

Acquiring complex plural morphology under minority language conditions: the case of Welsh

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This paper presents the results of two independent studies looking at different types of bilingual, Welsh-English children's acquisition of complex plural morphology in Welsh. Study 1 presented 88 7- to 11-year-old children, across three bilingual language groups – those whose first language was Welsh (L1 Welsh), those who learned Welsh and English simultaneously (2L1), and those who learned Welsh as a second language (L2 Welsh) – with a plural production task. Study 2 presented 168 12- to 17-year-old teenagers, across the same three bilingual groups, with a similar plural production task, adapted to suit the age-range of the children. Both studies revealed performances on plural morphology that were comparable to adult norms among L1 Welsh-speaking bilinguals in all age groups, with some progression among the simultaneous bilinguals at the older ages. In contrast, delayed progression was seen among the L2 Welsh-speaking bilinguals across the board. Forms requiring the addition of a plural suffix were less difficult to acquire than those involving alterations to the root, with each type acquired with greater levels of accuracy with increasing levels of exposure to the language. The implications of these findings for our understanding of bilingual acquisition of complex structures under minority language conditions are discussed.