Bilingual Exposure At Different Ages in Childhood: Do they Exhibit "Stage-Like" Language Acquisition Similar to Young Monolinguals?

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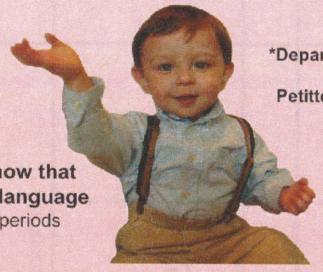


INTRODUCTION

Decades of discoveries in child language show that young children master specific parts of language
within highly regular and universal maturational periods
Despite
varying environments
differences among language organization and surface structure (typology)
Achievement of specific linguistic knowledge at regular maturational ages is under biological control

Linguistic Stages = The stable relationship between specific maturational ages and the child's sensitivity to and achievement of specific types of linguistic knowledge at the core of human language structure (e.g., phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics), and its change over time

"Stages" do not predict regularity in contents across all language typologies
"Stages" do predict regularity in "kind" (which parts of language structure will be tackled during which maturational age range)

Questions

Do young bilinguals exposed to two languages exhibit stage-like language acquisition comparable to monolinguals?
Does learning context matter?

Subjects

Bilingual children, where first exposure to their NEW language occurred at key ages corresponding to maturational brain growth,varying 1st or 2nd year into bilingual exposure, across 4 language populations N=11 children, three sessions each, over 6 months. **Table 1**

Context of Acquisition

Linguistic Community = Intensive NEW language exposure external to home, and over multiple contexts
Instructional = NEW language in classroom only

	Child	Age of 1st Bilingual Exposure	# of Years into Bilingual Exposure	Context	Language	
					NEW	Home
I	Mary	2-3	1	Linguistic Community	French	English
	Ivan		2	Linguistic Community	French	Russian
II	Elise	4-6	1	Linguistic Community	English	French
	Diego		2	Linguistic Community	French	Spanish
	Sally		2	Linguistic Community	French	English
	Marco		2	Linguistic Community	French	Spanish
III	Paola	7-9	1	Linguistic Community	French	Spanish
	Carlos		1	Linguistic Community	French	Spanish
	Nina		2	Linguistic Community	French	Russian
	Celine		1	Instructional	English	French
	Jacqueline		2	Instructional	English	French
	Françoise		2	Instructional	English	French

METHODS

Assessing Linguistic Stages in the Bilingual Child

We compared a bilingual child's NEW language (English or French) to the FIVE stages in monolingual children acquiring English[7] **Appendix 1**

OR

the FIVE stages in monolingual children acquiring French[8] **Appendix 2**

Analyses

Calculation of stages of NEW language acquisition
Calculation of success of NEW language mastery by age & context of exposure
Calculation of the percent time major morpho-syntactic markers (subject, verb or direct object) were missing in obligatory linguistic contexts[7-8]

RESULTS

NEW Language Competence & Community Exposure

First Year All children (all age groups) used the morpho-syntactic markers identified in Stages (I) to (III) for English, or for French, plus Stage (IV) Nascent

Second Year All children achieved (I)-(III), plus Stage (IV), and into Stage (V) **Figure 1**

NEW Language Competence & Instructional Exposure

First & Second Year All children (all age groups) did not exhibit "stage-like" language acquisition regardless of #years into NEW language. Many One-word utterances characteristic of monolingual "Stage I" A few isolated routinized phrases, e.g., social routines ("What's your name?") characteristic of Stage (IV) **Figure 1**

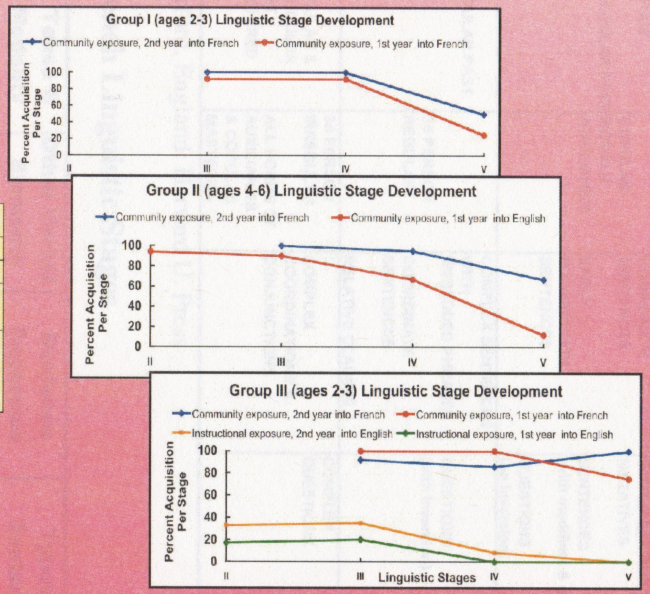
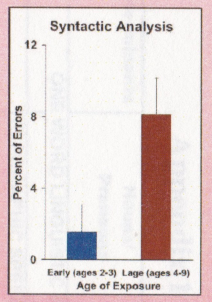


Figure 1

Impact of Age of First Bilingual Exposure on NEW Language Mastery



Bilingual children in the youngest age group with community exposure had significantly less syntactic errors in their NEW language as compared to the older-exposed children (Kruskal-Walis test: $\chi^2 = 4.00$, $p < 0.05$)
Figure 2

CONCLUSIONS

Bilingual children do exhibit "stage-like" language acquisition comparable to monolinguals across several developmental ages of fist exposure to a NEW language (i.e., ages 2, 4, 7)

BUT

only with intensive community exposure (not instructional)
This should prove useful for future linguistic assessment of young bilinguals in educational settings

Only bilingual children with intensive community exposure exhibit the core set of linguistic structures in their NEW language within only 2 years (not instructional)

Early bilingual exposure is better than later exposure
Successful transition into a NEW language ***is*** age dependent

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