Ronice Quadros

Univeridade Federal de Santa Catarina

Code-Blending in Bimodal Bilingual Development

Children who are exposed to a spoken language and a signed language can become bimodal bilinguals. Like adult bimodal bilinguals (Emmorey et al. 2008), children produce a variety of structures reflecting one or the other language, and most interestingly, structures reflecting the influence of both languages. The latter include cases of cross-linguistic influence (code-mixing), code-switching, and code-blending. Code-blending is a unique reflex of the bimodal bilingual's option to produce (portions of) a linguistic message using both modalities simultaneously.

In this presentation, we focus on instances of code-blending in the spontaneous production of bimodal bilinguals (hearing children with Deaf parents) from two language pairs: English + American Sign Language (ASL), and Brazilian Portuguese + Brazilian Sign Language (Libras). We will report on data from children ages 1;04-3;09, and their adult interlocutors. Our model considers code-blending to be one possible outcome from a derivation that freely makes use of linguistic elements from both languages. The derivation is constrained by the need for selected elements to be appropriately licensed. Each utterance produced, whether unimodal or bimodal, reflects the derivation of one proposition.

Our quantitative analysis reveals that the majority of productions are unimodal, with greater bimodality in sign language target sessions. Also, to explore our hypothesis that blending utterances reflect the output of a single computation, we analyzed the amount of overlap between the speech and the sign. The cases of most interest are those in which there is a (partial) mismatch. We find three types: i) cases of apparent mismatch in the number of utterances (e.g., one sign corresponding to three spoken utterances); ii) timing mismatches (speech and sign are not produced at the same timing beat); iii) non-redundancy (part of the message is conveyed in each language, but neither contains the full message).

We conclude that children are different from adults in that they are still developing coordination, but otherwise they make full use of the possibilities made available in bimodal bilingualism. In particular, they may combine aspects of both languages as the output of a single computation.