DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 125 249 FL 007 476

AUTHOR Hamayan, Else; And Others
TITLE Differences in Performance in Elicited Imitation between French Monolingual and English-Speaking Bilingual Children. Working Papers on Bilingualism, No. 8.
INSTITUTION Ontario Inst. for Studies in Education, Toronto. Bilingual Education Project.
PUB DATE Feb 76
NOTE 30p.; For related documents, see FL 007 475-479
AVAILABLE FROM Bilingual Education Project, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1V6 (as long as supply lasts)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bilingual Education; Bilingual Schools; *Bilingual Students; *Error Patterns; French; *Imitation; Language Instruction; Language Programs; *Language Skills; *Memory; Native Speakers; *Second Language Learning
IDENTIFIERS *Immersion Programs; Quebec; Saint Lambert Program

ABSTRACT

This study represents an attempt to describe the second-language competence of English-speaking children who are learning French as a second language. The performance of fourth- and sixth-grade children taking part in a French immersion program was compared to that of French-speaking children of the same age using an elicited imitation task. The subjects' performance on eight syntactic features was measured. French-speaking children, in general, performed better than the English children. A consistent pattern of errors by the English children indicated that they possessed a rule system for several of the features which was different from that of the child native speakers. By giving a digit span task in both languages, it was possible to rule out a confounding memory factor which may have offered an advantage to French speakers in a sentence-repetition task. (Author)

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January, 1975

DIFFERENCES IN PERFORMANCE IN ELICITED IMITATION BETWEEN FRENCH MONOLINGUAL AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING BILINGUAL CHILDREN[1]

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Recently, the process of second-language acquisition has been compared to the process by which a child acquires his mother tongue (see, for example, Sampson & Richards, 1973; Tucker & d'Anglejan, 1974). Native language acquisition and second language acquisition are now viewed as analogous processes characterized by the development of rule-governed and creative behavior. Although different strategies may be used by native language learners and second language learners, the developmental pattern in each case is thought to be systematic and predictable (Brown, 1973; Kennedy, 1973; Sampson & Richards, 1973).

A series of investigations of second-language acquisition have suggested that the second-language learner's competence at a given stage in learning may be characterized as an internally consistent system, and that the different stages through which the learner progresses toward native-speaker competence may be described as though each stage possessed a

grammatical system of its own (Cook, 1969). If it can be assumed, as Corder (1971) and others have done, that the learner formulates generalizations about the target language which result in a reorganized linguistic output, and that errors occur as a result of the application of inappropriate rules to structures of the target language, then an analysis of the errors made by second-language learners may help us to understand better the process of second-language acquisition and may, of course, also have direct and immediate pedagogical implications (Cook, 1973; Dulay & Burt, 1972, 1974a, 1974b; Scott & Tucker, 1974; Selinker, 1972).

In the present study, the linguistic ability of a group of English-speaking elementary school children taking part in the St. Lambert program of home and school language switch was investigated. These children had received a large part of their schooling in French (for a description of this program, see Bruck, Lambert & Tucker, in press a, in press b; Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Their performance on a French sentence-repetition task was compared to the performance of French-speaking pupils of the same age who were attending French language schools. The present study extended a recent investigation by Markman, Spilka and Tucker (1974) in which the French language competence of children following the same program had also been examined. Markman et al. had compared

the performance of third and fifth grade English-speaking children to the performance of French-speakers on a repetition task constructed specifically to test competence on selected French linguistic features. In general, the native speakers repeated correctly significantly more of the various stimulus sentences than did the second language learners. It was not possible to interpret the results of this study unambiguously, since either of two factors could have affected the students' performance: first, a memory factor which might have been based on familiarity with, and exposure to, French; second, an "internalized grammar" factor which facilitated the production of structures according to the child's own interim grammar--whether grammatical or deviant.

In the present study, we attempted to examine, in more precise terms, the French language competence of English-speaking bilingual children in the St. Lambert program, as compared to that of native speakers of the same age group. The methodology used in this study was again that of sentence repetition or elicited imitation. This methodology has been widely used to tap the linguistic competence of groups of language learners. It was popularized by Slobin and Welsh (1973) who used the technique to study first-language acquisition, and was later used to investigate second-language learning (Cook, 1973; Hamayan, Saegert & Larudee, 1974). The

validity of the technique rests on the assumption that the child, or the second-language learner, when presented with a sentence longer than his immediate memory span, will pass it through a type of filter--his interim grammar--before repeating it. If a specific syntactic feature is not part of an individual's grammar, that element will be distorted during production. Thus we hope that by observing the deviations made by learners, we can begin to draw inferences about the transitional rule systems they are using at various stages of second-language exposure or study.

