

Competing Factors for Language Acquisition in Diglossic Environments: Languages, Metalanguages and the Socio-Syntax of Development Hypothesis

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The linguistic reality of Cyprus is diglossic (e.g. Papapavlou & Pavlou 1998, Tsiplakou *et al.* 2006; for a recent overview, see Arvaniti, in press), where the ‘low’ variety of Cypriot Greek (CG) co-exists with the ‘high’ Standard Modern Greek (SMG), which is also the variety spoken in Greece (where no generalized diglossia exists). The two varieties have been argued to differ in terms of clitic placement in declaratives with CG and SMG requiring enclisis and proclisis, respectively. Grohmann *et al.* (2010) investigate the acquisition of object clitics in monolingual Greek Cypriot typically developing (TD) and language-impaired (LI) children aged 3;0–5;11, and conclude that object clitics are acquired by age 3. Leivada *et al.* (forthcoming) readdress the issue of acquisition of object clitic placement, yet approaching it from the other aspect of diglossia in Cyprus, that is, by examining the placement of object clitics in children from mainland Greece, native in the ‘high’ variety, as well as Greek Cypriot children, by presenting them with two versions of the same task, one for each variety. Both studies employed a picture-based task from COST Action A33 (Varlokosta *et al.*, to appear) in which children had to complete 12 sentences, inside a *because*-island, by producing a verb and direct object clitic, similar to Tsakali & Wexler’s (2003) elicited production of clitic-shaped D-linked definite objects, replicating Schaeffer (1997).

We discuss the findings of both studies and draw a comparison of the alternative proposals made with respect to the linguistic development of these children, who despite living in the same linguistic environment follow different patterns of acquisition in terms of deciphering linguistic input. The fact that some Greek Cypriot children who performed 100% non-target placement in the CG version commented on their performance or on the experiment’s pictures in CG, suggests that especially in bilingual populations, children are metalinguistically aware. If Crain & Fodor (1987) are right in suggesting that metalanguage is innate as a medium of representation used to encode observations about language, the link between enhanced metalinguistic abilities and multilingualism established in Bialystock (1991) and Jessner (2005) becomes relevant also for diglossic environments like the one in Cyprus (see Ibrahim 2009 for Arabic). The question raised here is whether the performance of Greek Cypriot children is an instance of code-mixing, as a result of bidialectism, or a(n) (un)conscious demonstration of metalinguistic awareness driven by linguistic anxiety to (show that they are able to) speak ‘properly’. Regarding Greek Cypriot children, entrance in public school could explain the sudden rise of proclisis percentages in Greek Cypriot children at age 4;6–5;11. This can be associated with meta- or sociolinguistic factors; a suggested first factor is what we call the Socio-Syntax of Development Hypothesis. Findings of Leivada *et al.* (see Tables 1–2) do not relate this performance with sociolinguistic factors, such as the school place as a social institution or the social unfamiliarity of the children with the investigator, that could result in the use of ‘formal’ language, i.e. SMG and proclisis. Hence, the same sociolinguistic factors were relevant for Greek Cypriot children, aged 4;6–5;11, in both testings; still, they significantly changed from enclisis to proclisis when taking the different versions of the test. Also, although the Socio-Syntax of Development Hypothesis works for Greek Cypriot children, it remains to be explained why the socio-syntactic development of SMG-speaking children does not go through the same stages. Table 1 shows that, while CG-speaking children of age 4;6–5;11 get affected by input coming from school, SMG-speaking children do not: Their clitic placement remains unaltered, despite CG input from classmates.

Following Bates & MacWhinney’s (1987) view that there is very little evidence for a single sequence of acquisition of grammatical forms, we examine different patterns of (the acquisition of) clitic placement in SMG and CG and suggest that competing factors are relevant for the socio-syntactic development of different populations in diglossic environments like the one in Cyprus. Our current view of the Socio-Syntax of Development Hypothesis captures the existence of these factors by assuming that the linguistic development of Greek Cypriot children primarily involves the need to resolve linguistic anxiety and adjust to the ‘high’ variety. This is a need SMG-speaking children lack: Their socio-syntactic development involves the need to decipher different sources of input so as to remain to the ‘high’ variety.

Age groups	Mainland Greek children (speakers of SMG)				Greek Cypriot children (speakers of CG)			
	SMG version of the test		CG version of the test		SMG version of the test		CG version of the test	
	clitic production	target placement (proclisis)	clitic production	target placement (enclisis)	clitic production	target placement (proclisis)	clitic production	target placement (enclisis)
3;0-4;5	78.6%	100%	79.8%	2.9%	91.7%	46.5%	72.2%	96.1%
4;6-5;11	91.7%	100%	96.7%	0.8%	97.5%	98.3%	90.8%	39.4%
6;0-7;5	95.0%	100%	99.2%	0%	98.3%	83.1%	96.7%	50.8%
7;6-8;11	100%	99.2%	100%	3.3%	99.1%	100%	94.4%	37.2%

Table 1: Clitic production and placement of SMG and CG speaking children (Leivada et al., forthcoming)

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