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Bilingual child brain at work

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Abstract

This study investigates the acquisition of negation by children simultaneously acquiring a double negation and a negative concord language. Natural languages are divided into two groups based on the ways of expression of negation. One group is of double negation languages, which explicitly allows using one negative element per clause to express sentential negation. The second group, the negative concord languages group, allows more than one negative element to express a single semantic negation. Following Zeijlstra's (2004 et seq.) hypothesis for identifying the ways of expressing negation, this study will investigate the data of children acquiring Dutch, a double negation, and Italian, a negative concord language, and receiving input for both of them from their caregivers simultaneously. Results show that children acquire both negation systems simultaneously, and their brains can easily comprehend both. No effect was found for one of the negation systems over the other. We argue that bilingual children acquire Dutch and Italian simultaneously as their L1s and do not mix the grammar of both of their languages. Furthermore, their acquisition of negation is similar to their respective monolingual peers. It is concluded that children's brains can simultaneously process two grammars for two different negation systems.

Keywords: Bilingual, Child language acquisition, Negation, Negative concord

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