The acquisition of French object clitics by L2 children: effects of age of onset
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Previous research on sequential bilingual children with age of onset (AO) between 3 and 5 show that these children perform similarly when compared to bilingual children who acquired French from birth in terms of production of French object (clitic omission and errors; Strik et al. 2015 ; similarly Prévost 2006). These previous studies are based on production (elicited or spontaneous) and compares L2 children to monolinguals, simultaneous bilinguals or adults. This study seeks to investigate the effects of age of onset on the acquisition of French by comparing L2 children of different age of onset. Specifically, we wish to address how the differences in age of acquisition for sequential learners affect the acquisition of French object clitics. In addition, we wish to determine whether those children have a knowledge of the position of the clitic as well as of verb movement in French. To answer these questions, we have tested 16 children French L2 learners (8-11 years old, mean 9 year-old) with English as the majority language, in immersion schools in the Greater Toronto Area (Peel, North York and Milton). Time of exposure varies between 2-6 years. For the first question, we used the same elicited production task as Strik et al. (2015) but with children who have been exposed to French starting at age 6 in the French immersion system, with English as their main language. For the second question, we use a preference task with strong pronouns and pronominal clitics. Both strong pronouns and pronominal clitics were used in this task. Results for the elicited production task show that the production of object clitics is even lower in our group when compared to the sequential and simultaneous bilinguals in Strik et al (2015). For the preference task, results indicate that participants respond at chance with respect to the correct position of the pronominals (P >.05, p=.523) (t = -.655).