

Late L1 Learners Acquire Simple but Not Syntactically Complex Structures

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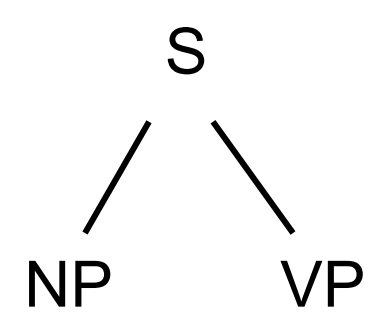
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Introduction

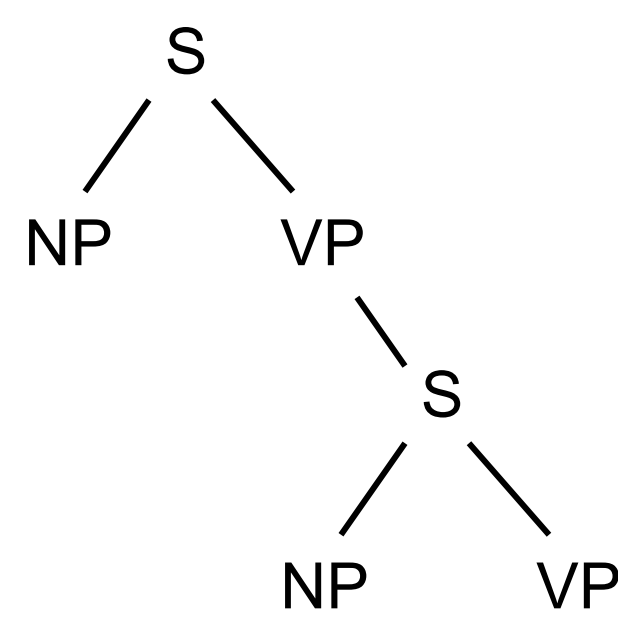
- The outcome of late L1 acquisition is significantly worse than that of late L2 learning.¹ Whether these effects are systematic with respect to syntactic acquisition is unknown.
- If the trajectory of late L1 acquisition parallels child language acquisition, then late L1 learners should acquire simple, mono-clausal structures, because child acquisition begins with these types of structures.²
- In addition, if late L1 learners run out of developmental time, due to their late start in the acquisition process, they would not be expected to acquire complex structures.

