

Winter School on Multilingualism across the Lifespan

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Kees de Bot

Language development over the lifespan, a dynamic perspective

Dynamic Systems Theory is a relatively new approach to development in general and second language development in particular. Its strength lies in the connection it allows us to make between sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of language development. It is a radical break with traditional research in the sense that it looks at developing systems as a whole, including the interaction between an individual and her environment. Simple single factor causality does not work in this type of thinking, and more generally, well-established concepts like causality and generalizability are questionable. The rejection of such notions has far-reaching consequences for how we can and cannot study second language development.

Elizabet Arocena-Egaña/Mirjam Günther-van der Meij

Becoming multilingual in the Basque Autonomous Community and in the province of Fryslân

The context in which more than two languages are learnt is a complex reality existing in many parts of Europe. In the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) and in the province of Fryslân, students receive part of their education in the minority language (Basque or Frisian), in the majority language (Spanish or Dutch) and in a foreign language (predominantly English). There are important differences existing between multilingual education in these two regions that might affect the proficiency level the students attain in the three languages by the end of their obligatory secondary education.

As part of a larger project, this study aims to analyse the factors involved in the process of learning three languages throughout secondary education. We will analyse the proficiency level attained by the students in the three languages they are taught in. Hereby we pay special attention to language policy, early start versus late start English programmes and teacher didactics in each of the regions. We will also look at the amount and type of interaction with each of the languages the students experience at different stages of education without forgetting other factors such as motivation and attitude of students towards the languages and their exposure to the three languages in and out of school. For this project, we have collected and measured data in both regions by means of questionnaires, essays, classroom observations, language use diaries and interviews with language teachers.

The results show some interesting differences between the proficiency level in writing skills in three languages among the students of both regions and also in the sociolinguistic and educational factors involved in multilingual education. Those differences have possible implications for educational policy and allocation of language instruction time. When learning a language, the role of schools is limited while the exposure outside the school becomes an important factor as the results of this research show.

Claire Basarich/Imma Miralpeix

**Multilingual immigrant mothers in Barcelona:
Perspectives on language attitude and use**

This descriptive study explores the language behaviors, attitudes, and use of a group of immigrant families in Barcelona, but particularly the mothers and children. The participants represent a new category of immigrants, reflecting recent trends in population changes in Barcelona and Europe in general, of educated middle class professionals and families whose migration patterns differ from previous groups and whose roles in society reflect evolving globalization.

Using qualitative research methods such as questionnaires and interviews, the study reveals their personal stories managing various levels of linguistic competence in a bilingual regional-language focused society and how these experiences have shaped their views of local policies and their own language use. The participants are asked to discuss the language use and behaviors of their children, revealing intergenerational differences in language use, as well as how the children cope with multiple languages at home and school and how they maintain a connection to their heritage languages and cultures with the mothers' support.

Finally, the participants reveal their future hopes for their children as multilingual citizens, further highlighting how the regional language plays a different role and is developed differently in the two age groups. The study concludes by discussing implications for further research and commentary on qualitative methods of investigation as well as the importance of the findings in light of Barcelona's changing linguistic and immigration contexts.

Alexandra Edlinger

Fremdsprachen Lernen im dritten Lebensalter: Dynamiken sozialer, psychologischer und linguistischer Faktoren

LernerInnen im dritten Lebensalter sind die „neue Zielgruppe“ von Fremdsprachenkursen an Weiterbildungsinstituten. Demografische Veränderungen spielen dieser Alterskohorte immer stärkere gesellschaftspolitische Bedeutung zu. Aktives Altern und Lebenslanges Lernen sind viel diskutierte Konzepte. Laut Statistik Austria erfreuen sich besonders Fremdsprachenkurse bei dieser Altersgruppe besonderer Beliebtheit. An den österreichischen Volkshochschulen betrug der Anteil der über 60-jährigen in Fremdsprachenkursen im Kursjahr 2008/09 etwa 20 %.

Diese Arbeit will hier ansetzen und die psychologischen, sozialen und linguistischen Kontexte dieser Zielgruppe beleuchten und ihre Wechselwirkungen darstellen. Theoretischen Hintergrund dieser Arbeit bildet die Dynamic Systems Theory. Untersucht wird Sprachen Lernen als dynamischer Prozess, der sich durch Interaktion sozialer und psychologischer Faktoren entwickelt. Zielsetzung ist die Identifikation der Faktoren, die ältere FremdsprachenlernerInnen dazu bewegen, einen Sprachkurs zu besuchen und ein motivierendes Lernerlebnis zu erfahren. Im Sinne der Dynamic Systems Theory können diese Faktoren als „attractor basin“ verstanden werden. Ein „attractor basin“ bildet sich durch ein Konglomerat verschiedener Anziehungskräfte („attractors“) im steten Zusammenspiel sozialer, psychologischer und linguistischer Faktoren. Die Identifikation der Faktoren, die dieses „attractor basin“ bestimmen, soll Rückschlüsse auf Didaktik, Methodik, Zielgruppenorientierung und LehrerInnenfortbildung zulassen.

