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Constructing an Experimental Design to Explore French Foreign Language

Attrition in Greek Learners: Hypotheses and Expectations

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Background

While a substantive body of research on first language attrition has been developed over the past thirty years, interest in foreign language attrition still remains rare (Bahrick, 1984; Weltens, 1988; Hansen, 1999). However, the permanence of the acquired foreign language skills should be a matter of great interest not only to FL teachers and learners, but also to FL learning policy makers, considering the increasing investment in foreign language teaching (Schmid & Mehotcheva, 2012).

Based on the notion of **Language Maintenance Effort (LME)** introduced by the **Dynamic Model of Multilingualism** (Herdina & Jessner, 2002), as well as on the **frequency and recency** of language use supported by the **Neurolinguistic Theory of Bilingualism** and the **Activation Threshold Hypothesis** (Paradis, 1993, 2004, 2008), the present study focuses on studying the attrition of French as a foreign language (FFL) in Greek students. Our principal objective is to investigate the governing principles of this phenomenon and the different extralinguistic factors which influence its development, two aspects which still remain unexplored to a large extent (Köpke & Schmid, 2011).

Research hypothesis and questions

Learners who have studied FFL, but do not practice it any longer, will suffer deterioration in their language skills, and their level will subsequently decrease.

- Do **language use and contact** during the period of attrition have a positive effect on FFL retention?*
- Are the various **language skills (receptive, productive)** influenced by attrition to the same degree?*
- Does **linguistic proximity/distance** between French and Greek impact the FFL retention?*

Participants

Baseline (BG) – T1: May 2017

41 learners

Greek students attending courses at the French Institute of Greece:

B2 (21), C1 (14), C2 (6)

Female: 29 — Male: 12

Mean age: 24

Range: 31 (min. 15 max. 46)

Standard Deviation: 8,76

Attriting (AG) – T2: May 2018

? attriters

Former students of the French Institute of Greece having obtained the DELF B2 and the DALF C1/C2 diplomas.

| Test battery | Paradigms and references | What will we examine? | Expectations | Research question |
|--|---|---|---|-------------------|
| Sociolinguistic questionnaire | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freed et al., 2004 Keijzer, 2007 Dendrinou et al., 2013 | Personal info, linguistic background: 20 q. Language contact and use: 5 q. Information on FFL learning: 19 q. | Language contact and use during the period of attrition will reinforce FFL retention. | a |
| Writing test | “Describe the happiest moment of your life” (200-250 words) | Syntactic complexity using the Syntactic Diversity Index (Housen, 2016) | AG < BG: syntactic complexity scores | a, b |
| C-test | 5 texts with a focus on articles (15), adverbs (7), adjectives (11), conjunctions (3), prepositions (9), pronouns (7), nouns (31), verbs (17) | Participants’ current proficiency level Linguistic distance effects (e.g. use of infinitive & articles) | Scores of AG < BG L1 influence → FL (negative transfer) Incorrect use of modes & grammatical gender confusion | a, b, c |
| Vocabulary test (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004) | 20 N+V (10 B2 + 10 C1/C2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> L1 → FL translation FL → L1 translation L1 → FL multiple choice FL → L1 multiple choice 10 cognates + 10 false cognates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> L1 → FL translation FL → L1 translation | Lexical access Passive/active reception Passive/active production Linguistic proximity/distance effects (e.g. planète, dialogue/gymnase, fantasma) | AG: Decrease of % correct answers BG-AG: L1 influence → FL (negative transfer-false cognates) BG-AG: L1 influence → FL (positive transfer-cognates) | a, b, c |
| Free speech | “Describe your future plans (work, studies, personal life)” (10 minutes) | Lexical diversity, frequency and distribution of disfluency & hesitation phenomena: repetitions, pauses, self-corrections, reformulations | AG: Increase of hesitation and disfluency phenomena preceding lexical items & limited lexical diversity | a, b |
| Can-do scales (ALTE Can Do project, CEFR) | 51 statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oral comprehension: 19 Oral production & interaction: 19 Reading comprehension: 9 Written production: 12 | (Retrospective) Self-evaluation proficiency at the onset of attrition | AG < BG | a, b |

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