Adult versus peer input

- Differences in the language of six-year-olds who have been to day care centres versus those who have been at home with an adult

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to find out if there were any detectable differences in the language and language use between children who had been at home with an adult, versus children who had been at day care regularly before they started school. Eight six-year-olds, four from each group, were interviewed and their answers compared to each other. The results pointed to a slight difference in word choices and sentence structure and also a greater difference in the past tense verb forms. Children with a day care background tended to discuss and interact more with their peers, though with simpler sentences and several incorrect verb forms, while the stay-at-home children used more complex sentences and had a higher rate of correct past tense verb forms. The conclusion from this study suggests that children need both adult and peer input to develop correct language and the necessary skills for interaction.

Keywords: language, language use, day care, six-year-olds, adult input, peer input
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1 Introduction
From a very young age until they start school, many children spend most of their days in day care centres, while others are at home with an adult. As the foundation for language is laid in our early years, the language of a child’s environment will be the norm and inspiration for that foundation. According to the “critical period hypothesis”, a child is most impressionable when it comes to language from the age of two until he/she reaches puberty (Bjar 2003, p. 32). This means that the earliest of these impressionable years are spent in very different environments for these two groups of children. Linguists agree that environment plays a role in children’s language acquisition. However, to what extent and how much the adult input matters in children’s language use is not as clear. This paper will present a small case study, investigating whether the difference in environment makes a detectable difference in the vocabulary and sentence structure of two groups of children who have just started school. Ideally, one test group would be children who have had no peer input and the other no adult input of any kind, but as that would be impossible, the two test groups will consist of groups with a greater or lesser degree of the different input. By interviewing children at the age of five to six from the two groups, using information questions and a series of pictures as a basis, I will be able to analyse their syntax and vocabulary and compare them in order to detect possible differences between the two groups. I will begin this essay with a theoretical background before introducing the approach in greater detail and end with the conclusions made from the investigation.

2 Theoretical Background
The theoretical background for this paper is mainly based on research carried out on adult and peer input in children’s language acquisition as well as how to analyse children’s language. I have also included research on the development in children at the age of five to six in general. In order to understand why a five-to-six-year-old speaks the way he/she does, one needs to understand something what makes the prerequisites for acquiring a language.

According to the parenting website PBS Parents, a child learns between 3000 to 4000 new words between the ages five to six, adding to the 5000 words (approximately) already acquired (PBS Parents 2011). Under the right circumstances, that is, if the child is given
access, a child at this age is capable of learning as many as nine new words per day. According to speech-language pathologist Kurtz, a child in general is not able to correctly pronounce all consonant sounds until the age of eight (Kurtz 2010), although the understanding of the words is not connected to the pronunciation. This suggests that the psychological as well as the physiological maturity of the child has reached such a level that as long as there is new material, the child will easily learn the new words, although the interviewed children might not be able to correctly pronounce all words, as they have not reached the age of eight yet. The question of where the child acquires the new words is not raised by these experts, it is stated that the child “continues to learn words when adults name objects, and increases ability to infer word meanings from context” (PBS Parents 2011, my italics). Here adult input is being brought to focus, being pointed out as the only source of new words and new context. However, as previously pointed out; acquisition depends on access to new words, suggesting that peer input would be equally important. The suggestion from this is that from a maturity perspective, the source of input is not important; the child will learn the language of its surroundings. This idea of imitation would support the behaviourist theory which states that language is a behaviour that is taught, and not something universal that we as humans are born with, as the nativist theory believes. Behaviourists believe that language is a “habit, a behaviour like any other, which is mastered through general learning imitation, reinforcement, and punishment” (Fasold & Connor-Linton 2006, p. 224). Behaviourists do not, however, explain who the children imitate or are reinforced or punished by.

Research carried out by Foster-Cohen (1999) deals with syntax and semantics, naming verb forms as one of the prominent linguistic struggles for the five-to six-year-olds and she writes that “since the adult system involves a complicated chaining of forms, depending on which auxiliary verb appear, it is not surprising that many children struggle with these forms well into late childhood” (p. 80). These six-year-olds are thus in the middle of learning these verb forms and they will thus be one way of detecting possible differences between the two groups of children used for this study. Furthermore, she states that:

> It is important to remember that if we are interested in the complexities of the syntactic and morphological system, we must observe children in situations where they are most likely to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge.  

(Foster-Cohen, 1999, p. 80)
This has important implications for the way the interviews for this study were carried out which is discussed further in section 4; method and material.

Foster-Cohen also raises an important aspect that must be taken into account when analysing the children’s language; the language of the adults in the child’s surroundings. She presents an example where a five-year-old boy says the phrase “Where’s our tape recorder what we used to have” (p. 81) and explains that though this is non-standard English, it is used in many English dialects by the adult speakers. One must thus remember to separate immature linguistic mistakes and non-standard variations that might be used by the child’s surroundings when analysing the language use and acquisition of children.

