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The Acquisition of Gender and Plural with German Noun Vocabulary

Special Workshop on L2 and L3 Acquisition of Vocabulary in the Germanic Languages

Traditionally, German teachers have instructed their students to simply learn the gender and plural forms of each noun they learn as they learn the noun. Beginning in the 1980s though, scholars began to unravel a system of German noun gender assignment and later, plural assignment which is closely related to gender assignment. Much of this research has been first presented at previous Germanic Linguistics Annual Conferences. Donald Steinmetz put noun gender and plural research into practice in the German classroom. He claimed great success with it in his classes but unfortunately never published a work specifically concerned with the pedagogy of German gender and plural. He did however, co-author an unpublished handbook for students with Donald Nelson, *The Joy of Gender: A Student Handbook*.

Using primarily this handbook, I conducted a study in the spring semester of 2012 in which I taught two sections of First Semester German which offered me a unique opportunity to test the system on one class while using the other as a control group under identical learning conditions. On average, there were about 10 students from the test group and 10 from the control group participating in any given quiz. In the spring semester of 2014, I am teaching two sections of Second Semester German and conducting a similar study with 9 students from section 1 as the test group and 12 students from section 2 as the control group.

For the benefit of those members of the audience not familiar with the system, the first half of the presentation will introduce the system for deducing the gender and plural of German nouns and discuss how I have employed the system in the German language classroom. The paper will then present the findings of the two studies and discuss the differences in gender and plural acquisition between the test groups and control groups.

Nelson, D. (1998). Prolegomena to a German gender dictionary. *Word* 49.2, pp. 205-224.

Nelson, D. & Steinmetz D. (Unpublished) *The Joy of Gender: A Student Handbook*.

Steinmetz, D. (1986). "Two principles and some rules for gender in German: Inanimate nouns". *Word* 37.3, pp. 189-217.