

## IASCL - Child Language Bulletin - Vol 19, No 1: November 1999

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### IASCL NEWS

#### FROM THE EDITOR

The **Bulletin of Child Language** is the newsletter of the **International Association for the Study of Child Language**. It is distributed free to all members of **IASCL** and it is published twice a year. As the new editor of the **Bulletin of Child Language** I would like to give some information about the content and the distribution of this and future issues of the Bulletin. Apart from the usual sections (information about IASCL, conference information, book notices, etc.), the Bulletin will also include theoretical and research articles, interviews, book reviews and a special section taken from Info-Childes messages.

Some changes have also been introduced in the distribution of the Bulletin. The Bulletin will be included on the **IASCL Web** page (<http://atilawww.uia.ac.be/IASCL/>) and all members of the association will receive an e-mail message each time a new issue of the Bulletin is published. A hard copy of the Bulletin will only be sent to those members who ask for it by sending a message to the editor. We think that these changes are necessary in order to include more information in the Bulletin without increasing expenses.

The editor invites all members of IASCL to submit short articles (c. 400 words), book reviews and letters for publication in the **Child Language Bulletin**. Conference information and book notices are also welcome. Please send your contributions to the editor by e-mail or by postal mail (including an IBM compatible disk) to:

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Please feel free to communicate your suggestions concerning the **Child Language Bulletin** to the editor by electronic or postal mail.

## **IASCL 99 THE ALLOCATION OF GRANTS TO MEMBERS FROM ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED COUNTRIES**

***Edith Bavin***

At the general meeting held in San Sebastian, Martyn Barrett presented a report from the grants sub committee; the committee's role was to decide on grants to participants from economically disadvantaged countries. This article is based on that report.

The first task of the committee (Annick de Hower, Edith Bavin and Martyn Barrett) was to identify which countries to include as economically disadvantaged. The 1997 World Bank listing was adopted and the countries ranked at 39 or below on that list were deemed eligible. Those people who had submitted abstracts for the congress from these economically disadvantaged countries were invited to apply for a grant to assist them in attending the 1999 congress. The committee requested specific information to assist them in determining which applicants were more deserving than others.

The task of ranking applicants was not easy. Because of the shortage of funds the committee had to be very strict. Unfortunately, those people who did not provide the information requested by the committee could not be ranked alongside those who had. The committee members came up with independent rankings, which turned out to be remarkably similar. It was decided to award two levels of grants since some applicants were able to obtain travel funding from their home institution or from other sources. The standard grant of 400 euros covered registration and basic accommodation and meals. The lower grant of 300 Euros allowed people with other funds to supplement them. Of the 40 applicants (applying for a total of only 7,080 Euros), 12 were

offered grants at the higher level and 6 at the lower. One of these people did not show up in San Sebastian, so the allocated funds were offered to an applicant on the reserve list. The criteria used to determine the ranking of the applicants was strictly applied. Undergraduates were not given priority, nor people who planned to attend but were not presenters.

This is the first time the IASCL has set up a committee with the purpose of establishing guidelines to award grants to applicants from economically disadvantaged countries. The committee believes the funds were distributed fairly and equitably. The limited resources were a concern to the committee members, who urge the IASCL to request additional contributions from members in future years. This will enable more researchers from economically disadvantaged countries to participate in forthcoming meetings.

## **VIIIth INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD LANGUAGE NOT ONLY WORK!**

### ***Melita Kovacevic***

This year's congress which took place in San Sebastian, or as it is called in Basque, Donostia, has been attended by about 700 colleagues from more than a hundred countries all over the world. Really impressive! Although we are no doubt becoming a big group of people sharing the same interest, such a large number of participants was partly due to the venue itself.

In one of their reports Steven and Annick promised us that the San Sebastain congress would be a memorable event and they were right. Our hosts did a great job. It is certainly not easy to take good care of so many people, but they did think thoroughly about all the details and succeeded in each of their organizational attempts.