Empirisch fußt diese Arbeit auf Individualuntersuchungen der Kontexte von SeniorInnen, die zum Zeitpunkt der Untersuchung an einem Sprachkurs teilnehmen.

Der soziale Kontext wird mittels eines Tiefeninterviews zu Wohnsituation, Gesundheitszustand, soziale Netzwerke, ausgeübte Berufe und Bildung der ProbandInnen erhoben.

In einem Fragebogen, adaptiert nach Deci und Ryan (2000) und Noels (2003), wird die Motivation zur Teilnahme an Sprachkursen unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Self-Determination Theory untersucht. Für LernerInnen im dritten Lebensalter, die eine Fremdsprache fernab von instrumentellen Motiven lernen, bietet diese Theorie der Motivation als Befriedigung der Bedürfnisse nach dem Erleben von Kompetenz, Autonomie und Beziehung Erklärungsmodelle.

Die linguistischen Kontexte werden durch eine Sprachlernbiographie, einer Selbsteinschätzung der Sprachkenntnisse nach dem Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmen, sowie durch einen nach TELC adaptierten Test erhoben.

Der empirische Teil ist noch im Konstruktionsstatus. Im Februar sollen aber bereits erste Ergebnisse der Pilotphase vorliegen.

Carmen Muñoz

Age-related advantages vs maturational constraints in L2/L3 acquisition

This presentation will deal with the effects of age on additional language acquisition. It will present and discuss the findings from research focused on the existence of a critical period in naturalistic language learning settings, mainly the higher ultimate attainment of younger learners in the long term, but also the faster rate of older learners in the short term. Then, findings from research in second/third language acquisition in instructed language learning situations will be presented and contrasted. While the faster rate of older learners is an age-related advantage that has been consistently observed in research, younger learners have not been seen to surpass older learners in the long term. Because it has been argued that the “long term” in instructed language learning spans over a very long period of time, recent research has looked at (very) long term effects of age (longer than 10 years). This research has not shown an advantage on the part of early starters when amount and type of exposure are controlled for, either. In the end it will be argued that context mediates the role of age in a fundamental way.

Finally, evidence from the effects of age in second/third language acquisition in adulthood, and of aging in bilinguals and multilinguals will also be presented and discussed.

Christine Czinglar

How does the respective age of two L1 speakers of Russian shape their L2-acquisition of verb placement in German?

My dissertation project is concerned with the development of verb placement in the learner varieties of two untutored learners of German with L1 Russian. As sisters living in Germany together with their mother, the two informants mainly differ in age of arrival (AoA 8;7 vs. 14;2). This longitudinal corpus (DaZ-AF) contains weekly audio recordings over 18 months, from the 3rd week of language contact onwards (see e.g. Dimroth 2008a, Dimroth 2008b, Pagonis 2009). For my project I have analysed 21 one-hour-recordings of spontaneous speech per informant, over the whole observation period, yielding a total of 9.500 sentences containing verbs (about 1/3 of which are prefabricated chunks).

The acquisition of the two structural positions of the finite verb in German (V2 in main and V-final in subordinated clauses) seems to be strongly affected by age of acquisition: Sentences with the finite verb in third position (V3) are attested in adult L2-acquisition as an intermediate step towards V2-syntax (cf. Clahsen, Meisel & Pienemann 1983), but not in L1- or in early L2-acquisition (cf. Tracy & Thoma 2009, Rothweiler 2006). Similarly, putting the finite verb in verb-final position in subordinate clauses takes some time for adults to learn, at least if their L1 is not an SOV-language, but is mastered by L1-children as soon as they start to produce subordinate clauses (cf. Rothweiler 1993). Both learners in the DaZ-AF-corpus produce declarative main clauses with V3-order and subordinate clauses with the finite verb in non-final position. But the younger learner goes through these intermediate phases much faster than the older one, who still retains the deviant pattern at the end of the observation period. But the adolescent learner is in turn developing much faster than the adults attested in the literature. Differences in L2-acquisition between preschoolers, young school children, adolescents and adults cannot be explained by maturation (alone), they call for a multifactorial explanation of the age factor.

