French-English bilingual children’s acquisition of determiners
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Background

Previous research has shown that the acquisition of determiners broadly follows a three-stage course of development: (i) bare-noun stage; (ii) free variation stage; (iii) target stage (Chierchia et al. 1999). Children acquiring Romance languages (e.g. French) reach the target stage about six months before children acquiring Germanic languages (e.g. English).

Studies on bilingual children acquiring French–Germanic language pairs have reported that bilingual children stay twice as long in the bare-noun stage in French as their monolingual peers (Hulk 2004; Kupisch 2003). This delay has been attributed to be the consequence of ambiguous input from the Germanic language which allows definite and indefinite articles as well as bare nouns in [-count sing] and [+ count plur] contexts.

Apart from Kupisch (2003), none of these studies have examined whether the higher proportions of bare nouns in the French of these bilinguals were the result of cross-linguistic influence from their Germanic language.

Research questions

-Does a French-English bilingual behave like other bilingual children acquiring French with another Germanic language (e.g. German or Dutch) and omit determiners for a longer period than French monolinguals?

-Do they produce BNs in French in contexts in which English does not require an article?

-Can the ungrammatical use of bare nouns be considered as the result of cross-linguistic influence from their Germanic language?

Method

Longitudinal corpus: 1 French-English bilingual child in the UK dominant in English Exposure to English between 58%-65%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Period 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>2;06-2;10</td>
<td>3;00-3;02</td>
<td>3;03-3;07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLUw Fra</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLUw Eng</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Total number of French utterances: 1541 Total number of English utterances: 1897

Coding – Arguments

Morpho-syntax: DP, indefinite NPs, BNs
Discourse-pragmatic status: new, given, old
Discourse-function: intro., re-intro., maint.

Example – Partitive/Mass Nouns

- Je veux (du) chocolat. I want chocolate
- Tu as (de l’) argent dans mon sac. You have money in my bag.

Example – Indef. Plur.

- Paulin veut (des) rice-crispies Maman. Paulin wants rice-crispies Mummy.
- Et toi aussi, tu veux rice-crispies, toi, Maman? And you too, you want rice-crispies, you, Mum?

Example – Generics

- Elle aime (les) demi-queues. She likes poney tails.
- Paulin aime (le) thé. Paulin likes tea.

Results

Determiner omission in French
- Omission is constant across data (5% to 15%).
- Short rise comes from two peaks: one at 2;10 of 17% and a second between 3;03 and 3;04 of 23% and 40% omission.
- At 3;05.13 (MLU 4.63), she settles back in the target-stage as all determiners are realized.

Cross-linguistic influence from English to French
- Over 40% omission in partitive, 21% in Indef. Plur. and over 65% (2/3) in generic contexts.

Noun type/tokens

- Partitive/MN: 7 nouns (i.e. thé: 5 tokens; grenadine: 2 tokens; argent, café, pâte à modeler, ketchup, thé, chocolat: 1 token).
- Indef. Plur.: 2 nouns (i.e. rice-crispies 3 tokens; vêtements; 1 token).
- Generics: 2 nouns (i.e. demi-queue; thé).

Verb type/tokens

- A majority of these omissions in partitive/MN and in Indef. Plur. contexts occur with the verb ‘vouloir’ (14 tokens).
- Det. Omission in generic contexts occur with the verb ‘aimer’.

Conclusion

- Convergence to target-stage from at least 2;06 but not fully settled until 3;05.13.

- Det. omission in French in partitive, indef. Plur. and generic contexts contrasts with target-production in English.

- Cross-linguistic influence from English to French in both the form of transfer and delay.

- Lexical specificity of transfer: few noun and verb types

References

