

THIRD LANGUAGE LEARNING, TRILINGUALISM AND MULTILINGUALISM: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the importance of multilingualism has been largely acknowledged more and more research is being conducted on the acquisition and learning of a third language (L3). This is mainly because of the vast mobility of populations between countries and mixed marriages (Barnes 2005). Since multilinguals are far more compared to monolinguals in the world (Tucker 1998) it is just as important to investigate the way bilinguals use their languages while still in the process of learning their third language. A child's ability to communicate in more than one language is surely a more complex ability and thus represents a complex phenomenon too. This phenomenon entails acquiring more than one grammatical system as well as language learning processes that are not part of a single vacuum.

Keywords: Bilingualism, trilingualism, multilingualism, third language learning, children, English as a third language, beneficial effect.

DEFINING TRILINGUALISM/ MULTILINGUALISM

It is indicant that since trilingualism is a rather recent field of research there are a lot of differentiations on its definitions. Many attempts have been made so far to approach a definition of trilingualism. Most of them have been through bilingualism. Trilingualism has also been seen as a branch of bilingualism or even as an extension of bilingualism.

So far literature on multilingualism, including the one on trilingualism, has seen these speakers' qualities in several ways; Bloomfeld (1927), accepted as "true" multilinguals only those that have gained a mastery of all of their languages in a native like manner. Multilingualism is still seen as an exceptional quality although monolinguals are in today's world more of a rare case. Jessner (2008) has criticized the belief that trilinguals are still seen as three monolinguals in one, as well as that a true multilingual does not mix his/ her languages. Jessner goes on her criticism on that perception by saying that this "monolingual perspective of multilingualism is still prevalent in traditional research on multilingual acquisition" (p. 20), thus clearly pointing to a different direction towards research.

Nowadays, the most common scientific view of trilingualism, that most researchers consent to, refers to multilingual speakers who have gradually obtained the ability to communicate in each one of their languages; extending from simple understanding/communicating capabilities to the "model" of a solid multilingual person. In this sense, effective communication in each of the multilingual speaker's languages sets functional multilingualism, irrespectively of the patterns monolinguals use according to their age defined abilities (e.g. Cruz Ferreira, 2006; Tokuhama-Espinoza, 2001, 2003).

Typical cases of L3 learners as found in the literature on multilingualism include: a) children growing up with three languages from birth (e.g. Oksaar, 1977; Hoffmann, 1985; Barnes, 2005), b) *bilingual children learning an L3 – in many cases English – at school at an early age*, as in our study and as is the case in the Basque Country (Cenoz, 2005) or in South Tyrol (Jessner, 2006), c) bilingual migrant children moving to a new linguistic environment, such as Kurdish/ Turkish children learning German in Austria (Brizic, 2006).

Therefore, this definition, can apply to several types of trilingual speakers; adults who learn two foreign languages informally or within school context either at the same time or in later phases of their lives, early childhood bilinguals who are learning a third language later as children or as adults, as well as children who grow up by being in touch with three languages ever since they were born *or as very young learners* and can speak all of them fluently. However, this latter category of speakers is quite limited and can only apply to those children who have acquired a native – like proficiency of all of their languages. This type of proficiency though is rather rare and although it is mentioned by the relevant literature it seems as though it is talking about an ideal multilingual learner; one being quite far from the realistic one that we encounter either in classes or in the so far bibliography.

Haugen referred to multilingualism as “a kind of multiple bilingualism” (1956: 9). Oksaar defined bilingualism as “the ability of a person to use here and now two or more languages as a means of communication in most situations and to switch from one language to the other if necessary” (1983: 19). Also, Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) accepted the presence of more than two languages in the person she defined as bilingual. McArthur (1992: 673) maintained that a multilingual is a person who has “the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing. Different languages are used for different purposes, proficiency in each varying according to such factors as register, occupation and education”.

Cenoz and Genesee (1998) suggested that a student should be defined as trilingual if he can use his three languages to communicate in both oral and written speech. Furthermore, they described multilingualism as the final result of the process of acquisition of several non-native languages. Herdina and Jessner (2000) have suggested that multilingualism should be considered as a varied phenomenon involving bilingualism and monolingualism as possible forms, but addressing mainly those languages learnt after a second one. In this sense then bilingualism is identified with multilingualism.

