# Third Language Learners

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# Third Language Learners
## Pragmatic Production and Awareness

Maria Pilar Safont Jordà

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# *Acknowledgements*

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# *Introduction*

The birth of the European Union has increased the importance of learning foreign languages. This fact has indirectly promoted the status of the English language in our society, with the result that learning English now constitutes a necessity. Similarly, given the importance attached to language learning in our society, a concomitant interest in studying language acquisition processes has also developed. In conducting acquisitional studies, the multilingual nature of many European communities, such as those of Finland, Italy, Sweden, Austria or Spain, should be taken into account. Regarding this last country, we should point out the fact that in 1978 the Spanish Constitution was approved and Spain was recognised as a plurilingual society. Languages from each autonomous community (Basque, Galician and Catalan) are now learned at schools and universities. That is the case with Catalan in the Valencian Community, which is officially considered a bilingual area where both Catalan and Castilian are employed. This bilingual area constitutes the global framework of the present study.

The fact that most learners of English living in Europe already possess knowledge of at least two other languages has been partially neglected in second and foreign language acquisition research. The scarcity of multilingualism studies contrasts with the abundant existing research in the field of second language acquisition. Yet in the 1970s some researchers (Bain and Yu, 1980; Ben-Zeev, 1977; Ianco-Worrall, 1972) pointed to the positive impact of bilingualism on the individual's cognitive development. Subsequent research (Bialystok, 1988; Mägiste, 1984; Ringbom, 1987) has further confirmed the advantage of bilinguals over monolinguals in terms of linguistic and cognitive outcomes. These facts have given rise to a relatively young subfield in the study of language learning processes, namely that of third language acquisition.

Research in third language acquisition has addressed issues of language transfer (Hufeisen, 1991; Williams and Hammarberg, 1998) from L1 or L2 to L3, metalinguistic knowledge and creative thinking

(Lasagabaster, 1997), interactional competence (Jessner, 1999), the age factor (García-Mayo and García-Lecumberri, 2003; Muñoz, 2000) and immersion pedagogy (Bjorklund and Suni, 2000; Lyster, 1998). In fact, we may state that a growing body of investigation on third language acquisition now exists, as illustrated by the recent collection of studies provided by Cenoz and Genesee (1998), Cenoz and Jessner (2000), and Cenoz *et al.* (2001b). The positive results provided by third language acquisition studies that establish bilingualism as a good predictor of English language achievement (Cenoz and Valencia, 1994) argue for further investigation in this subfield in order to determine the true nature of the relationship between bilingualism and third language acquisition.

One aspect that has not received much attention in third language acquisition studies is that of the development of the learner's pragmatic competence in the target language. Fouser's (1997) study stands out as an exception. Nevertheless, Jessner (1997) posits advantages of bilinguals over monolinguals in terms of their interactional and communicative competence in the target language. For that reason, one of our main objectives relates to acknowledging the role of bilingualism in third language learners' pragmatic awareness.

In short, this book attempts to provide a bridge between two applied linguistics subfields, namely those of interlanguage pragmatics and third language acquisition studies. In the first part of the volume, and before we describe the empirical study itself, we present an overview of the theoretical background underlying the study as well as the sociolinguistic context in which the research is located. Thus, multilingual education in this community suggests/implies the existence of other multilingual education programmes in bilingual European communities. This reality has promoted research in third language acquisition and multilingualism, which will be presented in Chapter 1. In order to review research conducted within this relatively young discipline, we shall consider third language acquisition as related to but also distinguished from two other areas, namely those of second language acquisition research and bilingualism. We will first deal with defining characteristics of third language acquisition which refer to a new conception of language development (Herdina and Jessner, 2000). Individual differences, the context and the interaction between two or three languages known to the learner are seen as fosterers of the dynamism embedded in multilingual processing (Jessner, 1999). These specific characteristics of third language acquisition lead to the need to distinguish third from second language acquisition (Cenoz, 2000). Therefore, we will consider the main differences between these two applied linguistics subfields in this first chapter.

