

## The Acquisition of Spanish L4 by Learners with Croatian L1, English L2 and Italian L3

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**Abstract :** The study of acquiring a third and additional language has garnered significant focus within second language acquisition (SLA) research. Initially, it was commonly viewed as merely an extension of second language acquisition (SLA). However, in the last two decades, numerous researchers have emphasized the need to recognize the unique characteristics of third language acquisition (TLA). This recognition is crucial for understanding the intricate cognitive processes that arise from the interaction of more than two linguistic systems in the learner's mind. This study investigates cross-linguistic influences in the acquisition of Spanish as a fourth language by students who have Croatian as a first language (L1). English as a second language (L2), and Italian as a third language (L3). Observational data suggests that influence or transfer of linguistic elements can arise not only from one's native language (L1) but also from non-native languages. This implies that, for individuals proficient in multiple languages, the native language doesn't consistently hold a superior position. Instead, it should be examined alongside other potential sources of linguistic transfer. Earlier studies have demonstrated that high proficiency in a second language can significantly impact cross-linguistic influences when acquiring a third and additional language. Among the extensively examined factors, the typological relationship stands out as one of the most scrutinized variables. The goal of the present study was to explore whether language typology and formal similarity or proficiency in the second language had a more significant impact on L4 acquisition. Participants in this study were third-year undergraduate students at Rochester Institute of Technology's subsidiary in Croatia (RIT Croatia). All the participants had exclusively Croatian as L1, English as L2, Italian as L3 and were learning Spanish as L4 at the time of the study. All the participants had a high level of proficiency in English and low level of proficiency in Italian. Based on the error analysis the findings indicate that for some types of lexical errors such as coinage, language typology had a more significant impact and Italian language was the preferred source of transfer despite the low proficiency in that language. For some other types of lexical errors, such as calques, second language proficiency had a more significant impact, and English language was the preferred source of transfer. On the other hand, Croatian, Italian, and Spanish are more similar in the area of morphology due to higher degree of inflection compared to English and the strongest influence of the Croatian language was precisely in the area of morphology. The results emphasize the need to consider linguistic resemblances between the native language (L1) and the third and additional language as well as the learners' proficiency in the second language when developing successful teaching strategies for acquiring the third and additional language. These conclusions add to the expanding knowledge in the realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and offer practical insights for language educators aiming to enhance the effectiveness of learning experiences in acquiring a third and additional language.

**Keywords :** third and additional language acquisition, cross-linguistic influences, language proficiency, language typology

**Conference Title :** ICLLL 2024 : International Conference on Languages, Literature and Linguistics

**Conference Location :** New York, United States

**Conference Dates :** December 09-10, 2024