

Workshop on
‘The Development of German in Contact’
Universidade do Minho, Braga

Venue: Edifício 5, Auditório ELACH

ABSTRACTS

Aldona Sopata (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

German Across Bilingual Contexts: Heritage and Societal Language Dynamics

The presentation explores German across different bilingual contexts, focusing on both simultaneous (2L1) and successive (cL2) acquisition, as well as on the dynamics between heritage and societal language. The presented studies compare four groups of Polish–German bilingual children: simultaneous and successive bilinguals living in Germany (societal-language context) and their counterparts living in Poland (heritage-language context). By examining factors such as age of acquisition, length of exposure, and the linguistic environment, the studies investigate how these variables influence the development of German.

Drawing on data from multiple tasks, the findings show that primary-school-aged bilinguals generally achieve target-like knowledge of certain grammatical domains, such as verb placement, regardless of bilingual type. However, differences emerge at the level of language use. In other domains, variation across groups depends on both the type of bilingualism and the linguistic environment. While simultaneous bilinguals tend to display more target-like patterns overall, successive bilinguals—particularly those who begin acquiring German later—experience greater difficulty in mastering specific syntactic features.

Interpretation of telicity markers in German: evidence from non-native and native speakers

In German, it has been shown that the semantic entailments associated with telicity markers are acquired early and that speakers will turn to semantic–pragmatic principles to determine whether an overt culmination is cancellable (Richter & van Hout, 2013; Schulz & Ose, 2008; Schulz & Penner, 2002; van Hout, 1998, 2008). Here, we test the interpretation of three types of telicity markers by Portuguese L2 speakers of German, as well as Portuguese–German bilinguals and German monolinguals. A Bayesian analysis shows that Portuguese L2 speakers of German have difficulty processing telicity with resultative particles but show target-like performances with bounded DPs and adjectival markers. The analysis also shows that bilingual and monolingual speakers display no substantial differences in their understanding of telicity entailments, albeit with some variability regarding particle markers. I argue that the existing variation may be due to effects of lexical knowledge and transparency.

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Revisiting the Timing Hypothesis: The Role of Cues and Age of Onset Effects in Child L2 Acquisition

Building on the Timing Hypothesis ([1]), this paper argues that differences in the types of cues required to master early vs. late acquired phenomena help explain the absence of age of onset (AoO) effects in child L2 acquisition for late phenomena. Temporal connectives in German are examined as a case of late acquisition, while German V2 word order serve as an example of an early-acquired phenomenon.

The Timing Hypothesis (TH) posits that AoO and L2 input in bilingual acquisition interact with the timing of acquisition in monolingual development in a systematic way: early acquired phenomena, mastered before age three by monolingual children, are subject to AoO-effects whereas late acquired phenomena mastered after age three are not affected by AoO but by L2 input. Empirical evidence increasingly supports this distinction. For example, [2] compared simultaneous bilingual (2L1) and early sequential bilingual (eL2) children across multiple linguistic domains and found comparable performance on late phenomena, while 2L1 children outperformed eL2 children on early phenomena. In addition, studies focusing on late-acquired structures have shown that measures of L2 input are stronger predictors of children's performance than AoO ([3], [4]).

Drawing on these findings, I propose that the relative insensitivity of late-acquired phenomena to AoO-effects can be traced to the nature of the cues involved in their acquisition. Late phenomena typically require the integration of discourse-semantic and conceptual information with syntactic structure. Temporal connectives in German illustrate this pattern. Their acquisition, especially in complex cases such as non-iconic *after*-sentences ([5], examples (1), (2)), depends on integrating syntactic cues, conceptual knowledge of iconicity, and event-semantic reanalysis ([6]). While time is required for both conceptual development and for sufficient exposure to these structures in the input, the crucial point is that the cues are used more efficiently with higher age, supported by increasing working memory resources. Moreover, these cues for late phenomena remain accessible throughout the lifespan ([7]). In line with this account, bilingual children acquiring German as an L2 have been shown to follow developmental trajectories comparable to those of monolingual children in their acquisition of temporal connectives, independently of AoO, and to achieve similar outcomes ([8]).