Given the differentiations on defining multilingualism, Jessner (2008) has rightly summed up the issue by saying that “*finding a definition of multilingualism can be described as one of the most daunting research questions of current linguistics*” (p. 20). Her statement seems to be in accordance with Roman Jakobson’s (1953: 20) who rightly pointed out that “*Bilingualism is to me the fundamental problem of linguistics*”, since we support the view that bilinguals are multilinguals themselves. In this sense, Hufeisen (1998) has added that multilingualism should be used to refer to the learning of more than two languages. This statement also seems to be in line with scholars who have argued that learning an L2 differs from learning an L3.

However, each researcher gives or adopts his/her own definition of multilingualism, and there seem to be two main reasons for this: a) the participants’ own intricate state because of their very nature of use of their several languages, b) the researchers’ backgrounds, aims, personal beliefs and/ or ideologies which formulate their methodologies and frameworks. These two different but strongly connected factors intertwine and create this pluralism of definitions which most of the times seem to be rather similar and at the same time so far from each other.

Moreover, as early as 1953, Weinreich (1953: 113) set the problem of defining multilingualism in that “*no two studies are thoroughly comparable, because the linguistic techniques employed and the sociological orientations, if any, on which they are based have been so different from one case to the next*”. Also, Skuttnab-Kangas (1984: 81), has tried to classify the different types of definitions on multilingualism in terms of their scope. Therefore, definitions stemming from an origin wise perspective view multilingualism as a developmental phenomenon, definitions stemming from a proficiency perspective are based on the linguistic proficiency in two or more languages and functional definitions are based on functions that the use of language serve for the individual or the community. This kind of classification seems to unblock the “conflict” on defining multilingualism since it tries to explain the several interpretations by means of their field of research. In that sense, it is only natural to come across different “interpretations” if not definitions of multilingualism.

Moving further with this issue of defining multilingualism we need to stress out that there have been many researchers of language acquisition that insist on seeing multilinguals as some kind of many monolinguals. However, this seems to come from a perspective stemming from Chomsky’s theory on the proficiency owned by native speakers. Although this is not expressed directly, native speakers are identified with monolinguals. However, a more realistic perspective and thus more up to date with current research seems to be Cook’s concept of multiproiciency who based his own view on Grosjean’s holistic view of bilingualism (1992, 2001) and sees bilinguals as competent and “specific speakers – hearers”. In the long run this Grosjean’s concept of bilinugualism has led to Herdina and Jessner’s (2002:1) statement that “research on linguistics should be centered on the multilingual speaker as a norm, not on the monolingual individual”.

Furthermore, following Grosjean’s theory, Cook (2003) suggested that the L2 user, a definition which he prefers instead of ‘bilingual’, develops multiproiciency which is significantly different from monolingual proficiency. Cook claims that a multilingual is someone far more than a monolingual since he/she happens to own more linguistic attributes. Therefore, multilinguals have established a completely different knowledge of their languages and they thus have developed a distinguished language processing system and/ or methods. This perspective has been the basis of several studies according to which multilinguals are better learners compared to monolinguals, as already mentioned before.

Therefore, after Grosjean’s and Cook’s aforementioned models bilinguals are now viewed as people who own special language competencies that facilitate their ability to communicate in several multiple social contexts. Through this scope the differences existing between monolinguals and bilinguals have to do with sociological perspectives since they are perceived to be more able to cope with multiple contexts. According to Hoffmann (2001: 19) bilinguals “create their own linguistic means in order to master particular communicative situations”.

Moreover, as Kemp (2009: 24) clarified “most researchers now use the term ‘bilingual’ to refer to individuals who use two languages, and ‘multilingual’ to refer to individuals who use three or more languages (rather than using the term bilingual to mean more than two languages, or multilingual for users of just two languages)”. Based on Kemp’s statement we move further with this issue by stating that identifying bilingualism and multilingualism as a kind of the same quality seems a rather problematic assumption and we maintain that just as bilingualism has been proven to be in itself a multifaceted phenomenon, multilingualism

should be seen as an even more complex situation which owns distinct characteristics and needs to be viewed in its own right as an exceptional phenomenon.

Types of Trilingual Settings

Multilinguals may use several languages due to their different social, cultural and economic backgrounds and field of using their specific languages. They might live in a multilingual community, or bilingual communities, or they might be in contact with several monolingual communities during their everyday routines or social life. Their proficiency in each of their languages is possible to differ, and might change over time (Herdina & Jessner, 2002). The multilinguals' languages can have distinguished roles and functions, they may use them separately or code switch and code mix and last but not least *they are still seen as multilinguals even if they use three or even six languages*.