We had three major objectives in the present study. First, we wanted to compare the performance of English-speaking children on a sentence repetition task, using eight French linguistic features, to that of French monolingual children of the same age. Second, we hoped to eliminate the possibility of a confounding memory factor by measuring the subjects' (Ss') performance on a digit span task. By comparing the digit span of the two groups in their respective mother tongues, and the digit span of the Bilingual children in their two languages, we could make some statement about the children's differential memory capacities in the two languages. Third, we wanted to obtain a measure of how consistent the Ss were in their responses; so we gave all Ss three presentations of each linguistic feature and noted the consistency of their

responses across these three presentations.

Method

Subjects. Sixty fourth- and sixth-grade children participated in the study: one half of the Ss were English-speaking children who were enrolled in the St. Lambert program of home and school language switch (Bilingual group); the other half were French-speaking children selected from a French Catholic school in Montreal (French Control group). Equal numbers of Ss were chosen from the two grade levels.

Tasks. Digit Span: the digit span task from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children was given to all Ss using the standard instructions. The task was given to the Bilingual Ss in French and in English, and to the French Control Ss in French only. Elicited imitation: the following eight syntactic features were chosen from the study by Markman, et al. (1974): pour que + subjunctive, que + subjunctive, à, en, y, pendant, alors, and ça fait que. A 24 sentence stimulus list was constructed using these eight features, with each feature appearing three times. The first eight sentences on the list were original presentations of each of the eight features. These sentences are presented in Appendix A. The next eight stimuli were different sentences using the same

eight features. These sentences are presented in Appendix B. The length of any sentence was controlled for the two versions of the feature. For example, the original sentence for the feature pour que + subjunctive was: J'ai donné des crayons à Francois pour qu'il fasse un beau dessin, and the variant for that same feature was: J'ai acheté de la farine à maman pour qu'elle fasse un bon gâteau. The last eight sentences on the list were repetitions of the original sentences. The order of presentation of the features was varied across each of the three groups of sentences.

The sentences were constructed with words which were assumed to be within the vocabulary range of fourth- and sixth-grade children. The stimulus sentences were recorded by a French Canadian male speaker on a Uher 4000 Report L tape recorder. The interval between sentences was approximately 15 seconds.

Procedure. The Ss were tested individually in an empty classroom in their school. Two experimenters conducted the study--one operated the tape recorder and gave all English instructions; the other gave the instructions which were in French and recorded each S's responses on stenciled data sheets which contained the stimulus sentences in the order of their appearance on tape.

The Ss were first given the digit span test in their

mother tongue. Next, the Ss were told in French that they would hear a recorded voice saying sentences; they were told to listen carefully and to repeat as accurately as possible what they heard on tape. The tape recorder was stopped after each sentence to give Ss enough time to repeat the sentences. After the elicited imitation task, the bilingual Ss were given the digit span test, this time in French. To control for familiarity, the numbers were read backwards.

Method of analysis. Digit span: t tests comparing the digit spans of French Control Ss in French and of Bilingual Ss in English were run for each grade separately. We also ran t tests on the Bilingual Ss' digit spans in English and French, for each grade separately.

Elicited Imitation. Each S's response was assigned to one of the following categories:

1. Accurate repetition: the repetition was word perfect or contained only lexical substitutions which retained the meaning of the sentence.
2. Omission: the response was omitted, bore no resemblance to the stimulus sentence, or was meaningless (e.g., J'aime la confiture pour demain).
3. Inexact, feature retained: the response included some grammatical error, but the syntactic feature of interest was left intact (e.g., On n'avait pas

d'école, alors on a allé avec des amis).

4. Feature inexact: the syntactic feature of interest was distorted or omitted (e.g., J'ai donné des crayons à Francois pour qu'il fait un beau dessin).

