

Characteristics of the Russian verbal system of bilingual Russian-German children

The Russian and the German verbal systems exhibit obvious differences; the largest difference emerges in the category of aspect, which is grammatical in Russian, but not in German. A further difference consists in a subcategory of verbs, the so-called verbs of motion in Russian, which have semantic, aspectual and morphological features. The thesis can be put forth that the acquisition of these categories is more problematic in bilingual than in monolingual language acquisition, since bilingual children receive less linguistic input in Russian than monolinguals do. Further it is to be expected that bilingual children demonstrate larger differences among themselves than monolingual children do, because more variables (at what age they immigrated or if they were born in Germany, the extent of input from their parents, etc.) play a role.

In the present study the ways in which mono- and bilingual children between 4 and 10 years use aspect and verbs of motion in Russian are analyzed and compared on the basis of an extensive corpus (over 80.000 word forms). The corpus includes transcripts of recordings from a total of 35 bilingual and 20 monolingual children; per child there are 1.500 tokens on average. The data were gathered specifically with regard to questions of aspect. They include for each child the re-telling of a picture story, an online-description of a trick film as well as the re-telling of this film, a conversation with expressions regarding past and future experiences and explanations of game rules.

Based on these data the following questions should be analyzed: 1. Do more deviations in the aspect choice (aspect errors) arise among the bilingual children than among the monolingual ones? 2. How do the deviations in both groups look, and are there differences between them in the type of aspect errors? 3. Do more deviations for the verbs of motion arise among the bilingual children than among the monolingual ones? If so, what do they consist of? 4. Do the same deviations arise among bilingual older children as among young monolinguals or are there qualitative differences? 5. What do the results reveal about the process of acquiring aspect category and verbs of motion? The answers to these questions should finally be connected with the language biography of bilingual children: 6. Under which conditions do no or few differences from monolingual children appear, and under which conditions are there more differences?