The ability of a person to speak more than one language can occur under a variety of conditions. Edwards (1994: 39) states that “in most instances, multilingualism arises, and is maintained, through contact and necessity”. The emergence of three languages can exist when in each language there is both a source of input and the necessity for communication. Cases of trilingualism can be subdivided into four interrelated variables: (a) the age of the speaker when he made his first important contact with the language, (b) the input they receive (type, modality and quantity) (c) the level of proficiency in each language and (d) the order that the languages were obtained. It is not compulsory that the previously mentioned variables should be independent, although this may also be the case. For example, the time the speaker made his first contact with the specific languages could have a close correlation with the input, i.e. younger speakers could be expected to have a more “naturalistic way of acquiring their language” than older speakers, although this correlation can be a generalization that could be easily argued. Apart from that, in the involvement of three languages, there are many inherent variations in each learner, within each variable, as in the occasion of all cases of language acquisition.

It has to be clarified that the manifestation of the previously mentioned variables leads in various possibilities that would all outline different types of trilingual speakers, and such situations can be further divided according to the age of the speaker, the type and amount of input they receive and the proficiency in each language, considering also the order of acquisition. According to Hoffman (2001: 3) the following classification can be suggested:

- a) Trilingual children who grew up having adopted two home languages different from the one spoken in the community.
- b) Trilingual children grown up in a bilingual community and their home language (either spoken by one or both of their parents) is different from the language spoken in the community.
- c) Third language learners, that is, bilinguals who obtain a third language in the context of school education.
- d) Bilingual individuals who have turned into trilinguals through immigration.
- e) Individuals that belong to trilingual communities.

The present research focuses on children who have acquired their L1 and L2 and are currently learning their L3 within school context. Specifically, this research surveys the language interaction of children who come from an Albanian background and they were born and raised in Greece. They have learnt Albanian from their family, Greek from their family and their social environment and they have also received formal instruction in Greek at

school. Also, they are currently being taught English (L3) at school. It should be noted that their L1 may be either Greek or Albanian according to our participants and that Greek is of a native-like proficiency since they have been using it since their very early childhood interchangeably with Albanian within their family environment.

Evolving and dissolving trilingualism

Hoffman (2001) also clarified the difference between transient and recurrent trilingualism. Transient trilingualism occurs after descending usage of one of the three languages until it is eventually forgotten, absorbed by the other two languages or even never completely obtained, so that eventually the speaker turns to a bilingual or monolingual with a background in trilingualism. This quite common phenomenon is more likely to happen in childhood trilingualism, in instances that one of the languages becomes functionally unimportant so that in time the child loses the contact with the linguistic import as well as contact with the heritage language in a different country. However, what is mainly studied in scientific literature is the “recurrent trilingualism” phenomenon, in which each of the three languages retains its own functionality, so that each one is preserved and evolved by the speaker in a wider extent. It needs to be mentioned, though, that it's considered to be unlikely that all three languages evolve equally in the wider context of communication. As Hoffman (2001) and Cruz-Ferreira (1999) stated, at least one of the well-established languages is probably going to be less used than the other two dominant ones. Moreover, it is most usual to encounter “recurrent trilingualism,” in which each of the three languages has its own functions and relates to a specific domain, and thus each one is preserved and developed by the individual to a greater or lesser extent. However, the three languages are unlikely to be equally developed in every area of communication. *One or even two of the three, although firmly established, is likely to be used less than the other two or the most dominant one*, as shown in Hoffman (2001) and Cruz-Ferreira (1999).

It is expected that one of the three languages will outperform the other two, as a natural result of the education being occurred in the most socially accepted language. According to Fishman et al (1971), the possibility of balanced bilingual speakers is considered to be rare: “Bilinguals who are equally fluent in both languages (as measured by their facility and general correctness) are rarely equally fluent in both languages about all possible topics; this phenomenon is a reflection of the fact that societal allocation of functions is normally imbalanced and in complementary distribution rather than redundant” (Fishman et al, 1971, in MacSwan, 1999: 30).

A similar logic can also be adapted to trilingual speakers; nevertheless, it is very possible that trilingualism will appear more diverse according to the area occurred and the time of acquisition. Cenoz (2003) states: “Third language acquisition presents more temporal diversity than second language acquisition” (p. 72).

