

# The acquisition of *wh*-questions by child Mandarin heritage speakers

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This study presents a longitudinal investigation of spontaneous speech by child Mandarin heritage speakers (n=6, 2;00–5;02) in an English-speaking country with a focus on the acquisition of *wh*-questions. Through comparing child Mandarin heritage speakers' data with that of monolinguals, the study aims to show the effect of input in multilingual language acquisition, reveal any potential effects of language transfer and also provide more evidence for the syntactic analysis on Chinese *wh*-questions.

As a result, the child Mandarin heritage speakers followed a similar path to the monolinguals in terms of *wh*-question acquisition in both of Mandarin Chinese and English, furthermore, they could still properly apply subject-auxiliary inversion into English *wh*-questions. However, protracted development had been found in their heritage language, that is they took a longer time than that of monolinguals in the acquisition of Mandarin *wh*-questions, especially for the less frequently used *wh*-questions, e.g., *why*, *when* and *whose*-questions. These findings suggested that even though for heritage speakers, their input for each language is probably less than that of monolinguals, the English input from school and society might be still enough to keep their English development while the Mandarin input, which mainly came from the parents in the domestic environment, might not be able to fully support the children's language development and the less frequently used constructions in the heritage language might be more vulnerable.

This study also investigated the widely discussed *wh*-in-situ transfer from the *wh*-in-situ language (e.g., Chinese) to the *wh*-movement language (e.g., English) among bilinguals' studies. As a result, the findings here did not support the transfer since child Mandarin heritage speakers could produce the target-like interrogative structures in English. As for the reasons, it might be owing to the environmental support for the bilingual children's English. As the societal majority language, their English input came from the variety of sources and activities with different kinds of providers, the abundant input, especially in the quality, might help the children to extract the necessary categories, enhance their comprehension and production in English and thus diminished the transfer from Mandarin.

Additionally, this study also examined the subject-object asymmetry in both languages and found that different from English, there was no structural-related asymmetry Mandarin subject and object *wh*-questions, which seemed to prove that *wh*-in-situ, rather than *wh*-movement analysis applies in Mandarin Chinese.

Key words: *wh*-questions, child Mandarin heritage speakers, *wh*-in-situ transfer, input.