Multilingual learning in French immersion contexts: Age and socioeconomic factors

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Children master different verb-inflection patterns based on default status and reliability [1, 2]. We investigated verb production in French children and adult, monolinguals (L1) and multilinguals (MUL). We hypothesized that L1 and MUL participants would process verb inflection patterns differently [3] based on their default status and reliability [2] due to less exposure to the language [4]. Adult L1 but not MUL speakers were expected to show strongest verb production abilities.

Verbs were elicited in 238 L1 and MUL French speakers: A first group of 162 children (70 MUL) and 36 adults (11 MUL) were in French school or work contexts for one to five years. Children were preschoolers and first-graders from a high SES suburb of Montreal. A second group of 40 children came from a low SES suburb (30 MUL). Twenty-four French verbs with regular, sub-regular, and irregular participles were elicited in the past tense (6 each, ending in –é /é/, sub-regular –i, third conjugation –u /y/, and idiosyncratic forms). Verbs were presented in infinitive and present tenses with an image. Participants were prompted for target verb forms with a question (see example in Figure 1).

Models using logistic regression analyses for target responses in the first group showed no language status effects (L1 = MUL). Group (adults, children), and verb type effects, as well as a significant interaction of these factors, were found (Figure 2). The pattern [é = i = u < idiosyncratic] is observed in adults and children with subtle differences. Age and parental education modulated child results. Contrary to expectations, all groups showed strengths on default patterns and sensitivity to sub-regularity. Thus, MUL speakers can master French verb patterns to the same level as L1 speakers in immersive school and work contexts (contra [3]). Further analyses including the low SES group will be presented.
Figure 1: Example of verb elicitation for *cacher* ‘to hide’ using the *Jeu de Verbes* ‘verb game’ Android application.

Figure 2: Participant group (adults vs. children) and verb type effects on production of the passé compose in French.

References