The Basque Country is a small country, but as it said in one of the booklets, has something of all worlds. We had a chance to see some of them. Donostia, a city not large in terms of population (about 180 000), offers a lot to its visitors. It is a beautiful town well known for its La Concha bay, a few kilometers long sandy beach, historical Old Quarter in the heart of the city, with numerous restaurants and shops. We had a reception at the Miramar Palace that overlooks the convergence of the two bays. This breathtaking view made it clear why the Royal family had chosen it as a summer residence. No wonder! The third day, timed perfectly by our hosts, we were given three options for our sightseeing tours. We could visit the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, a small fancy tourist resort on the French side or the countryside of the Basque country. Everything sounded very inviting, but most of the participants selected the Museum. It is really an impressive centre of modern and contemporary art, envisioned by its creator architect Frank Gehry as a titanium made of stone and glass - great piece of art itself! After we all had professional exchanges and heated discussions, met some new colleagues, chatted with old friends, had updates on all kinds of professional and private issues, enjoyed delicious Donostia

specialities such as *crab a la pantxineta* or few *txikitos*, it was time for one more event - the conference dinner. Another encounter with one of the worlds of the Basque country: typical Basque cuisine in a rural area close to San Sebastian, with simple but tasteful dishes, a show featuring a traditional Basque sport - *harri jasoketa* (lifting stones weighing up to 300 kg) and music performed on traditional instruments, a special kind of wooden drums.

During the Congress we heard many valuable talks and read many good posters, but we also enjoyed ourselves - we learned more about this beautiful country and its people, their culture and customs. And we know that there is much more to be seen. **Biltzarra oso emankorra izan zen. Mila esker denoi!**

### **IASCL PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE**

After consultation with all members of the IASCL Executive Committee, IASCL-President Brian MacWhinney has appointed a new Publications Committee. This Committee now consists of Annick De Houwer and Steven Gillis (both Science Foundation Flanders and University of Antwerp, Belgium).

### **IASCL PUBLICATIONS NEWS**

The IASCL Publications Committee is very pleased to announce that as of now, John Benjamins Publishing Company will be publishing the official IASCL publications in the new series **Trends in Language Acquisition**. Two volumes are planned for every 3 years between IASCL conferences. Special discounts apply for IASCL members. Volumes will be guest-edited by invitation and will in principle focus on a particular subfield in child language research. Series Editors are Annick De Houwer and Steven Gillis. Look out for more news about the Series in your next Bulletin!

### **WHAT DO SPECIFICALLY-LANGUAGE IMPAIRED AND SECOND LANGUAGE CHILDREN HAVE IN COMMON?**

***Johanne Paradis***

Studies of children with SLI acquiring their L1 and of normally-developing children acquiring an L2 have until now been conducted mostly in isolation of each other. Despite this independence, both lines of inquiry have shown similar descriptions of the acquisition process and perhaps more importantly, similar theoretical preoccupations. Such parallels highlight the need to bring these two research areas together. After completing my doctoral work on L2 and bilingual children, I began post-doctoral research on children with SLI. When I read

my first transcript of a language sample from a French-speaking child with SLI, I was instantly struck with how much it read like the samples of the French L2 children I had previously been working with. Consequently, in collaboration with Martha Crago at McGill University, I began a series of direct cross-learner comparative studies designed to investigate just how alike (or different) morphosyntactic and lexical acquisition patterns are in impaired and L2 children. The results of this work have theoretical importance for understanding the mechanisms underlying language learning. They raise questions such as: Are impaired learners distinct from all other learners, L1 and L2? Conversely, are L2 learners distinct from L1, both normal and impaired? Or, do commonalities exist across all learners at certain stages in development? This research also has clinical relevance for the differential diagnosis of impaired populations in a multilingual society. In this report I summarize the results we have to date from our comparative work on L2 and SLI children. Bibliographic references to our work are listed at the end.

The data for all the studies come from a spontaneous language production corpora consisting of four groups of children: (1) Seven-year-old French-speaking children with SLI; (2) Seven-year-old English L1-French-L2 children matched in level of language (MLU) with the SLI group; (3) Seven-year-old French-speaking normally-developing children (age controls), and (4) Three-year-old French-speaking, normally developing children MLU-matched to the SLI and L2 groups (language controls). There are 10- 15 children in each group. The language samples have been transcribed using an adapted version of the CHAT format and analysed using CLAN, both from the CHILDES system. (<https://childes.talkbank.org>)

The goal of our initial study was to examine the so-called optional infinitive (OI) / extended optional infinitive (EOI) acquisition pattern (Wexler, 1996; Rice & Wexler, 1996) in French SLI and L2. It has been proposed that normally-developing children go through an OI stage in L1 acquisition which has the following characteristics: (1) Variable omission of tense markers resulting in the use of nonfinite verbs; (2) Accuracy with subject-verb agreement; (3) Obedience to word order contingencies associated with finiteness; (4) Greater omission rates for tense morphemes than for non-tense morphemes. The language of older children with SLI has been found to have these same characteristics, and thus children with SLI are considered to be in an extended optional infinitive stage.

