

Anonymous abstract

The acquisition of nonstructural Case in eL2-children with typical development and Specific Language Impairment

This longitudinal study investigated the acquisition of nonstructural Case in early second language learners (eL2) of German with typical development (TD) and Specific Language Impairment (SLI). The study had two aims: First, to examine the development of Case marking in eL2 acquisition of German, and second to investigate if our acquisition data are consistent with the two-way-distinction of nonstructural Case as suggested by Woolford (2006). Woolford (2006) distinguishes nonstructural Case assigned lexically via prepositions (e.g. auf dem _[DAT] Baum ‘on the tree’; see (1)) from Case assigned inherently via the subcategorization properties of verbs (e.g., dem_{DAT} Hasen geben ‘to give the rabbit; see (2)).

To date, little research has addressed the acquisition of nonstructural Case by eL2 learners of German. Studies so far suggest that nonstructural Case marking is still not target-like at age 10 in eL2-TD children (Gutzmann & Turgay 2011, Marouani 2006). Based on spontaneous speech corpora investigating four children Schönenberger et al. (2013) report Case to be problematic in eL2-SLI children. Regarding monolingual (MON) children with SLI studies show that MON-SLI children were considerably delayed in acquiring nonstructural Case compared to MON-TD children (Clahsen 1991, Eisenbeiss et al. 2006, Scherger 2015). Additionally, there was evidence for a further distinction between lexical and inherent Case (Scherger 2015).

We examined if eL2 acquisition resembles MON children in these two respects and therefore addressed the following research questions: (Q1) Do eL2-TD and eL2-SLI children differ in the acquisition of lexical and inherent Case? (Q2) Do eL2-TD and eL2-SLI children differ in their development over time?

We analyzed longitudinal data of 22 eL2-TD (age of onset: 2;10, age at T1: 03;8) and 11 eL2-SLI children (age of onset: 3;3, age at T1: 07;1) participating in four test rounds within two years (T1-T4). All children had an age-appropriate nonverbal IQ. All eL2-SLI children were diagnosed by a language therapist as language-impaired and performed below 1SD in ≥ 2 subtests of a standardized test (LiSe-DaZ, Schulz & Tracy 2011). Using an elicited production task, a total of 397 utterances were elicited containing lexical Case (locative Prepositional Phrases, see (1)) or inherent Case (indirect objects, see (2)). For the error analysis, realizations were counted as correct if Case was marked target-like. Omissions or substitutions of morphological Case markers as well as omissions of determiners in contexts with indirect objects and omission of determiners and/or prepositions in contexts requiring a Prepositional Phrase were counted as nontarget-like.

Correct marking of inherent Case was low in both groups at all times (see Table 1). Regarding lexical Case, significant differences between the two groups were found at T3 ($p < .001$) and T4 ($p < .01$). Regarding (Q2), the eL2-SLI children show persistent difficulties acquiring lexical Case even at age 8;11 (51% correct) while the eL2-TD children performed at 81% correct Case markings already at age 5;8 (see (3) and (4) for illustration).

This is the first study to show that eL2-SLI children are severely delayed in the acquisition of nonstructural Case compared to eL2-TD children. Unlike inherent Case marking, which is problematic for both eL2-TD and eL2-SLI children, difficulties acquiring lexical Case are only observed in eL2-SLI children. These difficulties persist up to age 9. Furthermore, our results support a two-way distinction of nonstructural Case as suggested by Woolford (2006) (see also Schwarze 2016).

References

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Examples

- (1) Das Eichhörnchen sitzt...? - auf dem Baum
The squirrel sits...? on the_{DAT} tree
- (2) Die Karotte gibt sie...? - dem Hasen
The carrot she gives to...? - the_{DAT} rabbit
- (3) eL2-TD: Baum (3;11) - in den Baum (4;5) - in dem Baum (4;10) - auf dem Baum (6;0)
tree in the_{AKK} tree in the_{DAT} tree on the_{DAT} tree
- (4) eL2-SLI: Baum (7;2) - Baum (7;8) - ein Baum (8;3) - in den Baum (9;3)
tree tree a_{NOM} tree in the_{AKK} tree

Table 1

Rates of correct inherent and lexical Case markings over time for eL2-TD and -SLI children.

T	eL2-TD		eL2-SLI	
	ø Age	% correct (raw numbers) inherent lexical	ø Age	% correct (raw numbers) Dative (IO) Dative (PP)
1	3;8	13 % (1/8) 41 % (7/17)	7;1	8 % (1/13) 32 % (7/22)
2	4;2	11 % (2/19) 16 % (5/31)	7;7	15 % (3/20) 30 % (7/23)
3	4;7	20 % (5/25) 75 % (36/48)	8;2	6 % (1/15) 10 % (3/30)
4	5;8	18 % (7/40) 81 (47/58)	8;11	10 % (1/10) 53 (9/17)
SUM		16 % (15/92) 62 % (95/154)		10 % (6/59) 28 % (26/92)