

Title: The Emerging Bilingual Lexicon: Translation Equivalents in Heritage Bulgarian and English

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Abstract:

Heritage Language Acquisition is a relatively new field that has been gaining traction in North America in the last three decades. It was found to be affected by maturational constraints and environmental factors, such as quality and quantity of input (Polinsky, 2015; Montrul, 2016). Heritage languages in the U.S. are spoken by second-generation immigrants who in most cases also reach target in the majority language.

My study provides new data from a less studied heritage language in the U.S. (Bulgarian) and reexamines existing theoretical proposals in the area of the bilingual lexicon. I discuss some preliminary findings from a longitudinal study of a 2-year-old child who is acquiring Bulgarian and English from birth in the U.S. Using the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (Fenson et al, 1994) I document and analyze the rate and distribution of the translation equivalents in his two languages in relation to the *Mutual Exclusivity Bias* which drives children to select only one category label for each object (Markman and Wachtel, 1988; Au and Glusman, 1990 for bilinguals).

Some scholars have argued that if bilingual children are exposed to two labels for each referent from birth they should not develop Mutual Exclusivity bias (Houston-Price et al., 2010). My analysis points out to a domain-specific use of each member, for example, in the pair *vpama-door* the Bulgarian word is used to designate doors in buildings while the English one refers to doors of a vehicle. Thus, the semantic domains of the two members of the pair appear to be referentially distinctive, without an overlap. This could be interpreted to show a weaker Mutual Exclusivity bias in the child's developing system, such that allows him to adhere selectively to the referential properties in his bilingual input.