

AG 11**The impact of internal and external factors in child second language acquisition**

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Sources of Individual Differences in Child English L2 Acquisition

24.02.2010, 14.30–15.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

Existing studies have found that language aptitude, L1 typology, age of acquisition, parent education, and quantity and quality of input outside the classroom can all influence how rapidly children learn a L2 (see Paradis, 2007, for review). The goal of this study was to examine which combination of these factors best predicts the development of vocabulary size and accuracy with verb morphology in English L2 acquisition, whether the contribution of certain factors would change from early to later stages of acquisition, and whether the same factors would predict lexical and morphological acquisition.

Participants were 165 English L2 children (mean age: 5;10; mean onset age of English exposure: 4;4), with an average of 17 months exposure to English in schools or preschools (range = 1-39). Children had the following L1 backgrounds: Cantonese/Mandarin, Punjabi/Hindi/Urdu, Arabic, or Spanish. Children were administered a receptive vocabulary test (PPVTIII: Dunn & Dunn, 1997), and verb morphology production probes yielding a composite accuracy score for 3S-s, past-ed, BE, and DO (TEGI: Rice & Wexler, 2001). Child-internal predictor factors were (i) whether the L1 marks tense, (ii) non-verbal IQ – general cognition, (iii) phonological working memory (non-word repetition) – language learning aptitude, and (iv) chronological age – cognitive maturity. Child-external predictor factors were (v) English use in the home (measure of English vs. L1 use among family members), (vi) mother's self-rated fluency in English, (vii) number of older siblings, (viii) richness of English environment (measured by English activities, books, media, and English native-speaker friends), and (xi) maternal education in years.

Children were divided into two groups: early stage (< 18 months) and later stage (> 18 months). Within each stage, correlations between L2 outcome variables and months of exposure to English were non-significant. Multiple linear regression modeling was conducted within each group for vocabulary and morphology scores separately. Results showed that the models predicted variance in vocabulary size and accuracy with verb morphology better at the early stage than the later stage, and they predicted verb morphology accuracy better than vocabulary size overall. The strongest predictors at the early stage tended to be the child-internal factors for both vocabulary and verb morphology; whereas, the child-external factor of richness of the English environment emerged as a strong predictor for both at the later stage. Children who were chronologically older at testing showed significant advantages for both vocabulary and verb morphology at the later stage, even with exposure time partialled out. L1 influence was a significant predictor of verb morphology at the early stage only. Presence of older siblings influenced children's accuracy with verb morphology at the later stage. While use of English in the home boosted both

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Zweisprachige Sachgeschichten für Kinder

Fremdsprachen sind in den letzten Jahren immer wichtiger geworden. Heute wird in Deutschland in vielen Familien und Freundeskreisen, in Kindergärten und Schulen mehr als nur eine Sprache gesprochen. Und durch Werbung, Radio oder Fernsehen sind Fremdsprachen für uns und unsere Kinder ohnehin allgegenwärtig.

Die frühe Begegnung mit anderen Sprachen wird in der bilingualen Erziehung gezielt aufgegriffen. Wissenschaftliche Studien weisen darauf hin, dass der Fremdspracherwerb im frühen Kindesalter, gerade auch in Kombination mit sachbezogenen Themen, besonders erfolgreich verläuft. Durch den Sprachvergleich entwickeln die Kinder zudem ein besseres Gefühl für die eigene Muttersprache. Schließlich fördert das frühe Lernen anderer Sprachen auch die kreativen Fähigkeiten der Kinder. Bilinguale Erziehung eröffnet also vielseitige Chancen.

Begleitet von Experten: Die *Bilis* wurden in Zusammenarbeit mit Fachleuten aus der wissenschaftlichen Fremdsprachenpädagogik sowie aus der bilingualen Kindergarten- und Grundschulpraxis entwickelt.

In *Bili* verbindet sich die Idee des frühen Fremdsprachenlernens mit der Vermittlung von Sachinhalten auf optimale Weise: Die zweisprachigen Sachgeschichten sind in übersichtliche, leicht zu erfassende Erzählabschnitte gegliedert. Die entscheidenden Szenen der Geschichte werden in anschaulich-frischen Illustrationen aufgegriffen, wodurch das Textverständnis zusätzlich erleichtert wird. Ein doppel-seitiges Bildwörterbuch veranschaulicht das ‚erzählte Wissen‘ im Gesamtkontext und verbindet dieses mit einer zweisprachigen Wörterliste zum Thema. Darüber hinaus vertiefen und erweitern detaillierte Zusatzinformationen die vermittelten Sachinhalte.

Die *Bilis* stellen damit eine zugleich sprachliche wie inhaltliche Bereicherung für die Kinder dar!

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vocabulary and morphology early on, contact with native-speaker models for English (English richness) was more important later on. Finally, maternal education was significantly and positively correlated with mother's fluency in English, but mother's fluency in English proved to be a significant predictor of the children's verb morphology at the early stage, and maternal education alone was not a significant predictor of either verb morphology or vocabulary at either stage.

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The impact of internal and external factors on linguistic performance in the home language and in L2 among Russian-Hebrew and Russian-German preschool children

24.02.2010, 15.00–15.30 Uhr, Raum 1.506

The impact of internal and external factors on linguistic performance in the home language and in L2 among Russian-Hebrew and Russian-German preschool children. This paper evaluates the contribution of external and internal background factors on the development of linguistic skills in the two languages of bilingual children. External factors (e.g., parent education and occupation, birth order and family size) are those the child brings to the language learning effort, while internal factors (age of onset and length of L2 exposure) are viewed here as reflecting the child's language experience.

Hypotheses. External background factors (parent education) are expected to play a greater role in L1 maintenance, while internal background factors (length of L2 exposure) are expected to correlate with success in L2 acquisition. More specifically, parents' educational level and occupation, is expected to influence linguistic performance in both L1 and L2, where children of parents with higher levels of education and skilled/academic jobs will have better target language performance and children of parents in less skilled jobs or unemployed will show more home language maintenance. L2 exposure is expected to correlate positively with performance on standardized tests, lexical abilities, morphological and grammatical knowledge in the target language, but not with such abilities in the home language.