Also, Cenoz (2000) describes at least four types of acquisition order:

- (i) Simultaneous acquisition of L1/L2/L3 (although this is rather rare)
- (ii) Consecutive acquisition of L1, L2 and L3,
- (iii) Simultaneous acquisition of L2/L3 after learning the L1,
- (iv) *Simultaneous acquisition of L1/L2 before learning the L3.*

As far as the classification of the types of trilingualism, it is necessary to say that the borders between them are flexible rather than rigid. As stated by Hoffmann (2001: 9), “it is not possible to discern clear cut-off points between the infant, the child and the older trilingual,

or between simultaneous and subsequent trilingualism, or between natural acquisition and acquisition as a result of structured learning”. Therefore, these classifications should be taken into account as a basis for studying trilingualism, and not as rules that force the researcher to think or work within a rigid framework. Third language acquisition is an intricate phenomenon and is therefore attached to both individual and psycho-social factors during language learning. Since this complexity has been found in studies on second language learning (e.g. Dornyei, 2005) we may assume that third language learning could top up this complexity.

The beneficial effect of bilingualism in learning a third language

The older perception held that children who learn a second or a third language add up a negative factor towards their overall language development; however this has been proven wrong. Different studies have shown that third language learners were more skillful and talented than second language learners. Many studies on trilingualism propose that if the circumstances are positive in supporting and preserving all of the languages known to a third language learner, bilingualism may appear to be a determinant factor in building up L3 proficiency. Most of the studies in the specific area are supported by cases of L3 acquisition through formal instruction, like with our study since our participants have been learning their L3 (English) at school.

The specific abilities and the language competency that seem to benefit from already existing bilingual experience are pragmatic proficiency (Safont Jorda, 2003), metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 1991, in Hoffmann, 2001), and language processing capabilities (Cenoz, 2003, Sanz, 2000). Hoffmann (2001) suggests that in the occasion of trilinguals “the experience of three different languages also results in further enhanced awareness of the analysis and control components of processing to enable the speaker to make the right choices and respond in linguistically and communicatively adequate ways” (p. 14). However, since the choices of trilinguals are probably plentiful; thus it should be expected that more occasions in which grammatically odd and/or unorthodox usage may occur. It should also be taken into consideration that language is totally linked to culture and serves as an exclusive way for analyzing and interpreting the surrounding objects and events (Auer 1998; Cruz-Ferreira 2006; Grosjean, 1985; Hamers and Blanc, 2000; Tokuhama-Espinoza, 2001); this inevitably results in a trilingual speaker seeing everyday things and situations through a different perspective than a monolingual or a bilingual speaker.

According to studies on bilingualism (Brohy, 2001; Hufeisen, 1998; Jessner, 1999), children who learn a second or a third language appear to be more intellectually acute. Furthermore, Griessler (2001) suggested that any third language has a beneficial effect on a child’s two other languages, not only on his grammatical awareness but also on his linguistic abilities, his memorizing techniques and his communication strategies. Brohy (2001) also mentions that bilingual children are more receptive to learning a third language compared to children who approach their second language with the help of just their mother tongue. Bialystok (2001) suggested that a bilingual does not have universally superior metalinguistic advantages and abilities but increased abilities in tasks that require attention L1. Cenoz (2003) pointed out that the majority of studies on general proficiency indicated a positive effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition and that this was also connected to metalinguistic awareness, language learning strategies and communicative ability, especially when we look into typologically related languages.

Also, Andreou (2007) has shown that the experience of three languages is likely to result in enhanced awareness of the analysis and control components of language processing on the part of trilinguals. Furthermore, McLaughlin (1990) supports the view that multilingual learners use different strategies compared to monolingual learners, who only learn their first language, due to their experience in language learning. Thomas (1992) also suggested that when a student has a former linguistic experience he/she uses strategies which influence his future success in the foreign language classroom. Moreover, Kemp (2001) showed that multilinguals pick up the grammar of another language faster, meaning that they use more grammar learning strategies. Furthermore, she pointed out that an experienced multilingual learner develops automaticity in processing several foreign languages depending on the linguistic environment (in Jessner, 2008). Therefore, the results of these studies indicate that a bilingual has the specific prerequisites for successful future language learning.

English as a third language

Research in learning English as a third language has attracted significant attention in the recent years, since it is the main language of communication among European Union citizens. Jessner indicated that “in a growing number of countries worldwide English is learnt and taught as a third language.” (2006: 2). Thus, English is seen as a factor in the formation of trilingualism and the spread of English.

