

Register Specific Structures in Multilingual Language Acquisition

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Researching the written-language abilities, meaning structures required by the formal register of multilingual children and adolescents in Germany a corpus containing 480 spoken and written texts from 120 pupils of 5th, 7th, 10th and 12th grade is used (collected in the DFG-funded project MULTILIT) (Schellhardt & Schroeder 2015). The presentation focuses on the challenges working with multilingual corpus data and shows which aspects have to be considered when interpreting the data and – from there – drawing conclusions to the representation of syntax:

Specific social contexts (determined by the participants involved, their relation to each other and the situation) require specific linguistic structures. Thus communication settings can be graded in registers by using the criteria how public or intimate and how formal or informal situations are (Maas 2008, 2015). Written-language structures used in formal situations are characterized by increasing information density and increasing decontextualization of the specific context. The noun phrase is the syntactic structure which is effected by these two parameters particularly. Analyzing the elaboration of noun phrases of pupils texts can reveal the register-orientation of the text producer and the view on different age groups enables to get an idea of the development from informal to written-language structures. Some of the expressions occur rather in oral language use than in written and vice versa (Schellhardt 2015). For example relative clauses are more common in oral texts than participial constructions (1) which are more often used in formal registers.

(1) (grade 12, written)

Die	im	Film	gezeigte	Szene
the.NOM	in.ART.DAT	film.DAT	PTCP-show-PTCP	scene
'the scene shown in the film'				

Both types of noun phrases represent alternative forms of the same meaning. What does the appearance of one of these structures in a pupils text mean for the classification of the different forms of elaboration of the noun phrase in a orate-literate scale? To get an insight on the representation of language in the learners mind the quantitative data will be enriched with descriptions of individual cases.

References: Montrul, S. (2008b). Incomplete acquisition in Spanish heritage speakers: Chronological age or interfaces vulnerability? In H. Chan, H. Jacob & E. Kipia (Eds.), *BUCLD 32: Proceedings of the 32nd annual BUCLD*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 299–310. Sorace, A. (2005). Selective optionality in language development. In: Cornips, L., Corrigan, K. P. (Eds.), *Syntax and variation: Reconciling the biological and the social*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 55–80. Sorace, A. & Serratrice, L. (2009). Internal and external interfaces in bilingual language development: Beyond structural overlap. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 13(2), 195–210.