

# Cross-linguistic influence in early language acquisition: advantages of early trilingualism. Results from a pilot study

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Several studies on early bilingual first language acquisition have revealed that some grammatical phenomena are vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence in dependence on the respective language combination (Müller & Hulk 2001). This influence may result in either an accelerated or a delayed acquisition process in one of the bilinguals' languages if compared to their monolingual peers (Repetto & Müller 2010, Schmeißer & Jansen to appear). For instance, the Romance language of a bilingual German-French/Italian child has a boot-strapping effect on the acquisition of German verb placement (J. Müller 2009). By contrast, Romance adjective placement and Spanish copula verbs *ser/estar* are prone to delay when acquired simultaneously with German (Rizzi et al 2013, Arnaus Gil 2013). The occurrence of cross-linguistic influence has been explained in terms of derivational complexity in the sense of Jakubowicz (2002). To give an example: Assuming Kayne's (1993) *Universal Base Hypothesis*, Spanish exhibits two positions for attributive adjectives, one being syntactically less complex (A+N) than the other (N+A). In comparison to this, German allows the less complex analysis only (A+N). As a consequence, bilingual children tend to make use of the less complex A+N analysis in Spanish resulting in a delayed acquisition of Spanish adjective placement.

For early trilinguals, a delayed acquisition process observed in bilinguals might also be present in the trilingual linguistic development due to language processing (Grosjean 2001, Serratrice & Sorace 2003). However, we would like to hypothesize that a specific language constellation in the trilingual child can positively turn a delayed bilingual acquisition into an accelerated development. This may be the case if the third L1 also has the more complex syntactic derivation at hand. Evidence for this prediction has been found in a recent longitudinal study on the acquisition of Spanish copulas by early German-Spanish and German-Spanish-Catalan children (Arnaus Gil 2013). For the acquisition of Romance adjective placement in German-Romance bilinguals, our assumption implies that a trilingual child can take advantage of his/her third L1 if this language has also access to the more complex derivation (N+A).

Following this idea, our present cross-sectional study investigates the elicited data of Romance adjective placement and Spanish copula verbs of children (n=40 approx.) being raised bilingually/trilingually in Spain with the language combinations Spanish-German(-Catalan/X) and Spanish-French(-Catalan/X). This pilot study is part of a larger study and still in a fledgling stage so that the first main results can be presented.

**This abstract should be considered for oral presentation.**

## References

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