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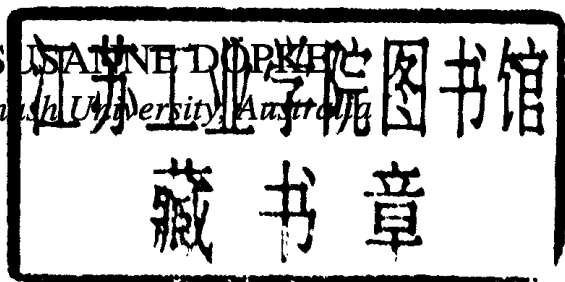
Edited by

Susanne Döpke

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Cross-Linguistic Structures in Simultaneous Bilingualism

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Preface

The present volume brings together a group of researchers with a shared interest in the simultaneous acquisition of two languages in early childhood. We share a curiosity in cross-linguistic structures and dissatisfaction with the treatment that they have received in the literature. We are delighted by the commonalities of our findings in spite of the fact that we are all working in different structural areas and with different languages. We are committed to finding far-reaching explanations for the various facets of bilingual development in the hope that these will eventually lead to a comprehensive picture of this type of language development.

Some of us met for the first time at the 1st International Symposium on Bilingualism in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1997. The idea for this book was conceived then. I would like to thank Li Wei and his team for organising such a stimulating event. The rest of the authors came on board through cross-contacts. During the production of the book, we all got to know each other very well through intensive internet contact.

In 1998 several of us had the chance to meet again at the International Conference of Infant Studies, which was held in Atlanta. I would like to thank Elena Nicoladis for organising the symposium on "One language theory or two? Toward a unified theory of language development" at this conference. The parallels between the Atlanta event and this book were quite by chance but very much welcomed.

Special thanks go to Kees Vaes at John Benjamins and the editors of this series for their patience during the rather lengthy process of getting all the contributions together and their help with finalising the product.

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Introduction

On the Status of Cross-Linguistic Structures in Research on Young Children Growing Up With Two Languages Simultaneously

Susanne Döpke
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Most people who have contact with young bilingual children at times notice structures in their speech which are atypical of monolingual children of the same age. More often than not atypical structures sound as if they are coming from the child's other language. In the aftermath of severe prejudices against bilingualism, such structures are still being viewed with suspicion by parents, teachers and health professionals. An important question to be answered by linguists is: What is the status of atypical structures produced by bilingual children?

In the debate during the last decade of whether simultaneously bilingual children start out with one unified structural system or immediately differentiate between their two languages, crosslinguistic structures in the children's output have become marginalised. Such structures were either not reported, were seen as too few in number to be of interest, or were disregarded as indications of early second language acquisition and therefore not of interest to research in simultaneous bilingualism.

That notwithstanding, the search for evidence against an initially unified structural system has convincingly shown that bilingual children predominantly produce language-specific structures at all stages of their development. This indicates that the simultaneous acquisition of two languages proceeds within the structural scope of each of the target languages. This is a very reassuring outcome of the research into bilingualism during the primary language acquisition process.

It is time now for us to take a fresh look at the more unusual structures produced by bilingual children and to assess them for the insights they can provide into the process of acquiring two languages simultaneously.

The aim of this book is to make crosslinguistic structures the focus. The contributors to this book are interested in discovering reasons for their presence or absence. In their analyses, they want to treat crosslinguistic structures as a legitimate feature of bilingual development and explain them within the core of their chosen theoretical framework.

There are a number of issues which have been common to studies on childhood bilingualism over recent years and which are reflected in the contributions to this volume as well.

A consistent thread through all the contributions to the present volume is the acceptance that even the earliest grammatical structures of bilingual children indicate that their two languages develop along the language-specific lines which are to be expected for each language. At the same time, all contributors have an active interest in accounting for those structures which seem to be motivated through cross-language influences. They do not see them as disproving the separate development hypothesis, but take them as a means for tracking the cognitive processes involved in the simultaneous acquisition of two languages. As Paradis (this volume) rightly argues, it is the extent to which crosslinguistic structures are evident which supports one or the other of the hypotheses. Limited appearance of cross-language influences should actually be expected even if the children do successfully distinguish between their languages.

Comparisons with monolingual children as requested by Tracy (this volume) are a feature of several of the articles in the present volume. It is heartening to see and fully within the predictions of the separate development hypothesis that the bilingual data by-and-large fall within the range of variation also evident in the monolingual development of the respective languages. Differences between monolingual and bilingual children are mostly small, but need to be considered in the light of claims that comparable structures "never" appear in monolingual children or in only very low quantities while their appearance under bilingual conditions is more frequent and more widespread.

