

Megan M.
Brown

Grammatical Gender Acquisition in a Trilingual Context: Initial Transfer and Ongoing Development

Megan M. Brown

Boston University

L3 Reading Group
February 15th, 2023



Outline

Grammatical
Gender
Acquisition
in a
Trilingual
Context:
Initial
Transfer and
Ongoing
Development

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Acquisition

Theories and
Models in L3
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Experiment
1: Cross-
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Experiment 1:
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Judgement Task

Procedures

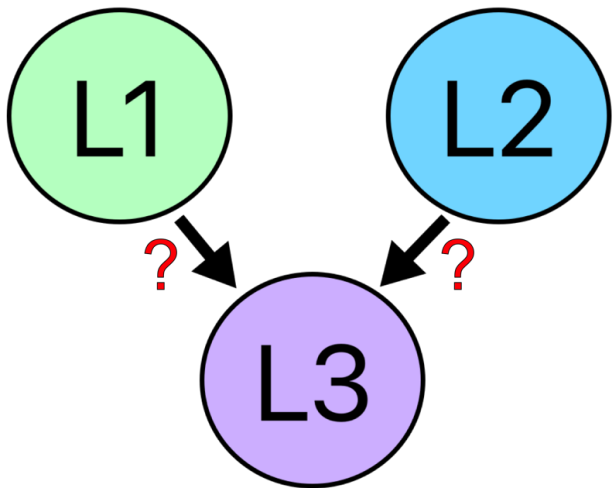
Results

Key Findings

Experiment

- 1 Third Language (L3) Acquisition
- 2 Experiment 1: Cross-Sectional Grammaticality Judgement Task
- 3 Experiment 2: Longitudinal Gender Development

CLI in L3 Acquisition



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Theories and Models of L3 CLI and Transfer

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Theories and Models of L3 CLI and Transfer

- **Cumulative Enhancement** (Flynn et al., 2004)
- **L2 Status Factor** (Bardel & Falk, 2007)
- **L1 Transfer** (Herms, 2010)
- **Typological Primacy** (Rothman, 2010)
- **Language of Community** (Fallah et al, 2016)
- **Linguistic Proximity** (Westergaard et al., 2017)
- **Scalpel Model** (Slabakova, 2017)
- **Top-Down Cognitive Control** (Green, 2017)
- **Full Transfer Potential** (Westergaard, 2021)
- **Grammatical Mapping** (Fernández-Berkes & Flynn, *in press*)
- **Cumulative Input Threshold Hypothesis** (Cabrelli & Iverson, *in press*)

Theories and Models of L3 CLI and Transfer

L3 models differ in terms of:

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Theories and Models of L3 CLI and Transfer

L3 models differ in terms of:

- Initial state/stages transfer vs. longer-term development

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Theories and Models of L3 CLI and Transfer

L3 models differ in terms of:

- Initial state/stages transfer vs. longer-term development
- Wholesale vs piecemeal initial transfer

Theories and Models of L3 CLI and Transfer

L3 models differ in terms of:

- Initial state/stages transfer vs. longer-term development
- Wholesale vs piecemeal initial transfer
- Role of additional factors
 - Typological similarity
 - Age/order of acquisition
 - L2/L3 proficiency
 - Language status
 - Cognitive factors

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Research Questions

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- Does previous **grammatical gender** knowledge from the L1 and/or L2 influence L3 grammatical gender acquisition?

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- Does previous **grammatical gender** knowledge from the L1 and/or L2 influence L3 grammatical gender acquisition?
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- Does previous **grammatical gender** knowledge from the L1 and/or L2 influence L3 grammatical gender acquisition?
- Does the role/influence of previous grammatical gender knowledge change throughout the L3 acquisition process?
- How might age/order of acquisition and language similarity promote or inhibit the transfer of previous grammatical gender knowledge to the L3?

