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Input and output of monolingual and bilingual 4-year-old children: The role of socio-economic status (SES) and linguistic background

This contribution will present new data and results of input-output relations in early monolingual vs. successive bilingual acquisition of German and the different impact of high vs. low SES. It will show that kindergarten teachers do not provide children with different input in view of compensating for insufficiencies in parental input according to different SES background.

The ongoing *INPUT*-project investigates the input and output of 48 Viennese monolingual (German L1) and bilingual (Turkish L1, German L2) kindergarten children with high and low SES backgrounds. The children are video- and audio-recorded in spontaneous interaction with their main caretakers (parents at home, teachers in kindergarten) during four observation periods in 18 months. A mixed-methods design is used: apart from the spontaneous speech recordings of the child-parent or child-teacher dyads, we also conduct various linguistic tests in German and Turkish (e.g. active and passive vocabulary, syntax, morphology) with the children as well as interviews with the main caretakers.

Within the results of a vocabulary test we have found significant SES-related differences for monolingual children, but not yet for bilingual children. Still, the spontaneous speech data of the bilingual children analyzed so far show that low SES children develop slower than high SES children in both languages; the L2 German output of low SES children after entering kindergarten may be even minimal. Low SES children also use morphology (of case forms, articles, number markings or plural) in a less productive and complex way both in L1 and L2.

When comparing children's output with their parental input, we have observed that low SES (German L2) parents, especially those with Austrian schooling background, are less likely to read Turkish texts than high SES parents. This lack of literacy practice may lead to reduced awareness of Turkish language structures. Due to more reading practice and higher language awareness, high SES parents show higher competences in both languages. Furthermore our results show large differences between monolingual German-speaking high and low SES families: direct requests are more typical for low SES parents, whereas high SES parents use more indirect requests as well as conversation-eliciting real questions. Again, these results could not be confirmed for the bilingual Turkish-speaking parents. Insufficient language input at home is so far a missing link in European empirical studies on the reasons for disprivileged development of both bilingual and monolingual children.

Due to our results the question arises whether and to what extent kindergarten teachers' input can compensate for insufficiencies in parental input. Our results have shown so far that kindergarten teachers do not speak more with children with low SES family background and they do not compensate insufficient parental input. Rather, to children who speak less, kindergarten teachers tend to speak less as well. This we consider to represent an unconscious way of interaction, which can be best explained by communication accommodation theory (Giles/Ogay 2007). (471)

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