

Language delay, language attrition, language loss. Early multilingualism and language development.
A case study

Sometimes it seems to us that speech therapists everywhere in the globe advice to raise the children in consistent monolingualism. One type of studies concludes that the multilingual environment reduces the SLI children's language production and development (Cheuk et al., 2005), and the other type declares it does not (Rothweiler, 2007), or even suggest the "bilingualism may be instructive for sequential bilingual children with SLI" (Armon-Lothem et al., 2010). Multilingualism usually not a dedicated "elite multilingualism" (*elective bilingualism*) but simply a "consequence of circumstances" (*circumstantial bilingualism*), it is not planned, it just happens.

Estonian is a rarely-spoken language. Its relative, Hungarian has fifteen times more native speaker, but the less one could be a dominant one as a majority-language in the migrants' life. This paper describes the language development of a Hungarian child holding developmental language disorder, who lived in Estonia between her age of 2;11 and 5;7. Exploring how she went trough two times the language attrition we must choose and follow a certain method. Separating the real language influences from the baby talk universals we must keep in mind the principles of Meisel. (Meisel, 1989)

The following examples illustrates fairly the change in her L1 and L2 dominance status:

Stage 1: dominant monolingual L1 (Hungarian) – age: cca. 2 years

L1

(1) *Ez* *mi* \emptyset ?

this what is

‘What’s this?’

Stage 2: dominant L2 interference with underdominance of L1 – First Language Attrition (FLA) – age: cca. 3;6 years

L1	L2
(2) * <i>Mi</i> <i>ez</i> <i>van?</i>	< <i>Mis</i> <i>see</i> <i>on?</i>
what this is	what this is

‘What’s this?’

Stage 3: dominant L1 – age: cca. 4;1 years

L1
(3) *Mi Ø ez?*
what is this
‘What’s this?’

These examples can be evidences of the of the attrition and loss if

- they are not baby talk universals (the influenced one is not an ordinary phase variant in the monolingual acquisition of the language),
- the child uses them regularly and persistently (they are not hapaxes),
- there are other similar and supporting examples of the language interference.

In our case the L2 interference ensued by the majority status of the Estonian. Other examples of L2 dominance and interference:

Interference of the complement

(4) **Hova* *felejtettet?*
where.to mislay.PAST.2SG

Estonian:

(5) *Kuhu* *unustasid?*
where.to mislay.PAST.2SG

Correct Hungarian:

(6) *Hol* *felejtettet?*
where mislay.PAST.2SG

Interference of the word order

(7) **Hova* *visszamenni* *akarsz?*
where.to back.go.INF want.2SG

(8) *Kuhu (sa) tagasi minna tahad?*
 where to (you) back go.INF want.2SG

(10) *Hova akarsz visszamenni?*
 where.to want.2SG' back.go.INF

Interference of the NP

In Estonian the adjectives agree with the nouns in case and number, but in Hungarian they does not.

(11) **Bemegyek a feketébe csoportba.*
 in.PREVgo.1SG ART black.ILLAT group.ILLAT

(12) *Lähén sisse mustasse rühmasse.*
 go.1SG in.ILLAT black.ILLAT group.ILLAT

(13) *Bemegyek a fekete csoportba.*
 'in.PREVgo.1SG ART black group.ILLAT

Loan translations

Influenced by Estonian homonyms „ära” prohibitive and „ära” preverb she replaced the Hungarian „meg” preverb with the Hungarian prohibitive „ne”, as in:

(14) **Ne'ettem.*
 PROH eat.PAST.2SG
 ‘*don't ate’

Correct Hungarian:

(15) *Megettem.*
 PREVERB.PAST.2SG
 ‘(I) ate (it).’

Estonian influence:

(15) *Ära söö.*
 PROH.SG eat
 ‘Don't eat.’

(16)	Söö	ära.
	eat.IMP.SG	away(PREVERB)
	‘Eat	up.’

She moved back to Hungary two years before. Surprisingly she can produce this Estonianisms sometimes – two years after her language loss.

The strong influence of Estonian could be the consequence of the child’s existing delay in her L1 acquisition (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukoma, 1976). Some of the researchers emphasize that how important to distinguish the bilingual SLI children not just by their age, gender, family type, and acquisition method but by the type of the involved languages too (Orgassa 2009).

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