Vocabulary skills of bilingual children

Bjørn Harald Kvifte, Ragnar Arntzen, Arnstein Hjelde

Østfold University College, Norway

This presentation is based on a longitudinal study. Since 2008 we have followed a group of sixteen bilingual children from their last year in kindergarten. They were born in Norway, grew up acquiring their parents’ native language at home as their first language (L1), and they started learning Norwegian (L2) in kindergarten. They can therefore be regarded as successively bilingual (Baker 2011) and heritage language learners (Montrul 2010).

In the 2nd grade we tested the children’s Norwegian vocabulary using ”TOSP” (Sunil Loona 1995). The TOSP test is especially designed to measure children’s vocabulary in both first and second language, and it aims at measuring various aspects of the vocabulary: breadth and depth, passive and active vocabulary and more or less context-dependent language (Sunil Loona 2005). In the 5th grade this part of their language skills was examined once more using the same test, this time both in Norwegian (L2) and in their heritage language (L1). In addition, we have tested two control groups: monolingual Norwegian students in 2nd and 5th grade.

The outcomes of the study:

- We find a vocabulary gap between the bilingual children and the monolingual Norwegian control group
- The bilingual children in 5th grade score higher on vocabulary skills in L2 than in L1
- Vocabulary skills in the two languages do not seem to complement each other covering most domains

References


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