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Neda Akbari

Comparing the L1 and L2 Mental Lexicon Development, Breadth, Depth and Accessibility

Mental lexicon is an important component of language in language and specifically second language learning, since words carry meanings and communication occurs through the meaning of words. It is equally important to look at mental lexicon as a multi-dimensional network consisting of breadth, depth and accessibility as opposed to the traditional one or two dimensional network. This study investigates the development of L2 mental lexicon compared to L1 mental lexicon from the three dimensions of breadth, depth and accessibility. In particular, this study examines how breadth of words affects depth and accessibility of words in the L2 mental lexicon of school students and how the L2 mental lexicon develops with the subjects' age. The participants are native and non-native speakers of English, year 1, 6 and 10. While the non-native speakers of English speak other languages at home, their English is considered adequate for mainstream education. A word association test and a yes/no lexical task are employed as tools to assess participants' "depth of vocabulary knowledge" and "breadth and accessibility" respectively. An additional proficiency screening and a bio-data survey are administered on the non-native speakers. The findings of this study will enrich our knowledge of L2 mental lexicon development compared to L1 mental lexicon development which will have implications for second language vocabulary learning and teaching.

Magalie Desgrippes

Growing old = growing bilingual?

The cognitive representation of *orange* across the life span

Recent studies in cognitive linguistics compared the grammatical and lexical categories of bilingual speakers to those of monolingual speakers. It was found that in bilinguals the cognitive representations of these categories may shift away from being typical of their L1s towards being rather more typical of their L2s (Cook et al. 2006, Athanasopoulos 2006, 2007, 2009). With regard to the subfield of color cognition, the implication is that for bilinguals a color category's "best example" will shift and resemble more closely a typical L2 one. In this paper, these findings are approached from another perspective. We conducted a cross-generational study investigating the cognitive representations of the color category orange in French and German. 52 participants from France and Germany, as monolingual as practically possible, were asked to name 62 colors of the Munsell color chart located between red and yellow and to locate the best example (i.e. focus) of orange, all under controlled lighting conditions. The age of the participants ranged from 11 to 90 years. Interestingly, the representation of orange in the naming task showed a large difference between the younger and the older participants whereas the focus locations were very close. This prompts us to put forward the following hypothesis: There has been an evolution of the orange category in both German and French and both the older and the newer categories are available in the cognition of older people. The choice of the category (past or new) depends on the task at hand and the emphasis it puts on similarity or difference. This hypothesis has the potential to provide an alternative account of the findings in the field of bilingual color cognition: both the L1 and L2 color categories might be available in the minds of bilinguals just as they are, hypothetically, present in older monolinguals.

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Monika S. Schmid

The discrepancy between L1 and L2: a perspective from L1 attrition

One of the most puzzling observations for linguists is the difference between learning a language from birth and later in life: while all normally developing children can attain full native language proficiency, there is considerable variability in ultimate attainment among older speakers who attempt to acquire a second language (L2). There is an ongoing controversy in linguistic research on whether this discrepancy is due to a maturationally constrained window of linguistic development making language learning difficult or impossible after puberty, or to general cognitive factors linked to the fact that the later an L2 is established, the stronger the competition it has to overcome from the more deeply entrenched first language (L1).

Studies attempting to resolve this controversy have so far focussed mainly if not exclusively on the development of L2 skills. New insight may be provided by investigating native speakers who are in many ways similar to L2 learners, namely migrants who have become dominant in the L2 (referred to as L1 attriters). On the one hand, such speakers have learned their L1 monolingually during childhood and are therefore not impeded by maturational constraints. On the other, they experience competition between their seldom used L1 and their highly entrenched L2. A comparison of L2 learners and L1 attriters may therefore be able to shed some light on the question of whether there is indeed a fundamental difference between early- and late-learned languages.

Incomplete learners vs. L1 attriters: the case of Russian speakers in Spain

There is a growing awareness that the impact of pre-puberty vs. post-puberty migration has an extraordinary impact on the development of attrition. The current study expands on research in L1 attrition, applying the concepts of the field to the case of Russian native speakers who have lived over 10 years in Spain. The main research question is how age affects the development of L1 attrition, being age of onset as the only predictor variable. Another question that results from the first is at what age does a language stabilize. Different age categories are, therefore, expected to make a distinction between attriters *before* and *after* puberty, in other words, *incomplete learners* vs. *L1 attriters*.