Method. 65 Russian-German and 78 Russian-Israeli migrant children with comparable length of L2 exposure (M=37mo) and family size (1.88 children) participated in 30 minute sessions in both languages. Sociolinguistic interviews with parents revealed differences in terms of age/age of L2 onset, birth order and SES (parent education and occupation). Linguistic data included standardized target language tests, non-word repetition in Russian/L1, and the following measures of linguistic performance in both languages: sentence imitation and story completion tasks investigating verb inflections, prepositions, case marking, and complex syntax (wh-questions, passives, relative clauses) as a picture naming task which tested knowledge of nouns and verbs.

Findings. Overall, internal factors showed a stronger relationship to language measures than External factors. Moreover, internal factors (age of L2 onset and length of exposure) correlated with L2, while external factors (parent education/occupation) correlated with L1 measures. Finally, SES differences

between the groups led to better L2 performance among Israeli children and more L1 maintenance among Russian-German children.

For both groups of children, internal factors (age, age of L2 onset, and length of L2 exposure) correlated moderately to strongly with success in the target language as reflected in performance on the standardized tests and in the L2 naming task, correlations ranging from .40 to .61. Internal factors did not correlate with any of the L1 measures developed for this study. The relationship between internal factors and L2 abilities was notably stronger for the German cohort, which was on average 5 months younger and began intensive L2 exposure 6 months younger than the Russian-Israeli children. Further analyses will attempt to partial out the role of age and look at additional measures of L2 ability in order to get at the developmental issues at stake. External factors, as predicted, plays a role in home language, but mainly for the Russian-German migrant children. Specifically, mother's educational level correlated with L1 performance on tasks involving prepositions, verb inflections and complex syntax: children of mothers with more education performed significantly better on these tasks ($p < 0.05$). Mother's occupational level also played a role in L1 performance, viz. on the non-word repetition task, with children of professional and skilled working mothers scoring significantly higher on this L1 measure.

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**The impact of external factors on the performance of L2 children in
standardized assessments**

24.02.2010, 15.30–16.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

Previous studies investigating the effect of external factors on language acquisition and educational success have primarily compared heterogeneous populations with varied L1 backgrounds, different instructional contexts and of different socioeconomic status (Oller & Eilers, 2002). The population examined in the present study exhibits homogeneity in terms of internal factors (same L1 background) and some external factors (low SES, basic parental education, and low L2 proficiency). Therefore the focus is shifted towards the relative contribution of each external factor on influencing child L2 learners' performance on different components of grammar and vocabulary.

49 Turkish-speaking child L2 learners of English aged between 6 and 9 years old (mean age: 7;2, mean age of onset: 3;3) with an average of 4;3 years of exposure (range: 1;10–6;9) along with 33 English L1 age-matched controls (mean age: 7;5) were tested on a battery of standardized assessments examining comprehension of grammar (TROG2, Bishop, 2003), vocabulary (BPVSI, Dunn, Dunn, Whetton, & Burley, 1997), production of third person –s and past tense –ed (TEGI, Rice & Wexler, 2001), production of articles and comprehension of wh-elements and passives (DELV, Seymour, Roeper & deVilliers, 2005). Additionally, the following information was gathered via parental and child questionnaires: (i) mother's level of education (mLoE), (ii) mother's self-rated proficiency in English (mSRP), (iii) English use at home (with parents and siblings), (iv) richness of the input before and during school years (hours of TV/radio, books), (v) child's years of exposure (YoE) to English, and (vi) age of onset (AoO) to English.

Initial L1-L2 comparison on the standardized assessments showed that the L2 children performed significantly lower than the age-matched L1 controls on all assessments and in most cases failed to reach age-appropriate norms. Consecutive multiple correlations between external factors and language assessments were carried out in order to assess the impact of each individual factor on language performance.

Results showed that the various external factors influence vocabulary and grammar differentially. The quality of maternal input in English as measured through mSRP correlated with the acquisition of vocabulary (raw and standard BPVS scores) and complex structures (DELV-passives, DELV-wh, overall DELV score). mLoE was not correlated with any of the language components, possibly due to the fact that maternal education was generally low and the range was very narrow. Child external factors such as YoE and current age correlated strongly with the raw scores on all language assessments apart from the use of articles. There was also a moderate negative correlation between AoO and the acquisition of complex structures (DELV-wh, DELV-passives, overall DELV score). English use at home was related to the development of vocabulary as well as grammatical morphology (past tense -ed and articles). Richness of input before school correlated with the comprehension of vocabulary, but there was no correlation between richness of input during school years and any of the language assessments.

We will discuss which combinations of factors predict L2 children's performance on standardized tasks and their ability to reach age-appropriate norms.

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Subject-verb agreement in L2 children: form, clause type and home language

24.02.2010, 16.30–17.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

In this paper we will show that accuracy with subject-verb agreement in L2 children is influenced by form of the morpheme, type of clause and language spoken at home (L1). The data discussed comprise oral production data from children aged 4;02 to 9;11 ($n = 62$), collected through a sentence completion task with conditions that varied between person and number of the grammatical subject and different types of clauses (main, inversion, relative). Children who participated came from families that immigrated to the Netherlands from China, Morocco and Turkey. In the families, Dutch was infrequently used; the children's exposure to Dutch mainly took place at school. The results show that (i) children's performance increases as a function of proficiency ($p = 0.0000$); (ii) children with richly inflection home languages

(Moroccan-Arabic/Tarifit ($p = 0.0017$) and Turkish ($p = 0.0042$)) outperform children with an isolating home language (Mandarin/Cantonese); (iii) performance with the bare stem used in 1SG contexts is better than with stem+en used in plural contexts ($p = 0.0005$) and stem+en in plural contexts is more accurately produced than stem+t in 2/3SG contexts ($p = 0.0013$). Two effects of clause type were found: (iv) subject-verb agreement in clauses with subject-verb inversion is less accurate than in clauses without inversion ($p = 0.0070$), and; (v) in 3SG contexts, children make fewer errors in relative clauses than in main clauses ($p = 0.0428$). In previous studies it is hypothesized that errors with subject-verb agreement are omission errors that happen in communicatively demanding situations (Ionin and Wexler 2002; Prévost 2003). The results of the present study show that in certain contexts substitutions are frequent as well and that inherent properties of the target morpheme are relevant (Gathercole 2007; Goldschneider & DeKeyser 2001; Paradis et al. 2008a). Previous studies did not find effects of transfer in the production of verbal inflection (Paradis et al. 2008b). Target language properties in combination with the participants' age at time of testing may explain this difference.