As mentioned above, we shall also consider a related discipline, that of bilingualism. We will pay special attention to that phenomenon seeing that it relates to our study in two ways. Firstly, some of the findings obtained by bilingualism studies (De Bot, 1992; Poulisse and Bongaerts, 1994) may facilitate our understanding of those processes underlying third language acquisition. Secondly, it may provide us with further information on those processing mechanisms (Hoffman, 1991; Li Wei, 2000; Volterra and Taeschner, 1978) our subjects may resort to as bilingual speakers. Finally, Chapter 1 will include previous empirical studies on the role of bilingualism in third language acquisition and use (Lasagabaster, 1997). Since the book relates third language acquisition to pragmatic competence, existing research accounting for pragmatic competence in third language use will be discussed in detail (Fouser, 1997).

Chapter 2 deals with the field of interlanguage pragmatics, and thus it focuses on language learners' pragmatic competence. This chapter will first of all include some of the most influential theories and frameworks for interlanguage pragmatists, such as existing models of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia *et al.*, 1995), the relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986), the politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and the speech acts theory (Searle, 1976). Secondly, we shall present an overview of research conducted within the interlanguage pragmatics field (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996), with a focus on developmental perspectives and speech acts production (Kasper and Dahl, 1991). Since our study will specifically analyse the linguistic realisations of request acts by foreign and third language learners of English, we shall deal in particular with the speech act of requesting. A description of request linguistic formulations (Trosborg, 1995) and of peripheral modification devices (Sifianou, 1999) will also be presented, as this will constitute the basis of our analysis, which is fully described in Part 2 of the present volume.

The analysis of requestive behaviour presented in the second part of the book was conducted in the Valencian Community. This sociolinguistic context is described in Chapter 3, where we discuss language learning and use in the Valencian Community. On the one hand, an outline of that community is presented, thereby pointing to the status of Catalan and Castilian, the origin and evolution of the Catalan language in the Valencian Community and the role of bilingualism in the university setting. On the other hand, we will focus on our informants' linguistic background, particularly referring to their knowledge of English and previous learning experience. The way in which mutilingualism is tackled by educational authorities in the Valencian Community will also be dealt with in this third chapter.

Our interest in the development of pragmatic competence and awareness on the part of bilingual learners of English derives from the actual concern of foreign and second language acquisition scholars about discourse and pragmatic aspects of the target language. Recently there has been a shift from a focus on learning and using structural and lexical aspects of the target language towards a more discourse-centred perspective. Since pragmatic competence was identified as one of the main components of Bachman's communicative competence model (1990), current studies have focused on the relationship between pragmatics and second language acquisition, that is to say, on what has been termed inter-language pragmatics. As discussed by Kasper (2000), interlanguage pragmatics research has concentrated on two main perspectives. On the one hand, scholars have focused on the learners' use of pragmatic aspects. On the other hand, some studies have focused on pragmatic development. The vast majority of research on interlanguage pragmatics has addressed second language use by comparing learners' pragmatic competence with that of native speakers of the target language (Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989). Topics considered within this perspective have been borrowed from studies of first language pragmatics; such is the case with speech acts, discourse sequencing and conversational management. Nevertheless, contrasting the use of pragmatic items by learners and native speakers of a given language does not seem to provide an immediate link to language acquisition, as claimed by Kasper (1996). Instead, investigation concerning pragmatic development accounts for a relationship between language acquisition processes and the pragmatic competence of the language learner. Unlike studies on L2 pragmatic use, investigation into developmental issues is rather scarce. Owing to this fact, little is known about those processes and factors implied in the pragmatic development of non-native speakers. However, scholars investigating developmental issues have provided us with some interesting assumptions.

