

Linguistic and sociological factors in the acquisition of German by child heritage speakers. What makes the difference?

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Factors determining the outcome of early bilingual language acquisition have been investigated in both linguistics and sociology. This project gathers both perspectives in one study. More specifically, I investigate how children with Italian or Turkish as their heritage language acquire two specific linguistic phenomena in German:

- syllable duration as a correlate of word stress
- grammatical gender marking on the definite article.

Previous research in linguistics, sociology and related disciplines has revealed several important factors that influence the bilingual language acquisition of these phenomena in the majority language (e.g., Eichler, Jansen & Müller 2013, Hoff 2003, Meisel 2018, Trofimovich & Baker 2007, Unsworth 2013, among others):

- cross-linguistic influence from the heritage language
- age of onset of acquisition
- language exposure
- socio-economic status.

The results will show whether and how these factors differently affect the production of the two phenomena. Furthermore, I will show how the four factors are related with each other. Revealing their relation allows us to disentangle the influence of the four factors. My conclusion is that the central factor in the acquisition path of the majority language by child heritage speakers is language exposure.

References:

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