Additionally, these researchers claim that the OI stage unfolds as part of a biologically-controlled program for language acquisition and that an EOI stage is the result of a deficit in this program. If L2 children also go through an OI stage, then we need to recast this theory to include the non-primary acquisition context, and refine the biological nature of the account accordingly. Although not directly testing the OI/EOI hypothesis, some L2 research on functional categories suggests such a stage may indeed appear in childhood L2 acquisition (Prévost & White, in press; Paradis, LeCorre & Genesee, 1998).

We examined each characteristic of the OI/EOI stage in our corpora and conducted quantitative analyses of use in obligatory context for the relevant morphemes and structures for each learner group. We found that L2 and

SLI children omitted tense markers at the same rate as each other and that their omission rate was significantly greater than the rate of both their age peers and the younger, language-matched group. The two control groups produced very few nonfinite verbs. The SLI and L2 children were also equivalent to each other and highly accurate in their use of subject-verb agreement and in their obedience to verb placement rules with respect to finiteness. In addition, SLI and L2 children, like both control groups, showed equal and negligent rates of omission for non-tense morphemes like determiners, possessive markers and prepositions. The only significant differences we found between the SLI and L2 children were (1) L2 children used more present tense as opposed to nonfinite verbs as errors in past tense context and (2) L2 children made more errors of commission with the gender of determiners. In sum, both the SLI and L2 children's grammars show OI/EOI characteristics at this stage in acquisition. The appearance of an OI stage in the L2 acquisition process raises the possibility of a common source underlying this phenomenon in all acquisition contexts and thus presents a challenge to the strictly biological account of the acquisition of tense.

To build upon our investigations of grammatical morpheme acquisition, we examined the use of object clitics in the SLI and L2 children. Object clitics in French might pose particular difficulties for language learners because they have distributional properties like grammatical morphemes, yet bear thematic roles like lexical morphemes and furthermore require pragmatic knowledge for correct use. Experimental research has shown that French-speaking children with SLI have difficulties producing object clitics (Jakubowicz et al, in press), and we believed it would be interesting to look at how children use object clitics in a naturalistic context, and whether L2 children display the same patterns as children with SLI. In contrast to tense markers, it is rarely obligatory in a grammatical sense to use an object clitic since referring to a verb's object using a lexical item is an acceptable option. Thus, we examined the children's corpora for use of object clitics in permissible rather than obligatory contexts, that is, when the object of the verb in question was supplied previously in near discourse, making pronominal reference possible. Also, by comparing the SLI and L2 children with the control groups, we could determine whether their use of object clitics was relatively typical rather than setting a firm standard, such as 100% of permissible contexts. After all, if normally-developing seven year old monolinguals use object clitics just 75% of the time when possible, we cannot expect more of the SLI and L2 children.

Our examination of object clitics yielded the following findings: The SLI and L2 children used significantly fewer object clitics in permissible context than the age-matched and younger, language-matched group. Furthermore, the SLI and L2 children used the same (statistically identical) low percentage of object clitics, and both groups made some errors in choice of clitic form (i.e., gender, number, direct or indirect object). However, the L2 children made more errors in their choice of clitic form than the SLI children. Thus, like the omission of tense marking, infrequent use of object clitics is a characteristic of an intermediate or incompletely-learned grammar of French in both an impaired and L2 context.

It is possible that the difficulties shown by L2 and SLI children with verb-related morphemes like tense markers and object clitics are part of a broader difficulty learning verbs. Normally-developing English-speaking children acquire nouns before verbs (Bates et al, 1994) and perhaps the greater complexity of verb semantics makes this word class more cognitively challenging to learn. Researchers have found that SLI children tend to have lower verb diversity and a larger proportion of general, all purpose (GAP) verbs in their lexicons than their normally-developing age peers (Conti-Ramsden & Jones, 1997; Rice, 1999; Rice & Bode, 1993). Other research suggests that low verb diversity is also found in the L2 lexicon (Harley, 1992; Harley & King, 1989).

In order to investigate whether L2 and SLI children show similarities in the composition of their verb lexicons, we applied measures of verb diversity to the first 80 utterances of each child's sample for all four groups. Quantitative analyses revealed that while overall word and verb type/token ratios were the same for all groups, the SLI, L2 and younger MLU-matched groups used significantly fewer verb types and tokens and a greater number of GAP (general, all purpose) verbs than the older, age-matched group. Moreover, the SLI and L2 groups did not differ from each other on any measures, but used more verb types and GAP verb tokens than the MLU-matched children. These results suggest strong similarities between L2 and SLI children in verb lexical acquisition, and indicate that, generally speaking, lower verb diversity is not just a characteristic of impaired acquisition. Although we do not know yet whether there is a relationship between the acquisition of the verb lexicon and verb grammatical morphemes, the data from this study indicate that investigating a relationship could be a fruitful area for future research.