In contrast, early-acquired phenomena such as German V2 ([9]) rely primarily on morpho-syntactic cues, including position and finiteness marking. These cues are formal in nature, do not depend on semantic or conceptual information, and operate at the clause level without imposing substantial working memory demands. However, such formal cues do not remain equally accessible across the lifespan. The development of semantic and cognitive abilities may obscure access to the underlying syntactic parameter. As a result, learners with a later AoO are more likely to exhibit non-target-like acquisition patterns. Empirical studies confirm that both child and adult L2 learners frequently produce structures that deviate from the V2 constraint ([10], [11], [12]), whereas bilingual children with an AoO between 0 and 3 years typically acquire V2 in a target-like manner (summary in [13]). How cross-linguistic similarities and differences of L1 and L2 affect acquisition of late phenomena requires further research.

- (1) a. **After/before** he ate an apple, he read a letter.
b. He read a letter, **after/before** he ate an apple.

- (2) (=1a)) Nachdem/bevor er einen Apfel gegessen hat,
After /before he an apple eaten has
hat er einen Brief gelesen.
has he a letter read

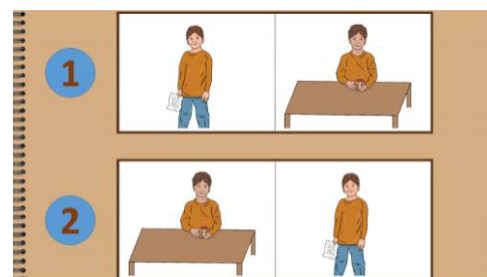


Figure 1. Test slide corresponding to sentence (2)

- (3) a. Er **nimmt** den Lutscher.
he takes the Lollipop
b. *Warum du **nimmst** das Lutscher? (from Haberzettl, 2005)
why you take the lollipop

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Variation and Stability across Different Types of Subordinate Clauses in Brazilian Hunsrückisch

Brazilian Hunsrückisch is a heritage language of German origin spoken especially in the southern region of the country. It can be described as a dialectal *continuum* whose linguistic base lies in the Rhine-Franconian and Moselle-Franconian dialects and whose development has been shaped by contact with other German varieties and with Brazilian Portuguese (Altenhofen 1996). Previous research on Hunsrückisch has shown considerable cross-generational syntactic stability, especially in the maintenance of German verb-placement rules: V2 in declarative main clauses and verb-final placement in the subordinate ones (Flores, Rinke & Wagner 2020). However, syntactic variation in subordinate clauses introduced by *dass* (and its related forms) remains largely undescribed, particularly regarding the relation between complementizer realization and verb placement. These constructions are of particular interest because certain patterns in Standard German vary between the complementizer *dass* with verb-final placement and complementizer omission with V2, which is triggered by ‘bridge verbs’ (declarative and epistemic verbs, Featherston 2004). This presentation examines these constructions in Brazilian Hunsrückisch, asking which patterns are attested in this variety and whether they point to contact-induced change or to internally structured variation compatible with German dialect syntax. The analysis is based on oral data from sociolinguistic interviews conducted in Morro Reuter and Santo Cristo, in Rio Grande do Sul. The data from Morro Reuter were collected by the author; the data from Santo Cristo derive from Wagner (2019). A total of 681 subordinate clauses were extracted from the interviews, which were transcribed according to ESCRITHU conventions (Altenhofen et al. 2007), and coded in a spreadsheet for clause function, complementizer type, verb placement and verb-cluster configuration. The quantitative analysis shows that 72% of the clauses introduced by *dass* display verb-final placement, while clauses without an overt complementizer occur mostly with bridge verbs and 93% of them have V2. There are also subordinate clauses introduced by *was* as an alternative clause marker to *dass*, a pattern not attested in Standard German. These clauses are more heterogeneous, but still show recurrent and systematic distributions, with 62% of verb-final. Regarding the non-canonical constructions, the qualitative analysis indicates that they are largely consistent with structures attested in German dialects and colloquial German, including Verb Raising, Verb Projection Raising and Extraposition. Possible influence from Brazilian Portuguese appears to be extremely limited and restricted to very few cases of expletive omission and VO-constructions. Overall, the data suggest a high degree of stability in the subordinate clause patterns attested in the corpus, which may be related to active and continuous contact with the language from an early age (Meisel 1994).