Paradis (this volume) crystallises recent developments in the research of bilingual children into a new hypothesis: the "interlanguage ambiguity" hypothesis. While she is the only one to use this term, it is implicitly the guiding hypothesis for several of the contributors to the present volume. It reconciles the obvious evidence for structural separation between the languages in young bilingual children's spontaneous utterances with the evidence for cross-language influences, which is equally impossible to ignore.

It is no accident that all papers are based on longitudinal investigations of small numbers of children. Such studies provide insights into the normal course of development and have been a feature of research into monolingual development for a long time. It is the accumulative effect of many such studies which

will eventually do justice to the full scope of the complexity of bilingual first language acquisition. Crosslinguistic structures are intricate aspects of a bilingual child's normal course of development. They surface at points of productive crises or, at least, points of difficulties and represent the extremes to which the developing systems of the young language learners can be pushed. Often times, such evidence is only available sparingly as routine productions predominantly reflect the separateness of the development of the two languages. The relationship between target and non-target structures both in quantitative and qualitative terms is important for understanding the motivations for their appearance. This can best be detected in the naturalistic settings of longitudinal investigations.

Since crosslinguistic structures are for the most part scarce and in some cases fairly minor in frequency even in the papers presented in this volume, I would like to spend a moment on the issue of frequency in studies of language development. Lack of quantity has been the leading argument in the marginalisation of difficult to explain structures in the study of monolingual and bilingual children alike. They have been treated as performance errors and, therefore, as not representative of the child's structural competence. While the distinction between competence and performance has occupied an important place in linguistic theory building, it does not necessarily follow that everything that remains below a certain threshold of frequency is unsystematic and therefore cannot contribute any insights to our research interests. Roeper (1992: 340 and fn.33) acknowledged this when he suggested that not every aspect of language development is accessible to the researcher; but in some places of development or for some children, major developmental steps might happen too rapidly or even silently. Therefore we might have to draw on "apparently minor overt signs of systematicity as possible indications of fundamental underlying principles" (p. 340). This is echoed by Radford (1996: 62) who argues that it is fallacious to generalise from the lack of evidence for a certain stage at a certain point in time that this stage does not exist. The researcher might simply have missed it because it preceded the period of observation. Therefore, minor occurrences in some children should not be disregarded while, at the same time, important theoretical points are made on the basis that structures do not occur at all in other children. Roeper asserts that the "significant fact is that some children exhibit [a certain] pattern, not that some children do not." (p. 363 fn.33).
    It is in relation to this ambivalence between rejecting numerically minor evidence on one hand but wanting to find missing links in the children's language development on the other that Radford's (1996: 81) by now famous (and for some people infamous) utterance "Every example counts" *needs* to be taken seriously. In fact, if structures are frequent enough to show up repeatedly in randomly collected data, they are unlikely to do so accidentally. Atkinson

(1996: 475) suggests that their multiplication into tokens for the relevant period of a child's development would provide an estimate of actual occurrence and would make it more difficult to dismiss them as irrelevant.

The reliance on infrequent occurrences in order to prove major theoretical points is not always considered unacceptable (Clahsen 1991; Meisel & Müller 1992; Wexler 1994; Roeper 1996).[1] Atkinson (1996: 483 fn.19) believes that one needs to exercise "sensitivity" as to whether to include minor frequency examples. This opens the door to the type of theoretical bias which Tracy (1995: 198) must have had in mind when she wrote: "What one counts as an exception is not just defined by some quantitative feature but by the fact that it lies in conflict with our theory."

Tracy (1995: 204) raises the issue of relativity for what is too little or enough evidence to be of interest. To prove her point, let us consider the following: Poeppel & Wexler (1993: 8) reckon that 6 out of 43, ie. nearly 14%, of nonfinite verbs in an unpredicted syntactic position are a "relatively small number of exceptions" which do not "require [Poeppel & Wexler] to restructure [their] theory explicitly to account for them", and Harris & Wexler (1996: 20) deem 6% to be "extremely close to zero". Roeper (1992: 365 fn.44), on the other hand, questions whether 2.7% is a "small amount", admittedly not in his own data but someone else's. Related to this is the issue of what the occurrences of an unusual structure are being calculated against. Any phenomenon can be relegated to insignificance by splitting the data up into too many cells or by including too wide a base against which they are calculated.[2]

