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Language development of bilingual children

A case study in the acquisition of tense and aspect in an Italian-Indonesian child

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ABSTRACT

This paper¹ describes the development of temporal expressions in a bilingual child acquiring two typologically distinct languages: Italian and Indonesian.² These languages differ from one another in the way tense and aspect are encoded and it is interesting to observe what kind of cross-linguistic influence one language system has on the other. Italian verbs are heavily inflected for person, number as well as for tense, aspect and mood, whereas, in Indonesian, the encoding of tense and aspect is lexical rather than morphological; moreover encoding is optional when the context is sufficiently clear. This means that tense and aspect in Indonesian is often marked pragmatically rather than grammatically. This paper considers the interference effects that result from simultaneously acquiring these two typologically distinct systems.

KEY WORDS

Child bilingualism, Italian, Indonesian, tense, aspect, cross-linguistic structures, interference.

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² Indonesian referred to in this paper is the colloquial variety mainly spoken in Jakarta also defined Jakarta Indonesian (JI), as opposed to Standard Indonesian (SI). Throughout the text both the definition of Jakarta Indonesian and Indonesian are used to refer to the same linguistic entity. Many of the features discussed in the paper are shared by Standard Indonesian. As far as Italian is concerned, the language referred to here is the standard version together with the regional variant spoken in the Southern area of Campania. Occasionally instances of Neapolitan dialect are used. Unless particularly necessary all the utterances are referred to as Italian.

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