

style to gender differences in friendship patterns is not reflected in research on bilingual communities. The ethnographic case study reported here involving 36 first-year high school students—21 girls and 15 boys, mostly 14 years old—in the Barcelona area shows that gender differences in peer group structure can affect the use of the bilingual repertoire, even when there are no apparent sex differences in second language acquisition. In this setting, girls' friendship circles are more solitary and cohesive than boys'. Moreover, girls' groups are ethnically and linguistically homogeneous, while boys' social circles can be ethnically mixed and internally differentiated linguistically. Girls' friendships set stronger constraints on language behaviour. In turn, boys and girls reap different social benefits and costs for their linguistic choices, with more serious consequences for girls' social identities and acceptance by peers.

## Child language development

**98-462 Beals, Diane E.** (Washington U.). Sources of support for learning words in conversation: evidence from mealtimes. *Journal of Child Language* (Cambridge), **24**, 3 (1997), 673-94.

One of the major arguments in the study of lexical development addresses what sort of cognitive endowments and experiences children have at different ages. The study reported here examined mealtimes of preschoolers' families to determine whether rare words were used in informative ways so that a child could learn their meanings. The issue addressed is whether there is an association between informative use of rare words and the child's later vocabulary. Each use of rare words in 160 transcripts was coded for whether it was informative or uninformative. Each informative exchange was coded for type of strategy used to provide support: physical or social context, prior knowledge, and semantic support. There were 1,631 exchanges around rare words. About two-thirds of these exchanges were informative uses from which the child could learn the word's meaning. The most frequent strategy used was semantic support, accounting for two-thirds of strategies used. The frequency of use of rare words was positively correlated with age-five and age-seven PPVT scores.

**98-463 Diesendruck, Gil and Shatz, Marilyn** (U. of Michigan). The effect of perceptual similarity and linguistic input on children's acquisition of object labels. *Journal of Child Language* (Cambridge), **24**, 3 (1997), 695-717.

The study reported here investigated whether and when children establish various semantic relations between old and new words. Fifty two-year-olds were taught labels for objects previously referred to by an over-extended term. It was found that children were more likely to learn a new label when (a) it referred to a new object that was perceptually dissimilar, rather than similar, to a known one; and (b) when linguistic

information indicated that it had an inclusion, rather than a mutually exclusive, relation to a known label. Children were more likely to interpret a new label as mutually exclusive to a known one when their referents were perceptually dissimilar. These findings are discussed in the light of theories of lexical development, particularly with regard to conceptualisation of constraints on the acquisition of word meaning.

**98-464 Hung, Feng-Sheng and Peters, Ann M.** (U. of Hawai'i, Manoa). The role of prosody in the acquisition of grammatical morphemes: evidence from two Chinese languages. *Journal of Child Language* (Cambridge), **24**, 3 (1997), 627-50.

This paper examines two issues concerning the acquisition of grammatical morphemes: (1) how their acquisition is influenced by prosodic and phonological characteristics of the language being learned; and (2) what sorts of prosodic and phonological properties grammatical morphemes have that might aid children in applying particular segmentation strategies. To address these issues, the acquisition of grammatical morphemes was compared in a pair of morphosyntactically similar but prosodically different languages, Taiwan Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese. Data analysis was carried out on the patterns of realisation and omission of a highly frequent subset of grammatical morphemes in six children's speech, recorded between the ages 1;6 and 2;3. The results from the between-language comparisons suggest that the rhythmic characteristics of languages can affect segmentation by providing different kinds of prosodic handles for children to grasp at.

**98-465 Levy, Yonata** (Hadassah-Hebrew U. Medical School, Jerusalem). Autonomous linguistic systems in the language of young children. *Journal of Child Language* (Cambridge), **24**, 3 (1997), 651-71.

This paper considers cross-linguistic findings concerning the early development of formal, arbitrary, grammatical systems in normal hearing and deaf children and in children with congenital brain abnormalities. The paper reviews evidence showing an early acquisition of grammatical forms. Such learning is typically dissociated from the development of the relevant semantics. Form-function correspondences were not required for the development of morphological paradigms and for certain aspects of formal syntax. This finding held across all the populations studied. It is hypothesised that the autonomous nature of these formal paradigms accounts for their priority in learning cross-linguistically.

**98-466 Marchman, Virginia A.** (U. of Texas at Dallas), **Plunkett, Kim, and Goodman, Judith.** Over-regularisation in English plural and past tense inflectional morphology: a response to Marcus (1995). *Journal of Child Language* (Cambridge), **24**, 3 (1997), 767-79.

