

Gender Marking in Bilingual Creole-French Child Grammar

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Gender marking has been extensively studied across Child grammars. In this study I analyse the production of gender by 11 children, in the age range 8-11years. These children include 4 Kreol Morisyen-Mauritian French bilinguals, 4 Mauritian French monolinguals and 3 Kreol Morisyen monolinguals. I collected spontaneous speech samples and narratives such as 'the Frog story'.

In the first part of the paper I briefly describe the sociolinguistic situation on the island. I also outline gender marking in Adult Kreol Morisyen (henceforth KM) and in the Adult Mauritian French variety (henceforth MF) spoken in Mauritius. The situation is complex given the use of several languages and the use of these languages being tied up with ethnicity. In the second part, I present the data which shows the following picture: (1) the acquisition of gender in French by bilingual Creole and French children is difficult and delayed as compared to monolingual children, (2) mismatches in gender specifications between the clitic pronoun and its antecedent (*le* instead of *lui*), (3) *le* seems to function as an unmarked/default clitic in the bilingual grammar. I interpret these results in the light of (1) the adult input children are exposed to and (2) the properties of the syntax-semantic mapping of nouns in these two languages. Overall, these findings seem to support the hypothesis that KM is the dominant language in the bilingual children.