

Workshop Proposal:

Child language data as a challenge to language acquisition theories.

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The field of language development has long been a battleground for competing theories and models. Recent research has heavily emphasized the role of Child-Directed Speech (CDS) and Child Speech (CS) relations, leading to the proliferation of input-based models across various linguistic domains such as morphology, semantics, syntax, and discourse-pragmatics (e.g., Ashkenazi, Ravid and Gillis, 2016; [Czapka, Topaj and Gagarina, 2022](#); Ashkenazi, Gillis and Ravid, 2020; Dattner and Ravid, 2023). These models posit that the linguistic input provided by caregivers plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's language development, serving as the primary mechanism for linguistic growth. For example, studies show that the distributional properties of CDS make it in many ways much more accessible to children than ADS (Adult Directed Speech) and other forms of child-oriented language, like that of books (Levie et al, 2020). CDS is fine-tuned to the child, involving clearer, slower speech than ADS. It is also more regular (Szagun, 2011), grammatically simpler and less diverse, with fewer disfluencies, shorter and more grammatical utterances, and with much scaffolding. CDS vocabulary typically consists of a highly frequent, repetitive lexicon, with concrete words, carrying predictable, salient, child-oriented information (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013; McCauley & Christiansen, 2019). Even in languages with rich morphological systems, CDS in early language acquisition is morphologically sparse, containing only a fraction of the possible alternations in morphological paradigms ([Xanthos et al., 2011](#)). CDS thus acts as a filter through which the most frequent and meaningful contrasts emerge. CDS often highlights morphological markers by pervasive use of diminutives (Dressler, Lettner, & Korecky-Kröll, 2012). This enables children to extract transparent patterns that consistently reflect grammatical systematicity. And importantly, input differences [might](#) explain differences in patterns of acquisition among children. As children grow older, CDS evolves with them and becomes more complex and more adapted to the general spoken usage.

On the other hand, the concept of self-organization (autopoiesis, lit. 'self-making'), which has been first created for biology, neurology and cognitive science, but then also adapted to linguistics (see Karpf, 1990; Dressler & Karpf, 1995; Dziubalska-Kořaczyk, 1998), has been defined by de Boer (2009) as *the emergence of order on a global scale through interactions on a local scale*. Autopoietic systems create themselves based on earlier stages of development and interaction with their environment. For child language acquisition, this applies to neurological development and language input by the main caretakers, by siblings and later also by peers of the children. This results in a successive decrease of non-adult-like productions and leads to an increase in complexity as well as modularization in the child's grammar. Specifically, recent findings show that children go through Blind Alley Developments (BADs; [Čamber & Dressler 2023](#); Dressler et al. 2020, 2022): ephemeral developments of young children which they have to give up soon because of continuous

opposing parental input. BADs represent radical examples of self-organisation (autopoiesis) by young children in acquiring one or more language(s). More important, they provide a challenge to linguistic theories, since so far, they have been described and explained only within the framework of Natural Morphology (Dressler et al. 2020, 2022). Most important in this respect are the so-called strong BADs, which have no basis in the input (therefore non explainable by input-based acquisition (incl. constructionist) models, and no pertinent inborn parameters have been assumed in nativist models of UG. Weak BADs are based on parental inputs, but in contrast to normal development in child language do not successively approach adult targets (as provided by parental inputs) but go against these inputs. We expect a generativist attempt to change this in UG. Interestingly, a so far never (before Čamber & Dressler 2023) observed weak BAD occurs in simultaneous bilingual acquisition, when there is an overlay between the structures of each language so that the target structures influence each other at the same time. This overlay can be modelled in terms of superposition, as adapted from Quantum Physics by Mattiello & Dressler (2022).

Finally, going above the level of morpho-syntax to discourse and narrative, the multidimensional theory of early narrative acquisition (Gagarina et al., 2019) argues for the importance of self-organization on this higher-order level. According to this theory, children construct narratives through a complex interplay of various interrelated levels, including linguistic, cognitive, and pragmatic components. This framework introduces the concept of factual and inferred components in narrative construction, thereby offering a nuanced view of how children acquire the ability to tell stories. The inferred and evaluative components in the narration are cognitively more complex, as they represent protagonists' goals and internal states which must be inferred from the pictures. In this respect, self-organization involves dynamic interactions among elements of a system. In early narrative acquisition, this could mean that children naturally start to construct narrative structures from the factual components provided by the images towards more complex inferred components. The combination of these components leads to the acquisition of episodes.

For bilingual language acquisition, CDS which is divided between languages is usually referred to more generally as input (quality) and it is much less investigated. The majority of studies examine general child-external factors, including richness and amount of input in a home or majority languages of a child and effects of age of bilingualism or onset of exposure to a majority language. Given a more complex nature of input a bilingual child is exposed to, input-based models face even more challenges to explain phenomena of child bilingual production.

Given these perspectives on development, the goal of this workshop is to reconcile the tension between input-based and self-organizing models by offering a more integrative viewpoint. We invite contributions targeting the complex interplay between external input and internal system changes through various methodological approaches, including, but not limited to, corpus studies, experimental elicitations, and computational cognitive modeling using Dynamic Network Analysis. The overarching goal of the workshop is to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, and as such, we encourage submissions that utilize mixed-methods approaches. By doing so, we hope to shed light on the multifaceted nature of early language development, thereby enriching our understanding and opening up new theoretical approaches and empirical avenues for research. We welcome contributions on the language pairs including, but not restricted to Germanic, Romance, Slavic and less

studied languages. **If we want to restrict then we should leave this specific languages:**
German with Croatian / Italian / Russian / Romanian and Ukrainian with Polish.

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