

Journal of Celtic Language Learning

Volume 6

Special Issue: First Language Acquisition

2001

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Editors:

Muiris Ó Laoire
Nancy Stenson

Guest editor: Jeffrey L. Kallen

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The *Journal of Celtic Language Learning* (ISSN: 1078-3911) is an international review for researchers and teachers of modern Celtic Languages. The official publication of the North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers (NAACL), *JCLL* includes papers presented at the Association's annual conference in addition to manuscripts submitted by scholars of modern Celtic languages world-wide. It is also a forum in which modern Celtic language teachers can share insights into methodology with their peers.

JCLL's mission, similar to that of the NAACL, is to provide another forum in which teachers and applied linguists can contribute to the literature presently available on bilingual and second language acquisition, as well as increase communication among modern Celtic language teachers and researchers.

Editors

Muiris Ó Laoire

*Department of Languages
and Communication
Institute of Technology
Tralee, Co. Kerry
Ireland*

E-mail: olaoirem@naaclt.org

Nancy Stenson

*Institute of Linguistics and Asian and
Slavic Languages and Literatures
University of Minnesota
190 Klaeber Court, 320-16th Ave., SE,
Minneapolis, MN 55455*

E-mail: stensonn@naaclt.org

Editor Emeritus: Thomas W. Ihde, *Lehman College, CUNY, ihdet@naaclt.org*

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SUBMISSIONS

- ☞ The *Journal of Celtic Language Learning* is published each winter.
- ☞ Submissions received by April 15 will be guaranteed consideration for the upcoming volume. Later submissions may be deferred to later volumes as space requires.
- ☞ Those interested should submit four typed copies of their manuscript (*two* without any indication of the author's identity) to Nancy Stenson, Institute of Linguistics and Asian and Slavic Languages and Literatures, 190 Klæber Court, 320 16th Avenue, SE, Minneapolis, MN, 55455. Keep a disk (computer) copy of the paper. It will be requested in the case of acceptance.
- ☞ All submissions should be double spaced. Articles should be 2500 to 3000 words long (with a 50 to 60 word abstract at the beginning), and short descriptions of a program or technique should be 200 to 500 words.
- ☞ All research papers will be refereed blindly by two anonymous readers.
- ☞ Comments from the referees will be forwarded to the authors together with the editors' decision regarding publishing by September 15 of the same year.

INDEXES

Some of the articles published in the *Journal of Celtic Language Learning* are abstracted or indexed in *Language Teaching*, LLBA (*Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts*), RIE (*Resources in Education*), the Modern Language Association *International Bibliography*, and *Selected Articles from Language Journals* from the Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann.

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PREFACE: THE ACQUISITION OF CELTIC LANGUAGES

Jeffrey L. Kallen
Trinity College Dublin

Some problems of Celtic language acquisition

It has long been recognised in the field of second language teaching and learning that there is some kind of relationship between the process of first language acquisition and that of learning language as an older child or adult in a classroom or other structured environment. The precise nature of this relationship, however, is by no means clear. Differences between first and second language learning may be *internal* to the mind and brain, *external* in so far as the linguistic environments are usually different for each type of learning, or *interactive* to the degree that the individual brings different attitudes and motivations to the language learning process in different social settings. Then again, apparent differences between first and second (or plural) language learning may not really be that great: conventional wisdom and particular research traditions hold that children have a natural superiority in language learning, sometimes attributed to the biology of brain maturation, yet more recent work and counter-evidence urges us to be cautious and qualified in accepting such a view (see, for example, Scovel 1988, Singleton 1989, and Bialystok and Hakuta 1994). Either way, or perhaps just because the field is still full of unanswered questions, the relationship between first and second language acquisition poses a central problem for anyone who works with language learning.

The problem of language acquisition is particularly acute for the Celtic languages, since most children acquiring a Celtic language as a first language do so in a minority language environment in which bilingualism with the socially dominant language is an inevitability. The effect of this large-scale bilingualism is twofold. Obviously, it becomes difficult to find children whose linguistic environments are so monolingually Celtic that they represent the 'pure' unfolding of a Celtic language in the mind. It thus becomes difficult to know if a child's deviation from the adult language norm is attributable to developmental errors of the kind typical of children everywhere, or if cross-linguistic interference from another language is involved. Due to the diversity of language inputs and environments for children learning Celtic languages from birth, it also becomes difficult for applied specialists such as classroom teachers or speech and language therapists to establish linguistic norms in the acquisition process: 100 learners of a minority language in a bilingual context may well show more