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**The impact of external factors in French cL2 as compared to (2)L1 and aL2:
Quantity and quality of the input**

24.02.2010, 17.00–17.30 Uhr, Raum 1.506

The study of children learning French as a second language at an early age (cL2) has recently received attention (Paradis, 2007; 2009; Meisel, 2009, among others). A central research question in this area is if and in what respect the language acquisition process in cL2 resembles that of adult second language acquisition (aL2) or of first language acquisition (L1). As far as language development in aL2 French is concerned, Bartning and Schlyter (2004) have suggested six developmental stages for a certain number of morphosyntactic phenomena. However, as underlined by Schlyter (2003), we do not yet know if these developmental stages are valid also for children acquiring French at an early age.

This study presents longitudinal production data from an ongoing project at Lund University, Sweden, and Université Paris X Nanterre, France, called Age of onset

and linguistic development of French (Schlyter, 2008; Kihlstedt, 2009), where we compare four different groups of learners: 1) Children with Swedish as L1 acquiring French from the age of 3-6 years (cL2), 2) Bilingual children acquiring French and Swedish from birth (2L1), 3) French monolingual children (L1), and 4) Adult Swedish learners of L2 French (aL2). The three groups of children are recorded regularly at Lycée Français Saint Louis in Stockholm, where the medium of instruction is French, while data from the adult learners come from previous research.

Previous results show that the language of cL2 children shares some characteristics with the aL2 group, at least for the phenomena studied so far: finiteness, tense/aspect morphology, clitic pronouns, gender agreement and subject-verb agreement (Granfeldt et al. 2007). Moreover, the results also reveal that the 2L1 children manifest certain differences compared to the L1 children when it comes to object clitics and gender agreement. 2L1 acquisition has long been considered an instance of L1 acquisition but subtle differences have nevertheless been observed and discussed in the literature, sometimes as an effect of cross-linguistic influence (Müller and Hulk, 2000). Another possibility is that the quantity and the quality of the input might play a role, not only for the cL2 learners, but also for the 2L1 children. In order to investigate the role of input, we carried out a detailed survey of the input situation of these children, inside and outside school.

In this paper we will present data on finiteness, subject-verb agreement in the plural and placement of object clitics. We will compare our cL2 longitudinal data with the other groups mentioned above in terms of linguistic development over time and of accuracy scores at specific data points. The results will be discussed with regard to age of onset of acquisition as well as quantity and quality of the input.

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Impact of the languages spoken *at* and *outside* home on bilingual language acquisition: Evidence from German Russian migrant families in Berlin

24.02.2010, 17.30–18.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

The study contributes to the ongoing debates around the two assumptions dealing with the impact of the languages spoken with bilingual children and at their homes: (1) the development of child L2 is not sufficiently sustained if the parents talk to children in their L2 at home (Tracy, 2007) and (2) the language use at home does not influence the development in the L2 ((De Houwer, 2007, Gutierrez-Clellen & Kreiter, 2003).

The study aims at clarifying the impact of the languages spoken to bilingual children, on L1 Russian and early L2 German bilingual acquisition. In particular, it addresses the following questions: How does the quantity of language use at home, i.e. the reported speech, influence L1 and L2 acquisition? The quantity of language use at home is measured according to the parental rating given during the detailed socio-linguistic interviews.

To analyse the quantity of reported language use at home we elaborated the scores for the two characteristics: language use at home and language use outside home. These two categories consist of the computed average of the subcategories, rated on a scale of ten points. For example, for the score "Russian/German outside" the following subcategories were elicited: How much Russian/German has the child (a) with children in kindergarten, (b) with neighbours, (c) at friend's parties, etc. Each subcategory was rated on a scale from 0-9 (no Russian/German – only Russian/German) and the average was calculated. This average was matched up to the level of lexical and grammatical development in L1 and L2, which was evaluated on the basis of the three types of tests performed in both Russian and German: (1) the noun-verb-naming-test (naming of 33 nouns and verbs) for the lexicon, (2) the elicitation test of the verb (1st and 2nd person singular) and case (accusative, dative) inflection for morphology and (3) the imitation test of complex syntax.

The data stem from 22 successive bilinguals (the age is between 50-69 months) of German Russian migrant families in Berlin, the length of acquisition is between 20-40months and socio-economic index varies from mid to high.

Our results show that, first, high L1 quantity of reported language use outside home does not negatively influence L2 development, second, high L2 quantity of reported language use at home positively influences some aspects of L2 (positive correlation between L2 at home and the elicitation test of the verb inflection for German (.05)), but contributes to the loss of lexicon in L1. A high score "L1 at home" positively correlate with the lexical proficiency in Russian measured by the tests mentioned above.

To conclude: high contact with L1 at home improves the lexical abilities in L1 and does not negatively affect L2, . The high exposure of L2 German at home does not improve the general competence for L2 but has a negative influence of the lexical competence in Russian. An influence of language use on grammatical abilities was

not detected. This dissociation of the domains can be explained with the different influence of the input to lexical and grammatical abilities (Chomsky, 1975, Meisel, 2003, Oller & Pearson, 2002, Pinker, 1994).

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Why 2L1 may sometimes look like child L2: Effects of input quantity

24.02.2010, 16.30–17.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

One major question in research on child L2 acquisition has been whether child L2 learners bear more similarities with bilinguals having simultaneous exposure to two languages from birth (2L1) than with adult L2 learners. Another major question concerns the age at which it is too late to acquire a language akin to a first language learner. In this contribution we would like to suggest that data from 2L1 learners with one language being noticeably weaker than the other may reveal factors that are relevant to answering the above questions.

Recent studies have suggested that the critical age for the acquisition of some grammatical phenomena may be as early as 3-4 years (Meisel 2007). It seems to be taken for granted that learners acquiring a language before that age acquire it in a way similar to a first language learner. Most studies, so far, have compared acquisition paths rather than acquisition outcomes. However, if we look at acquisition outcomes in adult bilinguals, simultaneous bilinguals do not always outperform successive bilinguals (e.g. Montrul 2008). This creates the necessity to investigate also borderline cases of first language acquisition and child L2 acquisition. In particular, one should question whether only age of onset is crucial to acquisition outcomes and whether some 2L1 learners may look like child L2 learners and, if so, why.

In this explorative study, we are trying to address these issues by comparing two children who had simultaneous exposure to English and German from birth. However, in one case the quantity of input in English was extremely low, and in the other case the child largely refused to German. Both children developed relatively fast in their stronger languages. Hence, although these children had a considerably earlier onset than child L2 learners, they are very similar to them with regards to speaking their weaker language.