Finegan states that even if children need to be exposed to their language; children do not learn a language by imitating adults, but it is rather the interaction and the use of the language itself that expands the collection of words and sentences. He writes that language is instinctive and children often utter sentences never heard before (2007, p. 504). This suggests that input is important, but that it does not necessarily have to come from adults. He also notes that the input from parents consists more of politeness issues rather than grammatical ones, for example; a parent would rather say “say thank you to the nice lady”, rather than “no, darling, you say ‘thank you FOR the cookie, not ‘thank you cookie” (p. 505) He continues:

Parents do not generally teach language to young children directly and, in ordinary settings, rarely correct young children’s grammatical mistakes, although they correct utterances that are inaccurate or misleading.

(Finegan 2007, p.505)

Finegan also clarifies that there is a difference in the input given by teachers and parents. Opposed to parents’ natural linguistic interaction with the child, the teachers’ input tends to be more pedagogic. Unfortunately the time spent by teachers alone with each child in day care centres per day does not exceed more than a few minutes, leaving essential communication interactions to be carried out among the children themselves. The small input from the teachers comes in the form of monologues, for example by story-telling.

When researching the background for this study, I interviewed pre-school teacher Björkman in order to understand her point of view on adult/ peer input. According to her, she and her colleagues try to use a language as natural as possible when speaking to the children they work with, but most often will they fall into more simplified language than they use when
speaking to other adults, or even with their own children. That they use this simplified language at work and not at home with their own children would suggest a clear difference in the input they as adults give. This would also suggest that the few minutes of linguistic interaction between the children and their teachers are in a language closer to that they get with their peers as well, rather than in complex adult language, which they might receive at home.

Beller (2008) claims that adult input is of large importance and that the structure, as well as vocabulary of the adult, will be critical for the child’s acquisition. In her publication, covering language in the day care setting, one can read that:

> Children whose educators used complex sentences more frequently were more advanced in the use of complex sentences than children whose educators spoke in simpler sentences. […] the quantity of language input has a very high predictive force for the child’s acquisition of vocabulary

(Beller 2008, p 7)

Her point is that adult input is vastly important and shapes the child’s vocabulary, and thus it alludes to the idea of imitation that Finegan refutes. Beller suggests that it is not the interaction but the input that shapes the language, suggesting a large importance of the adult monologues mentioned above.

The Swedish preschool teachers Stenemalm, Rasheed and Ekholm agree with Finegan; that interaction is crucial for language acquisition, although they believe that peer interaction is more important than adult input. In an article from 2010 one can read their findings on the importance of peer interaction for the development of a rich language (Stenemalm et al 2010 p. 28). Stenemalm and her colleagues studied young children and their language during meal times for three months at the day care centre, allowing the children to eat without the presence of an adult. By recording the conversations they found that in the absence of an adult, children who otherwise were not verbal at all, opened up and became active in the conversation. After the study, when the adults returned to the meal tables, the formerly quiet children continued their active conversations, suggesting that peer input acted as a trigger for language acquisition.

Slobin’s (1986) research on language acquisition also covers the importance of peer input. He writes about the “peer-oriented nature of the society” (p. 343) where the children, from a very young age, “establish groups with whom they interact intensively during school hours […] as
well as in the neighbourhood, at home, and in the playground” (p. 343). Slobin suggests that it is within these groups that children acquire their language, and specifically the variety he calls “peer-talk”. Secret languages, slang and new words are created by children and young adults without apparent input from adults in order to strengthen the bonds within the groups. Some varieties spread to other groups and become permanent within dialects or languages and others are just confined to small, secluded groups and eventually die out. The peer interaction thus becomes important in order for the language of a society to develop and stay creative and “the language forms are feeding on, and into, those of her contemporaries” (p. 344).

The various researchers above suggest that a child of five to six is capable of acquiring up to nine new words per day, and also that he/she is able to construct fairly complex sentences and how to take part in discussions (e.g. turn-taking and staying on topic). The researchers agree on the importance of input and inspiration for children to expand their language. However, the opinion as to whether peer or adult input plays the largest role in children’s language acquisition differs between the researchers. It would appear that both sources add to the child’s language, although perhaps in different ways. As children’s language differs from that of adults, the input it offers may also differ. Slobin (1986) suggests that peer input is important for the language to stay creative, although, as Beller (2008) suggests, in order for a child to be creative, he/she must first learn the basics of syntax and morphology before straying from them. The difficulty one faces when analysing children’s language is, as Foster-Cohen (1999) points out, to separate the creativity and intended contemporary changes to a language from lack of knowledge and simple mistakes. One must also remember that the various input is not static; language acquisition is continuous, the child can relearn the meaning of a word or the tense form of a word at a later stage. This study is merely a documentation of a glimpse of these children’s language use at this particular stage.

