

TECHNOLOGIES OF TEACHING VOCABULARY (A1, A2, B2)

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Abstract: *This scientific article presents information about the attention paid to language learning today and the development of vocabulary in language learning.*

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Children's vocabulary acquisition can vary according to an array of variables, including the number of languages that a child is exposed to (i.e., monolinguals, bilinguals, and multilinguals), the age of exposure to the target language(s), the amount of exposure, the nature of the input (i.e., natural or instructional contexts), the types of instruction received, the socioeconomic conditions of learning, and individual factors such as the motivation level and memory capacity of the learner (e.g., Fennell & Lew-Williams, 2018; Granena & Long, 2012; Marchman, Martínez, Hurtado, Grüter, & Fernald, 2017; Marulis & Neuman, 2010; Takanashi & Menestrel, 2017). Vocabulary development studies focusing on L2/FL learners ages 4 to 12, the particular interest group in this paper, are relatively limited compared with vocabulary studies on child L1 acquisition (typically dealing with monolingual children up to preschool), bilingual L1 acquisition (targeting simultaneous bilinguals, usually up to preschool) as well as adult L2 studies. However, it is important to keep in mind that any of these traditionally defined target groups (e.g., L1-learning children, bilingual-L1 children, young L2/FL children, etc.) are by no means homogenous and, indeed, often overlap. Given the heterogeneity of the target population (namely, young L2/FL children), I do not make a distinction between L2-learning children and FL-learning children (L2-learning children presumably can have more extensive exposure to the target language than FL-learning children). Additionally, since some young L2/FL learners are exposed to the target language from birth, this review covers both simultaneous and sequential bilingual language learners.¹ Finally, for the purposes

¹. Conventionally, *simultaneous bilinguals* refers to individuals who have been exposed to more than one language simultaneously from birth. In contrast, the term *sequential bilinguals* is defined as language learners who start learning their additional language(s) after they developed their L1, although a precise cut-off onset age for L2 is unspecified. In the United States, the term *dual language learners* is sometimes used to refer to children age 0 to 5 who are developing language(s) other than their first (or home) language(s), and they are often distinguished from children who are first exposed to their L2 in a school setting (Takanashi & Menestrel, 2017). In European contexts, the term *additional language learners* is more commonly used than *L2 learners* for referring to school-age children who are learning a language in addition to their L1 or home language(s).

of this review, I do not distinguish bilinguals from multilinguals; bilingual children in this chapter refer to children who speak two or more languages.

In understanding young L2/FL learners' vocabulary learning mechanisms and development, it is important to pay attention to the following two elements: (a) the role of having additional language(s) as opposed to acquiring one language; and (b) the role of age in vocabulary learning. I next discuss each of these elements in turn. Previously, researchers believed that children's vocabulary learning was essentially an act of mapping words with meaning and that learning vocabulary was a relatively easy task for children compared with acquiring other elements in language, such as grammar. More recently, however, researchers have begun to emphasize the complexity of vocabulary learning among children and to identify various challenges that they face (Westermann & Mani, 2018). Infants first identify which sounds are used in their language (i.e., phonemes). They next extract sequences of phonemes to form meaningful lexicon-like units out of streams of natural speech sounds, and then they associate them with meaning in context while dealing with environmental ambiguity and variability of input (e.g., different speakers use the same lexicon-like units with various accents in various environments). Children continuously refine their mental representation in this process (Westermann & Mani, 2018).

Basic mechanisms of vocabulary learning appear to be very similar between monolingual and bilingual infants. For example, bilingual infants can learn two different phonotactic regularities – combinations of phonemes permitted in a given language system – as equally well as monolingual infants who deal with only one system (Fennell & Lew-Williams, 2018). Likewise, bilingual infants show equivalent abilities to their monolingual counterparts when it comes to recognizing words from nonwords in languages that they are exposed to (Sebastian-Galles, 2010). Both monolingual and bilingual infants have similar onsets for receptive and productive vocabularies (De Houwer, 2009). Finally, high correlations are found between the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge (how many words a child knows and how much a child knows about words) for both monolinguals and bilinguals (Vermeer, 2001).

Even though the basic mechanisms for vocabulary learning are similar for monolingual and bilingual infants, differences in the environmental elements to which infants are exposed appear to play a role in their vocabulary learning. Byers-Heinlein and Fennell (2013) listed four major environmental elements unique to bilinguals that potentially influence their language development: "(1) bilingual infants have less exposure to each language than monolinguals; (2) bilingual infants must simultaneously represent two different languages; (3) bilingual exposure is 'noisy'; and (4) bilingual infants must separate and differentiate their languages" (pp. 275–276). Importantly, the effect of being bilingual on a young child's

vocabulary development – both in terms of vocabulary knowledge and lexical processing – largely depends on the amount and types of input that bilinguals have in each of their languages (Fennell & Lew-Williams, 2018).

