

THE SUBTLY NON-NATIVE LIKE FLAVOR OF NEAR-NATIVENESS – AN EFFECT OF AGE OF L2 ACQUISITION, OR SIMPLY AN INHERENT CHARACTERISTIC OF BILINGUALISM?

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The relatively recent insight, that the ultimate attainment of childhood L2 learners does not always – or, in fact, not very often – converge fully with that of native speakers, has called into question age of acquisition (AoA) as the cause of such near-native (rather than natively like) ultimate attainment. An alternative, increasingly cherished (admittedly theoretically intriguing) interpretation is that the subtle differences between near-native and natively like language knowledge and behavior arise, not as an effect of AoA, but merely as an artefact from the customary, allegedly biased comparison between monolingual and bilingual speakers. Along a similar line of thought, it is commonly held that it is the monolingual acquisition (made possible through total L1 loss and ‘neural resetting’) that makes it possible or internationally adopted children to become fully natively like in their L2 (or “new L1”). With data from a large-scale 2x2 factorial/crossed-design study, we challenge these views. Eighty adult speakers of Swedish, who were either L1 monolinguals (‘crib monolinguals’), L1 (simultaneous) bilinguals (‘crib bilinguals’), early L2 (sequential) monolinguals (‘childhood adoptees’), and early L2 (sequential) bilinguals (‘childhood immigrants’), were tested on 13 measures of language representation and processing in Swedish, covering both production and perception of phonetics, morphosyntax, and lexis. The results show robust and consistent effects AoA but next-to-negligible effects of bilingualism on ultimate attainment (and only on two lexical measures), suggesting that AoA – not bilingualism – is the primary determinant of L2 ultimate attainment.

Readings

Bylund, E., Hyltenstam, K. & Abrahamsson, N. (in press). Age of acquisition – not bilingualism – is the primary determinant of less than natively like L2 ultimate attainment. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, first view. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728920000188>

Bylund, E., Abrahamsson, N., Hyltenstam, K. & Norrman, G. (2019). Revisiting the bilingual lexical deficit: The impact of age of acquisition. *Cognition*, 182, 45–49. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.08.020>

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