



Language development in internationally-adopted children from China: a special case of early dual language learning?

Fred Genesee, *McGill University*

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This presentation will review the results of a longitudinal evaluation of the language development of internationally-adopted (IA) children from China. The language development of these children is of theoretical interest and of practical significance because they can be considered unique second language (L2) learners. Like typical L2 learners, they have delayed exposure to their L2. In contrast to typical L2 learners who continue to learn and use their birth language and, thus, divide their learning time between two languages, IA children cease learning the birth language upon adoption and they have total exposure to the L2. Adoptees from China are of particular interest from a language learning point of view because their pre-adoption environments are relatively favorable and have been shown to have no, or limited, adverse effects post-adoption. Our results revealed that there were no significant differences between the IA children and carefully matched non-adopted children of the same age, gender and socio-economic status on indices of socio-emotional, health, and general cognitive development. However, the IA children exhibited significant lags in language development at each testing time (4-5, 7-8, and 10-12 years of age). They also exhibited significant lags relative to the control children on measures of verbal short-term and working memory, but not on visuo-spatial memory. It is hypothesized that the IA children's lags in language can be explained by weaknesses in verbal memory which in turn may be linked to delayed exposure to the L2 or attrition of the birth language.