The other side of the coin is the status of target structures in the children's output. The majority of the forms young children produce are likely to be correct as per input. But whether they are indications of the children's grammatical competence just because they are high in quantity is not at all clear. There is evidence of forms and structures appearing in children's output as a direct reflection of the input through delayed repetitions and holistic chunks (Clark 1974; Speidel & Nelson eds. 1989). Many of the target structures might actually be reproductions based on the input rather than competence based child creations.[3] For the most part this is not verifiable for the researcher although some safeguards have been put in place over the years, such as excluding imitations of the adult input within a certain number of turns prior to the child's utterance or verifying that forms or structures are productive through their appearance in alternative combinations somewhere else in the transcript. Unfortunately these are meagre attempts at solving this problem in the light of some children's, especially some of the early talkers', exceptionally good memory capacities.[4]

While I am in no way suggesting that target forms are always reproductions of the input, I believe that they cannot inform us very well of what is happening inside the child's mind. For instance, we cannot really ascertain the independent

use of a verb affix until it shows up on verbs which were not modelled in the input or in positions where we would not expect it. Overgeneralisations, even if they only happen once or twice in our transcript, are very powerful sources of information that the child is actively using a grammatical form or a syntactic structure.

If there is one thing we can say about crosslinguistic structures, then it is that they are the children's own creations because the children could not possibly have heard them from their interlocutors.[5] It is in the nature of crosslinguistic structures, just as it is in the nature of overgeneralisations, that they will not necessarily manifest themselves systematically since the child does not receive any re-enforcing input. Crosslinguistic structures often remain "experiments", but experiments which are based on the child's momentary analytic capacities. A purely quantitative account of clearly creative structures at the edge of the child's momentary abilities hides more than it reveals if the creative structures are calculated against large numbers of possibly routine productions and reproductions of the input.

A stumbling block to overcome at the moment is to reconcile the diverse evidence we have gained from bilingual children's language development ranging from no apparent differences to monolingual development in some children to pockets of systematic variation in others. In part, this might be due to the combination of languages to which various bilingual children are exposed, as some language combinations generate greater structural ambiguities than others (Tracy 1995: 85; and several of the authors in this volume). Another reason for this might be found in individual differences between children. It is, therefore, important not to make general claims on just one or two children and to use the evidence from such small numbers of children to negate someone else's findings. Instead, we need to integrate the diverse range of evidence into a comprehensive picture of bilingual development. It is reasonable to suspect that what one child does frequently and another does only occasionally occurs for the same cognitive reasons. In other words, we should strive to find encompassing explanations across children. I concur with Tracy (1995: 199) when she argues that "if one child's exception can be another's well-documented pattern, we may have to re-evaluate our theory."

In conclusion to this elaboration on the frequency issue in studies of language development, I would like to stress that rather than negating minority cases of non-target structures as unimportant we need to adopt Hulk's (this volume) position and ask: "Why do these bilingual children make precisely these errors that seem to reflect characteristics of the other of their two languages?" and consider the possibility raised by Paradis (this volume) that "the marginal number of [...] constructions in one child [...] might indicate that for other [...] children systematic and sustained use of crosslinguistic structures could occur".

If we pay particular attention to the unusual, we may find out more about the more occult operations of the language learning mind.

A further issue which is being addressed by the present volume is the importance of the language combination and language module. In their explorations of the extent of the validity of the question "one system or two", several authors find that both the question and the answer need to be much more differentiated. What the reader will gain from this volume is the impression that the degree of cross-language influences crucially depends on the degree of inter-language ambiguity which is being generated by a particular language combination for a particular language module.

Predictions as to where cross-language influences are likely to occur would, however, be difficult to make. While some researchers might find this hard to accept because they see their ability to make predictions as proof that their theory is correct, others will agree with me that there is still much uncertainty about how the minds of children work with respect to language acquisition. In making predictions we assume that we already have a very clear picture of the role of the child's cognition in this process. In many cases this might be premature. If predictions do not prove correct that does not necessarily mean that the theory or the acquisition model are incorrect. We might just not have a clear enough picture of the child's role in the acquisition process for making this type of specific predictions. In other words, we are still not quite able to adequately assess the role of learning and the transition from no language knowledge to the ability to structure complex sentences.

The study of cross-language influences in relation to varying linguistic complexities is well suited to contributing to our understanding in this regard because bilingual acquisition situations appear to produce more unusual and un-expected child structures than monolingual acquisition situations tend to do. Thus the similarities, and differences, between monolingual and bilingual children might prove to be of considerable value for language acquisition research in general.

Lastly, there has so far been no clear order as to majority and minority language in the naming of hyphenated acquisition situations in the literature. I have taken the liberty to always place the minority language in front of the language of the country. Where that was not possible, as for example with respect to Canada, I have placed the language spoken in the home before the language of the immediate community outside the home. This may function as an easy reminder to the reader of some gross sociolinguistic features of the children's environments.

