

The acquisition of adverbs in trilingual children
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For this inquiry we assess the acquisition of adverbs in a trilingual context: does it measure up to the syntax and semantics of adverbs in the adult grammar of each language? If errors occur, are they due to cross-linguistic transfer, and if yes, in what direction?

Our data come from 13 Canadian children age 8-11, with Romanian as heritage language and who attended preschool in English (age 4 & 5; L2) and registered in French (L3) immersion classes (age 6). Each child tells a story in three languages (*The Frog Series*, Mayer, 1967; Table 1 for corpus). Measures of morphosyntactic complexity (verbal density), lexical richness (Guiraud's index) and accuracy (rate of error-free utterances) show that Romanian significantly lags behind French and English on the morphosyntactic complexity score ($Z=-2.691$, $p=.007$). It also scores below English on vocabulary richness and accuracy, but not significantly (Table 2). For the investigation of adverb acquisition, we use a comparative method based on Cinque's (1999) hierarchy of adverbs, which has been validated for French and English and extended in our analysis to Romanian. We find that the syntactic pattern for adverb placement is cross-linguistically shared and stable in the three languages. In our corpus, the distribution of all classes of adverbs show adult competence in all three languages. Errors are detected only in French, and they concern mainly word order. The errors mimic the Romanian word order, either because the adverb is fronted for discourse effects, or because the level of verb movement in relation to the adverb location is misjudged.

Our analysis takes into consideration the differences in the setting of major parameters that may have an impact on the linearization of clausal items: (i) the level of verb movement; and (ii) the configuration for discourse mapping. We conclude that the transfer takes place from the language with stronger settings for the parameters in (i) and (ii) towards the language with weaker/mixed settings for the same parameters. There is no transfer to or from English. Notably, this transfer takes place despite the fact that the participants' syntactic competence in Romanian lags behind French and English.

Our analysis suits models where transfer can be non-facilitative and justified by the proximity in parametric settings (Rothman, 2015, Westergaard et al 2017). In addition, our data also indicate that what transfers, are productive grammatical rules over contextually or lexically restricted rules of the target language (Amaral & Roeper 2014).

Table 1: Size of the corpus

Romanian	171 adverb occurrences	French	335 adverb occurrences	English	194 adverb occurrences
T-units	Total words	T-units	Total words	T-units	Total words
1227	8309	734	7031	909	8968

Table 2. Comparing language proficiency indexes across the three languages

	Romanian				French				English			
	Mean	Median	Range	SD	Mean	Median	Range	SD	Mean	Median	Range	SD
Verbal density	1.39	1.34	1.19-2.09	0.22	1.62	1.57	1.36-2.19	0.27	1.76	1.64	1.47-2.49	0.3
Giraud's index	6.31	6.36	4.95-7.29	0.64	5.55	5.64	4.3-6.85	0.78	6.84	6.51	6.21-7.78	0.62
Rate error-free utterances	0.7	0.7	0.47-0.91	0.13	0.53	0.52	0.35-0.78	0.1	0.82	0.82	0.63-0.89	0.07

References

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