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Grammatical Gender

Grammatical Gender

German:

Der Mann	Die Frau	Das Mädchen
The man Masculine	The woman Feminine	The girl Neuter

Romance:

Spanish	El chico	La chica
French	Le garçon	La fille
Italian	Il ragazzo	La ragazza
Portuguese	O menino	A garota
English	The boy Masculine	The girl Feminine

Grammatical Gender in L2

- L1 gender can transfer to L2 (i.e. Franceschina, 2005)

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- Key differences between offline vs. online experimental grammatical gender tasks (Długosz, 2021)

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- L2ers without gender in their L1 are able to develop a gender system (White et al., 2004; Sagarra and Herschensohn, 2010)
- Key differences between offline vs. online experimental grammatical gender tasks (Długosz, 2021)
- **How do L1 vs L2 gender systems influence L3 gender development?**
 - At the onset of L3 acquisition
 - At later points in the development process

Experiment 1: Brown (2020a)

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Experiment 1: Brown (2020a)

- Online survey and grammaticality judgement task via Qualtrics
- Sequential Spanish/English bilinguals
- “Beginner” German learners
 - <1 year (two semesters) L3 German instruction

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Language Background	Number of Participants
L1 English L2 Spanish L3 German	11
L1 Spanish L2 English L3 German	10
L1 English L2 German	11

German Grammaticality Judgement Task

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German Grammaticality Judgement Task

Gender Mismatch

*Das Baum ist groß
The_[N] tree_[M] is tall

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German Grammaticality Judgement Task

Gender Mismatch

*Das Baum ist groß
The_[N] tree_[M] is tall

Words reflecting biological gender were not included

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Gender Mismatch

*Das Baum ist groß
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Words reflecting biological gender were not included

Error questions were balanced in terms of:

German Grammaticality Judgement Task

Gender Mismatch

*Das Baum ist groß
The_[N] tree_[M] is tall

Words reflecting biological gender were not included

Error questions were balanced in terms of:

German Gender

Error Direction (M → F, M → N ect.)

Spanish Gender

Gender Assignment vs. Gender Concord

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Grammatical Gender Task

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Gender Assignment vs. Gender Concord

Grammatical Gender Task

Tür (Door_F)

Gender Assignment vs. Gender Concord

Grammatical Gender Task

Tür (Door_F)

Der_M

Die_F

Das_N

Gender Assignment vs. Gender Concord

Grammatical Gender Task

Tür (Door_F)

Der_M Die_F Das_N

Grammaticality judgment tasks were graded based on participants' perceived gender of individual lexical items.

Experiment 1: Scoring

Gender Assignment vs. Gender Concord

Grammatical Gender Task

Tür (Door_F)

Der_M

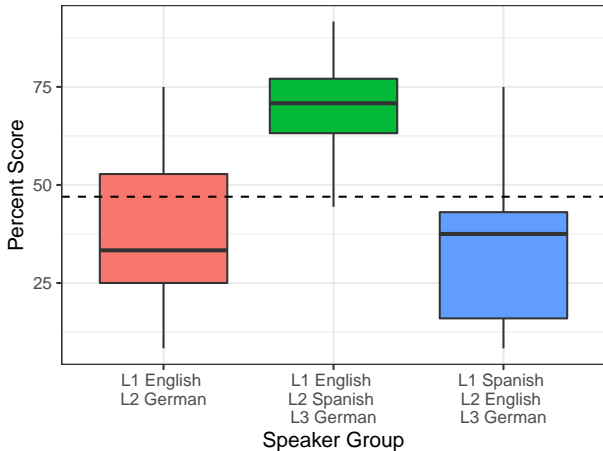
Die_F

Das_N

Grammaticality judgment tasks were graded based on participants' perceived gender of individual lexical items.

Experiment 1 Results

Brown (2020)



Experiment 1: Key Findings

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Experiment 1: Key Findings

- Beginner L3 German learners with **L2 Spanish** were better at identifying gender errors in L3 German.

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Key Findings

Experiment

- Beginner L3 German learners with **L2 Spanish** were better at identifying gender errors in L3 German.
 - L2 Status Factor Model
 - Scalpel Model

Experiment 1: Key Findings

BUT...

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Experiment 1: Key Findings

BUT...