The data for each of the eight stimulus features were analyzed separately. Separate two-way analyses of variance were performed for each stimulus feature and for each of the four response categories. Thus, there were 32 analyses in all. Grade level and language background were the two independent variables. The dependent variable was the score for each S over the three presentations of each feature· thus, a Ss' maximum score in each of the above analyses was three.

Results

Digit Span. The sixth grade bilinguals' digit span in English was significantly greater than the French Control Ss' digit span in French ($t = 2.23$, $p < .025$). There was no significant difference, however, at the Grade 4 level. Moreover, there was no difference in the performance of bilinguals from either grade level in English and French although the trend was for their digit span in French to be greater than that in English.

The digit span was assumed to give us an indication of

general memory capacity for English and French. Insofar as digit span represents a storage capacity for sentences, it may be concluded from the above results that a memory factor dependent upon familiarity with, and exposure to French did not bias the elicited imitation results obtained in the present study. In other words, a superior performance by French monolingual Ss on the sentence repetition task cannot be attributed to an additional memory capacity in their mother tongue.

Elicited imitation. In general, the results of the various analyses of variance indicated significantly better performance by the French control Ss than the bilinguals. Furthermore, the age factor was significant in many cases, with sixth graders performing better than fourth graders. For ease of presentation, of the different analyses, the most interesting significant outcomes will be pointed out for each of the four categories of scoring.

Accurate repetitions. There was a significant language effect for each of the eight features. The control Ss consistently repeated significantly more accurate sentences than the Bilingual Ss. For three of the features (à, y, and alors), the older children performed significantly better than the younger ones (see Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Omission. Significantly more Bilingual Ss omitted sentences, or responded with nonsensical repetitions than did French Control Ss for the following features: en, pendant, que + subjunctive, y, and ça fait que. In the last three features, there was a significant age effect, with the younger Ss omitting more sentences than the older Ss (see Table 2).

Inexact, feature retained. For four of the features (à, y, pendant, and alors), the Bilingual Ss produced significantly more inexact responses than did the French Control Ss. For the feature pour que + subjunctive, the order was reversed, that is, there were more inexact sentences in the French Control Ss' responses than in those of the Bilingual Ss'. For the y feature, the younger Ss repeated more inexact sentences than the older ones; however, in ça fait que, significantly more inexact sentences appeared in older Ss' responses than in younger Ss' (see Table 3).

Feature inexact. A significant language effect was obtained on each of the features such that Bilingual Ss produced significantly more repetitions in which the feature of interest was distorted or missed than did the French Control Ss. A significant age effect was obtained for the feature en,

such that younger Ss distorted or missed the feature more often than the older Ss (see Table 4).

INSERT TABLES 2, 3, AND 4 ABOUT HERE

Consistency of responses across the different presentations of each feature was checked by calculating the percentage of scores which were either correct or incorrect on the original version and the repetition. In general, the responses were fairly consistent; the consistency scores for each of the eight syntactic features and for each of the four groups are presented in Table 5. There are clearly language differences in the amount of consistency in responses, with French Control Ss responding in more consistent fashion than the Bilingual Ss. Furthermore, for descriptive purposes only, the mean accurate repetition score (out of a possible three) for each group was calculated (see Table 6).

INSERT TABLES 5 AND 6 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

The performance of the Bilingual Ss' is clearly different from that of the French Control Ss. The Bilingual Ss' do not perform so well as the French Control Ss. However, certain consistencies do characterize the behavior of the Bilingual Ss. Their behavior in certain instances suggests that they too may be behaving in a rule-governed, albeit different, manner on certain portions of the test.

The order of difficulty of repetition of the eight syntactic features was quite different ($\rho = 58$, NS) for the two groups (see Table 7). Furthermore, the Bilingual Ss did not seem to be so efficient as the French Control Ss in dealing with the eight syntactic features that were presented to them.

INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

The possibility that a memory factor offered an advantage to the French Controls in retaining the stimulus sentences was ruled out. Hence, it may be said that the difference in performance between the French Control Ss and the Bilingual Ss resulted from the difference between the internalized grammars that the Ss used in their production of sentences. The data

indicate that a fairly consistent pattern exists in both French Control and Bilingual Ss' responses. The French Control Ss produced sentences that were to a very large extent similar to the model sentences. Moreover, they repeated the syntactic feature of interest correctly most of the time. In that sense, one might say that their grammar for those eight features coincides with the competence which a grammarian would posit for adult native speakers.

