ABSTRACT

Even though research on bilingual first language acquisition (2L1) could be conceptualized as monolingual acquisition (L1) of two individual languages, the fact that in 2L1 acquisition there is exposure to input from two languages has consequences in terms of how the two language systems interact in the mind of the bilingual. This century has seen two important developments in this respect. First, a consensus seems to have been reached on the idea that the two systems are differentiated from the early stages (e.g. Genesee, 1989; De Houwer, 1990; Genesee, Nicoladis & Paradis, 1995; Köppe & Meisel, 1995; Genesee, 2003). The second development is related to how the 2L1 language faculty compares to the L1 language faculty and the consideration that the grammatical processes and operations in both bilingual and monolingual speech must be accounted for in the same terms (MacSwan, 2000; Liceras, Spradlin & Fernández Fuertes, 2005; Liceras et al., 2008, among others). However, while it is unquestionable that L1 and 2L1 acquisition share similar mechanisms and processes, there are core issues such as language dominance, crosslinguistic influence and code-mixing that are specific to simultaneous bilingual acquisition.

In this chapter, we address these three language contact phenomena by analyzing spontaneous and experimental data from the simultaneous bilingual acquisition of English and Spanish by two identical twins in Spain (FerFuLice corpus in CHILDES) as it compares to data from other 2L1 and L2 children and adults. We conceptualize language dominance in terms of the computational value of grammatical features in a given language. And so, the dominant language is the one that provides the functional category whenever that category is highly grammaticized. Crosslinguistic influence between the two languages of a bilingual is analyzed in the case of sentential subjects and copula predicates and we propose that the occurrence as well as the directionality of influence is linked to lexical specialization. Therefore, the presence of two sets of subjects (i.e. overt and null) and two sets of copulas (i.e. ser and estar) in Spanish leads to a lack of negative influence from English into Spanish. However, a facilitation effect appears in bilingual English as seen in bilinguals’ lower copula omission rates and lower null subject rate. In terms of code-mixing patterns between Determiners and Nouns, child and adult spontaneous production data differ from experimental data in that while the former show a preference for the Spanish Determiner (the category which is more grammaticized), the latter prefer the English Determiner.

We propose constructs such as the Grammatical Features Spell-Out hypothesis or the Analogical Criterion to account for these patterns. The analysis of these language contact phenomena provides an insight on how language properties shape bilingual production.
1. INTRODUCTION

While the mechanisms and processes that shape bilingual first language acquisition (2L1) should, in principle, resemble those of monolingual acquisition (L1) in the case of each of the languages involved, the fact that in 2L1 acquisition there is exposure to input from two languages forces us to confront two fundamental research questions: whether and how the two language systems interact in the mind of the bilingual and what the outcomes of this interaction may be. Consequently, the main objective of this chapter is to discuss specific ways in which these research questions have been approached in the acquisition literature.

The very title of the chapter makes it clear that we will be dealing with simultaneous bilingual acquisition, namely with children who are exposed to the two languages from birth, rather than so-called sequential (or consecutive) bilingual acquisition which deals with children who are exposed to the second language after being exposed to the first language for at least two or three years (Baker, 2011; De Houwer, 2009; Silva-Corvalán, 2014, among others). When the acquisition of a second language occurs past three years of age, it is usually referred to as child second language acquisition (cL2) rather than sequential bilingual acquisition (Meisel, 2008).

Some of the most salient outcomes of 2L1 acquisition are language dominance, crosslinguistic influence, and language mixing. Language dominance has been defined in terms of relative proficiency (Grosjean, 1982, among others) or relative speed of development (Wapole, 2000) and it has been measured in relation to language production and to language processing. While there is not a unified definition of language dominance in young bilinguals, an inventory of linguistic diagnostics along with other types of diagnostics, has been proposed to identify the dominant language. A first objective of this chapter is to propose a definition of language dominance that is
not necessarily equated to proficiency but to the grammaticalization of features in the various languages.

As for crosslinguistic influence (i.e. Döpke, 2000; Genesee, Nicoladis, & Paradis 1995; Liceras, Fernández Fuertes, & Alba de la Fuente, 2012; Müller, 1998; Nicoladis, 2002; Yip & Matthews, 2000), it is important to point out that, within the view of the bilingual mind that we maintain, and even if the two language systems share a single computational component, the realization of universal principles is to be mediated by the existence of two lexicons and two phonological components. This implies that the combinations of features present in the functional categories (i.e. pronouns, determiners, auxiliaries, complementizers …) and the lexical or substantive categories (i.e. nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives …) in the two languages may differ and, therefore, may result in crosslinguistic influence. It may also be the case that a feature or a set of features be realized as one lexical item in one language but as two lexical items in the other language. A case in point is the values of copula be in English that are realized as two different lexical items — ser and estar — in Spanish. The obligatory use of overt subjects in English but not in Spanish and the systematic availability of null subjects in Spanish but not in English have also been discussed as relevant loci for crosslinguistic influence. Thus, a second objective of this chapter is not only to discuss some potential loci for crosslinguistic influence in 2L1 acquisition but also to show that, while crosslinguistic influence can cause interference, it can also have a facilitating effect.

Finally, code-mixing or code-switching has also been investigated as an outcome of 2L1 acquisition, both as a diagnostic for language dominance as well as a reflection of how the properties of the two language systems may interact. We will use code-mixing and code-switching interchangeably even though the first term has been
used to refer to mixing that occurs before children have incorporated the functional categories of the two languages (Köppe & Meisel, 1995).

In order to discuss the above-mentioned outcomes, we will use data from the simultaneous bilingual acquisition of English and Spanish in Spain. We will specifically discuss 2L1 data from the bilingual twins in the FerFuLice corpus in CHILDES (MacWhinney, 2000; Fernández Fuertes & Liceras, 2010) in relation to L1 monolingual acquisition of both Spanish and English and paying special attention to copula omission and null and overt subject production, two constructions that have received a great deal of attention in the 2L1 acquisition literature (i.e. Paradis & Navarro, 2003; Silva-Corvalán, 2014). This will contribute to the understanding of individual bilingualism which can then be used as a point of comparison with societal bilingualism (Bathia & Ritchie, 2012). In our specific case, we will be discussing a case of individual rather than societal bilingualism and a situation where Spanish is the majority language while English is the minority language. Nonetheless, we want to address language dominance, crosslinguistic influence and code-mixing as outcomes of bilingualism that can be investigated across the board, as determined by the mere contact between two different language systems and, in principle, abstracting from the specific setting as such or the specific amount of input.

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1 The type of contact that has been mainly studied is the one in which the language that may eventually become non-dominant, and here we are using the term as the equivalent of proficiency (e.g. Spanish as minority / heritage language in the US), may have a facilitating effect in the acquisition of the dominant language (e.g. English as majority language in the US).