



Title	Towards an interactive view of third language acquisition: the case of the German Vorfeld
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Abstract of thesis entitled

Towards an interactive view of third language acquisition: the case of the German *Vorfeld*

submitted by

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This thesis investigates how students with Cantonese (L1) and English (L2) backgrounds acquire German as a third language (L3), with a focus on the acquisition of the *Vorfeld* (fronting) constructions of German. In L3 studies, the roles played by mother tongue, L2 and developmental grammar may be distinguished. Previous L3 studies have suggested that the role of L2 seems to be prominent in L3 strategy building, including interlanguage transfer from L2 to L3. Pursuing a cognitive approach, we argue that incremental production and language processing strategies are significant factors in accounting for third language acquisition and production.

A total of 45 university students of German completed a questionnaire and submitted copies of their compositions, followed by picture elicitation tasks. Three typical fronting types were found to be common amongst the learners:

1. Für mich, jede Familie hat eigene Situation und Probleme.
2. Obwohl gibt es viele Probleme mit alten Leuten zusammen lebt, finde ich gut dafür.
3. Jetzt die meisterns *haben* schon nach Hong Kong zurückgekommen.

Type 1 is argued to reflect indirect transfer of native language function-form characteristics. Type two is argued to be an intralingual error in which the learners have overgeneralized the verb second (V2) rule, without acquiring the correct function of the *Vorfeld* construction. The third type shows that apart from the influence of English in adverb fronting constructions, adverbs of stance or perspective adverbs like '*jetzt*' semantically do not form part of the proposition and they are therefore treated as "extra-sentential" constituents which do not affect the basic V2 construction.



The findings suggest that learners may have primarily acquired the topic function of German fronting, while failing to fully acquire the focus function. For the focus function, learners seem to prefer alternative constructions such as existential sentences using '*es gibt*'. Both of these findings implicate L1 Chinese influence.

As an overall perspective on the incipient field of third language acquisition research I propose a holistic and coherent view which encompasses syntax, semantics and pragmatics at all levels of language development. By probing an independent paradigm of L3 studies, we aim to contribute to a new dynamic research space as well to ongoing debates in the SLA field by attributing greater autonomy and consciousness to the learner, even on the level of grammatical interaction.

