

## REVIEWS

***Kindlicher Spracherwerb im Deutschen: Verläufe, Forschungsmethoden, Erklärungsansätze.*** By Christina Kauschke. (Germanistische Arbeitshefte, 45). Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 2012. Pp. xii, 178. Paperback. € 19.95.

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### 1. Summary.

In the introduction to *Kindlicher Spracherwerb im Deutschen*, Christina Kauschke states that the goal of her book is to provide a detailed overview of the course of first language acquisition, presenting empirical data from current research and discussing these data in light of different explanatory models in the child language acquisition literature. To this end, this book provides a detailed account of phonetic and phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic development among monolingual German children. This book also contains chapters devoted to bilingual language acquisition and atypical language acquisition. Sandwiching these chapters are an introductory chapter and a concluding chapter that introduce the reader to larger theoretical debates in the literature.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to child language acquisition, presenting key concepts and questions in child language acquisition research. Chapter 2 then describes the dominant methodologies used by child language acquisition researchers. This chapter includes discussion of seminal diary studies on German child language acquisition (see, among others, Stern & Stern 1928, Elsen 1991), the use of parent questionnaires, recordings of spontaneous child speech production, elicited language production, behavioral experimental methods (for example, preferential looking tasks), and neurophysiological methods, like event-related potentials (ERP) and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). Each method is described with an appropriate level of detail for students and nonexperts to gain a basic understanding of each methodology, alongside its advantages and potential disadvantages. This discussion also includes references to important studies in the literature that have implemented these various methodologies.

Chapter 3 outlines the earliest stages of language perception among babies in their first year, including the processes that go into segmenting the speech stream into distinct sounds, words, and syntactic constituents. Chapters 4 through 8 then detail the acquisition of specific linguistic features. Chapter 4 examines phonetics and phonology, focusing primarily on the production of individual segments and the phonological processes, like assimilation and reduction, which characterize children's speech production. There is also discussion of the acquisition of lexical stress patterns in German.

Chapter 5 focuses on vocabulary development, discussing both comprehension and production. This chapter includes discussion of several debates in the research literature surrounding the rapid growth of vocabulary during a child's second year, including how to quantify such growth and the underlying mechanisms that may drive this growth. The latter half of the chapter describes how children learn to connect words with their meanings and how the content and structure of a child's lexicon develops over time, with regard to the development of conceptual categories and the relationships between words, and the acquisition of different word classes. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of different theories proposed to explain how children acquire words and their meanings.

Chapter 6 focuses on morphology, describing the development of derivational morphology, the German plural system, case markings, and verbal inflection (number and tense). Chapter 7 focuses on syntactic development, starting with a brief discussion of the connections between age, vocabulary growth, mean length of utterance, and evidence of syntactic structure in children's utterances. The chapter goes on to detail the development of the verb-second rule, adult-like word order in questions and subordinate clauses, and the production of object-first sentences. Chapter 7 concludes with a brief discussion of a long-standing debate in the research literature regarding whether children acquire syntactic structures via innate language-specific learning mechanisms (that is, nativist approaches) or by extracting patterns in their linguistic input (that is, constructivist or usage-based approaches). Chapter 8—the final chapter in this section—focuses on the acquisition of pragmatic competence, including discussions of theory of mind, the development of speech acts, and how children acquire communicative and narrative skills.

Each chapter in this section includes clear descriptions that introduce and define key terminology. The chapters present a coherent account of the developmental stages children follow when acquiring each linguistic feature. These accounts are enhanced by actual examples from children's productions and, in many cases, these developmental stages are summarized by tables in each chapter. Throughout these five chapters, Kauschke also cites many recent studies on the acquisition of German, thereby providing references for readers interested in learning more about a specific topic.

Chapter 9 uses case studies of two children between the ages of 13 and 36 months to highlight specific examples of the developmental patterns detailed in the previous five chapters, as well as discusses the interaction between different linguistic features during language development. Chapter 10 touches on key concepts in bilingual child language acquisition, including how bilingual children successfully acquire multiple grammatical systems, how children transfer, borrow, and code-switch between languages, and the role that the quality and quantity of input in each language plays in bilingual language acquisition. Chapter 11 discusses situations involving atypical language acquisition, more specifically, the diagnosis and symptoms of specific language impairment (SLI) and its possible underlying causes. Chapter 12—the final chapter—provides an overview of three major approaches to language acquisition, namely, nativist, interactionist, and cognitivist approaches, situating each approach with regard to its perspective on the innateness of language and whether language acquisition relies on domain-specific or domain-general learning mechanisms.

## **2. Evaluation.**

This book provides a basic introduction to critical debates and approaches to child language acquisition research in general; it provides a rich description of how children acquire German in particular. Its prose is easy to follow, especially with the help of the summary tables in each chapter. As such, it would be an appropriate book for undergraduate students at German-speaking institutions and—depending on their proficiency level—could also be used effectively by non-native speakers of German who want to learn more about the child acquisition of German, while also developing their own German skills and knowledge of the German terminology relevant for this field.

Overall, this book strikes a good balance between describing, in detail, when and how German children acquire specific linguistic features and providing a basic understanding of the various models proposed in the research literature to explain the underlying mechanisms at work during child language acquisition. I also appreciate that Kauschke devotes space to bilingual language acquisition and atypical language acquisition, as these two topics are of vital importance to furthering our understanding of the mechanisms that drive child language acquisition more generally, and are often of particular interest to students interested in learning more about language acquisition.

However, at times, the level of detail devoted to particular linguistic features is somewhat uneven. For instance, the chapter on morphological development does not include any discussion of how German-speaking children acquire grammatical gender, in spite of recent research on this topic (for example, Sazgun et al. 2007). Further, there is no discussion of single-route versus dual-route models for the acquisition and processing of inflectional morphology, in spite of the prominent role German plural and verbal inflection has played in this debate (see, for instance, Köpcke 1998, Laaha et al. 2006). These omissions in the chapter on morphological development (chapter 6) contrast with the wealth of information and discussion of vocabulary acquisition in chapter 5.

In conclusion, this volume represents a welcome addition to the body of resources available on child language acquisition and more specifically, on the child acquisition of German. The issues I raise here are minor and should not detract from the larger value of this book. I look forward to using this book as a reference—for myself and my students—in the future.

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