3 Aim
The purpose of this paper is to investigate possible differences in the language use of children who have spent their first years at home with an adult (including grandparents/ nannies/other adults as well as a parent) versus those who have been to day care the majority of the day. The children at day care have adult input, although not to the same extent as children who are at home with an adult. They, on the other hand, have greater input from peers. The aim is to investigate whether the extent of adult or peer input makes a detectable difference in the
language of a child at the age of six. The goal is not to investigate whether one group is more advanced in their language use versus the other, but to detect possible differences in usage.

4 Method and material
The method used to carry out the investigation was to interview eight children who are at the age of six, four from each group. Permission forms (see Appendix III) were sent out to parents of six-year-old at the local school to sign, and eight children who were allowed to partake in the study and fitted the requirements were selected. This investigation presumes that children from both groups follow the learning curves for their age group and that none of the children have learning disabilities. The children who represent the stay-at-home group are only or eldest children and had thus no input from older siblings during the day. As most children today partake in various activities during the week from a very young age, I chose subjects that have had a maximum of ten hours of such activities per week. The reason is to minimise peer input as much as possible. The amount of planned activities was provided by the parents on the back of the permission forms. The interviews were carried out in Swedish as all informants have Swedish as their first language, and the results translated. In order to minimise any possible shyness and to encourage free speech, the interviews were done with a pair of children from the same test group at a time. There were thus four interviews altogether. It was felt that the children may be more inclined to speak freely if they had the support from a friend during the interview. In order to carry out interviews as effective as possible, I followed the technique found in the book A Guide to Interviewing Children: Essential Skills for Counsellors, Police, Lawyers and Social Workers (Wilson & Powell, 2001). The interviews were divided into two parts; informative questions and visual/ narrative material. In order to make the participants of the interviews for this investigation “demonstrate the extent of their knowledge” as Foster-Cohen (1999) puts it, the questions asked during the interview required longer and more specific answers but covered topics that are generally known by the age group. It was also important that the environment in which the interviews were carried out was as familiar and that someone they were comfortable with was in the room. To ensure that the environment was as familiar and relaxed as possible, the interviews were carried out in the children’s school, with their teacher present.

The interviews started with a few minutes of introduction, both of myself as well as of the children. The results from these interviews were transcribed and compared to each other.
4.1 Questions
During the interview the children were asked several questions (see Appendix I); they were given words and concepts and asked to describe them as specifically as they could. The questions involved explaining concepts and words that most children know the meaning of, although they cannot be explained in one or a few words, for example: “what is space”. This was in order to gather as much data as possible that could later be analysed. The goal was not to find out how much the children know about the certain things, but how they express themselves and therefore the questions were from different areas.

4.2 Visual/ narrative material
According to Foster-Cohen (1999) and Finegan (2007), one important stage in language acquisition is the proper use of past tense verbs where initially an overgeneralization occurs. Children tend to learn the rule for regular verb forms and use that on all verbs; they say *eated* instead of ate, *maked* instead of made, etc (Finegan 2007, p. 511). An analysis of the interviewed children’s use of the past tense verb forms were carried out in this investigation. The children were given a series of pictures (see Appendix II) and a story given in present tense and were afterwards asked to place the pictures in the right order and retell the story in past tense. The aim was to detect the use of irregular verb forms; such as go, eat and sit.

I shared with the children a very short, straightforward story of a girl that wakes up, gets out of bed and goes downstairs to eat breakfast before going to school (see Appendix I). As the plan was to let the children tell the story back to me, I wanted to keep it as easy as possible, while still complex enough to generate substantial data. I included two regular and seven irregular verbs in this story, to detect any possible differences is various words, i.e. do both groups make the same mistakes on the same words or not? Again, the results from the groups were compared to each other in order detect possible differences.

4.3 Reliability issues
In order to study children’s language, there are several factors that must be taken into consideration in order to understand and analyse it appropriately. One must remember that it is not only the amount of adult or peer input that affects the child’s language; interests, television and ambition are some of the things that play roles as well. Further one must also
be aware of the fact that “adult input” is not a static phenomenon; two children who spend their days with their mothers will not learn exactly the same things automatically. Variables, like the adult’s education, socioeconomic status and also the time he/she spends talking with as well as around the child affects the child’s language as well. This also, indirectly, affects peer influence. A child might learn words and phrases via a friend from the friend’s home surroundings. One must also take into account the relationship between the children. Two best friends might discuss among and influence each other more than two children who just happen to be in the same class. The children used in this study were all close friends from a small class and this might have influenced the results. It is almost impossible to trace from where a child acquires his/her language from a small case study. This investigation does however give an indication to the possible differences the various input make.

