

## **First Language Attrition and Second Language Acquisition in a Second Language Environment**

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Taking a dynamic, multi-competence view of bilingualism, this thesis is concerned with the outcomes of the parallel processes of first language maintenance and second language acquisition in adult bilinguals placed in a second language environment. In a mixed between-group/within-group design, 27 German late bilinguals resident in Ireland (mean LOR = 19.5 years), and two matching control groups of 18 Irish and 20 German L2 users were tested on an extensive test battery of parallel German and English language tests, which also comprised a linguistic aptitude test and sociolinguistic questionnaires. The thesis presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the proficiency data from the between-group attrition and attainment studies on measures of complexity, accuracy and fluency. Results indicate that the bilingual group performs both similarly and dissimilarly to the respective control groups, though the group differences are larger in the attainment study. There is large inter-individual variability across all three groups, but it is most pronounced in the bilingual group, where in both studies some participants perform outside the native-speaker range provided by the control groups. There is thus evidence of both L1 attrition and native-like (as measured by this test battery) L2 attainment. The findings contribute to the body of knowledge in distinct linguistic subfields, by drawing together perspectives from L1 attrition, L2 acquisition and dynamic approaches to bilingualism.