In conclusion, this series of studies demonstrates the presence of remarkable similarities in impaired and L2 acquisition when level of language development as measured by MLU is held constant. Importantly, we have found that overall there were greater similarities between the SLI and L2 children than between the SLI and younger L1 learners or between the L2 and younger L1 learners. Such similarities suggest that some common sources or mechanisms may underlie acquisition in the SLI and L2 contexts and provide challenges to theories positing mechanisms applicable in one context only, such as a tense-marking deficit for SLI. Although, it is important to point out that even if L2 and SLI children share many aspects of the acquisition process at the stage in development we are looking at, we nevertheless expect the L2 children to resolve these difficulties and show less variance in their ultimate attainment than impaired L1 learners. Thus, even though some common mechanisms may subsume both learning contexts, presumably there are other mechanisms specific to each context.

From an applied perspective, the presence of such striking cross-learner similarities complicates the search for clinical markers of SLI. Lexical and grammatical morpheme deficits are common hallmarks of SLI, but our research shows they are also hallmarks of a certain stage in normal L2 acquisition in the same age group. In comparisons between French-speaking children with SLI and their monolingual age-mates, variable tense marking, object clitic avoidance and low verb diversity may be distinguishing characteristics of SLI; however,

these characteristics may not effectively distinguish children with SLI from their L2 age-mates. Thus, pursuing the search for a grammatical and lexical profile unique to SLI would be worthwhile for clinical purposes in multilingual contexts.

### **References to our SLI-L2 work**

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Verb argument structure in child learners of Québec French. Paper presented at the Conference of the IASCL, San Sebastian, Spain.
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Tense and temporality: A comparison between children learning a second language and children with SLI. *JSLHR*.
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Is French SLI EOI? Paper presented at the 24th Annual BUCLD, Boston, MA.
- Paradis, J. & Crago, M. (2000).  
Acquisition of the verb lexicon: Do L2 and L1 learners do it differently? Paper to be presented at the AAAL 2000 Annual Convention, Vancouver, BC.

### **Other references**

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Toward tense as a clinical marker of specific language impairment in English-speaking children. *JSLHR*, 39, 1236-1257.
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The development of inflection in a biologically based theory of language acquisition. In M. Rice (Ed.), *Towards a Genetics of Language*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH MIGUEL SIGUÁN

### *Itziar Idiazabal*

Miguel Siguan est professeur émérite de l'Université de Barcelone et Docteur Honoris Causa de l'Université de Genève (1993) et de l'Université du Pays Basque (1996). Le professeur Siguan est l'auteur le plus prestigieux d'Espagne comme instigateur des études de psychologie du langage enfantin et du bilingüisme, il a été fondateur des études de psychologie à l'université de Barcelone et il a travaillé sans cesse pour le développement des études de psycholinguistique de l'enfant et du bilingüisme. Le travail fait par Siguan et ses collaborateurs a été décisif pour que le bilingüisme et l'enseignement bilingue soit acceptés par la société espagnole en accord avec les nouvelles exigences éducatives et démocratiques de l'Etat espagnol. Quelques uns de ses travaux les plus connus sont les suivants:

- De la communication gestuelles au langage verbal (1977),
- Education et bilingüisme (avec W. Mackey, 1986),
- Plurilingual Spain (J 992,1994),
- l'Europa de les llengües (1 995).

Nous avons posé quelques questions au professeur Siguan, en tant que conférencier au Congrès de la IASCL 99 à Saint Sébastien. Les réponses d'un des maître du langage enfantin nous semblent importantes pour connaître un peu l'histoire des études du langage enfantin en Espagne et pour souligner quelques messages importants pour l'avenir des études sur l'acquisition et sur l'enseignement du langage enfantin.