Being exposed to more than one language may delay some initial developmental processes, although such “delay” is usually a short term. For example, Fennell, Byers-Heinlein, and Werker (2007) reported that monolingual infants recognize minimal pairs (i.e., two words differing only in one phoneme) successfully by sometime around 17 months of age, while bilingual infants take a longer time (until 20 months of age) to be able to react to mislabeled objects that differ only by a phoneme. Interestingly, however, the researchers also found that 17-month-old monolingual infants could not learn a new word when it was pronounced by a bilingual speaker (i.e., when the pronunciation deviated from a monolingual speaker), while their bilingual counterparts could learn a word with the deviated pronunciation produced by a bilingual speaker. This result indicates bilinguals’ greater adaptability to a variety of pronunciations, likely because of their exposure to phonetically diverse environments (Fennell & Byers-Heinlein, 2014; Fennell & Lew-Williams, 2018; also see Mattock, Polka, Rvachew, & Krehm, 2010). When a learner’s L1 and L2 are related lexically, there is also some evidence that bilingual children as young as kindergarteners, if not earlier, can recognize cognates, although their sensitivity to cognates depends on the amount of exposure to L1 and L2 (e.g., Pérez, Peña, & Bedore, 2010, for a case of Spanish-English bilinguals). Furthermore, some studies report that vocabulary knowledge in L1 supports vocabulary growth in L2 longitudinally under certain contexts even between two unrelated languages (e.g., Pham, 2016, for a case of Vietnamese-English speaking school-age sequential bilingual children), although precise mechanisms for such positive effects are not yet well understood.

Exposure to more than one language makes bilinguals less dependent on *mutual exclusivity constraints* when associating a novel word with an object. It has been suggested that such mutual exclusivity constraints, or the tendency to associate a novel word to a new object rather than objects for which they already have labels, can be attributed to monolingual children (Markman & Wachtel, 1988). Mutual exclusivity can be a useful strategy for monolingual children, whose environment usually allows one-to-one mapping between a word and an object. But it seems to be a less attractive strategy for bilinguals, whose linguistic environments allow them to have more than one label for an object (e.g., Bosch & Ramon-Casas, 2014; Byers-Heinlein & Werker, 2013; Davison & Tell, 2005; Houston-Price, Zoe, & Raviglione, 2010). In Diesendruck (2005): 3–4-year-old bilingual children were more likely to accept a second label for an object when interacting with a bilingual puppet than with a monolingual puppet, suggesting the children’s pragmatic sensitivity to lexical-learning strategies.

One can assume that the above-mentioned bilingual environmental elements potentially influence not only the initial stages of vocabulary learning but also later lexical development among young L2/FL learners. It is frequently documented that bilingual preschool- and school-age children have smaller vocabulary sizes in each language (both receptive and productive vocabularies) than their monolingual peers (e.g., Carlo et al., 2004; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011; Uccelli & Pérez, 2007) even after controlling for their socioeconomic status (SES) (Hoff et al.,

2012) or irrespective of the students' L1–L2 combinations (Bialystok, Luk, Peets, & Yang, 2010). However, evaluating bilinguals' vocabularies based on standardized measurements in just one language can be highly misleading. One can assume that bilingual children are likely to use L1 and L2 in different contexts for different purposes. Indeed, we have ample evidence showing that bilingual children's vocabularies in L1 and L2 do not greatly overlap. Peña, Bedore, and Zlatić-Giunta (2002), for example, reported that approximately 70% of vocabulary knowledge (in a category-generation task) of Spanish-English bilinguals (age 4–7) was unique to either their L1 or L2; only 30% of the words were produced in both languages. When researchers combined bilingual students' vocabulary scores in L1 and L2, or used a *conceptual scoring* method (i.e., giving credit for each concept that a bilingual student knows in either language), bilingual students' vocabulary scores were compatible with those of their monolingual counterparts (e.g., De Houwer, 2009; Goodrich & Lonigan, 2018; Hoff et al., 2012; Pearson, Fernández, & Oller, 1993).

Observed variability in bilinguals' vocabulary *growth rate* is also due to various individual variables rather than being bilingual per se. After controlling for major influential variables such as students' SES, nonverbal cognitive abilities, gender, daycare attendance, and so forth, MacLeod and colleagues (2018) in Québec, Canada, reported that bilingual children's vocabulary growth rates between 3.5 and 8 years of age were compatible with those of their monolingual peers. Interestingly, after controlling for such variables, there was no difference in growth rate between simultaneous and early sequential bilinguals. Moreover, for multilingual children who speak a minority language (i.e., children who speak a language other than English or French at home), although their vocabulary sizes in either English or French at school entry were smaller than their counterparts who are monolingual or majority-language-speaking bilingual, their vocabulary growth rate after entering school (i.e., after age 6) was compatible with that of the monolingual and majority-language-speaking bilinguals.

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