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Anna Jorroch (University of Warsaw)

New-Speakers versus Old-Speakers. Über die Acquisition des Deutschen von zwei Generationen in Masuren.

Im Rahmen des Referates werden zwei Sprachsituationen gegenübergestellt, die mit unterschiedlichem Spracherwerb verbunden sind. Die eine ist mit der Acquisition des Deutschen unter natürlichen Bedingungen verbunden, als Masuren, der südliche Teil Ostpreußens zu Deutschland gehörte. Unter Berücksichtigung unterschiedlicher Sprachbiographien können die Sprecher, die vor 1945 in der Region geboren wurden, als „Old Speakers“ bezeichnet werden. Sie haben in der Kindheit Deutsch gesprochen und bis zum Anschluss der Region an Polen in einer deutschsprachigen Umgebung gelebt.

Die andere Situation betrifft den Erwerb des Deutschen, das – infolge der ungünstigen Sprachenpolitik - in der nach dem 2. Weltkrieg an Polen angeschlossenen Region innerhalb der deutschstämmigen Familien nicht mehr weitergegeben wurde. Die unter diesen Umständen lebenden Probanden sind Personen, die entweder zur gleichen Zeit oder nach 1945 in dem selben Gebiet zur Welt gekommen sind und erst später, oft im Erwachsenenalter auf Grund ihrer Sprachideologien und des Sprachmanagements Deutsch gelernt haben. Sie können nach O'Rourke, Joan Pujolar i Fernando Ramallo (2015:1) als „New Speakers“ qualifiziert werden:

„The “new speaker” label is used here to describe individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners.”

Im Referat wird auf Aussagen aus Interviews mit zwei Personen, die als „Old Speakers“ und zwei, die als „New Speakers“ bezeichnet werden, eingegangen.

An den von den Kontaktpersonen verwendeten Phrasen wird gezeigt, welche Wortarten für fremde Einflüsse besonders anfällig oder in der Kommunikation ausschlaggebend bzw. nachhaltig sind. Es wird auch an den Interviewauszügen gezeigt, dass Old- und New Speakers zur gleichen Altersgruppe oder zu unterschiedlichen Generationen innerhalb einer Familie gehören können, sodass das Problem nicht nur diachron, sondern auch synchron betrachtet werden kann.

Das Material wurde 2018 während einer Feldforschung im Rahmen des von der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft (Projektnr. HA 2659/9-1) und von dem Nationalen Forschungszentrum (NCN) (Projektnr. 2016/23/G/HS2/04369) finanzierten Forschungsprogramms Beethoven 2 in Zusammenarbeit des Instituts für Slavistik der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Universität Regensburg gesammelt. Im Rahmen des Projektes: »Generationsbedingte Differenzierung der Sprache: morphosyntaktische Veränderungen durch deutsch-polnischen Sprachkontakt in der Sprache zweisprachiger Personen« ist ein digitales deutsch-polnisches Korpus mit grammatischer und soziolinguistischer Annotation entstanden, sowie der Band „Soziolinguistik trifft Korpuslinguistik“ veröffentlicht worden.