**ITZIAR IDIAZABAL:** *Quelle est la raison pour laquelle le professeur Siguan a impulsé depuis les années 70 les études du langage enfantin et du bilingüisme à l'Université de Barcelone et est devenu lui même spécialiste en la matière alors qu'il avait travaillé préalablement sur la psychologie industrielle et sociale?*

**MIGUEL SIGUÁN:** Il est vrai que pendant des années je me suis dédié fondamentalement à la Psychologie sociale du travail et qu'au moment où je suis devenu Professeur de Psychologie à l'Université de Barcelone j'ai décidé d'orienter ma démarche vers la psychologie enfantine et très spécialement vers l'étude du langage enfantin. La raison principale en est que j'étais conscient que je devais développer la formation professionnelle en psychologie. Et à l'époque, il était impossible de penser que ce développement pourrait se faire à partir de la psychologie sociale et du travail. Par contre la psychologie enfantine avait déjà une certaine tradition et une acceptation sociale. Et dans la psychologie enfantine je me suis personnellement penché sur le langage enfantin pour son actualité et parce que j'étais depuis longtemps attiré par des questions linguistiques. En ce qui concerne le bilingüisme, la raison est claire: en Catalogne, la majorité de la population connaît et utilise autant le catalan que le castillan.

**I.I.:** *Dans l'Etat espagnol. la psycholinguistique et les études de bilinguisme ont eu un parcours souvent parallèle. S'agit-il d'un phénomène spécifique à l'Espagne?*

**M.S.:** A Madrid, il existe un noyau important de chercheurs de psycholingüistique. Mais dans le reste de l'Espagne, c'est dans les universités des régions où on parle une autre langue, la Catalogne, le Pays Basque ou la Galice qu'on cultive surtout la psycholingüistique en même temps qu'on fait des recherches sur le bilingüisme. Et le rapport entre ces deux faits me semble logique. La familiarité avec la situation de bilingüisme stimule l'intérêt pour la psycholingüistique. Il me semble qu'on trouve la même situation aux Etats Unis et au Canada où se produisent de nombreuses situations de bilingüisme.

*I.I.: Le bilingüisme et le plurilingüisme constituent un moyen d'intégration sociale nécessaire dans des communautés qui possèdent des langues propres "minorisées." Peut-on dire que les modèles éducatifs développés dans les régions bilingues d'Espagne ont un intérêt pour le reste d'autres régions d'Europe ou d'ailleurs (du monde)?*

**M.S.:** La constitution espagnole actuelle, rectifiant la politique officielle appliquée pendant de nombreuses années, reconnaît l'existence d'autres langues que l'espagnol et établit que dans les communautés autonomes dans lesquelles on parle ces langues celles-ci doivent avoir un caractère coofficiel au même titre que l'espagnol. Même si la situation de ces communautés (Catalogne: le catalan; îles Baléares: le catalan, Valence: le valencien, une variante du catalan; Galice: le galicien; Pays Basque: l'euskara; Navarre: l'euskara) est très différente d'un point de vue sociolingüistique, une importante proportion de la population parle cette langue propre à la communauté en tant que langue maternelle, même s'ils parlent aussi le castillan ou l'espagnol. Dans toutes ces communautés, la politique lingüistique qu'on applique maintenant essaie de compenser la discrimination que ces langues ont supporté traditionnellement: on essaie de promouvoir la connaissance de cette langue par toute la population et de stimuler son usage dans les divers services de l'administration ainsi que dans tous les niveaux de l'enseignement. Dans toutes ces communautés où réside le 40% de la population espagnole, on développe différentes formes d'éducation bilingue mais toutes ont le but de faire arriver à la fin de la scolarité obligatoire des gens capables d'utiliser les deux langues: l'espagnol et la langue propre de la communauté. Etant donné que les politiques de chaque Région Autonome ont été mises en place par des gouvernements élus démocratiquement et qu'elles ont été approuvées par un ample consensus, on peut affirmer que le processus de récupération de ces langues n'a pas produit de fractures sociales, mais tout au contraire, qu'elles constituent un élément d'intégration.

Je crois, franchement, que les politiques lingüistiques établies comme les modèles d'enseignement développés pourraient être pris comme points de repère, ou comme exemples dans beaucoup de situations de nombreux pays dans lesquels coexistent deux langues ou plus.

*I.I. : Quels sont les domaines de recherche et d'action éducative à développer prioritairement pour avoir plus de succès dans la compétence bilingue ou multilingue de générations à venir?*

**M.S.:** Il me semble important d'approfondir quelques points en rapport avec le bilingüisme:

- Comment est-ce que le bilingue acquiert les langues et dans quelle mesure utilise-t-il l'une ou l'autre dans ses processus mentaux?
- Fréquemment, quand on apprend une deuxième langue, même si on arrive à la connaître bien et qu'on l'utilise souvent, on a tendance, quand même à maintenir la langue primaire en tant que langue principale. Dans certains cas, cependant, il y a un changement de langue principale et il faudrait éclaircir dans quelles conditions et pour quelles raisons se produisent ces changements de langue principale.
- Dans l'éducation bilingue il y a un aspect intéressant qu'on devrait approfondir d'avantage, et c'est la question des transferts interlinguïstiques.
- Dans les régions qui ont deux langues les enfants apprennent deux langues locales mais ces enfants doivent apprendre aussi, au moins une autre langue étrangère. Il faut insister sur la recherche de l'apprentissage précoce de troisièmes langues.

#### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

The Organizing Committee for the VIIIth IASCL Congress in Donostia – San Sebastian has planned to publish selected papers from the Congress.

Further information:

<http://www.vc.ehu.es/iascl99/iascl.html>

Contributions are welcome.

#### **FROM INFO-CHILDES**

This section includes the messages that summarize the discussion on MLUm vs. MLUw. The messages have been taken from info-childes ([info-childes@childes.psy.cmu.edu](mailto:info-childes@childes.psy.cmu.edu)).

#### **MLUm vs. MLUw**

**Date:** Sun, 14 Mar 1999 19:19:01 -0500

**From:** Corinna Butt

[cbutt@nmu.edu](mailto:cbutt@nmu.edu)

Dear info-childes members,

As requested, here is a summary of the responses to the question I posted about a week ago: "Is there a difference between MLU in words and MLU in morphemes?" Responses included references to both published studies, as well as some anecdotal responses. Thanks to all who responded!

1. Studies of non-English speaking children showed high correlations between MLUw and MLUm.
  - o Hickey, T. (1991). Mean length of utterance and the acquisition of Irish. *Journal of Child Language*, 18, 553-569.
  - o Aguado, G. (1988). Appraisal of the morphosyntactic competence in a 2.5 year old child. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 43, 75-95.
  - o Thordardottir, E., & Weismer, S. (1998). Mean length of utterance and other language sample measures in early Icelandic. *First Language*, 18, 1-32.
2. A study in press by M. Malakoff (to appear in *Applied Developmental Psych*) found high correlation (.97) between the two measures for 24 month old African American children with low SES.
3. Responses from researchers who addressed this question either directly or indirectly in unpublished studies generally reported they recalled a high correlation between MLUm and MLUw. The one exception was a study of Hebrew children, which found a difference between the scores of the two measures. Others speculated that the difference in MLUm and MLUw was greater for language impaired children than for normal children. This is all the info I have for now. If anyone has any more information, I'd still be interested.

Thanks again!

Corinna Butt

**Date: Sun, 14 Mar 1999 17:18:50 -0800**

**From: Elizabeth Bates**

[bates@crl.ucsd.edu](mailto:bates@crl.ucsd.edu)

Just a quick observation regarding the difference between MLU in words and MLU in morphemes. I agree with the various authors who have concluded that the two measures are highly correlated. In fact, MLU of either sort tends to be "co-linear" (correlate highly) not only with each other but with a whole lot of complexity measures, including various complicated measures of propositional complexity. Many years ago Lynn Snyder and Inge Bretherton and I took great pains to apply some of the candidate propositional complexity measures of the time (e.g. Kintsch's procedures; Antinucci & Parisi's proposals) to our Boulder data (the same data reported in "From first words to grammar", now housed at least in part in CHILDES). In the end we decided not to publish the results, despite all the efforts involved, because the various indices that we were comparing were

so highly correlated, with each other and with MLU in morphemes, that they didn't tell us anything that we didn't already know from old-fashioned MLU. The matter is treated as a footnote somewhere in the book.

However, there is another point worth making here, particularly in the context of cross-linguistic research. Correlations tell us about the individual differences between children, i.e. children who are high on A are also high on B, children who are low on A are also low on B, and so forth. That does **NOT** mean, though, that two highly correlated measures give us the same information or CONTENT. Weight and height are highly correlated across the normal population, for example, and yet we would agree that each one yields quite distinct information. To illustrate the point: back in Boulder we also did a study (also unpublished...) comparing MLU in three free-speech contexts involving the child and his/her mother: having a snack, playing on the floor with standard toys, reading a book together. The MLU measures for these three situations were highly correlated, in the sense that individual differences on one correlated with individual differences on the other. However, there were interesting mean differences between situations in the kind of speech that was elicited, in directions that all child language researchers will recognize (more pronominal forms in free play; more nouns and adjectives in book reading; more past and future reference in the snack – after all, how much is there to say about the here and now in a snack, i.e. about the cracker and cheese?).