Our study traces the children's early development in both of their languages between the ages of 2 and 3 years. We then analyze production data of these same children

between the ages of 4 and 5 years, comparing German/English as weaker languages to German/English as stronger languages based on a variety of domains that are more or less vulnerable to transfer (including, e.g., verb placement in German and English, verb morphology and case in German, progressive aspect in English). Our preliminary results suggest that it is easier for the child with German as a stronger language to catch up with English than it is for the child with English as stronger language to catch up with German, in a setting where English is the language of the environment. We further observe less difficulty with syntactic phenomena than with morphology.

Based on our results we would like to propose that factors beyond age of onset, notably quantity of input as well as output and relative degree of difficulty of a particular phenomenon are crucial for acquisition outcomes and that these should be taken into account when classifying learners in terms of L1 or L2.

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Finiteness in Turkish and Polish child L2 learners of German: Evidence from elicited production and elicited imitation

25.02.2010, 9.30–10.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

In German, there is a relation between morphological finiteness marking on the verb and the position of the verb in the sentence: Finite verbs appear in a raised position, whereas non-finite verbs appear clause-finally. Investigating the development of finiteness thus provides insights into the nature of both morphological and syntactic knowledge in learners of German. Previous studies suggest that adult second language (L2) learners have to gradually build up knowledge about finiteness, in particular about the relation between verb morphology and verb position (e.g., Vainikka and Young-Scholten, 1996). This is considered by some to be deviant from the acquisition of finiteness in first language (L1) acquisition as well as L2 acquisition in young children, where the relation between morphology and syntax is often assumed to be present from the first utterances on (e.g. Meisel, 2009).

The present study uses an elicited production and an elicited imitation task to test the knowledge of finiteness in two groups of child L2 learners and compare them to the data of a previously tested group of adult L2 learners. The children were aged between 7 and 12 years and had been exposed to German on average for 7 months. For one group of children (n=18), the basic word order of the L1 was SVO (mostly Polish), whereas for a second group of children (n=20), the L1 word order was SOV (mostly Turkish). All adult learners (n=48) were native speakers of Turkish. The comparison of the use of finiteness in these three groups allows insights in the relative impact of age and properties of the L1 in (child) L2 acquisition. More precisely, it can be investigated:

- a) whether the two child groups show common characteristics that distinguish them from the adult learner group
- b) whether the child and adult groups with a SOV-L1 have common characteristics compared to the child group with a SVO-L1

Elicited production data were coded for the form and position of verbs in diagnostic contexts (e.g., with respect to negation, scope particles and adverbials). The elicited imitation task focused on negated sentences. The stimuli sentences comprised 6 types of sentences (and additional filler sentences), containing finite light verbs and finite and nonfinite verbs to the left and the right of negation respectively. It was coded whether participants made systematic changes to verb morphology, verb position or both when repeating the sentences. The results were strikingly similar in all three groups: Within each group, beginning learners who produced only a small number of finite verb forms in production strongly preferred a verb-final position both in production and in imitation (changing the position of verbs from raised to non-raised, but not the other way round), and no evidence for a relation between morphology and syntax. In contrast, slightly more advanced learner preferred raised over non-raised verbs in production and imitation, and showed evidence for a relation between morphology and syntax. Group comparisons showed that children seem to differ from adults, however, in the speed of the developmental process. Children with different L1s differed mainly in their use of non-finite default forms, which tended to be bare stems in children from SVO languages, but infinitives in children from SOV languages (as well as the adult group), reflecting the frequencies of certain types of verb forms in the second versus the final position in German.

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**Assessing the Roles of Maturation and Learning: A Case Study of the
 acquisition of English by a young Korean Child**

25.02.2010, 10.00–10.30 Uhr, Raum 1.506

Maturation and Learning (each reflecting a host of internal and external factors) are generally confounded in the developing child learning language (e.g., Mayberry et al 2002, Lust 2006). In this paper, we will suggest that study of developing bilingualism in the young child can help to dissociate these two areas of language acquisition in ways not exploited before.

We will report selected results from a case study of a male Korean child (MJ101602) studied longitudinally over a period of exposure to an English only nursery school situation in the US , with a newly developing multi-sampling methodology, combining both naturalistic and experimental approaches. The child's developing English and Korean bilingualism was sampled through 49 interviews over a period of 1 and ½ years, between the ages of 3 years and 4 years, 6 months. Tasks involve general observations, natural speech samples, standardized vocabulary tests (both

comprehension and production, i.e., Peabody Picture Vocabulary Production and Evocation tests) as well as elicited imitation tests of various aspects of developing syntax, complemented by experimenters' reports and teacher observations, each applied repeatedly, where possible.

We will report here results from one segment of time, wherein a natural occurrence allowed unique comparative measurements. The child returned home to Korea during the period aged 3.6-3.10 (years, months) where he was embedded in a totally Korean speaking situation before returning to the English speaking nursery school in the US. The general question we tested was: Would the child's developing English show regression or development over this period of time?

Results showed remarkably significant improvements in the child's control of English lexicon, phonology, syntax and semantics, as demonstrated in natural speech production. Mean length of utterance for words and morphemes, attempted full sentences, and grammaticality were remarkably improved. Utterances passed from those like "not play" at session 1 to "I'm not knocks it down" in the returning session. We contrast these results to those from 4 Korean children developing English without the input interruption of our case study.

We discuss these results in terms of various explanations for this development of English L2 in the absence of L2 input during the time of observed development and articulate proposals for further research. We also suggest these results may empower new methodology.

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Internal factors in the acquisition of French accusative clitics:

The role of morphology

25.02.2010, 10.30–11.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

Background: French accusative clitics are known to be difficult to master for child L2 learners (Prévost 2006) just as for children (and adolescents) with SLI and young typically developing children (Jakubowicz et al 1998, Hamann et al 1996, Tuller et al., in, press). While the reason for this difficulty is disputed, virtually all existing studies attribute it to factors of syntactic complexity (non-canonical position in Jakubowicz et al 1998, crossing chains in Chillier-Zesiger et al to appear, the UCC in Wexler 2002). The present study seeks to identify the role of morphological complexity in the explanation of the phenomenon. The abstract reports the results at T1 of a longitudinal study – the data of T2 are presently being coded.

Population and protocol: A production probe for pronominal clitics (PPPC, Tuller et al in press) was administered to a group of 15 child L2 learners of French with L1 English aged 6;6-12;3 with a time of exposition ranging from 0;11-4;6 and an age of onset between 4;3 and 10;10. The L2 children were compared to a group of

monolingual French children with SLI and control groups of typically developing (TD) French monolinguals aged 4, 6, 8 and 11 (12 children of each age).