Aus soziolinguistischen Gründen wurden die Interviews mit bilingualen Sprechern, d. h. mit „Old Speakers“ ins Korpus aufgenommen, während die Gespräche mit Probanden, die als „New Speakers“ bezeichnet werden, im Korpus der Zweisprachigkeit nicht berücksichtigt wurden.

Das bilinguale Korpus ist unter dem Link: <https://langgener.ijp.pan.pl/#!/> zugänglich.

Rita Luppi (Università di Bologna)

The language experience of the Kindertransportees between language acquisition and language maintenance

Einen entscheidenden Impuls erhielt die Mehrsprachigkeits- (Riehl 2014; Földes/Roelcke 2022) und Zweitspracherwerbsforschung (Riehl 2010) durch den sprachbiographischen Ansatz (Franceschini/Miecznikowski 2004), in dessen Mittelpunkt nicht die lebenslange Entwicklung der Sprachkompetenzen des Individuums steht, sondern das Spracherleben als „Ansatz, der danach fragt, wie Menschen in mehrsprachigen Lebenszusammenhängen ihre Sprachlichkeit wahrnehmen und bewerten und welche Erfahrungen, Gefühle oder Vorstellungen sie damit verbinden“ (Busch 2010: 58). Vor diesem Hintergrund zielt der Vortrag darauf ab, Spracherwerbs- und Spracherhaltsprozesse in Sprachbiographien zu untersuchen. Die Datengrundlage des Beitrags, der Teil des Projekts „Minors on the Move: Mapping forced migration from Nazism and its testimonies“ (PI: Prof. Dr. Simona Leonardi, Universität Genua) ist, sind die sprachbiographischen Interviews des Korpus FEGB – Flucht und Emigration nach Großbritannien (vgl. Datenbank für Gesprochenes Deutsch des Leibniz-Instituts für Deutsche Sprache Mannheim), das von Eva-Maria Thüne (Universität Bologna) 2017-2018 in Großbritannien erhoben wurde (Thüne 2019) und 42 Gespräche mit deutschsprachigen jüdischen Emigrant:innen enthält, die in den 1930er Jahren v. a. aus Nazi-Deutschland und Österreich fliehen konnten. Der Großteil der Interviews wurde mit den sog. Kindern durchgeführt, nämlich mit Sprecher:innen, die im Alter von 4 bis 16 Jahren dank der Rettungsoperation des Kindertransportes (Baumel-Schwartz 2012; Craig-Norton 2019) emigrieren konnte. Das Erlernen der englischen Sprache, von der die Mehrheit der Kinder keine oder nur geringe Kenntnisse hatte (Thüne 2020), war eine der größten Herausforderungen, der die Kinder nach ihrer Ankunft in Großbritannien begegneten (Thüne/Brizić 2022). Das Englische wurde somit bald zur ihrer Erstsprache, während das Deutsche in einigen Fällen als Herkunftssprache (Riehl 2016, 2018; Schmid/Köpke 2007) zurücktritt. Der Vortrag, in dessen Fokus die (Sprach-)Erfahrung der Kinder stehen, setzt sich zum Ziel, die folgenden Forschungsfragen zu diskutieren:

1. Welche Faktoren wirkten sich spracherhaltend für den Gebrauch des Deutschen aus, und warum?
2. Welche Faktoren führten dazu, dass das Deutsche nicht erhalten werden konnte?
3. Welche sprachbiographischen Entscheidungen haben die Interviewpartner:innen getroffen?

