is a lot easier because they're all sort of based on a similar grammar.' This supports Kellerman's (1986) research on linguistic distance and suggests that the speed with which she became fluent is partly dependant on her previous knowledge of an L2. She also highlighted the following: 'When your listening, your not listening to the words, your understanding the whole content.' These observations support the notion that language learning changes the way that a monolingual thinks. (Cook et al, 2002) Moreover, it supports the notion of psychotopology as a positive CLI and suggests that the use of previously learned languages as a substitute and framework helps the learner's conceptual understanding. (Angelis et al, 2001) Nonetheless, Spanish and Portuguese are very similar languages and have similar vocabulary; therefore confusion may arise between the different meanings and interpretations in 'cognate words'. She observed:

'In Spanish and Portuguese something that is quite hard for foreigners to pick up is that the word 'for' has got two meanings. Its got two words in Spanish and in Portuguese: 'Por' and 'para'. The thing is, in Spanish and Portuguese the meanings are different.'

The reference to this specific lexical difference is evidence of the close psychotopology between the languages. Essentially, the 'foreign language affect' and the close psychotypological distance between these languages seem to be factors influencing this transfer.

Lexical/syntactic borrowing

The participant focused on the CLI of Portuguese on her Spanish. In particular, she noted this influence after a period of isolation, (while abroad in Brazil) in which she spoke Portuguese, very limited English and no Spanish. She described that 'When I'm speaking Spanish, Portuguese comes into my head a lot. When I'm speaking English no.' This suggests that her Portuguese may transfer into her Spanish, but not her English. This supports the 'foreign language affect' (Angelis, 2005) whilst, implying that her current Portuguese proficiency has overtaken her current Spanish proficiency.

The participant described in some detail the unique nature of transfer from Portuguese to Spanish. She highlighted the difference between the grammar and tense of Portuguese and

Spanish: ‘In Brazil, they use a lot of the... participle and pretorite the whole time, whereas in Spanish you use a lot more of the past participle and a lot more present.’ The CLI of her Portuguese on her Spanish grammar and tense can be seen as a result of isolation in an L3 environment, where she spoke very little Spanish. Equally, she emphasises the affect that Portuguese had on her sentence structure. She explained that, ‘in Portuguese they put pronouns after the word quite a lot of the time, whereas in Spanish its always before.’ The CLI of Portuguese to Spanish can be seen through this syntactic borrowing. Interestingly, she admits to using ‘bits of either’ in situations where both Spanish and Portuguese are being spoken together whilst in Granada, further revealing the complex nature of language borrowing and mixing. Ultimately, her acquisition and native-like competence in Portuguese has provoked changes in her knowledge and use of Spanish.

Portuguese (L3) influence on English (L1)

Language loss/erosion

The affect of Portuguese on the participant’s English is exceptionally unique due to the relatively short period she spent in Brazil and the subsequent modifications to her native tongue. For example, she shared the following: ‘my vocabulary got a lot...the range shrunk. I don’t have as many big words rolling off my tongue.’ Although unusual, this seems to support the length of residence research, (Laufer, 2001) along with individual differences, that dictate the quality of her L1. Essentially, it could also be observed that language attrition has occurred as a result of her lack of L1 use during her time abroad. She added that her use of fillers had increased in her English:

‘Well, when my mum came out to Rio, she almost had a breakdown cos I say ‘like’ the whole time. I said it quite a lot before I went away, but that’s the whole thing, like, ‘like’ and ‘lol’ I use to fill out my speech.’

The decrease in her vocabulary and increase in her use of fillers both appear to be results of her reduced English use. For example, as her Mother highlighted and as the transcript demonstrates, she has started to use words ‘like’ and ‘thing’ more frequently. By looking at the dialogue directly, we are made aware of the abundance of fillers that she uses and I specifically remember a number of pauses dictating the interview as the participant thought of the right words to say. In fact, I decided to keep much of the ‘surface phenomena’ in the interview transcript in order to convey the extent to which her English had been affected. In essence, the affects that her Portuguese has had on her English are substantial and may be seen as a result of her length of residence in Brazil.

The participant seemed concerned about returning to England because her English syntactic knowledge was not focused. For example, she highlighted:

‘I’m kind of intrigued as to when I get back in England, because when I have to write more complex stuff in English, I do have to think, and the words I have to use don’t come easily. How I’m going to phrase something, it just doesn’t come, well, I mean obviously it comes to me naturally, because its my first language, but I don’t feel like I can write as well.’

She admitted to an increase in syntactic processing and a loss of lexical items within her L1 knowledge. The lack of use and the length isolation, whilst speaking predominantly Portuguese in Brazil, may be seen as the main factors contributing to these affects.