The PPPC elicits clitic clusters in simple root clauses of the type *Il me poursuit* (he-me-chases 'he chases me'). However, some children spontaneously produce infinitival embeddings like *Il veut me tuer* (he-wants me-to kill 'he wants to kill me'), where the two clitics are attached to different host verbs.

Hypotheses: The embedding strategy increases syntactic complexity. It still contains an accusative clitic in a crossing chain configuration, and it minimally adds to the complexity of clause structure. Morphological complexity is reduced. The clitic cluster *nom-acc-V* is broken up into two less complex words *nom-V*; *acc-V*.

We tested the predictions of two complementary hypotheses. H1: If syntactic complexity alone explains the difficulty with accusative clitics, then the embedding-strategy should be more prone to error than the mono-clausal one. H2: If morphological complexity plays a significant role, then the mono-clausal clitic clustering strategy should be more prone to error than the bi-clausal one, which avoids clitic clusters.

Results and discussion: We compared

- i. the total production of correct accusative clitics in clusters with that of the total number of correct accusative clitics (including those attached to an embedded host verb)
- ii. the error rate found in responses containing clitic clusters and that found in responses in which the embedding strategy was used

We found that i. the inclusion of non-clustered clitics led to an increase in correctly produced clitics (significant for all groups, strongly significant for the TD6 and TD4 groups); ii. children produced virtually no errors in the embedding strategy (no errors at all for the L2, TD6/8/11 groups), and the error rate is significantly lower for the separated clitics than it is for clitic clusters in the SLI and TD4 groups.

These data confirm H2: The presence of a clitic cluster caused more errors than did constructions that allow the separation of the two clitics, even though the latter implies additional syntactic complexity. This suggests that word structure is a relevant source of grammatical complexity in language acquisition. We intend to use this measure, in particular the longitudinal data obtained at T2, in order to distinguish the superficially similar behavior of L2 learners and children with SLI.

Chillier-Zesiger et al. (to appear). The acquisition and mastery of French pronouns in normal children. *Journal of Child Language*.

Jakubowicz, C., Nash, L., Rigaut, C., & Gerard, C.-L. (1998). Determiners and clitic pronouns in French-speaking children with SLI. *Language Acquisition*, 7(2-4), 113-160.

Hamann, C., L. Rizzi and U. Frauenfelder (1996): "On the Acquisition of Subject and Object Clitics in French". In H. Clahsen (ed): *Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition*. John Benjamins. Amsterdam.

Prévost, P. (2006). The phenomenon of object omission in child L2 French. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 9: 263-280.

Tuller, L., Delage, H. & Monjauze, C. (in press) "Clitic Pronoun Production as a Measure of Typical Language Development in French: A Comparative Study of SLI, Mild-to-Moderate Deafness and Benign Epilepsy of Childhood with Centrottemporal Spikes" *Lingua*.

Wexler (2002). The theory of clitics, a parameter of object agreement, and the extension of the UCC to massive cross-linguistic differences in object clitic omission: Evidence from normal development and SLI. IGG, Lecce.

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**Disentangling age and input effects in a crosslinguistic study of the acquisition
of grammatical gender in child bilinguals**
25.02.2010, 11.30–12.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

It is generally accepted that there are age effects in non-native (L2) acquisition in the sense that L2 children typically outperform L2 adults (see e.g., Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson 2003). However, relatively little is known about the extent to which L2 age effects exist within childhood, and furthermore, how these interact with the quantity and quality of input to which the language-learning child is exposed. This paper investigates the role of these two factors by (i) comparing different groups of child bilinguals, i.e. bilingual first language (2L1) children, 'early successive bilinguals' (children exposed to an L2 between 1 and 3 years) and L2 children (first exposure between 4 and 8), and (ii) comparing the acquisition of the same target language (TL) phenomenon in two different languages, i.e., grammatical gender in Dutch and Greek.

Greek has a 3-way gender system with clear morphological cues for a noun's gender; Dutch, on the other hand, has a 2-way gender system with very few morphological cues. It is thus predicted that the acquisition of Greek gender requires comparatively less input than the acquisition of Dutch gender. Previous findings for monolinguals (e.g., Van der Velde 2003, Mastropavlou 2006), as well as our own elicited production data from English/Dutch (n=48) and English/Greek (n=54) children, confirm this prediction: gender is acquired earlier in Greek than in Dutch for both groups. Here, we test this prediction more thoroughly using data from an extensive parental questionnaire on the children's current and previous language use. This questionnaire documents with whom and where the children spend time, both in the week and at the weekend, now and in the past, the % exposure to the TL at each of these times, plus other sources of language input, e.g., TV. These data are combined and used to compare child bilinguals with varying exposure to the TL, i.e., < 25%, ca. 50%, and > 75%: the input effect for Dutch is expected to be greater than for Greek.

This more detailed analysis of the input quantity will also allow us to redress one of the perennial problems of studies on age effects in L2 acquisition. The preliminary data from our three groups of bilinguals suggest the existence of age effects, i.e., for both languages, the 2L1 children outperform the 'early successive bilinguals', who in turn outperform the L2 children. However, closer inspection reveals a partial confound with length of exposure. This problem is of course not peculiar to this particular data set. Indeed, in any study comparing multiple L2 groups with different ages of first exposure, there is always a confound between two of the following three variables: age of first exposure, age at time of testing and length of exposure. When age at time of testing is held constant across groups, age at first exposure and length

of exposure are confounded. When length of exposure is held constant, age at testing and age at first exposure are confounded. In order to avoid this problem, we will use the aforementioned questionnaire data to measure length of exposure in a more precise way than the usual formula of “age at time of testing minus age at first exposure”. By taking into account the relative exposure to each of the child’s two languages over time in both the home and school environment, it should be possible to avoid the aforementioned confounds and thereby take a step closer to disentangling the effects of age and of exposure in early child bilingualism.

Hyltenstam, K. & Abrahamsson, N. (2003). Maturation constraints in SLA. In: Doughty & Long (eds.), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 539–588.

Mastropavlou, M. (2006). The role of phonological salience and feature interpretability in the grammar of typically developing and language impaired children. PhD thesis, University of Thessaloniki.

Van der Velde (2003) *Déterminants et pronoms en néerlandais et en français: Syntaxe en acquisition*. PhD thesis, Paris 8.