Cristina Flores (Universidade do Minho, Braga), Esther Rinke (Goethe Universität Frankfurt), Jürgen Meisel (Universität Hamburg) & Aldona Sopata (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

The L2 acquisition of subject use in German by Polish L1 speakers: referential hierarchy effects in the acceptability of illicit null subjects

This study investigates the acquisition of subject use in L2 German by Polish L1 learners. It specifically focusses on role of referentiality in the L2 acquisition of subject realization, asking whether interlanguage grammars in a second language (L2) are constrained by a universal referential hierarchy. 77 learners across various proficiency levels were tested using an acceptability judgment task. The experiment manipulated the following conditions: Subject type (referential vs. expletive), Subject realisation (realised vs. omitted subjects), and Clause type (main vs. subordinate). The study addressed the following two research questions: First, do L1 Polish learners of German show differential acceptance of ungrammatical subject omissions in German depending on their referential status? Concretely, do they accept omissions of non-referential subjects (omissions of expletive 'es') more readily than omissions of referential 'es'? Second, does learners' acceptance of omitted subjects decrease with increasing proficiency?

The results reveal systematic non-target-like acceptance of subject omissions, particularly at lower proficiency levels. Crucially, learners display asymmetrical behavior across subject types. Omitted expletives are accepted more readily than omitted referential subjects. This asymmetry provides evidence that interlanguage grammars are not merely underspecified, but shaped by constraints on referentiality, in line with proposals such as Fiéis and Teixeira (2025). Furthermore, the effect of proficiency indicates a gradual reduction in the acceptance of omitted subjects, suggesting a developmental trajectory that proceeds in a stepwise fashion from more to less referential contexts. The parallel between L2 development and diachronic change further suggests that both processes are governed by the same underlying constraints. Whatever the exact status of the referential hierarchy and the mapping hypothesis may be in the architecture of language, our results suggest that L2 learners can make use of such general and cross-linguistically valid principles while learning to overcome illicit argument omissions. The study thus contributes to a unified view of acquisition and change, in which referential hierarchies play a central role.

Nadine Kolb (University of Stavanger)

Individual Differences in Child Heritage Multilinguals

When examined as adults, heritage language (HL) multilinguals often show significant differences in their HL performance and competence from typical monolingual peers, and from one another. However, far less is known about HL development in childhood. In the European context, supporting immigrant youth can have significant impact towards the goal of integrating this population into their newly adopted countries. Support for continued development in the HL has been shown to contribute positively to societal language (SL) development, with possible knock-on effects for academic achievement.

Findings from 150 Syrian Arabic-German refugee bilinguals as well as further child HL populations involving both offline behavioral and online processing measures which, in combination, provide complementary information on HL multilingual trajectories. Offline measures included the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) on receptive vocabulary, the parents' estimates of the participants' oracy skills, and an elicited production task on grammatical gender. Online processing measures included an eye-tracking experiment on the use of gender cues for predictive processing. The Q-Bex questionnaire has been used to collect information on experiential variables.

The findings on receptive vocabulary suggest that age of onset in the SL and current exposure to the HL at home predict language outcomes in the HL, while current exposure to the SL predicts outcomes in the SL. Furthermore, the findings on the parents' estimates of the oracy skills show that HL use at home, HL reading frequency and the frequency of time with HL-speaking friends have a positive effect on the HL, while SL instruction at school, current SL exposure at school, SL use during the holidays and SL media use have a positive effect on the SL. While high accuracy scores on target gender assignment were found in the elicited production task, gender cues were not used predictively in either the HL or the SL in the eye-tracking experiment. The overall findings for HL multilingual children highlight the importance of current HL exposure and use at home for HL development and current SL exposure and use for SL development.

Anne-Sophie Hufer (University of Stavanger)

What matters most? Individual difference factors as predictors for language outcomes in child speakers of heritage German in Norway

This study investigates the role of individual difference factors for language outcomes of child heritage speakers of German in Norway. The aim of the study is to contribute to the current debate on how to best account for the heterogeneity in heritage speakers' language outcomes by analysing both the heritage language (HL) and the societal language (SL) (Kupisch & Rothman, 2018). Several factors have been shown to play a role in HL multilingualism (see e.g., Paradis, 2023 for an overview; Unsworth et al. 2024 on language richness; De Cat et al., 2025 on age of SL onset, cumulative SL exposure, current HL exposure at home; Torregrossa et al., 2025 on age and language complexity). Previous studies have found an effect of complexity on accuracy using the LITMUS Sentence Repetition Task (SRT) (Kałowski et al., 2025; Makrodimitris & Schulz, 2021; Marinis & Armon-Lotem, 2015). The present study investigates the following research questions:

RQ1: Which individual difference factors predict the language outcomes in child HSs of German and societal language (SL) speakers of Norwegian in each of their languages?

