MAŁGORZATA MRÓZ

BILINGUAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: FOCUS ON RELATIVE CLAUSES IN POLISH AND ENGLISH

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Wydanie I

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Specific aims

The aim of this study is to investigate the development of relative clause structures in bilingual simultaneous language acquisition of English and Polish as well as in monolingual first acquisition of Polish.

Specifically, this book attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is the development of two languages in a bilingual child autonomous or is there a certain degree of interference between the two languages? Specifically, will the findings from this research study support the Independent Development Hypothesis or the Interdependent Development Hypothesis?

2. Regardless of the autonomy or interdependence of the patterns of bilingual acquisition, is there any evidence to support Grosjean's famous claim (1989) that a "bilingual is not a sum of two monolinguals"? In other words, is bilingual development unique or rather does the development in each language follow the monolingual patterns? If the latter is true, what is the explanation for the differences between monolingual and bilingual acquisition?

3. Do Polish monolingual patterns of acquisition of relative clauses follow the same course of development as in English? Specifically, are free relative clauses primary in development to lexically headed forms in Polish as it has been reported by Flynn and Lust (1981) for English. In addition, what is the importance of semantic determinacy in the monolingual acquisition of Polish relative clauses?

To achieve the aforementioned goals the research conducted for the purpose of this book involved an Elicited Imitation Task carried out on Polish-American children living in Boston, MA, USA and a monolingual group in Warsaw, Poland.

Summary of the chapters

This book is divided into 11 chapters. The first seven provide a detailed review of past and current literature, while the last four report on the conducted study, its design, results and discussion of findings.

Chapter 1 is indented to provide an introduction to the concept of bilingualism. It attempts to present all existing definitions and classifications of bilingualism as well as to describe other aspects closely connected with this phenomenon, including code mixing and the influence of dual competence on learning.

Chapter 2 discusses first language acquisition from two main viewpoints: rationalism and empiricism. It attempts to explain the key differences between the two approaches by the description of its main theories: imitation, behaviorism and connectionism as examples of empiricist paradigm, and Chomsky's Universal Grammar as an example of the rationalist paradigm. The focus is given to the rationalist perspective.

Chapter 3 describes simultaneous and successive bilingual language acquisitions. It addresses the question whether or not the child has separate linguistic systems for each language she/he acquires. It also discusses the differences between first and second language acquisitions, the critical period hypothesis and the role of Universal Grammar.

Chapter 4 aims at shedding some light on actual linguistic development: the specific areas that have to be acquired and learning strategies adopted by children. This chapter discusses acquisition of lexicon (i.e. phonology and semantics) and syntax, but its focus is on the latter.

Chapter 5 presents literature review on the syntactic structure of relative clauses and their acquisition in English viewed from the traditional grammar approach as well as Chomsky's generative grammar model.

Chapter 6 provides a description of relative clauses in Polish and compares them with relative clause structures in English. It also reviews the available literature on the patterns of acquisition of relative clauses in Polish.

Chapter 7 presents information on the bilingual population living in the United States with a focus on Polish population. It includes the history of

Polish immigration, Polish language schools, Polish initiatives and attitudes towards being a Polish-American.

Chapter 8 reports on a new series of studies that the author has conducted for the purpose of this book. The study involved a group of bilingual children acquiring Polish and English simultaneously as their first languages and a group of monolingual children acquiring Polish as a first language. The chapter describes the design of the study, employed methodology and the participants.

Chapter 9 presents the results from the conducted study. The first part reports on the quantitative results, while the second part presents the analysis of errors.

Chapter 10 provides a qualitative analysis and discussion of the research findings.

Chapter 11 summarizes the main findings and discusses the implications for future research. It also offers some pedagogical recommendations for dealing with bilingual children.

Abstract

Language acquisition remains one of the most debated topics in linguistics and developmental psychology today. Researchers report contradictory evidence due to a great number of individual variations and specifics of each linguistic environment at the same time emphasizing that more research is necessary. Bilingual language acquisition is even more challenging. Linguists and psychologists attempt to describe a typical course of development of the two languages and to propose different hypotheses to account for the processes that occur in all bilingual children.

This book begins with a review of past and current literature on monolingual and bilingual language acquisition and other associated with this phenomenon processes. In order to provide new evidence to the field, it also describes a new series of studies on language groups that has not been researched before. Its focus is on restricted relative clause structures and their acquisition by bilingual English/Polish-speaking children (4;7–6;11, N=18) and by monolingual Polish-speaking counterparts (3;0–6;11, N=40).

The design of the study matched that of a previously conducted English and French monolingual studies (Flynn and Lust, 1981; Foley, 1996), which used the Elicited Imitation Task as a method for data collection.

The results indicate that the patterns of acquisition of relative clauses in English of bilingual children match those for English-speaking monolinguals, while the developmental patterns in Polish of bilinguals do not resemble that of Polish-speaking monolinguals. It is hypothesized that the reason for the discrepancy between the two languages in a bilingual subject lies in the proficiency in each language.

Furthermore, the results revealed that the two languages in a bilingual child develop autonomously and no interference between the two has been found, thus providing additional evidence for Independent Development Hypothesis. It is argued that the reasons for the differences between the two languages cannot be attributed to the uniqueness of bilingual development, but rather to the insufficient input in the linguistic environment.

In addition, the patterns of monolingual acquisition of relative clause structures in Polish differ from the development of these structures in English. No primacy of free relatives in Polish has been found. Moreover, semantic determinacy plays a more important role in the acquisition of relative clauses in Polish than in English implying that the underlying structure of free relatives and lexically headed forms differ between the two languages.

Despite the differences between Polish and English relative clause structures, the monolingual acquisitions of both languages are closely related. The findings corroborate Chomsky's generative grammar framework, the Strong Continuity Hypothesis and the Grammatical Mapping Paradigm.