

Does eL2 learners' acquisition pace depend on linguistic properties of a phenomenon?

This study investigates acquisition pace of six different phenomena in eL2 learners of German (AoO: 2;0 - 4;0) and in their monolingual peers. Studies on eL2 development have shown that eL2 learners acquire several phenomena faster than monolingual children do (Rothweiler 2006, Tracy & Thoma 2009 for sentence structure; Schulz 2013 for comprehension of wh-questions). Tsimpli (2014) assumes that linguistic properties of a phenomenon affect its acquisition time in monolingual, in simultaneous bilingual and in eL2 children. Thus, core syntax phenomena such as verb placement or subject-verb-agreement are acquired earlier in monolingual children than phenomena, which involve semantic or pragmatic knowledge or language-external resources, such as case or comprehension of exhaustive wh-questions. According to Tsimpli (2014), from this acquisition time in monolingual children, acquisition time in simultaneous bilingual and in eL2 children is predictable. However, it remains unclear whether linguistic properties of different phenomena also affect acquisition pace in eL2 learners. Therefore, we investigated the following question: Does eL2 children's acquisition pace differ from that of monolingual children depending on linguistic properties of a phenomenon under consideration.

Children's language abilities were assessed with the standardized test LiSe-DaZ (Schulz & Tracy 2011). Following phenomena were examined: comprehension of verb meaning, comprehension of wh-questions, comprehension of negation, production of prepositions, production of conjunctions, and production of case marking. All children were tested during four test rounds (six months interval between T1 and T2, and T2 and T3; one year interval between T3 and T4). 29 eL2 children (age at T1: 3;7 years, LoE at T1: 10 months, age at T4: 5;8, 16 different L1's) and 45 monolingual children (age at T1: 3;7, age at T4: 5;7) were tested. Children's acquisition pace was analyzed for each phenomenon separately via a multilevel analysis.

Results are presented in Table 1 for each phenomenon separately. The eL2 learners showed a significantly greater acquisition pace than the monolingual children in following phenomena: comprehension of verb meaning, comprehension of wh-questions, production of prepositions, and production of conjunctions ($p < .001$ for each phenomenon). No differences in acquisition pace between eL2 children and monolingual children were found for comprehension of negation and production of case. In addition, the analyses revealed that eL2 children's pace of acquisition depends on language phenomenon. Whereas for comprehension of verb meaning and for comprehension of wh-questions, the greatest rate of change was observed between T1 and T2, eL2 children's abilities in other phenomena improved more gradually over time.

Our findings indicate that eL2 learners show a greater acquisition pace than monolingual children only in particular phenomena. Notably, the results are only partially in line with Tsimpli (2014) since not all these phenomena belong to core syntactic structures, e.g. comprehension of verb meaning, or are acquired early in monolingual children, e.g. comprehension of wh-questions. Similar acquisition pace in eL2 and in monolingual children was found for phenomena that involve semantic and pragmatic knowledge and are acquired late as expected by Tsimpli (2014).

Selected references:

Rothweiler, M. (2006). The acquisition of V2 and subordinate clauses in early successive acquisition of German. In: Lleó, C. (eds.), *Interfaces in multilingualism: Acquisition, representation and processing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 91-113.

Schulz, P. (2013). Wer versteht wann was? Sprachverstehen im frühen Zweitspracherwerb des Deutschen am Beispiel der w-Fragen. In A. Deppermann (Ed.): *Das Deutsch der Migranten. Jahrbuch 2012 des Instituts für deutsche Sprache* (pp. 313-337). Mannheim.

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Table1. Results for monolingual and eL2 children for each phenomenon across four test rounds.

	Monolingual children				eL2 children			
	T1 Age: 3;7	T2 Age: 4;2	T3 Age: 4;7	T4 Age: 5;7	T1 Age: 3;7	T2 Age: 4;2	T3 Age: 4;7	T4 Age: 5;8
Comprehension of verb meaning (max. 12)	11	11	12	12	8	10	10	12
Comprehension of wh-questions (max. 10)	7	9	9	9	3	5	7	8
Comprehension of negation (max. 12)	9	9	10	11	7	7	8	10
Production of prepositions	7	6	6	7	2	4	6	8
Production of conjunctions	5	6	6	7	1	2	4	5
Production of case marking (max. 9)	4	4	5	6	1	1	3	4