

The acquisition of derivational morphology in German – Findings from a corpus study

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Within the research on German language acquisition, derivational morphology is rather underrepresented (e.g. Kauschke 2012, Rainer 2011, Schipke & Kauschke 2011).

Except for several studies on the nominal derivation suffix *-er* (*Fahr-er* ‘driver’), e.g. Schaner-Wolles & Dressler (1985), Meibauer (1995; 1999), Meibauer et al. (2004), and on verb particles (e.g. *an-kommen* ‘arrive’), cf. Behrens (1998; 2003), little is known about the acquisition of other nominal, verbal and adjectival derivation. One reason for this lack of knowledge is that these devices play only a minor role in early childhood, which is typically the focus of L1-acquisition studies. However, as Clark & Berman observe, “[d]erivational affixes appear to enter in large numbers only after age three” (Clark & Berman 2004: 1803).

In order to gain more insight into the acquisition of derivational morphology after age 3 (and up to age 6 at least), various corpora (longitudinal speech recordings, diary data, children’s vocabularies) were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. The main question were: Which patterns are acquired in this period and which of their structural and semantic properties are most salient for children? Which patterns are not used and/or not productive in this period (and why)?

Selected results of this broad study on nominal and verbal derivation will be presented and discussed.