By means of questionnaires, free speech (semi-structured interview) and video retelling among others, the current study attempts to identify morphosyntactic features (the Russian case marking system and the verbs of motion encoding distinctions in terms of aspect, directionality, manner, and path that are not encoded in Spanish verbal system) as well as other possible grammatical deviations that are vulnerable to attrition. Given this brief outline, Russian L1 attriters before puberty (incomplete learners) are expected to show greater variation in the case marking system and verb system than the mature L1 attriters whose L1 system might remain immune to L2 effects.

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Jolanta Sypianska

VOT realisation in L1 Polish of two age groups of Polish emigrants in Denmark

The aim of the paper is to present Polish VOT realisations of word-initial voiceless plosives in two different age groups of Polish emigrants in Denmark. All participants have lived in Denmark over 10 years and have arrived there as adults (that is over 18). The first age group consists of 13 Polish Jews who emigrated from Poland due to the political persecution of Jews in the late 60s, the other group includes 12 Poles who emigrated due to the political persecution of the Solidarność activists in the 80s. Due to a significant difference in VOT for voiceless stops between Danish and Polish and the long stay of the emigrants in L2 country, a difference in VOT realisation in L1 Polish is foreseen for both groups of participants. This difference or attrition is understood as a deviation from the VOT measures of voiceless stops as produced by Polish people of the same age who live in Poland. The differences in VOT realisation between the two groups of participants are analysed with respect to age and the quality and quantity of L1 and L2 language use of the participants.

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Foreign Language Attrition and Multilingual Awareness

Anyone who has ever learnt a language and then not used it for a while will be familiar with the phenomenon of language attrition: skills that are not used become 'rusty'. Traditional models of first/second language acquisition have mainly worked with linear language growth models, and rarely accounted for negative or inverted growth. In their dynamic model of multilingualism (DMM) Herdina and Jessner (2002) consider attrition as an integral and normal part of language development itself.

Developing and maintaining any language system(s) requires effort; keeping up two or more disproportionately more so. Multilinguals, in whom multiple language (sub)systems compete for both time and cognitive resources, can therefore be considered as particularly vulnerable to language attrition. On the other hand, multilinguals are believed to develop additional (cognitive) abilities that are not found in monolinguals, or even in bilinguals. It is possible that this multilingual awareness may actually inhibit or slow language attrition, or help language users to compensate for the effects of attrition more easily.

The ongoing longitudinal project presented in this paper examines the development of multilingual awareness and foreign language proficiency after formal language learning ceases when participants graduate from high school. In contrast to many traditional language attrition studies, this study takes a multilingual approach, looking not at attrition in one, but in several languages in interaction. We will present the study and some preliminary results from the pilot group.

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Scott Jarvis

Building a case for transfer

As pointed out by Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999, p. 10), “the contemporary view of learning is that people construct new knowledge and understandings based on what they already know and believe.” If this is true—and furthermore if it is *always* true—then it is probably unavoidable that a person’s acquisition of a new language will be influenced by the knowledge of any language(s) that he or she has previously learned. This type of influence, which is commonly referred to as transfer or crosslinguistic influence, has been documented at all stages of acquisition and in practically all domains of language knowledge and use (see Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Odlin, 1989). It has also been documented in the reverse direction, with new learning in one language bringing about changes in a person’s knowledge of a previously acquired language (see, e.g., Cook, 2003; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

Despite the prevalence of crosslinguistic influence, researchers and theorists have discovered a number of possible constraints on its occurrence (see, e.g., Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Kellerman, 1983; Ringbom, 2007; Schachter, 1983). Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that transfer is negligible or even non-existent under certain conditions or in certain domains of language, such as morphology and syntax (Dulay & Burt, 1973; Eubank, 1993/1994; Håkansson, Pienemann, & Sayehli, 2002).

Crucially, researchers’ ability to confirm or falsify these claims and to clarify the conditions under which transfer is either likely or unlikely to occur requires a well developed, principled approach to determining definitively, accurately, and precisely when crosslinguistic influence has and has not occurred in the language use of language learners, bilinguals, and multilinguals.

This paper outlines the key components of the framework I propose regarding the achievement of argumentative rigor in building a case for or against the presence of crosslinguistic influence in a given sample of learner data. I describe how a case can be built on multiple, complementary arguments, each of which rests on its own set of premises and pieces of evidence. Additionally, I discuss the types of evidence that are relevant to each argument, how those types of evidence are gathered and interpreted, and ultimately how they contribute to the rigor of the argument.

