

Foreign Accent in Heritage Speakers

Tanja Kupisch

Since Benmamoun et al. (2013: 140) observed that research on heritage speakers' (HS) phonology has "barely scratched the surface", studies in this field of research have grown constantly (see, Chang 2021 for an overview). Also in the field of child bilingual development (ages 1-4 years), studies on phonology have very good coverage (see Kehoe 2018, in press for overviews). However, the two research fields have developed independently (despite the fact that many child bilinguals are HS), and they have produced at least partially contradictory results. Research on the phonological development in child bilinguals points to *bidirectional* (*cross-linguistic*) influence, while adult HS tend to show *unidirectional* influence from their majority to their heritage language. If valid, these findings raise the question at what point, between early childhood and adulthood, CLI shifts from operating bi-directionally to being largely unidirectional. It has often been mentioned that one decisive moment is when children enter school and are massively exposed to the societal majority language (Montrul 2008, 2016). However, there few studies looking at bilingual children during their early school years. Montrul (2018) has referred to this as "the missing link".

Herein, I present two studies on the perceived accents of primary school children who grow up as simultaneous or early sequential bilingual children in Germany (Study 1 on German-Russian bilinguals, Study 2 on German-Italian bilinguals). In Study 1, younger children are more likely to be perceived a foreign-sounding in the majority language, while older children tend to be perceived as more foreign-sounding in the heritage language. In Study 2, there is no effect of age. Instead, most children are deemed native in the majority language, while perceived nativeness in the minority language depends on the amount of language use. Together, the results suggests that the phonological systems of the primary school children are still malleable, that the amount of expose is sufficient for developing a native accent in the majority language, while the development of the heritage language is highly dependent on language experience.