

The role of language experience in the lexical development of European Portuguese as a heritage language. A study on Portuguese-German and Portuguese-French bilingual children.

Liliana Correia

Centro de Estudos Humanísticos, Instituto de Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade do Minho
lilianamocorreia@gmail.com

In the last decades, a large body of empirical research has emerged within the field of Heritage Bilingualism, with a considerable amount of studies having shown that heritage speakers' (HSs) language development is characterised by variability, regarding not only the sociolinguistic experience of each speaker, but also the levels of language proficiency individuals attain in each of their languages (Montrul, 2016; Unsworth, 2016).

As far as the lexical domain is concerned, several studies have revealed that child HSs' productive and receptive vocabulary sizes tend to be smaller than those of their monolingual counterparts when only one of their languages is assessed (Cobo-Lewis et al., 2002; among many others). Additionally, many of these studies have also demonstrated that the variation observed in bilingual children's lexical outcomes is significantly associated with factors related to their language experience, such as the amount and type of exposure to the target language (Unsworth, 2016).

In this talk, we are going to present preliminary results of an empirical study focussed on the acquisition of European Portuguese (EP) as a HL by 6-10-year-old bilingual children living in Germany and France. In light of previous research on Heritage Bilingualism, this study aimed at assessing the lexical development, in the HL, of Portuguese-German and Portuguese-French bilingual children, not only by investigating whether both bilingual groups perform monolingual-like in productive and receptive vocabulary knowledge tests, but also by examining whether there are significant differences between the two bilingual groups with respect to their performance on both lexical tasks. Concomitantly, this study aimed at evaluating the role of input-related factors in the HSs' lexical outcomes.

Fifty-nine bilingual – 26 Portuguese-German and 33 Portuguese-French – and 43 monolingual children were tested on a picture naming task (Brownell, 2000a; Cunha, 2011) and a picture identification task (Brownell, 2000b; Costa, 2011) in EP. Data related to the bilinguals' language experience were collected by means of a parental sociolinguistic questionnaire.

Results from between-group comparisons reveal significant differences regarding the productive and receptive lexical knowledge: monolinguals outperformed bilinguals in both tasks; Portuguese-German bilinguals outperformed Portuguese-French bilinguals in the naming task but not in the identification task. Within-group comparisons, in turn, showed that the receptive vocabulary knowledge of both bilingual and monolingual children is significantly larger than their productive one.

Correlation analyses reveal similarities and differences between the bilingual groups in the way input-related variables influence their productive and receptive lexical knowledge. The productive vocabulary knowledge of both groups is positively and significantly correlated with the quantity of HL input/output within the household and with the amount of cumulative exposure to the HL. Richness of the input was also found to be positively correlated with the productive vocabulary knowledge of both bilingual groups, but, in the Portuguese-French group, the correlation is only marginally significant. Concerning the receptive vocabulary knowledge, results from the correlation analyses showed that the Portuguese-German bilinguals' lexical performance

is positively and significantly associated with all the previous variables except for output quantity, which only reached marginal significance. No correlations were found between the receptive lexical knowledge of the Portuguese-French bilinguals and any of the aforementioned variables.

Summing up, these findings confirm the results of numerous studies on Heritage Bilingualism, showing not only that bilingual children tend to present smaller productive and receptive vocabulary sizes than their monolingual peers, but also that their lexical knowledge in the HL is highly affected by their language experience. Moreover, the results also indicate that the productive lexical knowledge is more vulnerable to the effects of reduced language exposure/use than the receptive one.

References

- Brownell, R. (2000a). *Expressive one-word picture vocabulary test*. Novato: Academic Therapy Publications.
- Brownell, R. (2000b). *Receptive one-word picture vocabulary test*. Novato: Academic Therapy Publications.
- Cobo-Lewis, A., Pearson, B., Eilers, R., & Umbel, V. (2002). Effects of bilingualism and bilingual education on oral and written Spanish skills: A multifactor study of standardized test outcomes. In D. K. Oller & R. Eilers (Eds.), *Language and literacy in bilingual children* (pp. 98-117). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Costa, O. (2011). *Análise do Desempenho do Vocabulário Compreensivo em Crianças dos 5 aos 10 Anos de Idade: Um Estudo Exploratório no Concelho de Fafe*. Dissertação de Mestrado, Universidade do Minho, Braga.
- Cunha, I. (2011). *Análise do Desempenho do Vocabulário Expressivo em Crianças dos 5 aos 10 Anos de Idade: Um Estudo Exploratório no Concelho de Fafe*. Dissertação de Mestrado, Universidade do Minho, Braga.
- Montrul, S. (2016). *The acquisition of heritage languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Unsworth, S. (2016). Quantity and Quality of Language Input in Bilingual Language Development. In E. Nicoladis & S. Montanari (Eds.), *Bilingualism Across the Lifespan* (pp. 103-122). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.