In 2001 Eurostat found that 90 percent of pupils in secondary schools in the European Union learn English (Pilos, 2001), and according to “The Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe” (2012) it is confirmed that English is by far the most taught foreign language in nearly all European countries. In this sense, English is in many cases a second or even a third and not a foreign language and it is in contact with other languages since many European countries are bilingual or multilingual. According to the “Eurobarometer” (2012) conducted by the European Commission, 74% of the Greeks believe that English is the most useful language for their personal development, while the total of the Europeans that took part in that study answered to that question that English is the most useful in 64%. Also, Greeks believe that English is the most useful language for their children’s future in 92% while Europeans believe the same thing in 79%. Finally, 51% of the Greeks stated that they are confident in having a conversation in English, whereas only 9% of the participants were confident with French. Clearly, this reinforces the perception that English is by far the most “popular” foreign language in Greece and thus widely taught and learnt. Also, it has a high prestige within the Greek population and children are introduced to it from an early age (most of them around the age of seven).

Moreover, English is nowadays one of the languages the majority of the multilinguals own since it is being learnt as a second, third or fourth foreign language. English is actually a lingua franca and although this term is used according to Crystal (1997: 454) as “a medium of communication for people that speak different first languages”, Cenoz and Jessner (2000: 248) point out that in the case of Europe specifically this term should be also used for people speaking different second languages too. This particular suggestion sums up the great diversity of the language situation within Europe today as well as the implications (linguistic, social, economic and political) that will emerge in the near future.

In most European countries English had been taught as a second language with a foreign language methodology, however nowadays it is common that it is taught as a third language. For instance, the case of immigrants from non-European countries who learn the official

language of the country they have settled in and they also study English at school. Research into trilingualism also looks at bilingual children's acquisition of the third language through schooling. Studies of this kind have been carried out with linguistic minority children in Canada (Bild & Swain, 1989; Genesee, 1998), Belgium (Jaspaert & Lemmens, 1990), Greece (Anastassiou & Andreou, 2014; Andreou & Anastassiou, 2011) and the Basque Country (Cenoz, 1998; Cenoz & Lindsay, 1996; Valencia & Cenoz, 1992) among others.

Moreover, Hoffmann and Stavans (2007) *point out that most of the research on trilingualism focuses on individuals who acquire or learn a third language in a school context* – just like our case - (e.g. Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Cenoz, Hufeisen, & Jessner, 2001) or migrant minorities who learn a third language in social contexts (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1993). Also, the majority of these studies look into the development of a third language consecutively to the development of one or two other languages, just like our study presented below. Furthermore, recent literature promotes the learning of more than one language as a way to ensure cognitive advantages (compared to monolinguals) (Bialystok et al, 2004).

Most of the schoolchildren in Greece learn English as a second language with a foreign language curriculum and methodology. In fact, English is the first foreign language that every Greek pupil will start with, since there is the belief that it is a global language and the most useful one towards their professional future life. There have been more languages introduced in public schools and children (and their parents) have had the option of learning French, German, Italian, and in some schools Spanish. However, the amount of effort that was needed in order to change the beliefs regarding the usefulness of the languages as well as the great problematic attitude towards learning a foreign language within public school education has not given the desired results in terms of the language trend shift. Greek children however are considered as one of the most multilingual learners within Europe, since the vast majority of them have attended foreign language classes and they have also sat the relevant language exams to gain the relevant certificates.

Nowadays, the multilinguality of the Greek children has moved even more forward since during the last twenty years or so children coming from immigrant families have been an ever increasing number of the schoolchildren. These children bring their own linguistic experiences in the general education classroom and they are learning English as their third language, since they speak their heritage language, Greek which is the wider society's official language and they are also learning English at school. In most of the cases of these immigrant communities the children are not being taught their heritage language by effort of their communities and their parents. It is rare that children may show literacy in their heritage languages and this is mostly because of the status their languages have in Greek society as well as the unstable situation they experience due to the manner they have arrived in Greece (their majority do not possess the legal documentation needed). Therefore, their children become literate only in Greek when they enter school age, although their naturalistic manner of learning Greek has preceded because they use it from their early years and onwards.

