

Into the wild: A look at L3 acquisition from the onset and across development

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This talk will discuss the design and preliminary results of a research project that seeks to advance our understanding of third or further (L3/Ln) language acquisition, focusing on the transition from early exposure into more advanced stages of interlanguage development. It has often been highlighted that L3 acquisition is constrained by a very large number of variables, including some that are unique to the L3 setting—i.e., they do not apply to first or second language acquisition—and some that are well-known in other instances of language acquisition but become particularly challenging in multilingualism. The project I will present in this talk aims to factor that complexity into its methodological approach, which combines behavioural and eye-tracking data, offline and online tasks, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, implicit and explicit instruction. The progress of a group of L3 learners of Spanish is being charted from the onset and for three years, while laboratory based experiments examine the acquisition of artificial grammars implicitly taught as L3s to different groups of bilinguals. These experiments provide total control over the nature and amount of input that learners receive, and allow us to control for and understand key variables that apply to the more ecologically comparable group of L3 Spanish learners. This research will provide invaluable data to assess the relative contribution of different variables to the L3 acquisition process, and in particular to determine if and how linguistic transfer from previously acquired languages impacts the architecture of the initial L3 interlanguage, and how this may affect the course of development in the shape of constraints on L3 specific learnability.