Review of the doctoral dissertation

Erika Csillingh: *Conceptual Representation in the Speech Production of Bi- and Multilingual Children*

The dissertation set out to explore cross-linguistic influence and offer empirical data on the specific traits of conceptual representation within three distinct language pairs: English–Hungarian, English–French, and French–Hungarian. The significance of these combinations lies in the fact that they comprise typologically diverse languages with distinct structural, conceptual frameworks, and cultural backgrounds.

This analysis offers valuable insights into how bilingual individuals manage the complexities of conceptual equivalence—specifically, the way speakers align lexical items and conceptual categories across languages with partial overlap. By examining concrete language pairings, the dissertation aims to illuminate both the universal mechanisms of bilingual language production and the distinct conceptual mappings generated when specific linguistic and cultural frameworks intersect.

Methodologically, the dissertation addresses the need for naturalistic research in cross-linguistic influence, which has traditionally relied on controlled, laboratory-based experimental designs. While experimental studies offer valuable insights, they often compromise ecological validity. By focusing on spontaneous language use, this study tries to capture cross-linguistic influence as it naturally occurs rather than through artificial elicitation and the naturalistic designs minimize priming effects and experimental artifacts, yielding results that better reflect real-world communication.

The structure of the thesis is logically organized and carefully considered: after the general introduction, Chapter 2, the theoretical section of the dissertation engages extensively with literature across psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic contactology. This multidisciplinary approach enables the author to examine the phenomenon under study from different perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding.

The methodological chapter (3.) provides a sufficiently detailed account of the qualitative research data collection methods, the context of the study, the sociolinguistic characteristics of the informants and data processing. Chapter 4 and 5 present the case studies of two bilingual children and of a multilingual teenager in the contexts of Hungarian–English bilingualism and French–Hungarian–English multilingualism. Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive discussion that integrates the findings from all three case studies. This is followed by Chapter 7, which presents the study's conclusions alongside its limitations, broader significance, and practical implications.

The language of the dissertation is clear, its style meets the expectations associated with scholarly prose, and the use of terminology is consistent.

The thesis argues convincingly that if bilingual children are prompted to reflect in one language on experiences acquired in another, their speech production fluctuates based on a variety of factors. These include age, proficiency, language dominance, experience with code-switching, and their specific individual language constellations.

Below, with a constructive intention, I would like to offer a few comments regarding the research and the interpretation of its results.

1. Based on the literature, the author makes a conceptual distinction between the phenomena of *lexical transfer* and *semantic transfer.* Regarding the data on this issue, in section 4.2.12, Example 6 (pp. 58–59), the Hungarian expression „*hallgat az órákra*" (literally: "listens to the classes") is classified as both lexical and semantic transfer (p. 59). For the sake of analytical precision, it would be advisable to refer to this exclusively as semantic transfer, as there is no borrowing of lexical form from the non-target language here, which, according to the author, is a defining criterion of lexical transfer: "CLI phenomena at the lexical and semantic level reflect non-target production in the choice of words ***based on word from*** *(lexical transfer)* or based on meaning (semantic transfer)" (p.53). In the literature on language contact, this phenomenon is called **semantic borrowing.**

2. In subsection 4.3.2.1.1 (*Full equivalence and code-switching*), we read that code-switching sometimes occurs between lexical items with equivalent semantic content: "Code-switching between ***fully equivalent lexical categories*** is generally considered least likely to occur in a single language context" (p. 72). Here, it would be necessary to indicate that lexemes may be equivalent in their primary meaning, though less so in their secondary or tertiary derived meanings (in case of polysemy). Thus, it is not the lexical items themselves that are equivalent, but rather their primary meanings.

3. Finally, a formal observation: on page 51, at Example 1, we read: "This sequence contains multiple speech phenomena most of which, as well as their interrelatedness, **will be discussed in a later section**." In such cases, it is advisable to specify the exact section where this issue will be discussed (for example: *4.2.2. Explicit forms of CLI*).

Based on the available data and the content of the dissertation, the work meets the requirements of research ethics.

I consider Erika Csillingh's dissertation, which is based on extensive empirical and theoretical research, to be suitable for public defence, and I fully support the awarding of the doctoral (PhD) degree.

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10 November 2026

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