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The influence of input quality on the acquisition of gender in children

25.02.2010, 12.00–12.30 Uhr, Raum 1.506

German gender is generally known for being acquired without problems in mono- and bilingual L1 acquisition. However, when analyzing over 100 narratives of 17 multilingual children between the ages of five and six years growing up with various L1s and German, it becomes clear that acquiring the German gender is even with a German input from birth more problematic than often considered. The difficulty lies not “only” in the fact that the gender is not marked correctly; of more concern is that the majority of the children does not classify nouns at all. These children use no gender rather than using an incorrect gender.

Nominal agreement is the key for theoretically grasping the acquisition task and for establishing progress. The latter is important since gender acquisition progress over an extended period of time does not have the effect that the proportion of correct gender markings increases. Important steps towards a mastery of gender go hand in hand with a reduction in the variety of genders exhibited and can look like steps backwards.

In the test group, children whose L1 has gender distinction and who received consistent first language input from their parents during their first years of life, are most successful. The children, whose input mainly consisted of a low level learner variety of German, regardless of whether their other L1s have gender distinction or not, have the most difficulties. One child that received medium level learner variety input and consistent L1-input, in contrast, is quite successful in acquiring gender.

The data show evidence for the fact, that an input of a low level learner variety is an important factor for the language acquisition of children. An input of a learner variety of an average to good level, on the other hand, does not seem to have any impeding impact on gender acquisition, if in combination with consistent first language input.

The results indicate that input quality (L1 versus low level learner variety) is an important factor in language acquisition, in addition to the influences of the typological properties of the L1s and the target language. These facts lead to

consequences of high practical relevance, particularly when advising families on multilingual education.

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On the interrelation between gender and case in the development of the DP in child L1 and L2 acquisition

25.02.2010, 12.30–13.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

The acquisition of case and gender presents protracted problems in adult L2 acquisition (e.g. White 2007) and has also been reported to be associated with difficulties and delays in child L2 acquisition. Whereas the development of gender in child L2 acquisition has recently been investigated in numerous cross-sectional studies (e.g. Blom et al. 2006; Unsworth 2008), little is yet known about the interaction of gender and case in child L2 development.

For the development of the DP in child L2 acquisition, e.g. Kaltenbacher & Klages (2006) postulate that the acquisition of gender is a necessary precursor for the acquisition of case marking in and child (L1 and) L2 acquisition. Evidence in favour of these claims is predominantly based on longitudinal case studies (e.g. Wegener 1995). The present paper aims to investigate the acquisition of the DP cross-sectionally in a larger sample of L2 children, comparing L2 developmental patterns against L1 development

In this paper, we report elicited production data from 89 children between the ages of 3;5 and 6;5 who acquire German as their L1 (n=25) or their L2 (n=64). L1s were mixed, with the largest group of L2 children having Turkish as their L1 (n=25). Ages of onset ranged from 2;1 to 5;1, and length of exposure varied from 0;6 to 3;1 years.

As part of a larger project, the participants were tested on a 16-item elicitation task, in which wh-questions elicited complex DPs (Det-Adj-N) in relation to pictures, requiring the use of different gender and case markings. Answers were coded for accuracy of gender marking (in unambiguous nominative contexts), case (NOM, ACC, DAT) and DP-internal concord (Det-Adj-N). In this talk, we aim to address the following research questions:

- What is the development in the acquisition of gender? Do children proceed from a no gender via a two-gender to the target three-gender system?
- What is the development in the acquisition of case? Do children proceed from a NOM via a NOM-ACC to a NOM-ACC-DAT tripartite case system?
- Is there a correlation between the development of gender and case?
- When does concord (Det-Adj, Adj-N, Det-Adj-N) emerge in the development of the DP in child L2 acquisition?
- Do child L2ers show similar developmental routes compared to L1 children?
- (How) does age of onset affect the development of case and gender?

The results of the L2 children show great inter-individual variability in gender marking, which cannot be consistently related to age of onset and/or L1, as well as uniformity in developmental paths in case marking, largely irrespective of age of onset and L1. However, there is no uniform relation in the development of case and gender in child L2 production. Moreover, although different in accuracy, the developmental patterns in case marking in the child L2 learners correspond to those in the child L1 learners and those reported in the child L1 literature (e.g. Eisenbeiss 2002; Tracy 1986). We will discuss the findings in relation to the impact of internal factors in child L2 acquisition.

Brigitta Keij / Leonie Cornips / Johanne van Emmerik / Roeland van Hout /
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Knowing versus Producing:

Grammatical Gender in Dutch Multilingual and SLI Children

26.02.2010, 11.30–12.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

Orgassa & Weerman (2008) argue that child L2 learners and monolingual SLI children show a similar pattern in their acquisition of grammatical gender in Dutch. In this talk we will present experimental data on production and comprehension which shed a new and slightly different light on this claim. We will present experimental data of 97 children: 34 monolingual children, 37 multilingual children, from various language backgrounds, age 6-10, and 26 monolingual SLI children, age 8-12. In each group we distinguish two developmental levels. A sentence completion task based on Unsworth (to appear) was used to elicit production data and a forced choice grammaticality judgement task based on van Emmerik (in progress) to tap the actual knowledge.

We will address the following questions: (1) what are the differences and the similarities between typically developing monolingual, multilingual children and monolingual SLI children in the acquisition of Dutch grammatical gender and (2) to what extent do these groups differ in the relation between knowledge and production?

When comparing the three groups, we found an obvious difference between the monolingual control group on the one hand and the multilingual group and the SLI group on the other. The monolingual group shows a target-like pattern on the

production task as well as on the judgement task, as is expected for their age. This group does not show any essential differences between common and neuter nouns.

The multilingual group is clearly delayed in comparison to the monolingual control group. The younger multilingual group performs worse on neuter nouns than on common nouns on the production task. However, this difference is not visible in the judgement task, which might suggest the use of a production strategy of overgeneralisation of the common determiner DE to neuter nouns by multilingual children at this developmental level. The multilingual group as a whole shows a delay in acquisition, but within the multilingual group there is a pattern of further development between the younger and the older group.

The SLI group is even more delayed in comparison to the monolingual control group than the multilingual group. Interestingly, within the SLI group there are no traces of development between the younger and the older group on the production task. There is, however, a slight development on the judgement task. Moreover, there is no evidence of the use of a production strategy by the SLI children. The absence of developmental pattern and the absence of a production strategy together imply that the SLI group crucially differs from the multilingual group.