However, there is another side to this multilingual aspect of English. Although there are an ever-growing number of people learning English as a foreign language, it seems that native English speakers are on the verge of becoming a rare case. As Graddol (2006) points out monolingual English graduates may soon find themselves in a disadvantaged position since young people from other non English speaking countries nowadays own their mother tongue, English and another language. Therefore, they have an advantage towards their professional career since they are being taught English – in most cases as a startup and then more

languages follow – ever since they are schoolchildren. On the contrary, the British Council (2007) seems to alert on the lack of motivation and encouragement English schoolchildren seem to be getting in order to learn other languages due to the effortless communication that they enjoy by owning a lingua franca.

On top of that, today's mass communication medium, the internet, has proved to be more multilingual and less English dominated than originally thought. Although English continues to be one of the most used languages, the mobility of the world population and the tendency of the Diaspora to use its own language to communicate within social media and chat rooms have created a multilingual need for the internet itself. This way less used languages have been flourishing and they keep gaining ground. Hence people that have been living away from their countries as well as their children have nowadays more incentives and more motivation towards their heritage language maintenance. Although English is at the time being indeed a lingua franca and the medium of communication for people coming from many different language backgrounds it seems that this kind of domination is not going to be the case in a few years time.

Besides, this English language domination has been having a negative effect on people whose mother tongue/ first language is English, since they do not have enough incentives to learn and use other languages too. Multilingualism can be achieved when both sides make an equal effort to approach the same goal; otherwise it is a less effective struggle. In that sense, the European Union "1 plus 2" recommendation which aims to promote the learning of one's mother tongue/ first language + two other languages, has been trying to increase the languages being learnt and spoken within the European citizens. This recommendation had been also trying to ensure that the domination of just one language will not prevail for much longer and that less popular languages will not be less privileged in that sense. Moreover, the perception of a certain language's prestige may in the long run hinder the learning and usage of other languages and thus hinder multilingualism as perceived and implemented by the European Union (see more at the EUNIC Recommendations on language learning, 2006).

From Monolingualism and Bilingualism to Trilingualism

Romaine (1984: 1) pointed out that "it would certainly be odd to encounter a book with the title 'Monolingualism'. However, it is precisely a monolingual perspective which modern linguistic theory takes as its starting point in dealing with basic analytical problems, such as the construction of grammars and the nature of proficiency". This concept sets the scenery; there is a default setting under which monolingual or bilingual skills may be compared to, without taking it for granted that this is the only way to evaluate the proficiency of bilingual or trilingual speakers. According to Rothman and Niño-Murcia (2008) there might be a possibility to evaluate the success or failure of multilingualism in terms of the output of multilingual speakers in each corresponding language. They seem to argue that the use of monolingualism, as the utmost "benchmark" for the assessment of multilingual production, denotes that bilingual skills cannot be considered as equal to a sum of two monolingual systems, since the conditions the languages are learnt and their functions are different even in the rare situation that the exposure to each language appears to have similarities. Although the methods (i.e. learning strategies, inborn language faculty and processing capacities) that each speaker acquires bilingualism are more or less identical. Apart from that, it would be logical to assume that monolingual grammatical skills are somehow "fixed" for each speaker who is exposed to a specific dialect, regardless of the context in which it is acquired. Also, the final proficiency of each language appears to be varied amongst speakers in an overall

sense - even within the same speakers who may show different grammatical competences for each one of their languages (see Montrul, 2008 for a discussion).

According to Grosjean (1985) bilingual speakers are not only the sum of two monolinguals, and what is more, a bilingual speaker has established unique language skills and proficiency. Accordingly, trilingualism should not be considered as the sum of three monolingual systems and neither as just another language which has been added to a bilingual situation, simply because it appears to have boundless variations in the level of linguistic and social context as well as variability amongst the learners (Cruz-Ferreira, 2006; Rothman and Niño-Murcia 2008).

CONCLUSION

As time passes more and more research is being conducted on this relatively new linguistic field. The increasing interest on trilingualism and by extension on multilingualism is walking side by side with our era. People immigrate, communicate with other cultures, there are cases that countries have more than one official language and in general we need to speak more than our mother tongue to be able to adapt to every aspect of our lives. Moreover, the European Union has proposed the “Mother tongue plus one” guideline suggesting that European citizens should learn apart from their mother tongue, one neighbour country’s language and another lingua franca. Future research on trilingualism/ multilingualism will give more data on the way languages interact and how a speaker subconsciously chooses how he code switches any time he needs to as well as some insights into trilingual speech production, including its related issues of language choice, language dominance and directionality of switches.

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