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German dative case marking in monolingual and simultaneous bilingual children with and without SLI

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Highlights

- The ability to produce dative case marking is a potential clinical marker for SLI in monolingual and bilingual children in German
- Dative case marking of pronouns is acquired faster than of full determiner phrases (DPs)
- There are no cumulative effects of bilingualism and SLI with respect to case marking

Abstract

This study explores the role of German dative case marking in disentangling effects of specific language impairment (SLI) and bilingualism. Longitudinal data of German-Italian bilingual children with SLI (N=3) is compared to cross-sectional data (N=42) of monolingual and bilingual typically developing (TD) children and monolingual children with SLI (ages four and seven). Spontaneous and elicited speech data is analysed in terms of target-like dative case marking in German. Results show differences between the acquisition of case marking of pronouns and of full Determiner Phrases (DPs). Regarding the target-like dative case marking in total, there were no differences found between bilingual TD, monolingual and bilingual children with SLI by the age of four. They demonstrated a similar delay when compared to monolingual TD children. By the age of seven, however, bilingual TD children ‘catch up’ with their monolingual peers. Children with SLI do not master the acquisition of dative case marking by this age. Cumulative effects of bilingualism and SLI were not found neither in younger nor in older bilingual children. These findings underline the importance of further research on linguistic markers and of distinguishing between effects of SLI and bilingualism.

Keywords: German dative case marking, Italian, bilingualism, specific language impairment, cumulative effects

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