The impact of siblings vs. peers on the German language acquisition of Viennese bilingual children

PROJECT AIMS & RELEVANCE

The aim of this research project is to investigate the influence of siblings and peers on children's language acquisition, focusing on lexicon acquisition, grammar, pragmatics and reading. The project will show, what impact siblings and peers have on kindergarten and elementary school children as well as why and how the variables of sibling and peer impact should be considered in educational programs. It will be discussed, for example, whether it is good practice to separate siblings in kindergarten and school classes and whether children of different ages should be in the same class together.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**RQ1:** What is the impact of siblings on Viennese children’s (second) language acquisition in bilingual vs. monolingual families?

**RQ2:** What is the impact of siblings vs. peers on Viennese (bilingual) children’s (second) language acquisition?

HYPOTHESES RQ1

**Lexicon:**

a) Firstborn monolinguals show better receptive and productive vocabulary skills than later born children before they reach the 50-word milestone [1]

b) There are no birth order effects for children’s vocabulary skills after reaching the 50-word milestone [1], [2]

c) Later born monolinguals have an advantage in the acquisition of pronouns and verbal prefixes compared to firstborns [2], [3]

**Grammar:**

a) Monolingual firstborn children show better grammatical skills than monolingual later born children [4]

b) Bilingual children either show no birth order effects [4] or bilinguals with school-aged older siblings show better second language skills [5]

**Pragmatics:**

a) Older siblings play an important role in the pragmatic development of preschool-aged monolinguals [6], [7]

b) Successive bilinguals with older siblings hear their second language more often than bilinguals without older siblings and thus show better second language skills [5], [8]

**Reading:**

a) Engaging in literacy practices is beneficial to younger and older siblings [9], [10]

b) The number of siblings has a negative effect on reading skills [11]

c) Sibling gender has no influence on reading practices [11]

HYPOTHESES RQ2

**a) Children who spend more time with their siblings than with peers show better language skills than children who spend more time with their peers that with their siblings. They also have better German grades at school [12], [13]**

**b) The impact of siblings on (second) language acquisition is rated as more influential by children and their parents than the impact of peers**

REFERENCES