In a recent note, Marcus (1995) suggests that the rate of over-regularisation of English irregular plural nouns is

not substantively different from that of English irregular past tense verbs. This finding is claimed to be in conflict with the predictions of connectionist models (Plunkett & Marchman, 1991, 1993) which are said to depend solely on the dominance of regular over irregular forms in determining over-regulation errors. However, these conclusions may be premature, given that Marcus averaged over-regulation rates across irregular nominal forms that varied in token frequency and across samples representing a broad range of children's ages. A connectionist view would predict an interplay between type frequency and other item level factors, e.g. token frequency, as well as differences in the developmental trajectories of the acquisition of nouns and verbs. This response briefly reviews longitudinal parental report data ( $N = 26$ ) which indicate that children are significantly more likely to produce noun than verb over-regularisations across a prescribed age period (1;5 to 2;6). At the same time, these data also show that children are familiar with proportionately more irregular nouns than irregular verbs. These findings are consistent with the predictions of Plunkett & Marchman in that the larger regular class affects the frequency of noun errors but also that the familiarity with individual irregular nouns tends to reduce the likelihood of over-regularisations. In contrast to the conclusion of Marcus, the connectionist approach to English inflectional morphology is claimed to provide a plausible explanation of the phenomenon of over-regularisation in both the English plural and past tense systems.

**98-467 Stevens, Tassos and Karmiloff-Smith, Annette** (MRC Cognitive Development Unit & U. College, London). Word learning in a special population: do individuals with Williams syndrome obey lexical constraints? *Journal of Child Language* (Cambridge), **24**, 3 (1997), 737-65.

Williams syndrome (WS), a rare neurodevelopmental disorder, is of special interest to developmental psychologists because of its uneven linguistico-cognitive profile of abilities and deficits. One proficiency manifest in WS adolescents and adults is an unusually large vocabulary, despite serious deficits in other domains. Rather than focusing on vocabulary size, this paper explores the processes underlying vocabulary acquisition, i.e. how new words are learned. A WS group was compared to groups of normal MA-matched controls in the range 3-9 years in four different experiments testing for constraints on word learning. It is shown that, in construing the meaning of new words, normal children at all ages display fast mapping and abide by the constraints tested: mutual exclusivity, whole object and taxonomic. By contrast, while the WS group showed fast mapping and the mutual exclusivity constraint, they did not abide by the whole object or taxonomic constraints. This suggests that measuring only the size of WS vocabulary can distort conclusions about the normalcy of WS language. The study shows that, despite equivalent behaviour (i.e. vocabulary test age), the processes underlying vocabulary acquisition in WS follow a somewhat differ-

ent path from that of normal children, and that the atypically developing brain is not necessarily a window on normal development.

**98-468 Tardif, Twila** (U. of Michigan), **Shatz, Marilyn and Naigles, Letitia**. Caregiver speech and children's use of nouns versus verbs: a comparison of English, Italian, and Mandarin. *Journal of Child Language* (Cambridge), **24**, 3 (1997), 536-65.

This paper examines naturalistic samples of adult-to-child speech to determine if variations in the input are consistent with reported variations in the proportions of nouns and verbs in children's early vocabularies. It contrasts two PRO-DROP languages, Italian and Mandarin, with English. Naturalistic speech samples from six 2;0 English-, six 1;11 Italian-, and ten 1;10 Mandarin-speaking children and their caregivers were examined. Adult-to-child speech was coded for the type frequency, token frequency, utterance position, and morphological variation of nouns and verbs, as well as the types and placements of syntactic subjects and the pragmatic focus of adult questions. Children's spontaneous productions of nouns and verbs and their responses to adult questions were also examined. The results suggest a pattern consistent with the children's spontaneous production data. Namely, the speech of English-speaking caregivers emphasised nouns over verbs, whereas that of Mandarin-speaking caregivers emphasised verbs over nouns. The data from the Italian-speaking caregivers were more equivocal, though still noun-oriented, across these various input measures.

## Sociolinguistics

**98-469 Arthur, J.** (Edge Hill U. Coll., Ormskirk, UK). 'There must be something undiscovered which prevents us from doing our work well': Botswana primary teachers' views on educational language policy. *Language and Education* (Clevedon), **11**, 4 (1997), 225-41.

A small-scale survey of Botswana primary teachers' views on educational language policy showed overwhelming support for English as the medium of instruction. The survey forms part of a wider research project by the author, in which classroom observation revealed classroom communication difficulties created by the use of English—effectively a foreign language for the majority of Botswana teachers and pupils. This paper discusses the apparent paradox of teachers' support for English medium, taking account both of the symbolic role of English as the language of educational achievement and its practical role in the national examination system. Parallels are drawn with the reasserted prestige of ex-colonial languages in other African countries over the last decade. Despite the clear overall support for English, the opinions of the teachers sur-