

Similarities and Differences in the Error Patterns of Monolingual and Simultaneous Bilingual German-speaking SLI Children: Evidence from a Sentence Repetition Task

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Specific Language Impairment (SLI) is characterized by a limited language ability in the absence of neuro-cognitive abnormalities, sensori-motor impairments, socio-emotional problems or low nonverbal intelligence and affects around 7 % of children (Tomblin et al. 1997). In SLI, syntax and grammatical morphology are typically affected areas (Leonard 2014).

A Sentence Repetition Task was used in order to examine the performance and errors of two groups of German-speaking children with SLI: 14 monolinguals (age: 5;7-7;7), 11 simultaneous bilinguals (age: 5;8-9;4), with Turkish, Portuguese or Arabic as their second L1. The control group consisted of 5 typically developing monolinguals (age: 5;6-9;0).

The Sentence Repetition Task (Hamann et al. 2013) covered various SVO declaratives, coordination structures, complement clauses, bare and NP-restricted wh-questions, subject/ object relative clauses and topicalization and has been shown to be a reliable identifier of SLI (Hamann & Abed Ibrahim 2017).

Overall, the groups were more similar than different. The SVO conditions were the most stable for both SLI groups, but they were clearly weaker in comparison to controls. Subject-verb agreement and V2 word order was largely unimpaired though (contradicting Clahsen et al. 1997 and Rice et al. 1997). Performance was better on Coordination than on Complementation for both SLI groups, suggesting difficulties with embedded structures. Structural and lexical case was overall weak in both groups (contradicting Eisenbeiss et al. 2006). Phonological errors distinguished the groups, as monolinguals performed a lot worse, suggesting that bilingualism can function as a 'cure' in this domain. Syntactically complex structures that involve subordination and/ or syntactic movement were very weak, without major differences between the two SLI groups, providing evidence for a deficit in the CP layer in German-acquiring SLI children, as it has been described by Hamann et al. (1998).

References

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