

The Role of Caregivers' Language Input in Early Bilingual Learners: Relating Caregivers' Code-switching and Proficiency to Children's Receptive Vocabulary

Nina-Sophie Sczepurek, Josje Verhagen

University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication

n.szepurek@gmail.com

Previous research has shown that the quantity of language input matters for bilingual acquisition (David & Wei 2008; Hoff et al. 2012; Thordardottir 2011). However, qualitative input variables are less frequently investigated. Instead, many studies point towards a need to further dismantle qualitative input variables in order to examine if linguistically richer environments can be associated with bilingual children's language development (Driessen et al. 2002; MacLeod et al. 2012). Qualitative input properties relate to the type of exposure a bilingual child receives (e.g., whether the child receives native or non-native input). Unlike monolinguals, bilingual children are more likely to receive input from both native and non-native speakers of their language(s) (Fernald 2006). Besides contrasting native versus non-native speaker input, another way of approaching the type of exposure a bilingual child receives is whether the child is exposed to caregivers' code-switching, "the mixing of two or more languages in discourse" (Poplack 2015, p. 918), and subsequently mixed input. The current study looks at the effects of two quality-related variables – caregivers' (native) language proficiency and caregivers' code-switching – on children's receptive vocabulary of the majority language Dutch. Seventy-two bilingual children with a mean age of 35 months ($SD = 7$ months), who were exposed to Dutch and (an)other language(s) at home, were tested on a Dutch receptive vocabulary task (i.e., The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test). Information on caregivers' proficiency and children's home input situations was assessed using an electronic questionnaire on the basis of already existing questionnaires (ALDeQ; BiLEC; Language Mixing Scale). Linear mixed regression analyses showed that the amount of native Dutch input at home by children's caregivers was a significant predictor of children's vocabulary knowledge. The amount of total Dutch input at home by children's caregivers was also a significant predictor of children's vocabulary knowledge. Neither the amount of intrasentential code-switching (within a sentence) nor the amount of intersentential codeswitching (between sentences) provided by caregivers came out as a significant predictor of children's vocabulary knowledge. The evidence presented in this study advances our understanding on the relation between input quality factors and bilingual children's language development. Even though speculative and calling for future research, our findings suggest that native input may provide a higher frequency of complex structures and/ or (types of) words necessary for the child to acquire its vocabulary items. With regard to CS, caregivers may have underestimated and/ or underreported on their use of CS due to the lack of awareness about the frequency of their own CS behavior. Whereas some earlier studies point towards a negative effect of caregivers' use of CS on children's language skills, we cannot provide evidence for this notion.

References

David, A., & Wei, L. (2008). Individual differences in the lexical development of French-English bilingual children. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11(5), 598-618. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050802149200>

- Driessen, G., Van der Slik, F., & De Bot, K. (2002). Home language and language proficiency: A large-scale longitudinal study in Dutch primary schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 23(3), 175-194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630208666464>
- Fernald, A. (2006). When infants hear two languages: Interpreting research on early speech perception by bilingual children. In P. McCardle & E. Hoff (Eds.), *Childhood bilingualism: Research on infancy through school age* (pp. 19-29). Multilingual Matters.
- Hoff, E., Core, C., Place, S., Rumiche, R., Señor, M., & Parra, M. (2012). Dual language input and early bilingual development. *Journal of Child Language*, 39(1), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000910000759>
- MacLeod, A. A. N., Fabiano-Smith, L., Boegner-Pagé, S., & Fontollet, S. (2012). Simultaneous bilingual language acquisition: The role of parental input on receptive vocabulary development. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 29(1), 131-142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659012466862>
- Poplack, S. (2015). Code-Switching: Linguistic. In N. J. Smelser & B. Baltes (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of social and behavioral sciences* (pp. 2062-2065). Elsevier Science.
- Thordardottir, E. (2011). The relationship between bilingual input and vocabulary development. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 15(4), 426-445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006911403202>