Experience with language and communication vs. statistical learning skills: Can first exposure studies help to gauge their respective impact on beginning L2 learners?

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Zusammenfassung

For this study, groups of novice child and adult learners of Polish (speakers of Italian or German from the VILLA project*) were exposed to a series of monolingual and interactive input sessions without access to meta-information about the target language. Learners individually retold a story after 14 hours of target language contact. The presentation focuses on form–function associations in the learners’ production data and compares them to properties of the input the learners were exposed to. In addition to support for input-driven factors, there was evidence for a uniform syntax, for individual creative constructions, and for reinterpreted morphological variation. Findings revealed differences due to learners’ age but not their language background. The results pointing to an influence of communication principles and to an effect of system-internal factors will be discussed in relation to the predictions of the usage-based approach and the learner-varieties approach to second language acquisition.