Childhood utterance growth³

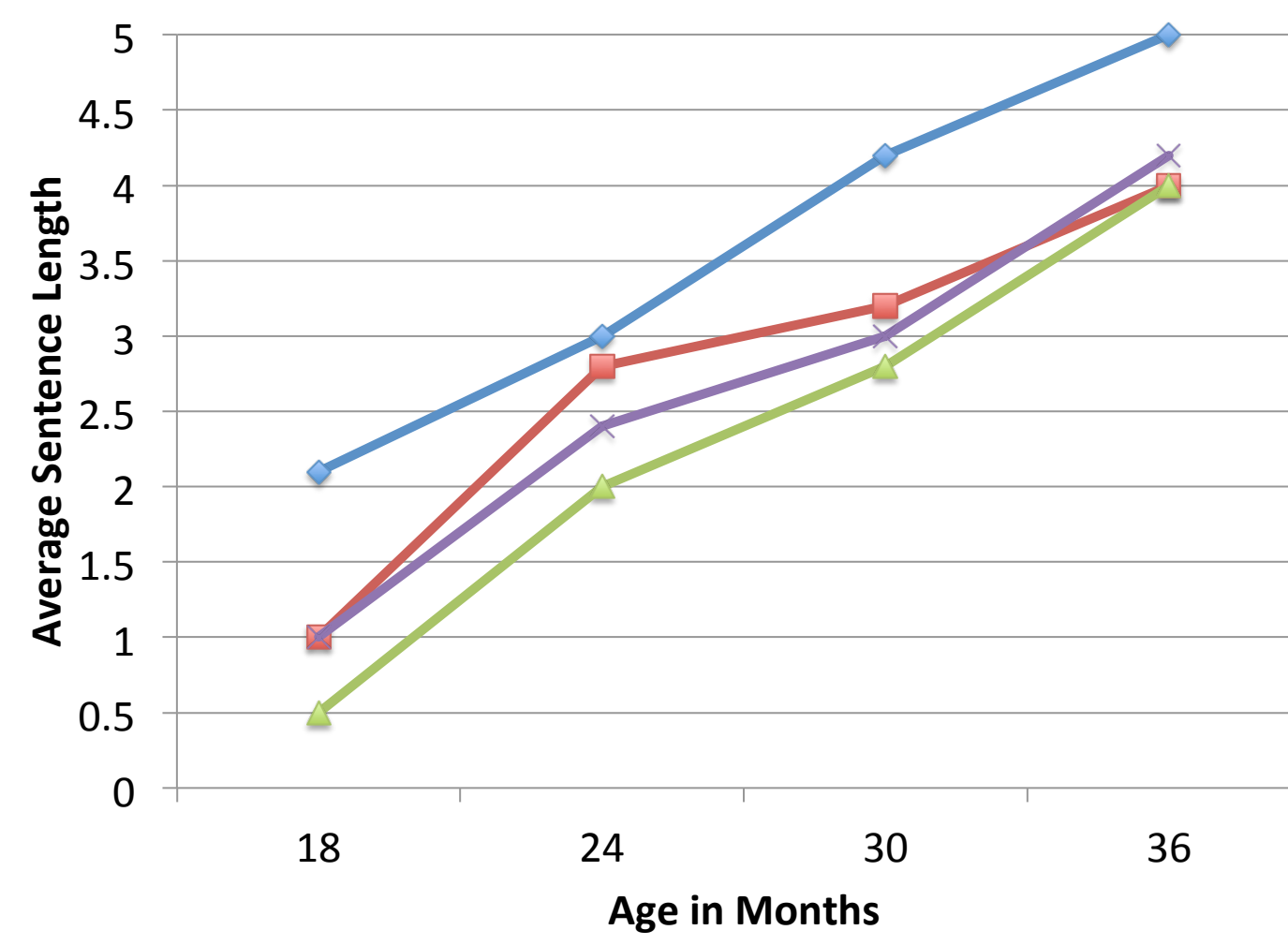
MLU \leq 4.0



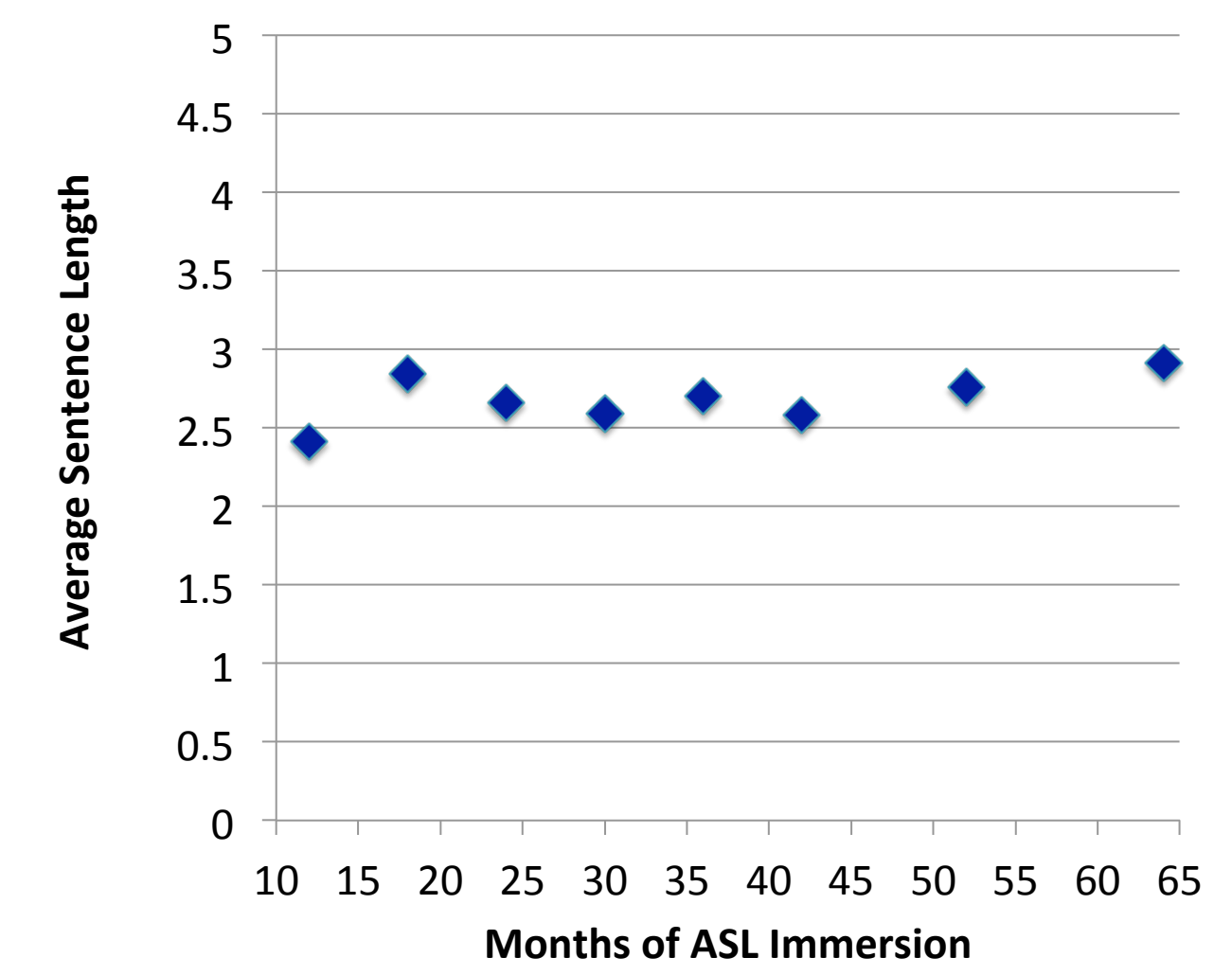
MLU > 4.0



MLU of typical ASL L1 learners⁴



MLU of adolescent L1 learners⁵



Methods

>> Stimuli

Mono-clausal: single verb

Subject-Verb (SV): LITTLE BOY SLEEP WELL.
 Subject-Verb-Object (SVO): WOMAN KISS TALL MAN
 Negative (Neg): SMALL GIRL NOT SLEEP
 Agreement (Agr): NUMBERS WOMAN TEACH-plural
 Aspect/Modal (TAM): SMALL BOY EAT-CONTINUOUSLY
 Topic-Comment (TC): WOMAN TALL MAN KISS

Bi-clausal: two verbs

Classifier (Cl): HAVE 2 BICYCLE: CL-upright, CL-on-side
 Complement (Cmp): MONKEY WANT MAN EAT BANANA
 Relative Clause (RC): [BOY HAVE BANANA] PET MONKEY
 Reported Speech (RS): MAN TELL GIRL, "I LIKE READING"
 Conditional (Cnd): [IF BOY-x PUSH GIRL-y] SHE CRY

Inter-sentential: two sentences

Who/What/Where (Wh1): BOY KICK GIRL. WHO KICK?
 When/How/Why (Wh2): FAMILY EAT DINNER. EAT WHEN?
 Pronoun (Pro): 3 BOY 1 GIRL HAVE ICE-CREAM. OOPS, ICE-CREAM MELT. 3rd-pl CRY, 3rd-sing NOT.

>> Task

- Sentence-to-picture matching task
- 6 trials each structure, 3 alternative pictures; 4/6 indicates acquisition, $p < .01$
- Lexical items controlled: Vocabulary screening task