This latter point has recently become important to us again, in the context of a cross-linguistic project that I am currently carrying out with Cristina Caselli, Antonella Devescovi, Judy Reilly, and several students in Italy and San Diego (with sage advice provided now and then by Elena Pizzuto). We are looking at grammatical development in English vs. Italian two-year-olds who are matched for vocabulary size (using the MacArthur CDI). The point of this exercise is to look at cross-linguistic differences in grammatical complexity and morphological marking when the children are matched for levels of lexical development. We have already shown *WITHIN* each of these languages that there is a very powerful relationship between vocabulary size and grammar (even when variation in age is regressed out -- recent paper by Caselli et al. in JCL). However, we also know (on informal grounds) that the *AMOUNT* of grammatical morphological that Italian children have to master at any given point in development is a lot more than English children have to master. Our question was: how can we show this cross-linguistic difference in quantitative terms? So we have developed a series of MLU measures ranging from MLU content words, total MLU in words (including functors), and several different indices of MLU in morphemes designed to pick out similarities and differences in the morphological options between these two languages. The project is still underway, and I can only cite preliminary results, but it looks like (1) there continue to be strong correlations between vocabulary size and any complexity metric, within either language, but (2) our ability to detect differences between the two languages is quite dependent on the MLU measure that we choose (e.g. differences in terms of MLU in words and differences in terms of MLU in morphemes give very different perspectives on cross-language variation).

I hope this is helpful -- and we would very much appreciate hearing from anyone who has asked a similar cross-language question.

Advice very welcome.

liz bates

**Date: Tue, 16 Mar 1999 08:38:15 -0500**

**From: C. Snow**

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A quick postscript to Liz Bates' contribution concerning MLU: in a paper that appeared in *First Language* in 1996, Pam Rollins, John Willett and I reported a similar analysis of MLU within English speakers (Predictors of MLU: Lexical versus morphological developments. *First Language*, 16, 243-259, 1996). Some children produce an MLU of 2.0 using almost exclusively content words, whereas others who look identical on the portmanteau measure have much more morphology. Of course, the relative poverty of the English morphological system limits the total possible contribution of morphological complexity more than in Italian.

So it seems that the value of MLU as a very general index of language development may reflect, to some extent, its insensitivity to various component processes. And a bibliographical postscript as well:

- Arlman-Rupp, A., van Niekerk de Haan, D., and van de Sandt-Koenderman, M. (1976). Brown's early stages: Some evidence from Dutch. *Journal of Child Language*, 3, 267-274.

Correlations between MLU in morphemes, in words, and in syllables are reported for four children Dutch-speaking children observed five times each. The MLU-m to MLU-syllables correlations ranged from .91 to .99. The MLUm to MLU-word correlations ranged from .98 to .99.

**Date: Tue, 16 Mar 1999 09:22:06 -1000**

**From: Ann Peters**

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A follow-up to Liz and Catherine: I agree that, especially in early morphosyntactic production there are two things going on, and they probably need to be assessed differently. On the one hand there is [A] the stringing together of content words/ideas (MLUw?); on the other is [B] the increasing inclusion of grammatical markers (MLUm?).

The trouble with English is that so many of the grammatical markers are free morphemes that one is tempted to think that counting **words** is the way to go. However, these capacities probably develop separately, showing up as individual differences in early combination. In fact, the kids who go the [B] route are probably the “frame and slot” kids who structure their early combinations around morphosyntactic frames. I think one sees these patterns even more clearly when one looks at languages (like Italian) with more bound morphology. I have found it useful to compute MLU in two ways:

1. just open-class lexical items (excluding free grammatical morphemes), and
2. all morphemes, whether bound or free.

I believe these measures would equate better across languages than the traditional MLUw that grew out of working with English. I have tried to address some of these issues in my chapter in Slobin's vol.5: A.M. Peters, 1997. “Language typology, prosody and the acquisition of grammatical morphemes”. In *The Cross-linguistic Study of Language Acquisition*, vol.5, D.I. Slobin, ed. Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 136-197.

Ann Peters

**Date: Wed, 17 Mar 1999 14:40:06 +0100**

**From: M.Vihman**

[m.vihman@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:m.vihman@bangor.ac.uk)

Following up on Ann's comments, I can't resist adding in a reference to a 1982 paper of mine, in *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 3, which looks at my son's development along Ann's line [A], even though he was learning a highly inflected language, Estonian, as well as being exposed to English to a lesser extent. Courtney Cazden had noted these two approaches in the dev. of Eve vs. Sarah, among Brown's 3 subjects, in 1972.

marylin vihman

## BOOK NOTICES

De Houwer, Annick (ed) (1998)

*Bilingual Acquisition*. London: Kingston Press.

