

The acquisition of clitic subject and object pronouns in early child L2

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In this presentation I investigate the acquisition of clitic object and subject pronouns in French of monolingual German children (age of onset: 3;00-4;00 years).

A number of researchers, like Meisel (2007), assume that this age span falls within the critical period. This means for language acquisition that the innate ability to acquire an L1 continuously starts fading out. The result is that a number of children show different morpho-syntactic patterns, resulting in a type of acquisition in which both elements from L1 and from L2 are found (Schwartz 2003). Kroffke & Rothweiler (2006) find, in their study of Turkish children learning German at age of onset 3;-4,0 and 5;0-6;0 respectively that the younger children behave like L1 learners while the older children clearly exhibit the profile of L2 acquisition.

The central question is if these findings are confirmed in the present study and if young children acquiring a second language from the age of 3;00 to 4;00 years still behave like L1 children.

It is known from adult L2 learners of French that they often use clitic object and subject pronouns in positions where only strong pronouns are allowed (Granfeldt & Schlyter 2001, Schwartz & Sprouse 1996). Bilingual children use strong pronouns in combination with non-finite verbs, but they never use non-finite verbs with subject clitics (Kaiser 1994).

The data which I will present here show that the children behave mostly like (2)L1 learners, but they also produce typical constructions known from L2, i.e, they sporadically use non- finite verbs with subject clitics. Nevertheless, the children don't use "typical" L2 constructions like postverbal object clitics, but they prefer DP objects instead of object clitics. The cases in question will be examined in detail and compared to monolingual and bilingual language acquisition, as well as to typical adult learning patterns.

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