>> Participants

Native learners, n = 30

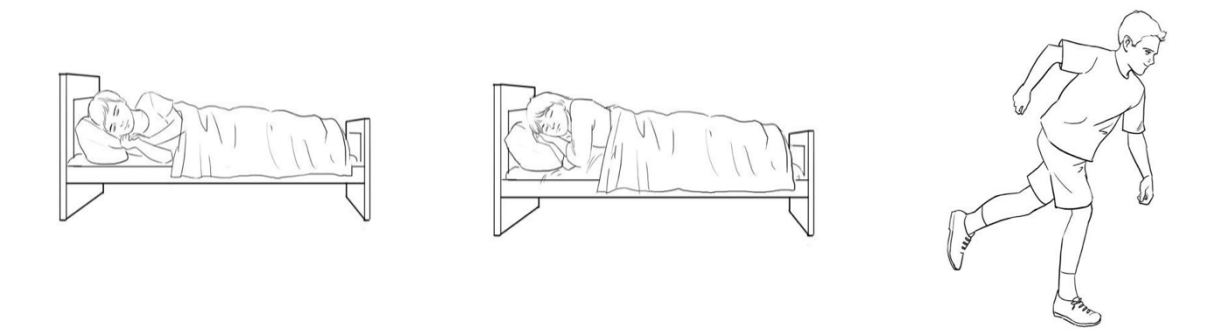
- Born deaf with deaf parents
- L1 ASL acquisition from birth

Late L2 learners, n = 3

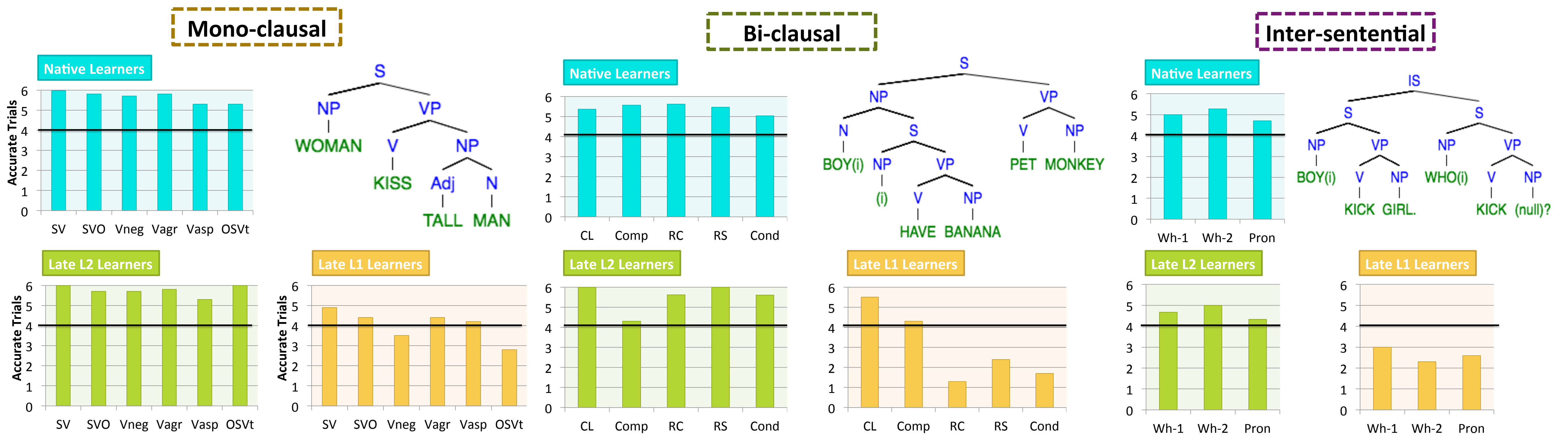
- Use foreign sign language from birth
- L2 ASL acquisition in adolescence

Late L1 learners, n = 3

- L1 ASL acquisition from age 12 to 21
- Families use no sign language
- No consistent education before ASL immersion



Results



Discussion

- As predicted, the late L1 signers showed mastery of most simple structures, but few bi-clausal or inter-sentential structures.
- Using only sign languages, the results replicate the finding that the outcome of late L1 acquisition is much worse than late L2 learning.
- Equally important, the results provide evidence for the hypothesis that late L1 acquisition resembles child L1 acquisition insofar as both begin with mono-clausal structures.

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Footnote

1. Matthew L. Hall is currently at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

References

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- Diessel 2004
- Brown, 1973; Diessel, 2004
- Hoff, 2010; Hoffmeister 1978
- Ferjan Ramirez, et al. 2012; Gates 2002