Döpke, S. (2000)

*Developing two languages at once*. Multilingual Matters.

Elsen, H. (1999)

Ansätze zu einer funktionalistisch-kognitiven Grammatik. Konsequenzen aus Regularitäten des Erstspracherwerbs. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Foster-Cohen, S.H. (1999)

*An Introduction to Child Language Development*. London: Longman.

Guldal, T.M. (2000)

Bilingual Play Interaction. *Multilingual Matters*.

Vihman, M.M. (1999)(ed)

*First Steps in Morphological and Syntactic Development: Cross-linguistic evidence*. London: Kingston Press.

## **FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES**

**2000**

March 11-14. Vancouver, Canada.

**American Association of Applied Linguistics AAAL).**

E-mail: [pcarrell@gsu.edu](mailto:pcarrell@gsu.edu)

May 19-20. Chohula, Pueblo, Mexico.

**V Conference of Applied Linguistics.**

<http://www.pue.udlap.mx/posgrado/m1in.htm>

July 9-14. Budapest, Hungary.

**7th International Pragmatics Conference.**

<http://www.pscw.uva.nl/emca/index.htm>

July 23-27. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

**7th International Conference on Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research.**

<http://www.uva.nl/congresbureau>

16-19 August. Edinburgh, UK.

**VIII meeting of the International Clinical Phonetics and Linguistics Association.**

<http://sls.qmced.ac.uk/ICPLA2000/index.htm>



18-20 October. Montreal, Canada.

**2nd International Conference on the Mental Lexicon.**

e-mail: [kaufmanh@magellan.umontreal.ca](mailto:kaufmanh@magellan.umontreal.ca)

**2001**

**April 18-20. Bristol, UK.**

**3rd International Symposium on Bilingualism.**

Deadline for colloquia 20 June 2000 and for oral presentations 15 September 2000.

E-mail: [jeanine.treffers-daller@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:jeanine.treffers-daller@uwe.ac.uk)

19-22 April. Minneapolis, MN, USA.

**Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Biennial Meeting.**

<http://www.srcd.org/biennial.shtml>

**9th IASCL CONFERENCE**

**MONTREAL, CANADA**

**JULY 2002**

Further information in the next issue of the Child Language Bulletin

**LETTER TO CHILD LANGUAGE BULLETIN**

**“SIGN LANGUAGE IS 'JUST' ANOTHER LANGUAGE”**

Beppie Van den Bongaerde When research on sign languages began back in the late 1950's an important issue was to convince linguists (and psychologists, pedagogues, medical professionals etc.) that sign languages were natural languages, comparable to spoken languages in all respects but modality. Ever since that early period, however, sign linguists have had to 'prove' continuously to other linguists specialized in spoken languages, over and over again, that indeed sign languages are natural human languages. I think we have left that period behind us now and over the years it has clearly been established that sign languages are fully fledged natural languages, that can be studied in all the accepted fields of linguistics: phonology, semantics, morphology, syntax, acquisition and pragmatics (Klima and Bellugi 1979; Petitto and Marentette 1991)

At the last IASCL conference in July 1999 in San Sebastian I was disappointed to find that yet again papers on sign language acquisition were grouped together, unlike papers on, say, the acquisition of French. Papers on the acquisition of spoken languages are normally grouped around a theme, or instance the acquisition of vocabulary, or of the verbal system. But not sign languages these are all grouped together, even though their research themes are very different: for instance, discourse studies were grouped together in one session with the acquisition of grammatical morphemes and the development giving visual attention.

I would hereby like to ask the organisers of the next IASCL conference to show that sign language acquisition studies have been accepted for what they are: acquisition studies. It would enhance awareness in all researchers interested in linguistics that sign languages are considered equal to spoken languages, that they are 'just another language'.

**References:**

Klima, E. & Bellugi, U. (1979)

*The Signs of Language*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Petitto, L.A. & P.F. Marentette (1991)

Babbling in the manual mode: evidence for the ontogeny of language. *Science*, vol. 251, pp. 1493-1496.

**SAD NEWS**

With sadness we received the news that Natasha Gagarina's son Anton died at the age of 9 after a long battle with leukemia. Anton had become well-known to many in the child language community because of Magdalena Smoczynska's much appreciated calls for help. We wish Natasha and her family much courage and strength. Our thoughts are with them.