

Heritage vs. monolingual acquisition of Russian: Diversity in timing and developmental paths?

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The Russian-speaking population in Germany is large and there are various possibilities of maintaining this home language (L1) across generations, including private and state bilingual kindergartens, schools, media, health services, etc. Such environmental possibilities together with the parental policy to maintain home language, in our case Russian, should lead to low diversity in bilingual acquisition path and timing. Still, some recent studies report that bilingual acquisition shows a higher level of diversity across children, in stark contrast to monolingual acquisition especially in the domains of lexicon and grammar, but not in discourse (Haman et al., 2017 on Polish-English bilinguals, Lindgren, 2018 on Turkish-/German-Swedish bilinguals). We aim to examine the diversity across monolingual and bilingual acquisition of Russian in this domain – discourse. Discourse is represented in our study by elicited narratives, in which macrostructure is analyzed; this domain is an interesting and less explored area for investigation because it is considered non-language specific and universal in nature (Liles, 1993), is less dependent on a child's language proficiency and on environment factors than other domains.

Macrostructure in narratives is traditionally evaluated via *story grammar* (Stein/Glenn, 1979), which is grounded in the global organization of the various components of a story and which constitutes the skeleton of a narrative (Heilmann et al. 2010; Trabasso et al. 1989). The present study is based on novel analyses, which consider two distinguished parts of macrostructure: Story Structure and Story Complexity. Here we report findings on Story Structure only. Story Structure was investigated using a quantitative measure which deals with the number of story grammar elements produced. This approach in our study is applied (a) to compare the overall macrostructure scores of monolinguals and bilinguals and (b) to determine the level of diversity across these groups.

Method. A monolingual Russian group of children (n=24, mean age 4;9), as well as a bilingual Russian-German (n=26, mean age 4;11) group were tested. Narratives were elicited via the *Multilingual Assessment Instrument for Narratives* (MAIN, Gagarina et al. 2012, 2015). This instrument contains theoretically-based pictorial stimuli, which are controlled for explicit picturing of each element of the story grammar, for the cognitive content of the single pictures and the whole story sequences, for cultural appropriateness, etc. Each elicited story was scored for Story Structure, the number of elements up to 17 points maximum.

Results. A correlation analysis of Story Structure elements showed that the monolingual group scored significantly higher than the bilingual group (Estimate=2.688, $p < .001$). Furthermore, bilingual children showed more diversity with a number of children performing at very low scores for Story Structure.

Discussion. The higher scores of the monolingual group at Story Structure might be due to the language support programs, which start at age three in the Kindergartens and aim at early development of narrative skills. The bilingual group's lower Story Structure scores and their larger scattering show the variability in the children's L1 narrative skills and can be interpreted by the impact of L1 family policy on general L1 development. Given that Story Structure at around age five is still actively developing, the results of our study support previous findings on the crucial role of L1 used at home on its development.

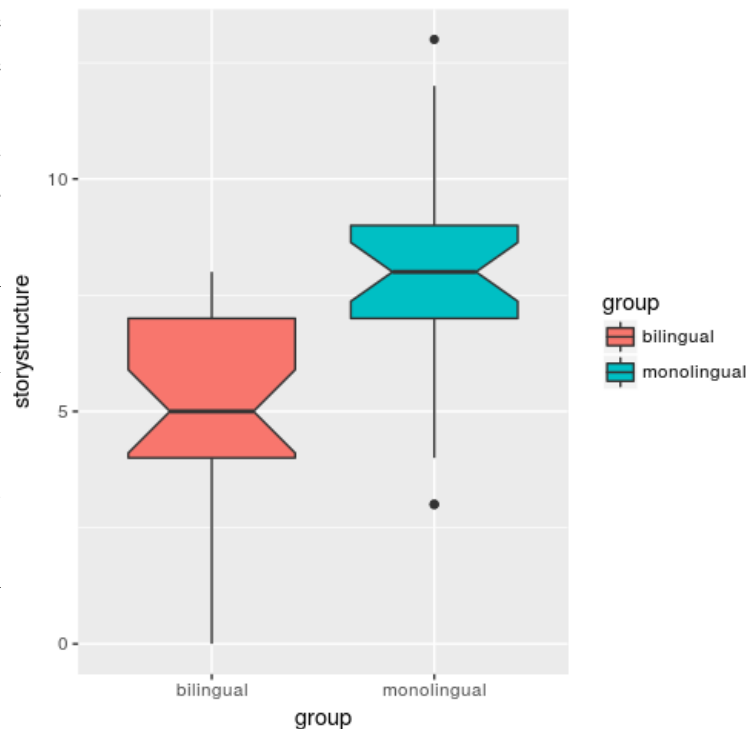


Figure: Means of the Story Structure Score, as achieved by the bilingual and the monolingual group.

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