We will also discuss what the individual patterns can tell us about the developmental stages in the acquisition of grammatical gender in Dutch, which is – as is well known – very different from other languages: the literature (on production) shows that initially typically developing monolingual children overgeneralize the (common) definite determiner DE to all nouns, and seem to have no knowledge of gender. The (neuter) HET comes in slowly and late, and is reported not to be target-like before age 7 at the earliest.

Orgassa, A. & Weerman, F (2008). Dutch gender in specific language impairment and second language acquisition. *Second Language Research*, 24 (3): 333-364.

Van Emmerik, J. (in progress). Written language acquisition of Dutch deaf adults: in between L1 and L2? A comparison between Dutch deaf adults and hearing adult L2 learners. PhD Thesis, Radboud University Nijmegen.

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**Production and Processing of grammatical morphemes in Turkish-Dutch
children and Dutch monolingual children with SLI**

26.02.2010, 12.00–12.30 Uhr, Raum 1.506

Children learning a second language (L2) are known to frequently erroneously omit or substitute grammatical morphemes in their L2. Previous studies focus primarily on the production data and treat these errors as either related to problems in the syntactic representation of these elements or as resulting from difficulties in the processing of inflectional morphology. In this study we address the underlying nature of L2 children's production errors by comparing production with comprehension (online data). If the inflection errors in L2 production reflect syntactic deficits, we expect L2 children to ignore these errors during online comprehension. If these children show sensitivity to the inflection errors then we can ascertain that their syntactic representation of these linguistic elements is intact.

We examine the online comprehension of verbal and nominal agreement in Turkish-Dutch bilingual children and monolingual Dutch children. The majority of bilingual children in our study start having systematic exposure to their L2 when they enter the education system. As a consequence, their language abilities often lag behind their monolingual age peers and resemble children with SLI (Håkansson, Salameh & Nettelbladt, 2003; Salameh, Håkansson & Nettelbladt, 2004). Specifically, the production data of grammatical morphemes under scrutiny show similar patterns of errors (Orgassa, 2009; Blom, 2008; Blom, Polišenská, Weerman, 2008). The production errors appear to be the same; however, they could have different underlying causes in the two populations examined. We expect the online data to help us distinguish between the errors observed in these two populations.

We examine the nature of production errors related to verbal and nominal agreement in Dutch in both populations. Subject-verb and article-noun agreement is tested in production using sentence completion tasks and in online comprehension using the self-paced listening task. The groups that are being tested are Dutch monolingual control group (N=30; age 5, 6, 7), Turkish-Dutch group (N=30; age 7, 8, 9). The online comprehension data is expected to reveal whether errors in production are due to deficits in the underlying representation or due to processing problems.

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What counts: parent's educational background or time?
Evidence from production and comprehension in eL2 German
26.02.2010, 12.30–13.00 Uhr, Raum 1.506

This study investigated the influence of external and internal factors 'parental level of education' (PLE) and several measures of the factor 'time' in eL2 of German. In L1 acquisition, both factors have been found to be predictive for many language measures (e.g., Grimm, 2001; Unsworth, 2008). Looking at PLE in eL2, a correlation between PLE and vocabulary knowledge was found (Schwartz et al., 2009). However, it is open whether PLE influences children's L2 competence also in more grammatical measures. Examining 'time' in eL2, several measures have been studied: chronological age (CA) (e.g., Dubowy et al., 2008), overall time of exposure (ToE) (e.g., Schulz et al, 2008; Unsworth, 2005), and age of onset (AoO) (e.g., Schwartz, 2004). Parallel to L1 acquisition, CA and ToE have been found to be positively correlated with children's language ability. In contrast, evidence for the influence of

AoO is mixed. It may be negatively correlated with language performance or subject to multiple sensitive periods, leading to categorical changes (Meisel, 2009). In eL2 acquisition of German, research has to date been limited to case studies (e.g., Thoma & Tracy, 2006; Rothweiler, 2006), making it difficult to examine external and internal factors systematically. The present study therefore explored the effects of the factors CA, AoO, ToE, and PLE on eL2 learner's language abilities, both in production and comprehension. Three hypotheses were tested: (H1) Children with low PLE mothers (<10 school years) exhibit significantly lower language abilities than children with higher PLE mothers (≥ 10 school years). (H2): ToE is positively related to performance on production and comprehension tasks. (H3): AoO is negatively related to performance on production and comprehension tasks.

63 eL2 preschool children (mean: 6;1, range: 5;5 - 6;8) with different L1 languages participated. Their mean AoO for L2 German was 3;4 yrs (range: 2;2 - 6;1), with a mean ToE to German of 32 months (range: 4 - 47). Data of the children's developmental background and PLE (mean: 10,14 yrs, range: 5 - 13) was collected through a questionnaire. All children were tested with LiSe-DaZ, a standardized test aimed at assessing production and comprehension in eL2 and L1 children (Schulz & Tracy, in prep.). Verb meaning (VM, 12 items), negation (NEG, 12 items), and wh-questions (WH, 10 items) are assessed via TVJT and question-after-picture-tasks. Syntactic development is assessed via elicited production (14 items). 52 of these children also received a standardized test of expressive vocabulary AWST-R (75 nouns and verbs, Kiese-Himmel, 2005). Performance on LiSe-DaZ subtests was comparable to the norming population wrt production (33% mastery of main clause structure, 67% mastery of main and subordinate clause structure) and comprehension (VM: 95,8%, NEG: 83,2%, WH: 80,3% correct). The mean in the AWST-R was 30,5 (range: 6-49), sig. lower than in the L1 norming group as expected. Contradicting (H1), children in the low PLE group did not perform significantly different from the high PLE group in any of the 4 subtests of LiSe-DaZ and in the vocabulary test. ToE was positively correlated with VM ($p=.013$), WH ($p=.022$), and AWST-R ($p<.001$), and children who mastered subordinate clauses had a longer ToE than children who did not ($p=.031$), confirming (H2). AoO was negatively correlated with WH ($p=.039$) and AWST-R ($p<.01$). Once ToE was controlled for, the effects disappeared, partly rejecting (H3). However, children who mastered subordinate clauses had a lower AoO than children who did not ($p=.017$); CA and PLE were not significant.

Taken together, these data provide first evidence that the impact of external and internal factors in eL2 crucially differs from what is known for L1. Notably, 'parental level of education' and 'chronological age' were not related to either production or comprehension competence. Further studies are needed with a wider range of ages to consolidate the effects found in this study with preschool children aged 5 and 6.