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Laura Sanchez Perez

The impact of age on rate and route of acquisition in ab initio learners of L4 English

The study presented here contributes to the investigation of the age factor in multiple language acquisition, along with its interaction with input and the constraints it imposes on CLI. Drawing on a corpus of 122 Spanish/Catalan learners with L3 German and L4 English, the aim of the study is two-fold. It first inquires into the effects of biological age on CLI in the route of acquisition of VP headedness in L4 English. To this aim, data elicited from ab initio learners at the ages of 9.9 (n= 79) and 12.9 (n= 43) using a written narrative task were analysed after the same instructional time (66 hrs. of formal exposure only at school). Secondly, the study examined how instructional time affected rate of acquisition at different ages, as measured by learners' writing performance in the narrative task. The results concede (at least) an initial advantage to older learners under the same input conditions. Different-aged learners relied heavily on their L3 German, although the incidence of CLI from this language was significantly lower in older learners ($p= .038$) especially in main clauses with complex verb phrases ($p= .011$). As far as rate of acquisition is concerned, older learners were faster and they outperformed their younger peers. This was true above all in grammatical complexity (number of coordinate and subordinate clauses: $p=.014$ and $p=.001$; coordinate and subordinate clauses per sentence: $p=.001$ and $p=.000$), but also in accuracy (percentage of error-free sentences: $p=.037$), and in fluency (number of sentences: $p=.007$; words per sentence: $p=.015$). The evidence highlights the benefits of cognitive maturity on rate of acquisition, and it lends support to an interplay of biological age with input. This is the case even though a previously non-native language is systematically preferred over the L1 as the source language of influence irrespective of age.

Mandira Halder

Cross-linguistic influence in acquisition of possessive determiners in L3 German: An experimental study

The results of a study investigating cross linguistic influence in the acquisition of third person singular possessive determiners in L1 French, L2 English and L3 German are reported in this paper. Our study deals with three hypotheses. Firstly, transfer is possible from L1 French to L3 German since both languages agree between the grammatical gender and the possessed entity. Secondly, learners would rely on structural principles of gender assignment (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2007) in L1 French to attribute a default gender to possessed entities in L3 German. Thirdly, the recency of explicit learning experiences in L2 English, where gender agrees with possessor might influence the categorisation of the latter in L3 German. The participants are Francophone learners belonging to two different age groups in a middle school (11-13) and a high school (15-17) respectively. The study was conducted in experimental and controlled conditions. In the former, acquisition compatible grammar tasks with typographically enhanced input (White 1998) was administered to subjects and they were subsequently asked to explicate their language awareness. In the latter, input in acquisition tasks was not enhanced and metalinguistic explanations were omitted. The results show cumulative influence (Flynn et al. 2004) from L1 French and L2 English in acquisition of possession in L3 German. The results also show that language maintenance effort (Herdina & Jessner 2002) is inversely proportional to the language acquisition effort in the control group than in the experimental group. It is hypothesized that conceptual transfer of possession occurs across L1 French, L2 English and L3 German and is highly informative of metaphoric extensions and mental imagery of learners' representations conditioned by language-mediated concepts (Jarvis & Pavlenko 2007). We conclude that enhanced language awareness in the experimental group enabled learners to tackle the general cognitive effort in reconciling their shared representations (Zappatore 2003) of possession across languages.

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Tanja Gulan

Interlingual identifications in beginners and advanced learners of German and English as a foreign language at the university level

The aim of the study presented in this paper was to investigate whether positive transfer can be used as a strategy in foreign language learning. Various other studies (e.g., Weinreich 1953; Jarvis 2000; Ringbom 2001) point to the importance of interlingual identifications and students' so-called psychotypology, in cross-linguistic influence in the case of multiple language learning. In this study students' ability to identify specific linguistic elements was examined: modal particles and modalizing elements in Croatian, English and German, respectively. The study also investigated the learners' psychotypology, i.e. their assessments of the overall similarities between their L1, L2, and L3 with respect to English, German and Croatian. Cenoz (2001) reports that perceived transferability is a more important factor than the objective distance between languages. The development of a psychotypology is considered to be under the influence of the overall metacognitive development under which the metalinguistic development may be subsumed. Thus, it was assumed that beginners (1st year) and advanced learners (4th year students) would differ in their "psychotypology assessments" due to this claim.