Syntactic borrowing

Moreover, the participant described the affect of Portuguese on her English syntax. She described, ‘sometimes, where you would use past tense in Portuguese I now use it in English. If I think quickly and write something.’ This is highly interesting, as her acquisition of Portuguese and isolation for a short period has had such a dramatic affect on her English. She also highlighted:

‘When I was in Brazil, if I spoke English with my Portuguese friends, to practice their English, I found that speaking English to foreigners, you speak it using the same sort of tenses that you would use in Portuguese, in the other language.’

She reveals that she currently uses Portuguese syntactic structures in her English syntax. This is highly unusual and shows the complexity and extent to which interlanguage transfer has occurred in her L1. In a similar way, the participant told me about her experiences of lexical borrowing between Portuguese and English. She highlighted, ‘things like “LOL” (a word popularly used in Rio- Portuguese- that she started to say after a couple of months of being out there) are just easy, a shortcut in expressing yourself.’ The participant’s acquisition and transfer of words and phrases from Portuguese into English convey further the dramatic extent of linguistic borrowing that occurred as a result of her isolation and immersion into the Portuguese language and culture.

Code-blending

In a similar way, the participant’s Portuguese influence in her English is revealed in her use of communicative technology. She shared that ‘with things like Blackberry messenger, cos I’m always messaging people in Spanish, Portuguese and English, three different languages, I’ll be sending a message to someone in Spanish, when I’m meant to be writing it in Portuguese and I’ve actually sent people messages in Portuguese or Spanish when it’s an English friend.’ This confusion may be seen as a technical memory issue, however, there also seems to be some confusion in her lexical constructions. For example, the message she sent me the day prior to the interview read as follows: ‘yes tomoras would be perfect for a skype interview’. She seemed to have mixed and combined the English word ‘tomorrow’ with a Portuguese ending ‘-as’. This supports Porte’s (2003) study on codeblending and language play. Moreover, this is highly unusual and unique. She has constructed personal words with elements from both languages, indicating the strong connection between her languages.

In essence, throughout the interview, I was made aware of the confusion inherent in the participant’s lexicon and between her language systems. This may be a result of her recent immersion in a Portuguese language community and subsequent living in Spain; however, it is hard to escape the strong CLI’s and connections between her languages. She revealed:

‘I’m just confused. Well, I have to see, you know at the moment I’m speaking all three... I was in France for a week a month ago. I wasn’t speaking Spanish or Portuguese and I spoke the odd bit of French and mainly English. I came back and my head felt like it might explode. I was in a lecture and I was like ‘oh my god’, I wasn’t following at all.’

This observation suggests that her current usage of all three languages simultaneously is affecting, both positively and negatively, the overall communication of her languages. She alerted us to another factor, tiredness: ‘Sometimes I get confused. I have days when I don’t know what I’m speaking because, if I’m tired or something I start speaking the wrong

language or go between.’ Therefore, factors such as tiredness, interest and motivation may also affect the usage, proficiency and mixing of her languages. The fluctuation and change in her language use in each language dictates her competency and control over them at any given time.

Conclusion

Essentially, through my exploration of the effects of the learning and influence of an L3 on both the L1 and L2 of the participant, I hope that I have gone some way to proving that CLI/transfer is central to the study of multilingualism. Transfer is an extremely complex process and occurs at all levels, whether phonological, syntactic, semantic and recently, also on a pragmatic level. The factors discussed, specifically, linguistic borrowing, language attrition and code blending can be seen as affects of usage, language distance and length of residence in a target environment. Language distance was seen to affect both the acquisition of the L3 and borrowing between the L2 and L3. The participant’s length of residence in Brazil was distinctive, as affects normally appear after years in another language environment, but due to her relative isolation, affects seem to have appeared in her L1 and L2 after only 6 months. Although, I have focused mainly on the issues of language distance, length of residence and recency, other cultural, social, personal and historical factors may also affect these transfers. I am aware that the participant is a unique case, who has had both a distinctive learning background and rare affects to her L2 and L1; however, it is especially intriguing to note the changes and factors involved in this transition. Jessner et al. suggested that ‘language can be seen as inherently dynamic, something that exhibits change and flux, and is characterised by motion.’ (Jessner et al., 2002:73) The interview has exhibited this through the apparent fluctuating use of the participant’s languages and the cross-linguistic influences that have resulted. In fact, I think it would be highly interesting to re-interview her after she has returned to England for a substantial time period and see how her languages are interacting. I think that it is a very interesting and exciting area of study and look forward to future research and developments in the field.

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