

The Impact of Input in the Development of Harmonious Bilingualism in French-Russian Children

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Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of input in the harmonious development of bilingualism among French-Russian five-year-olds residing in France. Two types of early bilinguals are recruited, depending on the age of first regular exposure to Russian and French (Type 1: Bilingual First Language Acquisition, with exposure to both languages from birth; Type 2: Early Second Language Acquisition, with exposure to a single language from birth and exposure to a second language starting between age 1.5 and 4; De Houwer, 2009). The originality of this project lies in its investigation of three concepts that are rarely associated with each other, viz., well-being, input, and oral fluency; moreover, these are considered in the specific context of the acquisition of several languages. Given that oral fluency (as measured by, for instance, speech rate and average syllable duration) is an objective indicator of the ease with which people speak (Segalowitz, 2010; Skehan, 2003), it is hypothesized that young bilinguals assessed as being fluent will experience greater well-being linked to languages and their use. In contrast, children who speak a particular language less fluently could feel frustration with their multilingual situation, or even refuse to speak the language concerned. Fluency and a sense of well-being related to language are therefore closely linked. While input has been shown to play a major role in bilingual development (De Houwer, 2018; Pearson & Amaral, 2014; Unsworth, 2016), we do not yet have precise knowledge of the quantity and quality of input necessary to foster harmonious development in children growing up in a multilingual environment. The current project aims to gain more knowledge on this topic so that the conditions favorable to early bilingual development can be better identified. Such knowledge will hopefully help support more positive attitudes towards early bilingualism and through dissemination channels such as HaBilNet help raise awareness of the parents and educators concerned.

References

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Key words

harmonious bilingualism, input, oral fluency, early bilingualism, French, Russian, language development