

## **An Assessment of Early Bilingual language Acquisition in Multilingual Contexts: A validation of the Sentence Repetition Test**

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### **Abstract**

Extensive research has been carried out on the acquisition of Western languages monolingually and bilingually with WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) populations. However, little is known about the acquisition of many African languages (Kidd & Garcia, 2022; Rochanavibhata & Marian, 2022). This study contributes to filling the existing gap in the literature on the acquisition of Hausa, monolingually and bilingually in Northern Nigeria at both grammatical and sociolinguistic levels. An experience and usage-based approach has been employed here by exploring onset factors (Kaushanskaya & Marian 2009), exposure factors (Kim, Park & Lust 2018; Cohen, 2016; Sánchez Calderon & Fuertes 2020), grammatical complexity (Seral et al., 2012) and how the relative frequency of constructions in both languages (Ambridge et al. 2015; Marchman 1997) impacts the acquisition process. More in particular, we include here two studies to validate a future sentence repetition test to be used with children. Study 1 looks at potential sociolinguistic differences in the use of Hausa by adult bilingual and monolingual speakers. 257 adults participated, 165 of them being Hausa monolingual speakers. Results showed that bilinguals scored higher on all three main socio-economic indicators: education level, years of western (English) education, and declared income. An interaction effect has been found between the number of places and contexts chosen to use either language. Interesting differences across groups and a strong influence of socio-economic status over language usage indicate vulnerabilities for the future status of Hausa, with an impact on acquisition that will be discussed here. Study 2 consists of a series of grammaticality and frequency judgments (same participants of Study 1). 62 sentences presented in English and Hausa were rated by participants. Results show that Hausa monolinguals allow for a much freer word order, particularly for SOV sentences. In contrast, bilingual speakers tend to apply a more strict SVO order for Hausa than monolingual speakers. Results of both studies indicate that, although Hausa is not considered an endangered language, it is severely affected by the use of English. This validation provides the basis for a future study with children, described in more detail in the discussion.