

## CROSS-LINGUISTIC INFLUENCE IN THIRD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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### Abstract

This study investigates the role of previously acquired languages, testing three different third language (L3) acquisition models: the absolute L1 transfer, L2 status factor, and Typological Primacy Model (TPM). The absolute L1 transfer claims that the first language (L1) plays a privileged role in L3 acquisition, whereas the L2 status factor suggests that the second language (L2) plays a stronger role than the L1 in the early stages of L3 grammar development. Turning to the TPM, it maintains that the initial stage transfer depends on psycho-typological proximity between third language and prior languages. To understand the role of prior languages, the researcher tested knowledge of object pronouns in French by proficiency-matched L3 and L2 French speakers whose L1s are either Chinese (n=17) or English (n=28). The data were collected via production tasks in French. The results suggest that L3 speakers experience non-facilitative transfer from their L1.

**Keywords:** *Chinese, French, Object pronouns, Second language transfer, Third language*

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## Introduction

The present study investigates transfer in L3 acquisition by testing three different L3 acquisition models: Absolute L1 Transfer, L2 Status, Factor, and Typological Primacy Model (TPM). L3 models make different predictions about the role of previously acquired languages. The absolute L1 transfer assumes that L1 plays a significant role in L3 acquisition (Herms, 2010). The TPM has been developed by Rothman in a series of studies (Rothman 2010,). This model claims that transfer in L3 acquisition occurs selectively, depending on psycho-typological proximity between L3 and prior languages. The L2 Status Factor suggests that L2 plays a stronger role than the L1 in L3 grammar development (Bardel & Falk, 2007). The key goal of the present study is to shed light on L3 grammar development. This goal is achieved by means of a study of L3 French speakers whose prior languages are English and Chinese. Further, this group was compared to a group of L2 French-L1 English speakers.

### *Syntactic background*

As illustrated in (1), the referential pronoun is expressed overtly in English, and overtly expressing referential object pronouns are obligatory in English as in (2).

1. Speaker A: Do you read the newspaper?

Speaker B: Yes, I read it.

2. Speaker A: Do you read the newspaper?

Speaker B: \*Yes, I read  $\emptyset$ .

In French, object pronominalization is realized through a clitic or a weak pronoun (as in 3-b). The clitic construction given in (3-b) allows us to comprehend that in French, clitics precede inflected verbs. Further, null object pronouns are not accepted in French as in (3-c).

3.a. Speaker A: Est-ce que tu lis le journal?  
 Q you read the newspaper  
 ‘Do you read the newspaper?’

b. Speaker B: Oui, je le lis.  
 yes I it read  
 ‘Yes, I read it.’

c. Speaker C: \*Oui, je lis.  
 yes I read  
 ‘Yes, I read.’



## Methodology

Seventy-six participants took part in the study. There were two experimental groups and a control group. Two experimental groups included seventeen L3 French speakers and twenty-eight L2 French speakers whose prior languages were L1-Chinese–L2-English (hereafter L3 speakers) or L1-English (hereafter L2 speakers). The native control group included fifteen L1-French speakers. The L2 and L3 speakers completed a validated cloze test in French. The independent samples *t*-test showed that the L2 speakers and L3 speakers are not significantly different with respect to French language proficiency ( $t(46)=1.32$ ,  $p =.385$ ).

## Materials

The data was collected via a production task in French. It compares the use of object pronouns in French by L2 and L3 French speakers. The participants completed the task individually. The following predictions were made in the French production task. If the L3 speakers experience non-facilitative transfer from Chinese, they will use null object pronouns in French. On the other hand, if they transfer from English (their L2), they will reject null object pronouns in French.

## Results and discussion

The results are reported in Table 1. The L2 group has more than 30% of S-CI-V<sup>6</sup> structure, whereas the L3 group's use of that structure is lower (24.41%). Interestingly, the two non-native groups differ from each other as the L3 group used \*S- $\emptyset$ -V<sup>7</sup> (25%) more frequently than the L2 group (4.6%). Following Larson-Hall (2016), A chi-square analysis was conducted on the three response types produced by the two non-native groups. The result was significant ( $\chi^2(2) = 29.61$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ).

**Table 1:**

*Percentage (raw number) of each structure produced, by group*

Structure produced	Group		
	L1 French ( <i>n</i> =15)	L2 French ( <i>n</i> =28)	L3 French ( <i>n</i> =17)
S-CI-V	86.67 (260)	32.14 (180)	24.41 (83)
*S- $\emptyset$ -V	00.00 (00)	04.46 (25)	25.00 (85)
S-V-NP <sup>8</sup>	13.33 (40)	63.40 (355)	50.59 (172)

<sup>6</sup> Object clitic structure as in (3-b).

<sup>7</sup> Null object pronoun structure as in (3-c).

<sup>8</sup> Overtly expressed object pronoun as in (1).

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Hypothesis 1 is compatible with the Absolute L1 Transfer. It maintains that if the absolute L1 Transfer model is correct, then the L3 French speakers will transfer from L1 Chinese. Therefore, the results suggest that the L1 plays a stronger role than the L2.

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