

Workshop on Sign Bilingualism in Asia-Pacific Region

Sign Bilingualism in the Americas

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This talk will discuss two types of sign bilingualism in the Americas: Deaf readers' knowledge of written English and American Sign Language (ASL); and hearing children's knowledge of a spoken language (English, Brazilian Portuguese) and a sign language (ASL, Brazilian Sign Language, or LSB). The latter subject is based on work at the beginning stages, in collaboration with Deborah Chen Pichler and Ronice Quadros.

Our primary questions concern how our participants' two languages are influenced by Universal Grammar (UG). Since Deaf readers access English in a non-primary channel, there is the possibility that they might employ general learning strategies rather than UG its development. This might even help to explain the overall lower proficiency in English which Deaf students attain. However, our data show evidence for the role of UG in Deaf readers' knowledge of English, along with some non-target parameter settings and variability in lexical knowledge.

Another view of the role of UG in the development of sign bilingualism comes from the study of hearing children who are learning both a sign language from their deaf parents and a spoken language from the surrounding community. We are beginning a study that will look at cross-language influence for these bilingual children, taking as a starting point the hypothesis that such influence will be especially seen in interface areas. We will include two sign/spoken language pairs to test the generalizability of our findings, and to compare languages with somewhat different structures. This talk will present the rationale for our study and some of our predictions.