

The development of conversational turn-prediction abilities in bilingual toddlers

Marina Kalashnikova^{1,2}

¹Basque Center on Cognition, Brain and Language (BCBL); ²Ikerbasque Basque Foundation for Science
m.kalashnikova@bcbl.eu

In conversations, speakers accurately identify when it is their turn to speak by predicting the completion of their interlocutor's conversational turns (CT). Adults rely on contextual, lexico-syntactic, and prosodic information, but all this information is not available to young children. Monolingual one-year-olds rely solely on prosodic cues to CT completion, especially in infant-directed speech (IDS). The ability to rely on lexico-syntactic cues appears after 36 months of age.

This study investigated early turn-taking abilities in bilingual children who face the additional challenge of learning prosodic and lexico-syntactic cues to CT completion in each of their languages. We administered an eye-tracking anticipatory looking paradigm to 30-month-olds (N=20) acquiring Spanish and Basque (M dominant language exposure =53.14%), two languages that differ drastically in prosodic, lexical, and syntactic structure. Toddlers watched puppets conversing in Spanish or Basque IDS or adult-directed speech (ADS) (three one-minute conversations per register/language). To test toddlers' reliance on prosodic vs. lexico-syntactic cues, CT completion was marked by prosodic and lexico-syntactic cues in half the utterances in each conversation but only by lexico-syntactic cues in the other half.

Toddlers anticipated CT completion more accurately when prosodic cues were available, but performance did not differ across languages and speech registers (Fig. 1). Bilingual toddlers thus benefit from access to prosodic cues to CT completion in their two languages, even when hearing the less familiar ADS. These results will be discussed in relation to bilingual children's degree of exposure to each language and the language-specific prosodic properties of bilingual IDS and ADS.

Fig. 1. Bilingual toddlers' proportion of correct anticipation of CT completions in Spanish and Basque IDS and ADS conversations

