

*This thesis investigates the acquisition of Japanese as a second language by adult speakers of English and Spanish, arguing that the learner's mother tongue plays a central and underexplored role in determining which L2 features are difficult to acquire. Drawing on weak linguistic relativity, cognitivist SLA models, and the Multilingual Turn, the thesis introduces Mother-Tongue Dependent Salience (MTDS), a framework that measures acquisition difficulty based on the degree of mismatch between L1 and L2 reality-encoding systems. Features absent or differently structured in the learner's L1, such as Japanese final particles or English articles, require cognitive restructuring that communicative exposure alone cannot produce.*

*Building on MTDS, the thesis proposes Meaning Conveyance Translation (MCT), a pedagogical translation methodology designed to make high-MTDS features explicitly accessible to learners through L1-referenced instruction. MCT is evaluated against translation practices found in widely used Japanese textbooks, and tested in a classroom experiment at the Autonomous University of Barcelona comparing MCT-informed instruction with conventional teaching. Results inform the development of 7Step Japanese, a set of early-stage learning materials grounded in the theoretical and pedagogical principles developed throughout the thesis.*