This longitudinal research aims at assessing and modelling the acquisition of Dutch and French in Brussels in real time. It focuses on establishing how time, cohort membership and home language impact learners’ linguistic and social-psychological development. The main theoretical framework which directed the operationalisation and interpretation of this research is Bachman & Palmer’s communicative ability model (1996). In addition, insights from Gardner’s socio-educational model (1985) and Dörnyei & Otto’s process model of L2 motivation (1998) also guided this research.

In the course of three consecutive school years, two cohorts (age respectively 12 and 15) of 45 monolingual secondary school pupils from Dutch language schools in Brussels were tested for their first and second language skills as well as their social-psychological orientations. Both their L1 and L2 reading, listening, writing and speaking skills were assessed by means of multimethod tests calibrated at the native speaker level. Their social-psychological orientations were measured by means of Likert scale questionnaires. Linguistic parameters such as fluency, accuracy and complexity were selected in order to assess the longitudinal development of their L1 and L2 skills.

With regard to the language skills, GLM repeated measures MANCOVA revealed that overall both the L1 and L2 skills tend to improve incrementally across time regardless of cohort membership. GLM repeated measures MANOVA showed that both cohort membership and home language determine the development of social-psychological orientations to a significant extent. A SEM analysis aimed at determining the strength and direction of relationships between language skills and social-psychological orientations across time and cohort within one single model. It confirmed that time has a progressive positive impact on the development of language skills and also impacts the development of social-psychological orientations, while cohort membership has no significant influence. It furthermore evidenced that the relationship between language skills and social-psychological orientations is both weak and changeable across time.

Bibliography