All participants (N=148) were native Croatian speakers, and were students of German language and literature at Croatian universities either in their 1st or 4th year of study. Data relevant for their foreign language learning was gathered and was used in the analysis as a covariate. The results show that these two groups of students differ in their ability to identify target elements with respect to their L2. The test persons' assessment of similarity significantly correlates with the success in task performance only for the group of beginners.

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Jesse Snedeker

The end of innocence: Language acquisition in the preschool years

What role does biological maturation play in language acquisition? How do older learners differ from younger learners? At what point in development does the child's age of acquisition begin to influence the course of language development? To explore these questions we have been examining the acquisition of English in internationally-adopted children. Parental reports and speech samples were collected from 2-6 year old children, within the first year after they were adopted from China or Eastern Europe. Children who were adopted at two or three showed the same developmental patterns in language production as monolingual infants (matched for vocabulary size). Early on, their vocabularies were dominated by nouns and social words and the proportion of predicates and closed-class words increased with age. Thus shifts in lexical composition appear in older learners and are unlikely to reflect the development of new conceptual resources. Children who were adopted at four or five deviated from this pattern, acquiring fewer nouns and more predicates in the early stages of acquisition. Measures of syntactic complexity were also shaped by age. While complexity correlated with vocabulary in all groups, older preschoolers showed greater mastery of free-standing function words and less mastery of grammatical affixes than vocabulary-matched controls. In concert with previous findings (e.g., Meisel, 2009), our results suggest that the manner in which children acquire languages begins changing as early as four years of age.

SINERGIA project group

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Project ‘Multilingualism across the Lifespan’ (‘Mehrsprachigkeit und Lebensalter’)

The SINERGIA-project „Multilingualism across the Lifespan“, financed by the SNSF (Swiss National Science Foundation), started its work in October 2010. It comprises 12 researchers working on four different research projects at the Universities of Fribourg (Switzerland), Berne (Switzerland) and Lund (Sweden).

The project is based on a broad definition of multilingualism, which includes (very) partial competences in a foreign language. We do not focus on the ‘traditional’ age-related question regarding ultimate attainment of early vs. late learners. Instead, we are interested in the dynamics of the multilingual repertoire in certain age groups and at certain decisive points in the lifespan. The linguistic repertoire is conceived of as interacting with a person’s cognitive (e.g., working memory), social and affective resources – and therefore as being affected by changes in these resources across the lifespan.

The four subprojects approach this topic in different but complementary ways:

Project A deals with interlingual inferencing. Participants are asked to translate isolated spoken or written words from Swedish, which they have never learnt, into their L1 German. Task success is assumed to be dependent on the participants’ ability to draw on their first language (Swiss German) and foreign languages they know in order to fulfil this task. Both inferencing speed and accuracy are measured and compared across age groups.

Project C focuses on pragmatic processes in a foreign language. Participants are tested on their ability to act on syntactically and referentially ambiguous instructions by exploiting contextual factors during the pragmatic disambiguation process. They are asked to act out these instructions using a computer mouse and their response times, accuracy and mouse movements are recorded for analysis.

In project D we are interested in what happens in the first few minutes of contact with a completely new foreign language. After having watched a 7-minute weather report in Mandarin Chinese, participants perform a lexical decision task testing whether they can distinguish real Chinese words from nonwords violating Mandarin phonotactics. The study probes the capacity of learners at different ages to extract abstract linguistic information from the input after brief exposure.

Projects A, C and D rely on the same pool of participants for their experiments, which consists of Swiss Germans ranging from 10 to 85+ years of age.

Project B works with a different set of participants and is primarily concerned with sociolinguistic issues. It examines the impact of so-called ‘language-related major life events’ (e.g., retirement, commencement of university studies or an apprenticeship) on the multilingual repertoire. Combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the project aims to describe the linguistic development of the participants and the different social, cognitive and affective factors shaping it.

R. Harald Baayen

Generalized additive mixed-effect models and their application in psycholinguistic research

The generalized additive model (GAM) is an extension of the generalized linear model that makes it possible to study non-linear functional relations between one or more dependent variables and the response variable. Generalized additive mixed-effects models (GAMMs) offer the possibility of including subjects and items as random-effect factors along with fixed effect factors and covariates. Following an informal introduction to GAMs, I will provide examples of their application to data from dialectometry, ERPs, eye-movements, and reaction times. GAMs often provide substantially improved fits. However, the resulting models tend to be more difficult to interpret. For some data sets, computational models may well provide the only tool for a proper understanding of the quantitative structure revealed by a generalized additive model. GAMMs are implemented for R, and examples of how to fit GAMs to data sets will be presented.