- No interference was found from nouns with different Spanish genders.

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Experiment 1: Key Findings

BUT...

- No interference was found from nouns with different Spanish genders.
- These participants were **beginners** but **not initial state** learners.

Experiment 1: Key Findings

BUT...

- No interference was found from nouns with different Spanish genders.
- These participants were **beginners** but **not initial state** learners.
- **Are these results from initial transfer or some later developmental difference?**

Experiment 2

Longitudinal L3 Development

- Dissertation project aiming to tease apart the findings of Experiment 1.

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Longitudinal L3 Development

- Dissertation project aiming to tease apart the findings of Experiment 1.
- Longitudinal design - participants complete the experiment within the first two weeks of beginning their first German course, and again at the end of their semester.

Experiment 2

Longitudinal L3 Development

- Dissertation project aiming to tease apart the findings of Experiment 1.
- Longitudinal design - participants complete the experiment within the first two weeks of beginning their first German course, and again at the end of their semester.
- Examination of gender in both listening and reading contexts.

Procedure Summary

- A German listening task involving virtual eye-tracking

Procedure Summary

- A German listening task involving virtual eye-tracking
- A German self-paced reading task

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- A German listening task involving virtual eye-tracking
- A German self-paced reading task
- A German gender assignment task (only at second meeting)

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Procedure Summary

- A German listening task involving virtual eye-tracking
- A German self-paced reading task
- A German gender assignment task (only at second meeting)
- Multilingual LEAP-Q
- Proficiency and gender knowledge assessment in other known languages

Experiment 2 Participants

- “Ab initio” German learners
 - True beginners with no previous German exposure

Experiment 2 Participants

- “Ab initio” German learners
 - True beginners with no previous German exposure
- Intermediate or higher L2 proficiency
 - Spanish, French, Italian, & Portuguese

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Language Background	Number of Participants
L1 English L2 Romance L3 German	10
L1 Romance L2 English L3 German	6
L1 English L2 German	10

Listening Task

- Trained on 12 nouns in the target language (German)

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Listening Task

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- Also trained on two adjectives, "Large" and "Small"

Listening Task

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- Virtual eye tracking serves as the key measure

Listening Task

- Trained on 12 nouns in the target language (German)
 - Nouns were balanced between target language genders and translation equivalent genders
- Nouns reflecting biological gender were excluded
- Also trained on two adjectives, "Large" and "Small"
- Virtual eye tracking serves as the key measure
- Two key experimental conditions, Gender Match and Gender Error

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Listening Task

Gender Match



(F)



(M)

(M)



(N)



Listening Task

Gender Match



(F)



(M)

“Hier ist der große Stift richtig”
(Here, the(M) big pen (M) is correct)

(M)



(N)



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Gender Match



(F)



(M)

(M)



(N)



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Listening Task

Gender Mismatch



(F)



(M)

(M)



(N)



Listening Task

Gender Mismatch



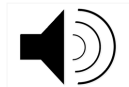
(F)



(M)

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(M)



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Gender Mismatch



(F)



(M)

(M)



(N)



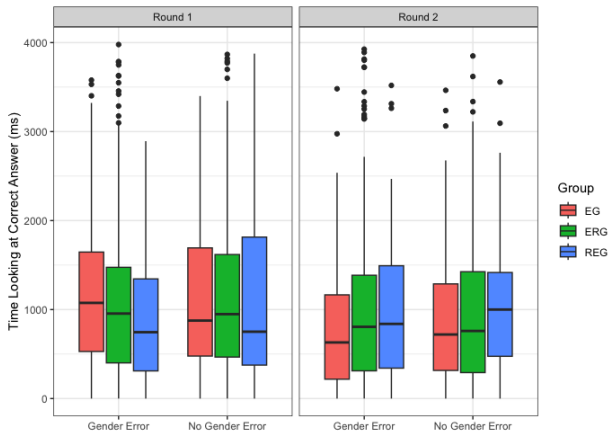
Listening Task

- Are learners at each data collection point point able to process gender cues in real time?