RQ2: How does complexity interact with the investigated individual difference factors?

Data was collected from 71 children with one or two German-speaking parents and either Norwegian or German as their language of school instruction. The German and Norwegian version of the LITMUS SRT served as a language outcome measure targeting morpho-syntactic structures grouped by complexity (Marinis & Armon-Lotem, 2015). Linguistic and biographical background information was obtained through the caregiver version of the Q-BEx questionnaire (De Cat et al., 2025).

In a preliminary statistical analysis employing Generalized Linear Mixed-Effects Regression modelling the following variables were included: age, language of schooling (German or Norwegian), parental education (as a proxy for socioeconomic status), age of onset (AoO), richness of input, and current exposure and use at school, at home, in the community and during holiday. The results suggest that age and complexity (of linguistic structures in the LITMUS SRT) are the only variables predicting both German and Norwegian outcomes. In accordance with earlier findings (i.e. Torregrossa et al., 2025), accuracy decreases with higher complexity but increases with age in both HL and SL. A significant interaction between richness and complexity further indicated that language richness positively affected accuracy in German, especially for the more complex structures. This is in line with previous studies identifying language richness as a predictor for language proficiency (i.e., Unsworth et al., 2024). However, richness in Norwegian does not play a role for outcomes in Norwegian. In contrast, age of onset in Norwegian is significant for outcomes in Norwegian but not for German. We will discuss these findings in light of the ongoing debate in the field on individual differences in HL multilingualism.

Natalia Mitrofanova & Serge Minor (UiT The Arctic University of Norway)

Crosslinguistic influence in grammatical case processing by bilingual children: German in contact with Russian.

We investigated predictive processing of grammatical case in mono- and bilingual children (aged 6–12 years) acquiring German and Russian compared to monolingual German-speaking controls, as well as another group of heritage bilinguals in Spain. We employed a Visual World eye-tracking task based on the methodologies proposed by Kamide et al. (2003) and Özge et al. (2019). The task involved manipulating case marking on the first noun phrase (nominative vs. accusative) – and introduced a novel experimental manipulation between two visual contexts: event representations versus individual referent presentations (see Figures 1-2 and Table 1).

The heritage Russian speakers were drawn from two bilingual populations: German-Russian (N = 70) and Spanish-Russian (N = 85). These groups were closely matched by age, overall exposure to both heritage and societal languages (measured via Q-BEx), and lexical proficiency in the heritage language (assessed through MAIN narratives). The selection of these populations was motivated by structural similarities between the languages: while both Russian and German mark grammatical case (nominative vs. accusative) overtly in noun phrases, Spanish does not employ overt case marking.

Results from the eye-tracking tasks revealed that structural similarity between the societal and heritage languages did not facilitate the acquisition of case marking in the heritage language: Both German-Russian and Spanish-Russian bilinguals exhibited similar processing patterns of case marking in Russian.

On the other hand, in German bilingual German-Russian children showed a stronger predictive effect of case marking compared to age-matched monolingual German-speaking children, suggesting facilitation from the heritage to the societal language.

We discuss these findings in the context of recent theories of cross-linguistic influence in bilingual language processing, focussing on possible predictors of cross-linguistic influence. We argue that differences in case cue salience and frequency of non-canonical (OVS) word order patterns between languages play a critical role in explaining the direction of cross-linguistic influence in bilingual language acquisition. Furthermore, our results underscore the impact of additional cues, such as visual event representations, on case processing – particularly for bilingual children.