The study[1] described in Part 2 of this book attempts to tackle some of these assumptions which relate to the role of instruction, the learners' proficiency level and the task type in the use of request acts. Furthermore, we aim at broadening the scope of research in two different areas, namely those of interlanguage pragmatics and third language acquisition. Hence, this second part of the volume includes an analysis of the use of request acts formulations and the evaluation of such use by bilingual and mono-lingual learners of English as a foreign (third) language. Chapter 4 is devoted to describing in detail the methodological aspects of our study; that is, the informants' characteristics, the elicitation procedures and the methodological decisions taken in the data analysis.

Chapters 5 to 8 include testing procedures, results obtained and further implications for ongoing research. Thus each chapter focuses on testing the hypotheses deriving from previous research in the interlanguage pragmatics and third language acquisition areas. Chapter 5 deals with the role of explicit instruction in foreign language learners' pragmatic production. As argued by Kasper and Rose (1999, 2002), the development of pragmatic competence will take place only if learners are immersed in the target language culture or when they receive explicit instruction on pragmatic aspects. Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) considered the effect of being immersed in the target language culture, and recent studies have dealt with the role of explicit and implicit instruction in the development of pragmatic competence (Barron, 2003; Rose and Kasper, 2001). Nevertheless, further empirical studies are needed to support Kasper and Rose's above-quoted assumptions (1999, 2002), particularly in foreign language learning settings. On that account, Chapter 5 deals with the role of instruction in English learners' pragmatic production.

In addition to instructional effects, studies focusing on interlanguage pragmatics development have investigated the relationship between L2 proficiency level and the acquisition of pragmatic competence (Koike, 1996). Chapter 6 examines the influence of learners' proficiency level in their use of request realisations and peripheral modification items. Researchers investigating the effects of proficiency level (Bergman and Kasper, 1993; Fouser, 1995; House, 1989; Robinson, 1992) point to a mismatch between the learners' linguistic proficiency level and their pragmatic competence in the target language. Most of these studies have dealt with subjects at advanced proficiency levels. For this reason, Kasper and Rose (1999, 2002) argue for the need to include learners at beginner proficiency levels in developmental interlanguage pragmatics studies. In an attempt to shed more light on the role of the learners' proficiency level, we have dealt with intermediate and beginner learners of English as a foreign language. This chapter analyses the influence of the learners' proficiency in their use of request acts. In order to obtain data concerning participants' requestive behaviour, different elicitation techniques are employed.

Chapter 7 deals with the role of the elicitation method used – an issue that has deserved some attention in interlanguage pragmatics (Sasaki, 1998). Findings contrasting various methods or tasks that learners were required to perform point to significant differences in learners' pragmatic behaviour. A main distinction is found between results obtained by means of oral and written task types (Beebe and Cummings, 1996). However, few studies have included more than one type of elicitation method in their

analysis of pragmatic production. Because of this, there seems to be a need for resorting to various elicitation techniques in ascertaining language learners' use of pragmatic items in the target language. In view of this, we have included three different task types, namely those of a written production test, an oral production task and an awareness-raising task. The effect of each instrument on learners' performance has been examined in order to test the influence of each task type on the subjects' pragmatic performance.

Chapter 8 is devoted to analysing another aspect of the learners' pragmatic competence, that of pragmatic awareness. In so doing, a link is made with their linguistic background in order to discover differences or similarities between the monolingual and the bilingual subgroup. In this chapter we consider the extent to which pragmatic awareness may be more developed in third than in second/foreign language learners of English. Despite the fact that bilingualism effects have been taken into account in previous chapters, it is at this stage that a deeper analysis is conducted, and thus a clearer attempt is made to bridge the gap between the disciplines of interlanguage pragmatics and third language acquisition.

Finally, a concluding chapter raises the main lines of discussion and summarises results presented in previous chapters. In addition to that, Chapter 9 includes those theoretical implications deriving from the findings described in Chapters 5 to 8, as well as suggestions for further research related to the fields of interlanguage pragmatics and third language acquisition.

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*Part 1*

# *Theoretical Background*