

María Pilar Safont Jordà 2005: *Third Language Learners. Pragmatic Production and Awareness*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 184 pp.

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At a time in which the multilingual nature of many European countries, such as Sweden, Italy or Spain, has been acknowledged, *Third Language Learners* is an important contribution to the study of both interlanguage pragmatics and third language acquisition. Indeed, this volume is a timely contribution to the increasing body of current research into the acquisition of a third language by learners who belong to bilingual communities from the perspectives of pragmatic competence and awareness. In this line, the volume presents original research which broadens the scope of enquiry in two different areas, namely those of interlanguage pragmatics and third language acquisition.

The book is divided into two parts: The first part (Theoretical Background) provides the general framework for the second one (The Study). Part 1 of the present volume is further divided into three chapters which deal with third language acquisition, pragmatic competence, and the sociolinguistic context of the study conducted, respectively.

Chapter 1 presents some defining characteristics of the concept of third language acquisition. In order to understand the development of third language acquisition, the author also considers in this chapter two related disciplines, i.e. second language acquisition and bilingualism. According to Herdina and Jessner (2000), multilingualism refers to those languages learned after a second one. Learning an additional language entails restructuring the overall linguistic system of the learner, that is, the third language learner's linguistic system is influenced by the constant change of the relationship established among the languages involved.

Third language acquisition has been influenced by studies in second language acquisition. The author therefore accounts for the difference between these two related fields by stating the originality of approaching language learning from a perspective different from that of second or foreign language. In this sense, Cenoz (2000) reports on the main differences between second and third language or multilingual acquisition, which are as follows: (a) the order in which languages are learned, (b) sociolinguistic factors, and (c) the psycholinguistic processes involved. In second language acquisition, there are few possibilities of variation regarding the order of acquisition, as either the L2 is acquired after the L1 or they are learned simultaneously. However, when more than two languages are involved in the acquisitional process, the possibilities for order variation increase. The learning process of one language could be interrupted by another for a long or short period of time owing to external causes (for example, living in a foreign country) or internal ones (learners' lack of motivation or interest).

Sociolinguistic factors refer to the relationship between the languages being learned as far as linguistic typology is concerned, since languages which are typologically closer to the target language may favour its acquisition. The last difference between second and third language acquisition as pointed out by Cenoz (2000) deals with psycholinguistic processes. Acquiring a third language poses difficulties to internal

cognitive processing by presenting a unique situation of language acquisition (Clyne 1997). As stated by Safont in her book, more research is needed in order to discover the specific operations that affect multilingual processing. In this respect, the study reported in Part 2 may help to provide some explanation for third language development, as it dealt with monolingual and bilingual learners of English as a foreign and as a third language.

The third section of Chapter 1 deals with bilingualism, a close field to third language acquisition. The author acknowledges the difficulty in defining this phenomenon. Despite this fact, a chronological list which aims at illustrating different definitions of the term is reported, including early definitions of the term (Bloomfield 1933) and recent ones (Hoffman 1991). Not only is the notion of bilingualism difficult to define, but equally so are the different types of bilingual competence. In this section, over 20 types of various degrees of competence are shown (Wei 2000). In spite of the apparent ambiguity and confusion related to variability in bilingual competence, there exist specific features characterising bilingual speech which reflect interaction between those languages known by the bilingual person. Of particular interest is the phenomenon of language switching, as it best illustrates the difference between monolingual and bilingual speech production. The relevance of language switches takes us to the last section of this first chapter, in which María Pilar Safont tackles the effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition. Studies such as Hufeisen (1998) and Jessner (1999) seem to indicate that knowing a second language facilitates the development of a third one. By the same token, research conducted in a Spanish setting (Lasagabaster 1997) also points to an advantage for bilingual subjects over monolingual ones. Moreover, Cenoz and Valencia's (1994) study reveals the beneficial effect of bilingualism on the acquisition of English as a third language.

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned studies, it may be assumed that bilingual learners will acquire an additional language faster and more efficiently than monolinguals. Yet, as pointed out by the author, scant research to date has investigated pragmatic competence in third language learners. For this reason, the study reported in Part 2 aims at addressing this lack by means of focusing on multilingual production of certain pragmatic realisations (i.e. requests). Therefore, the present study not only represents an innovation, but it also illustrates the increasing interest in the field of interlanguage pragmatics.

The first section of Chapter 2 is devoted to describing several models of communicative competence which to a greater or lesser extent have taken into account the pragmatic component in a foreign context at beginner and intermediate levels. This foreign setting is fully explained in Chapter 3, whose first section deals with the status of the Catalan language among speakers of Valencian. From the perspective of second language acquisition research, the second section explores some aspects (relevance theory, politeness principle and speech act theories) which have had an impact on pragmatic competence. A proposal by the author to foster pragmatic competence in the foreign language classroom follows, which has as major assumptions the following: first, the need to teach pragmatic aspects in a foreign setting with a focus on comprehension and production. This is of the utmost importance for subjects learning a foreign language because, unlike second language learners, the former do not have many opportunities to be exposed to natural and authentic language use. The second

assumption claims that comprehension of pragmatic items might be achieved by fostering learners' connections between their previous pragmalinguistic information and the new pragmatic information. Finally, Safont's proposal for fostering pragmatic competence in the foreign language classroom centres on the need for providing pragmatic patterns in identifying and using specific speech acts based on findings from research in interlanguage pragmatics and foreign language acquisition. The suggested proposal for the promotion of pragmatic competence stems from the fact that this kind of competence is one of the main components of the global construct of communicative competence. Therefore, according to the author, production and comprehension of the sociocultural norms underlying target language use should be taken into account.