The contributions to this volume are loosely ordered by the language combination

and the language module they address. The article by **Tracy** opens the discussion by taking the reader through a range of difficulties typical for analysing young bilingual children's production data. She argues that the analytic problems we have with adult bilingual data are even more severe when it comes to analysing young children's speech. Tracy recommends that we compare the bilingual acquisition data with the range of variation found in monolingual children and that we interpret utterances which are clearly motivated by crosslinguistic influences in relation to what the developing language systems in each of the child's languages are capable of at the time. She argues that the superb abilities of the mind to deal with structural ambiguities are responsible for young children being able to integrate conflicting evidence into two discreet language systems. Many of Tracy's threads are picked up by the other contributors to this volume.

Van der Linden compares the behaviour of bilingual adults and children with respect to crosslinguistic influences on lexical choices. From the example of two bilingual French-Dutch speaking children, van der Linden argues that the cognitive interaction we commonly find in the lexicon of bilingual adults is also found in bilingual youngsters. In fact, to expect otherwise would be unreasonable. In rejecting the lexical gap hypothesis, van der Linden makes some interesting suggestions regarding the reasons for variation in the degree of cross-language activation in different children.

Hulk extrapolates the principles of the acquisition and use of the lexicon in the same two French-Dutch bilingual children to their development of syntax. She argues that indirect influences of Dutch on French increase the frequency of those structures in the children's French which superficially overlap with Dutch. It is important to note that this view is very different from the position of one language dominating the other. It reconciles the findings of language-specific development and cross-language influences in an account of "cognitive permeability" between the languages.

The theme of indirect influences of one language on the other is also reflected in the paper by **Döpke** on German-English bilingual children. She draws on the Competition Model in order to explain the cross-language processes which become activated at points of superficial overlap between the structures of the two languages. She argues that contrasts between the languages enable the child to keep the development of the languages separate. However, at points of structural similarities, the cue competition otherwise operative within one language extends across languages. This affects the strength of structural cues within each of the languages and might modify the path of development.

Schelleter looks at unusual negation structures in the English of a German–English bilingual child. She argues that the language contact situation motivated the child to analyse the negation as a substantive rather than a functional category. Thus, like Hulk and Döpke, Schelleter suggests indirect influences on

the processing of the language-specific input.

Gawlitzek-Maiwald focuses on infinitival constructions in the development of English-German bilingual children in relation to the children's development of IP and CP. She finds that asynchronous development can be explained as due to systematic differences in the syntactic structures of the two languages. Mixed utterances appear at times when the children restructure their syntactic systems or when one system is significantly ahead of the other in terms of development. Gawlitzek-Maiwald argues that bilingual data help us to reconsider preconceptions about monolingual acquisition and provide arguments in favour of "system thinking", that is, to see the complex relationships between the part and the whole.

Sinka asks whether lack of structural overlap between the two languages a child is acquiring would result in the absence of crosslinguistic structures. Her young subjects are simultaneously exposed to Latvian and English, with Latvian being the syntactically freer and morphologically richer of the two languages. Sinka finds that crosslinguistic influences are, indeed, very rare. When they do occur, they involve syntax rather than morphology, which is congruent with a range of other studies.

Paradis considers the disparate results in her own studies of French-English bilingual children's morpho-syntax on the one hand and their phonological processing on the other. She argues that at points of structural similarities ambiguities may arise for the young child, which in turn may lead to cross-language interaction during the acquisition process. She speculates that various subcomponents of language, like morpho-syntax, lexicon or phonology are affected by cross-language interaction in different ways.

The study by **Gut** on two of the children already reported on by Gawlitzek-Maiwald supports the hypothesis that various modules of language are not affected equally. She finds that her informants show no crosslinguistic influences in the phonological systems of their English and German in spite of a high degree of similarities of the two systems in this respect. Thus ambiguities and similarities may interact with the relative complexity of the system to be acquired.

Lanza provides the concluding remarks to this volume. She reminds us of the sociolinguistic dimension of mixed utterances. This provides an important extension to the largely psycholinguistic perspective taken by the other contributors.

Together the papers in this volume show that crosslinguistic structures have a psycholinguistic basis which is closely connected with the process of acquiring language for the first time. This stresses the similarities between monolingual and bilingual children. At the same time, crosslinguistic structures are features of language production. This unites very young bilinguals with mature bilinguals. These psycholinguistic aspects of cross-language influences are complicated by environmental factors. The papers in this volume pay tribute to this complexity.