The Bilingual Ss' performance, on the other hand, seems to indicate an internalized grammar system that is still in a developing state, and that is different from the standard grammar of adult native speakers. For example, it was possible to observe typical and consistent patterns of error for a few of the features. The percentage of responses which showed a typical error for each feature over the number of inaccurate responses was calculated.

1. Pour que + subjunctive and que + subjunctive. These features which involve the use of the subjunctive form of the verb seem to be rather difficult to acquire. The Ss showed a tendency to use the present indicative form of the verb instead of the subjunctive. For example, they said qu'il fait, rather than saying qu'il fasse. For

pour que, 35% of the fourth graders' responses, and 54% of the sixth graders' responses showed that error. It is surprising that such a large percent of the sixth graders produced that error. It may be due to simplification, which is the application of a general rule to a more specific case not requiring that rule. For que, 53% of the fourth graders' responses, and 69% of the sixth graders' responses showed that same type of error.

2. en: The deletion of en in the sentence J'aime la confiture, j'en mets sur mes rôtis le matin occurred in the fourth graders' responses more frequently (46% of all incorrect responses) than it did in the sixth graders' responses (23%).
3. pendant: This feature was replaced by pour in a sentence like L'année derniere il a fait soleil pendant 45 jours 43% of the time by fourth graders, and 44% of the time by sixth graders.
4. y: This feature did not elicit a uniform error, but involved an interesting deviation. When the feature was deleted, the y sound was introduced into the verb; for example, in the stimulus sentence Est-ce-que vous y allez des fois, vous

autres?, the verb was changed to alliez and irez.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be said that by using a sentence repetition task, with groups of native speakers and second-language learners, insights may be gained about the production system that a language learner is using at a given time in his learning. The differences between first- and second-language learners, as well as learners of different ages or types of experience should certainly be investigated further. The present study can be extended in a number of ways; it would be interesting, for example, to investigate the child's awareness of errors, that is, the extent to which a child can distinguish between an erroneous utterance and a grammatical one. It would also be interesting to go beyond these basic syntactic features and to attempt to study the acquisition of structures of different syntactic and semantic complexities. Finally, it would be interesting to probe more deeply the specific language abilities of these children in an attempt to reconcile the findings by Bruck, Lambert and Tucker (in press a); Lambert, Tucker and d'Anglejan (1973) and Lambert and Tucker (1972) that English-speaking children following a program of home and school language switch develop a sufficient

mastery of French to enable them to use that language effectively as a medium of communication and instruction and the present results which suggest that their grammatical system is still very different from that used by same-aged native speakers.

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Footnotes

1. This research was supported, in part, by grants from the Canada Council and the Defence Research Board to W.E. Lambert and G.R. Tucker. The authors wish to thank Alison d'Anglejan for her comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2. Now at Yeshiva University.

Table 1

Cell Means and F ratios in the Two-way Analyses of Variance for Accurate Repetitions for each of the Eight Syntactic Features.

	CELL MEANS				F RATIOS		
	Bilingual Group		French Control Group				
	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade	Language	Interaction
Pourque + subjunctive	.47	.20	2.60	2.27	3.06	150.18**	.04
que + subjunctive	.33	1.00	2.93	2.73	1.68	144.98**	5.80*
à	.40	1.07	2.13	2.60	6.15*	51.08**	.19
en	.20	.33	2.27	2.27	.14	121.74**	.14
y	.40	1.13	2.00	2.73	15.98**	76.08**	0
pendant	.53	1.13	2.47	2.47	1.49	58.14**	1.49
ça fait que	.27	.47	2.40	2.27	.03	111.26**	.80
alors	.20	.47	1.47	2.33	5.07*	38.75**	1.42

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 2

Cell Means and F ratios in the Two-way Analyses of Variance for Omissions for each of the Eight Syntactic Features.

	CELL MEANS				F RATIOS		
	Bilingual Group		French Control Group				
	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade	Language	Interaction
pour que + subjunctive	.20	.07	0	0	1.07	2.97	1.07
que + subjunctive	.67	.20	0	0	4.70*	16.21**	4.70*
à	.73	.40	.27	.13	1.46	3.62	.27
en	.60	.87	.07	.07	.55	13.72**	.55
y	.93	.27	.13	.13	6.83*	12.70**	4.57*
pendant	.33	.40	.07	.13	.07	5.45*	.07
ça fait que	1.40	.33	.07	0	11.30**	24.44**	8.80**
alors	.27	0	0	0	3.03	3.03	3.03

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 3

Cell Means and F ratios in the Two-way Analyses of Variance for Inexact, Feature Retained for each of the Eight Syntactic Features.