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Adopted Children and Dutch Gender

Dutch gender has both a lexical and a rule based side. In recent studies on the acquisition of Dutch gender (Blom, Poliřensk, Unsworth red. 2008) various hypotheses have been formulated with respect to the role of the age of onset and the role of the input. One of the difficulties in these studies is that the data for the L2 children are ambiguous. In one interpretation they support the idea that there are age effects in the rule based side of gender, although the data do not clearly indicate whether the crucial distinction is around the age of six (cf. Newport 1990 a.o.) or around the age of four (cf. Meisel 2007). Others suggest, conversely, that the different results for L2 versus L1 children can be entirely attributed to the quantitatively and qualitatively different input these children receive, since the L2 children tested all grew up in a minority setting, where Dutch is the L2, while the L1 children tested came from a higher socio economic class and were not bilingual.

One way to deal with this ambiguity is to test (internationally) adopted children, as we do in this study. The children (N= 15) are comparable to L2 children in terms of age of onset (i.e. they start acquiring Dutch at a later age), but to L1 children in terms of class and input. However, they are not actively speaking their original L1 anymore. At the moment of testing they had been acquiring Dutch for 4 to 5 yrs. In order to make a distinction between the two views on the critical age, we made two groups differing with respect to age of onset: an older group who arguably did not receive enough Dutch input to acquire the rule based side of gender before the age of 6, and a younger group for whom this borderline is around the age of 4. Both lexical and rule based knowledge were tested, as in earlier studies.

With respect to the lexical knowledge of gender the results of the adopted children show, first of all, that both the older group and the younger group behave alike in that they show the same type of overgeneralizations as all other groups tested until now, that is, mainly overgeneralizations from common to neuter gender. Second, the adopted children score much better than the (immigrant) L2 children, supporting the idea that input is indeed crucial for lexical knowledge of gender. This is corroborated by a third observation: the older group scores better than the younger group. This 'reverse age effect' cannot be due to the input, since this was kept constant for both groups, but it can be attributed to lexical learning, since in general the older group arguably could have been more efficient in this respect.

With respect to the rule based side of gender we observe the opposite pattern. Here the younger group scores better than the older group, and in fact comparable to the L1 groups tested before. Hence, the 'reverse age effect' found for lexical learning does not extend to rule based learning. This finding is compatible with a critical age effect for the latter type of learning. In addition, the data suggest that the crucial distinction is not around the age of 4: in that case both adopted groups should have a similar score and should both be different from the L1 groups. Rather it suggests that the critical age is around 6. This does not mean, however, that the older adopted group is entirely comparable to the (immigrant) L2 children. In fact, the adopted

group clearly performs better and there is no sign of across the board fossilization. We speculate that this difference may be explained as follows: the older adopted group may remedy some of the problems in their rule based knowledge by means of lexical learning. Since it is dependent on a qualitatively and quantitatively rich input, this option does not work as well for the (immigrant) L2 children.

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**Determining the role of internal and external factors in children's
comprehension: A comparison of early second learners
of German and monolinguals**

This study examines the impact of the factors months of exposure, sex, and educational background of the parents on children's performances in LiSe-DaZ (Schulz & Tracy, in prep.). LiSe-DaZ provides a means to measure the comprehension and production abilities of German eL2 learners, but can be used for monolingual German-speaking children as well. The module 'comprehension' contains three sub-tests, which are designed as TVJ tasks and question-after-story-tasks: understanding of verb meanings (12 items), understanding of wh-questions (10 items), and understanding of negation (12 items). In addition, production is examined via an elicited production-after-story-task (14 items).

In this paper, we report the results of the module 'comprehension', administered to 33 children acquiring German as early second language (eL2) and 67 monolingual children. The children participate in a larger study, which investigates the acquisition of German, using a combined longitudinal and cross-sectional design. At the time of first testing, the age range was between 3;6 and 3;11 (mean ages: 3;7, both in the eL2 group and in the monolingual group). In the eL2 group, age of onset was 2;0 years or older. Information about the children's developmental and educational background was collected through a questionnaire. All children were recruited and tested in local kindergartens in Frankfurt (Main). There was no evidence for hearing impairments, psycho-social deprivation, or mental retardation. In the eL2 group, the time of exposure to German varied between 4 and 26 months (mean: 10.12 months).

This study provides the first extensive investigation of language comprehension abilities in eL2 and monolingual learners of German. As previous studies focused on language production and examined small groups (cf., Thoma & Tracy 2006, Rothweiler, 2007), our predictions are derived from different populations and tasks. We expected sex and educational background of the parents not to be significantly related to children's comprehension skills in LiSe-DaZ. With respect to the eL2-specific factor months of exposure, we explore whether this factor, even though at first testing much lower than in previous studies (cf., Schulz & Wenzel 2007), influences the degree of children's comprehension abilities.

Statistical comparisons were performed for each group (eL2, monolinguals) and type of task (verb meaning, wh-questions, negation) separately. A T-Test showed that neither in the eL2 nor in the monolingual group the factor sex has an impact on children's performance in the three sub-tests. In addition, there were no significant correlations between the educational background of the mothers (measured in years of schooling) and test performance in any of the three subtests (Spearman's Rho-Test). The same holds for the educational background of the fathers. Finally, there was no significant impact of the factor months of exposure on the eL2 group.

Our findings are in line with previous results showing that girls and boys do not differ wrt to their language acquisition, when core grammatical abilities are assessed. There was also no correlation of maternal or paternal educational background and test performances in each of the two groups. This finding shows that the three sub-tests in fact probe children's linguistic competence rather than social factors confounding language skills. We also did not find a significant correlation of months of exposure and test performance. This finding seems surprising given that test performance positively correlate to months of exposure in older eL2 children (Schulz & Wenzel 2007, Unsworth 2005). However, for 24 of the 33 eL2 children (72,7%) time of exposure to German was 10 months or less. Therefore, contact with German was still limited, and conclusions can be drawn only after the second round of data collection.

We conclude that comprehension abilities develop independently of sex and parental background in German eL2 learners and monolinguals. The conclusion seems to contradict previous findings showing that particularly boys from migration backgrounds perform poorly in several learning assessments (e.g., Prenzel et al. 2000, Dubowy et al. 2008). We argue that it is necessary and possible to select test materials in a way that language skills can be assessed independently of these factors.