

*Ek wil 'n bietjie water *(hê) !*

Grammatical transfer in typologically closely related languages: learning Afrikaans as a heritage language in the Netherlands

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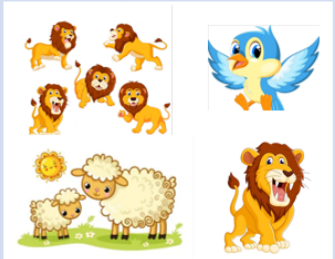
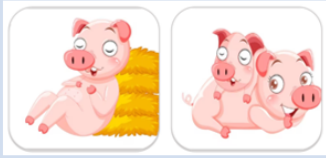
Background and Main Aim. As in most Western European countries, the multilingual context of today's Dutch society has given rise to different kinds of multilingual speakers ranging from those who may be considered native speakers in two languages to those who do not reach native competence in their home language or in Dutch. This study is concerned with child heritage speakers of Afrikaans who are living in the Netherlands and raised by two Afrikaans native-speaking parents in the Netherlands, resulting in some degree of bilingualism in both Afrikaans and Dutch.

In a small pilot-project we intend to get a clearer picture of the grammatical development of Afrikaans as a heritage language, identifying potential effects of grammatical transfer of the community language on the inflectional morphology and syntax of Afrikaans in children between 4 and 6 years of age. Given that Dutch and Afrikaans are typologically closely related languages, the language pair offers a unique opportunity to investigate to what extent very subtle differences between the two languages give rise to grammatical transfer. Our aim is to focus both on 'simplification' and 'complexification' strategies: we will be looking at potential sources of incomplete or delayed acquisition of the Afrikaans heritage grammar based on grammatical structures that are absent in Dutch as compared to Afrikaans (e.g. double negation) but also at properties that are specific to Dutch only and may lead to (non-native like) complexity in the grammar of Afrikaans (e.g. subject-verb agreement).

Method and Results. Starting point for the assessment of morpho-syntactic development is the Afrikaans CHILDES database (Southwood, 2006) which provides normative data on the morpho-syntactic abilities of typically developing Afrikaans-speaking preschool children and the results of a series of language tests that assess the comprehension and production of grammatical features related to number, person, case, and tense. As they were shown to elicit a high number of both correct and usable responses, we will use an adapted version of the four-picture selection task and language sample elicitation task developed by (Southwood, 2005) to assess grammar comprehension and production in Afrikaans-speaking children. Regarding syntactic development we will use the same type of tasks to assess binding relations, the use of have/be as auxiliaries, constituent doubling and sentence negation. Examples of the test items are given in Figure 1.

Given that this pilot study is part of an ongoing PhD project, we will provide the outcomes of a small multi-case study with 2 heritage-speaking children of Afrikaans living in the Netherlands, 2 native-speaking children of Afrikaans living in South-Africa, and 2 native-speaking children of Dutch living in the Netherlands. The children are between 4 and 6 years old and are matched as closely as possible for the 3 subgroups based on age, gender and SES. As the test items have been selected to include minimal differences between Dutch and Afrikaans, they will enable us to show the results of fine-grained transfer between the dominant language (Dutch) and the heritage language (Afrikaans) both with respect to potential simplification and complexification.

Figure 1. Examples of the test items used in the comprehension and production tasks

COMPREHENSION (picture selection)		PRODUCTION (language elicitation)
Child is shown a stimulus picture set, hears stimulus sentence and is asked to point to the corresponding picture.		Child is shown a stimulus picture set and asked to complete the sentence.
Grammatical features		
Number	<p><i>Wys vir my die leeus</i> 'Show me the lions'</p> 	<p><i>Hier is een vark, maar hier is twee...</i> target response: 'varken' 'Here there is one pig, but here there are two ... pigs'</p> 
Person and case	<p><i>Wys vir my die ou huis</i> 'Show me the old house'</p>	<p><i>Keven en Ilse is beste vriende. Hier Keven soen Ilse, maar hier hy ...</i> target response: 'gee vir haar blomme' 'Kevin and Ilse are best friends. Here, he is giving her a kiss, but here ... he is giving her flowers'</p>
Genitive case	<p><i>Wys vir my die vrou se skoën.</i> 'Show me the woman's shoe'</p>	<p><i>Hier is die kat se stert en hier is ...</i> [pointing to dog's ears], target response: 'die hond se ore' 'Here is the cat's tail, but here are ... the dog's ears'</p>
Agreement and Tense	<p><i>Wys vir my Hy vang een vis.</i> 'Show me He catches a fish'</p>	<p><i>Hier die apie dra elke dag 'n broek. Gister, net soos elke ander dag, ...</i> target response: 'het hy 'n broek gedra' 'This monkey wears pants every day. Yesterday, just like any other day, he ... wore pants'</p>
Syntactic constructions		
Binding relations	<p><i>Die apie en die seuntjie gee vir mekaar presente.</i> 'The monkey and the boy are giving each other presents'</p>	<p><i>Die leeus sê elke apie krap ...</i> [while pointing at a picture of two lions saying to each other that two monkeys are scratching themselves], target response: 'hem self' 'The lion says each monkey is scratching ... himself'</p>
Auxiliary choice	<p><i>Hy het by die huis aangekom.</i> 'He arrived at the house'</p>	<p><i>Wat wil Sebastiaan hê?</i> [while pointing at a picture of a boy looking at a glass of water], target response: <i>hy wil 'n bietjie water hê.</i> 'What would S. like to have? He would like to have a bit of water'</p>
Constituent doubling	<p><i>Hy klim op die berg op.</i> 'He is climbing up the mountain'</p>	<p><i>Sy loop na die handoek toe en ...</i> target response: <i>klim uit die swembad uit.</i> 'She is walking to the towel and he ... is getting out of the swimming pool'</p>
Sentence negation	<p><i>Die kat sit nie in die boom nie.</i> 'The cat is not sitting in the tree'</p>	<p><i>Die hond het water maar die kat ...</i> target response: <i>het niks/ geen water nie.</i> 'The dog has water but the cat ... has no water'</p>

References

- Southwood, F. (2005). A comparison of the responses to three comprehension and three production tasks assessing the morpho-syntactic abilities of Afrikaans-speaking preschoolers. *Per Linguam*, 36-59.
- Southwood, F. (2006). An investigation of the morpho-syntactic abilities of Afrikaans-speaking preschoolers. *South African Linguistic and Applied Language Studies*, 35-55.