Section three of this chapter is concerned with the notion of interlanguage pragmatics. This is a relatively new subfield within second language acquisition research which focuses on pragmatic competence and performance of second and foreign language learners. Studies carried out in this field of enquiry have ascertained the disparity between learners' grammatical and pragmatic competence (Blum-Kulka 1996). As this fact has aroused interest in the study of pragmatic competence by second language acquisition researchers, the author presents research conducted taking this mismatch into account from both a cross-sectional and a developmental perspective.

The fourth section centres on a specific speech act, namely that of requesting. For this reason, Safont offers a detailed description of its main parts: the head, which performs the function of requesting, and its peripheral elements, which mitigate or aggravate the force of the request. Following this description, there is a compilation of some studies examining foreign language learners' use of requests (e.g. House and Kasper 1987; Trosborg 1995; Hill 1997). Results from these and other studies seem to show that the choice of requests is influenced by the situation, the elicitation method employed, and the level of the participants. However, Safont (this volume) points out the need for studies that (a) implement various elicitation techniques in order to contrast the effect of these instruments on request-acts behaviour, (b) account for beginners, and (c) investigate foreign language learners, since most studies have focused on second language learners.

In order to address these needs, the study in Part 2 is innovative in that it focuses on learners of English in the Valencian Community. In fact, several laws have tried to regularise the inclusion of Catalan in the educational system of this region. This implies that certain bilingual programmes have been implemented since the 90s so as to guarantee a good command of Castilian and Catalan on the part of the students, as described in the second section of the present chapter. The two remaining sections focus, on the one hand, on multilingual education in the Valencian Community, and on the other, on foreign language learning in the university setting. This last section is of paramount importance due to the fact that the context in which the study was conducted is Jaume I University. This institution has as a defining feature the teaching of English as a compulsory subject in all BA degrees and diplomas, a fact that differentiates this University from the other existing universities in the Valencian Community.

Once the general framework for the study conducted has been fully developed, Safont presents Part 2 of the volume, which starts with the description of the method

involved in the study. The author chose 160 monolingual and bilingual students at beginner and intermediate level. In order to avoid extraneous variables, all the participants were females belonging to two different disciplines, namely those of Industrial Design Technical Engineering and Primary Teacher Education. As far as the tasks selected to elicit requests are concerned, they consisted of an open role-play and an open discourse-completion test. The open versions of the above-mentioned tasks allow for more freedom on the part of the learners when choosing a form. In turn, a discourse-evaluation test was used in order to measure learners' pragmatic awareness.

The empirical study addresses four main goals: (a) the role of pragmatic instruction in developing pragmatic competence, (b) the effects of proficiency on pragmatic production, (c) the effects of task on pragmatic production, and (d) the role of bilingualism in pragmatic awareness. Results from the study point to the positive effects of instruction on pragmatic development as described in Chapter 5. Indeed, the author reports a significant increase in terms of both the number and type of strategies employed from the pre-test to the post-test. As for proficiency effects on pragmatic production, findings reported in Chapter 6 show that the higher the proficiency level of the subjects, the more request strategies they employ. In the same vein, it was also found that intermediate learners made use of more peripheral modification devices than beginners.

In Chapter 7 Safont aims at ascertaining whether the task performed affects the use of requests. To this end, a written task (discourse-completion test) and an oral one (role-play) were employed. Statistically significant differences were found for a wider use of request strategies and modification devices in the written task. On this account, the author states that the nature of the tasks learners had to carry out influenced their pragmatic production. As we can see, these three last chapters were related to pragmatic production issues; however, Chapter 8 examines pragmatic awareness and the effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition. As the participants of the study were grouped into monolinguals and bilinguals, focusing on the possible differences related to pragmatic awareness was possible. Results from the present study coincide with previous research (Fouser 1997; Jessner 1999) pointing out that bilinguals show a higher degree of pragmatic awareness than monolinguals. The discourse-evaluation test revealed that bilingual subjects outperformed their monolingual counterparts in recognising pragmatic failure and in providing suggestions for those request formulas they found inappropriate.

The concluding chapter is a final look at the main findings of the research described in the previous chapters, together with the following suggestions for further enquiry: first, Safont claims that further contrastive analyses are needed on subjects who have, and those who have not, received explicit instruction not only on requests, but also on other speech acts. Second, the extent to which different task types elicit pragmatic behaviour could also be examined with learners of different proficiency levels (i.e. beginner, intermediate and advanced) in the target language. A final suggestion for further research concerns a comparison of the results obtained in the Valencian Community with other suggested by studies from other bilingual communities that include similar bilingual programmes.

Bearing in mind that bilingualism or multilingualism seems to be the rule rather than the exception. In many European societies, such as Spain, a young field of enquiry

is growing, to part of which the present study is an appropriate contribution. In fact, it focuses on interlanguage pragmatics and third language acquisition, while taking into account the actual sociolinguistic characteristics of language learners. For this reason, language educators and scholars working in the above-mentioned disciplines will find this volume an interesting and enriching source of information for understanding current and future research in those fields of applied linguistics.

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