Early acquisition of the determiner phrase:

A comparative corpus analysis

In the past two decades, there has been increasing interest in the study of Bilingual First Language Acquisition (BFLA) as a means to understand the cognitive processes underlying acquisition of linguistic structures - lexical and particularly grammatical elements. While it is certainly worthwhile to analyze a monolingual child's acquisition of her L1 in order to better understand which areas of acquisition are most difficult or troublesome (e.g. tense, agreement, development of functional elements), studying the speech of bilingual children in particular often provides "the additional advantage of allowing for cross-linguistic comparison within the same individual, thus allowing the researcher to control a number of variables like individual maturation, processing capacity, personality factors, etc., and to tease apart structural factors from other factors in language acquisition" (Meisel, 2001: 13). Currently, the majority of studies in BFLA have focused on the acquisition of the VP, IP/TP, and CP structures, with comparatively little work done in development of the determiner phrase (DP), which is the focus of this study. In this paper, I investigate the acquisition of the DP by two subjects from the CHILDES corpus – a bilingual English-French speaking child and a monolingual French child. I begin by situating this study within previous research in BFLA as well as within the proposed stages of determiner acquisition by monolingual (L1) and bilingual (2L1) French children. I analyze the production of the two subjects, focusing on the inclusion and use of determiners and whether the production of the bilingual child indicates cross-linguistic influence. My findings, which support the Continuity hypothesis of language acquisition, indicate the possibility of cross-linguistic influence; however, the scarcity of such occurrences in the data also suggests the bilingual subject is in the process of creating two independent grammars rather than one overarching system.

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