

Contact phenomena in English-Estonian early bilingualism.

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The paper explores contact phenomena in the speech of an early (2;3-2;11) English-Estonian simultaneous bilingual from the usage based angle. In our view, there are no universal constraints on contact-induced language change, no strict border between lexicon and morphosyntax, and language is viewed as “an experience driven system” (Quick et al. 2019), so that grammar is shaped with usage and experience. The speaker’s two languages constantly interact and influence each other. As one of the languages in the pair, Estonian, is rich in inflectional morphology, it provides an opportunity to glance into emerging bilingual grammar. So far there have been only a few studies on Estonian-English bilingual children’s code-switching (see for example Vihman 2018).

The dataset contains a lot of code-mixed utterances (2,996 Estonian, 3,089 English and 2,744 code-mixed utterances), which thereby provides a good opportunity to study contact phenomena in early bilingual speech. The family follows a policy where on 3 days a week they all speak Estonian and on 4 days a week English. During the recording period the child did not attend daycare, so most of her input came from her immediate family. The utterances were categorized based on Muysken’s (2013) typology. The data reveal that all three types of code-switching types (insertion, alternation, congruent lexicalization) are represented. We found that in utterances where Estonian is the base language Estonian inflections may be added to inserted English stems, but it is not always the case. The data also included English-dominant utterances with only one Estonian inflection (e.g. Where does that goe-ib? go-3SG). However, the analysis showed that predictions made by Muysken (2013) as to what type of code-switching is preferred under which sociolinguistic conditions and the role of structural differences between languages, do not seem to work. Estonian and English are typologically different, yet this does not prevent congruent lexicalization because the rules of two monolingual grammars are not necessarily maintained. We found that just as in adult Estonian-English bilingual speech compromise forms and bilingual constructions emerge (Verschik & Kask 2021). Some examples included compound verbs (e.g. kukkus off, which in Estonian would be kukkus ära and in English fell off.)

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