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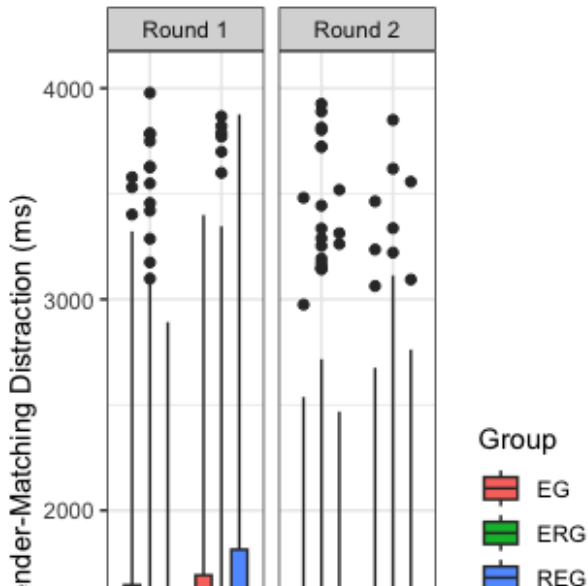
Listening Task

Results: Noun Learning



Listening Task

Results: Gender Distractions



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Reading Task

- Self-paced reading task

Reading Task

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Experiment

- Self-paced reading task
- Same nouns as in the listening task

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Reading Task



(F)

Reading Task



(F)

**Hier
(Here)**

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Reading Task



(F)

ist
(is)

Reading Task



(F)

die/der
(the, F/M)

Reading Task



(F)

**Tür
door**

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Reading Task



(F)

gros
big

Reading Task



(F)

(Hier ist die/der Tür groß)

(Here the(F/M) door is large)



Reading Task

- Are learners at each time point able to process gender cues, and are they deterred by gender errors, when processing in real time?
- Are these results different between the reading and the listening task?

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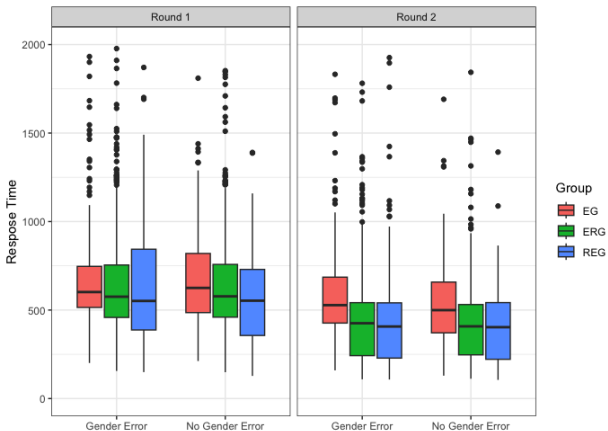
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Discussion and Takeaways

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- While “beginner” learners might show evidence of CLI from L3 in their processing of written gender, this was not found in “ab initio” learners.

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- While “beginner” learners might show evidence of CLI from L3 in their processing of written gender, this was not found in “ab initio” learners.
- Grammatical gender acquisition in L3 is a complex process that maybe be influenced both positively and negatively by previous gender knowledge, particularly from the L2.

Discussion and Takeaways

- While “beginner” learners might show evidence of CLI from L3 in their processing of written gender, this was not found in “ab initio” learners.
- Grammatical gender acquisition in L3 is a complex process that maybe be influenced both positively and negatively by previous gender knowledge, particularly from the L2.
- Grammatical gender processing results differed between listening and speaking tasks

Next Steps and Future Questions

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Trilingual
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Ongoing
Development

**Megan M.
Brown**

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Acquisition

Theories and
Models in L3
Grammatical
Gender

Experiment
1: Cross-
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- Continued analysis of dissertation data

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- Continued analysis of dissertation data
- Examination of more diverse language triads

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Key Findings

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- Continued analysis of dissertation data
- Examination of more diverse language triads
- Longer-term development examinations

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Special Thanks



Thank You!

These slides can be found at <https://www.meganmbrown.com>

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