	CELL MEANS				F RATIOS		
	Bilingual Group		French Control Group				
	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade	Language	Interaction
Pour que + subjunctive	.20	.20	.40	.73	1.35	6.52*	1.35
que + subjunctive	.13	.13	.07	.07	0	.51	0
à	1.00	.80	.40	.27	.81	9.32**	.32
en	.27	.40	.20	.60	2.65	.16	.66
y	.73	.27	.20	.07	6.75*	10.08**	2.08
pendant	.60	.80	.27	.20	.28	5.35*	.79
ça fait que	.47	1.33	.33	.67	8.46**	3.76	1.67
alors	1.40	1.53	.87	.60	.06	6.78*	.50

* $p < 05$

** $p < 01$

Table 4

Cell Means and F ratios in the Two-way Analyses of Variance for sentences with Feature Inexact for each of the Eight Syntactic Features.

	CELL MEANS				F RATIOS		
	Bilingual Group		French Control Group				
	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade 4	Grade 6	Grade	Language	Interaction
pourque + subjunctive	2.13	2.53	0	0	1.72	166.64**	1.72
que + subjunctive	1.87	1.67	0	.20	0	79.18**	1.14
à	.87	.73	.20	0	.86	15.21**	.03
en	1.93	1.40	.47	.07	6.72*	60.53**	.14
y	.93	1.33	.67	.07	.24	14.30**	6.08*
pendant	1.47	.67	.20	.20	3.97	18.63**	3.97
ça fait que	.87	.87	.20	.07	.11	13.77**	.11
alors	1.13	1.00	.67	.07	2.17	7.92**	.88

* $p < 05$

** $p < 01$

TABLE 5

Consistency scores (percentage of responses which were correct or incorrect on both the original and the repetition) for each of the eight features and each of the four groups.

	Bilingual		French Control	
	4	6	4	6
pour que + subjunctive	53	60	100	100
que + subjunctive	47	60	100	93
à	40	47	80	93
en	47	13	87	93
y	7	20	50	87
pendant	27	53	87	87
ça fait que	13	53	73	93
alors	47	80	80	100

TABLE 6

Mean Accurate Repetition Scores (out of a possible maximum of three) for each of the Four Groups.

	Bilingual Group	French Control Group
Grade 4	0.35	2.28
Grade 6	0.73	2.46

TABLE 7

Order of Difficulty of Repetition of the Eight Syntactic Features for Bilingual and French Control Ss

	French Control Group	Bilingual Group
que + subjunctive	1	4
pendant	2	1
pour que + subjunctive	3	6.5
y	4.5	2
à	4.5	3
ça fait que	6	5
en	7	8
alors	8	6.5

Appendix A

Original Presentations of each of the
Eight Syntactic Features.

1. Est-ce que vous y allez des fois, vous autres?

2. J'aime la confiture, j'en mets sur mes rôties le matin.

3. Jean donne à manger à son chien avant le souper.

4. Je veux qu'il vienne seulement le dimanche après-midi.

5. J'ai donné des crayons à Francois pour qu'il fasse un beau dessin.

6. On n'avait pas d'école, alors on est allé jouer chez des amis.

7. L'année dernière il a fait soleil pendant 45 jours.

8. Le bébé pleurait, ça fait que la maman l'a pris dans ses bras.

Appendix B

Different Sentences Using the Same
Eight Syntactic Features.

1. J'ai mal aux dents, ça fait que je suis allé chez le dentiste.

2. Tu veux d'autres chocolats, mais tu en as plein la bouche encore.

3. J'ai acheté de la farine à maman, pour qu'elle fasse un bon gâteau.

4. J'aimerais qu' il vienne au mariage de mon frère aîné.

5. Est-ce que tu y crois à cette histoire-là?

6. Ce que tu m'as raconté hier est difficile à croire.

7. Nous n'avions pas de travail, alors nous sommes allés magasiner.

8. La semaine derniere, nous sommes allés à la campagne pendant 3 jours.