Variability of the article system in heritage language grammar

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One of the greatest challenges in the study of language has been to tease apart the contribution of the genetic endowment for language and general mechanisms of learning. This study investigates the extent to which the language property that regulates the distribution of articles in bilingual grammars is shaped by the language specific computational mechanisms and general learning mechanisms in challenging input conditions. (In)definiteness and specificity are among the linguistic properties that are underrepresented in the input available to heritage speakers. If heritage speakers in this investigation behave in line with monolingual speakers in processing and producing the articles, this will indicate that their acquisition is guided by language universals (Kupisch et al. in prep). However, if we observe fluctuations in these properties of the language based on frequency and consistency of form-meaning mappings in the input, this will imply that general cognitive processor is sensitive to the patterns in the input and free from the innate licensing mechanisms (MacWhinney, 1999). The populations compared are adult heritage speakers of Turkish and first generation Turkish immigrants (parents of heritage speakers) in Germany, and monolingual speakers of Turkish. In order to get the best possible insight into the underlying processing mechanism and their production ability, we conduct experiments that test on-line processing and production of articles (i.e., eye-tracking, elicited sentence completion, information gap tasks). Additionally, we look into the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of the article system such as language use, proficiency and age of acquisition.

References

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