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***Key concepts in applied linguistics /  
Conceptos clave de la lingüística aplicada***

**THE ACQUISITION OF ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES**

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Going beyond second language acquisition to the *acquisition of additional languages* (AAL) is very common for many people all over the world. AAL is more common in bilingual and multilingual contexts, in which, due to historical or political reasons, two or more languages are used, but it is also common in the case of individuals who need to communicate in several languages and in schools where two or more foreign languages are taught. In spite of this, most studies on second language acquisition just focus on one target language, and do not pay any attention to the other languages already acquired or being acquired by the learners. In the last years, an important effort has been made to fill in this gap and there is a growing body of research into the acquisition of additional languages (mainly third language acquisition) and multilingualism. Research on AAL has been reported in a number of recent publications (see references below), the publication of a specialized journal *The International Journal of Multilingualism* (Routledge) and at international conferences devoted to research on third language acquisition and multilingualism (Innsbruck, Austria [1999]; Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, Holland [2001]; Tralee, Ireland [2003]; Fribourgh-Biel, Switzerland [2005]; Stirling, Scotland [2007], and Bolzano, Italy [2009]). The main issue discussed in this research is the identification of the characteristics that distinguish third language acquisition and multilingualism from second language acquisition and bilingualism. AAL

covers psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and educational issues. Some of the most important areas are the following.

**Early multilingualism.** Research in this area focuses on language development when children are exposed to three languages from a very early age. It follows the research methodology of studies on early bilingualism but includes an additional language. It reports on the development of different aspects of communicative competence in different languages and the interaction between the languages. An interesting aspect of research in early multilingualism is the relative proportion of language mixing in the child's production. Most parents and researchers report that children tend to mix their languages at the onset of speech production but that there is separation of the language systems afterwards.

**The effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition.** As one of the main areas of interest in third language studies, this compares bilingual and monolingual learners acquiring a target language. Most studies on the effect of bilingualism confirm the advantages of bilinguals over monolinguals in language learning. The results concerning general aspects of proficiency indicate that bilingualism has a positive effect on third language acquisition when L3 acquisition takes place in additive contexts and bilinguals have acquired literacy skills in both their languages (see Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Safont, 2005). However, bilingualism does not always result in more efficient third language learning because socioeconomic and socioeducational variables can also play an important role. In fact, the sociolinguistic context in which the research takes place is very important, and third language acquisition is a complex phenomenon affected by a large number of individual and contextual factors.

**Cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition.** The interaction between the languages and particularly the influence of the first

and second language on the production of additional languages has received a lot of attention recently. Research in this area highlights the differences between second language acquisition and AAL, and it also analyses metalinguistic awareness. Research has focused mainly on the lexicon and has analysed the effect of different factors, such as typological distance. In oral production, learners tend to borrow more terms from languages which are typologically closer to the target language. Learners also tend to borrow more terms from other second languages they have learned than from their first language, if there is no interaction with typology. Cross-linguistic influence in second language acquisition has been related to the learners' level of proficiency in the target language and their use of the different languages in their linguistic repertoire. Other factors that can determine the presence of cross-linguistic influence are related to the specific sociolinguistic context in which oral interaction takes place as well as the interlocutors and the topic of conversation.

**Age and third language acquisition.** Research on second and third language acquisition at school indicates that instruction in foreign languages from an early age in the school context does not necessarily mean higher achievement in all cases. When exposure to the target language is very limited (2 to 4 hours per week), older children make more progress than younger children both in second language acquisition and AAL. Research indicates that when exposure to the target language is very limited and there is no contact with the target language outside the school, the younger is not necessarily the better. Introducing a third language as a school subject from a very early age (3-4 years old) has no negative effect on the first or the second language or cognitive development, but this does not imply that results are going to be better than when the third language is introduced later, particularly if it is also used as a language of instruction.

Second language acquisition and AAL have a lot in common, both theoretically and in terms of research methodologies. However, AAL is a more complex phenomenon than second language acquisition and entails some specific characteristics. AAL can be affected by the fact that learners are more experienced as language learners and have developed their learning

strategies and metalinguistic awareness to a greater extent. Moreover, learners of additional languages have a larger linguistic repertoire at their disposal and can use this repertoire as a resource, either when they have limitations in the target language or when they prefer to code-switch and code-mix to express their communication intent better.

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