5 Results and analysis

First I will present the answers from the six informative questions asked to the children (see Appendix I) and thereafter the results from the visual story/ the past tense verb form test (see Appendix II). After the presentation of the results, there will be short summaries of the two parts. The analysis of the first part will focus on word choices and grammar and to some extent the sentence lengths, the second part will only focus on past tense verb forms. The transcribed answers have been translated by me, and are as grammatically close as the original answer as possible.

The groups have been named Group A and Group B:

Group A: consists of four children (two girls and two boys) who were at home with a parent before they started school

Group B: consists of four children (also two girls and two boys) who spent most of the day at a day care centre before they started school.

The children have also been given an individual number in addition to their group letter. The first child will thus later be referred to as A1, the second A2 and so on.

5.1 Questions

5.1.1 What does a dinosaur look like?

Group A: A1 and A2 first answered “big”, and later added “it can be of green colour” and “it can have a long tail”. The other pair was more specific: A3 answered “it has sharp claws. Sharp teeth. Quite long. Big head. (here A3 said “stor huvud” and not the correct “stort”). A4
provided the longest answer: “err, quite long, big head (he used the correct form “stort”). Sharp teeth. Long tail. Long body. Err, big angry eyes. And quite long legs and sharp feet and claws”.

Group B: B1 could not initially think of anything, but after hearing B2’s answer “it’s big. It has big hands. It eats a lot” said: “I wanted to say that, but didn’t think of it”, and thus supported the friend’s answer. The second pair also consisted of one answer and one support: B3 answered “big. It has sharp teeth” and B4 just said “same as [B3]”. These short answers make it impossible to detect any structural differences, although one can see the effect of peer influence.

5.1.2 Why do you go to school?

Both groups said that one goes to school to learn things. Several children said that one learns to read and count. A4 was the only one to say that one learns “the alphabet”, opposed to others who said that one learns “the letters”. B1 added that one goes to school to “make new friends”, after which B2 quickly added “to make mates” to his answer. Again, this shows peer influence and support. The change of word from friends to mates (vänner and kompisar) might suggest the creativity as opposed to plain imitation that Finegan (2000) speaks of.

5.1.3 Which is your favourite book/film? Why?

The most common answer from both groups was merely the name of the book/film and “funny” as the answer to the follow-up question. A1 answered “because I like animals. And I like to watch films” and this is the second longest answer provided on this question. The one answer that stood out was provided by A4, who answered:

Book? I have quite many favourites. In that case, I have a book about dinosaurs. In that one can read about how tall they are and how the skeleton looks like and things. And films… I could say quite a few. Dinosaurs… Garfield. Oh, and one more; Narnia! That’s good.

The expressions used in this answer was partially very mature compared the overall answers of the other participants, for example the sentence structure and word choice.

5.1.4 What is a king?

Group A provided very different answers on what a king is. A1 answered “they are special”, where after A2 said “…and has a crown”. The other pair provided longer answers. A3 said that the king is one who “is in charge. They have crowns. Long coats. Sit in chairs. He has a long cloth (meaning a cloak)”. A4 knew a great deal about kings and provided a very detailed
answer, however the most noticeable in that answer was “han har en skink” (he has a ham). The Swedish word “skinka” (ham) is very close to the word “skynke” (cloth) and shows that A4 was influenced by A3’s answer and used a word on the outside of the vocabulary. A3 quickly corrected A4, who repeated the correct word before continuing answering.

Group B also answered that a king is in charge and has a throne. B1 answered that “he runs the entire world. Has a throne and lots of gold. Perhaps 2000”. B2 just answered “he is in charge”. Then B1 and B2 began to wildly discuss among themselves how much money they had and how much money video games costs, forgetting about the interview. B3 did not provide an original answer, but merely said “same a [B4]”, who had already answered that “he has a crown” and named some of the titles of a royal family.

5.1.5 Who is your favourite person? Why?

On the question about their favourite person, the longest and most specific answer came from A1 and A2. They both named one person each and provided long explanations as to why they loved this person. A2’s answer was very specific and contained long, fairly complicated sentences with several sub-clauses and no grammatical errors. A2 described the friend (“a girl that doesn’t go to this school, but lives in Nicaragua”) and the friend’s family conditions; how the friend’s family “used to live close by, but her parents got a divorce and because her father comes from Nicaragua, they had to move back there, to be close to his family”. A3 also named one person, although did not provide a very long answer and answered: “My big sister, because she is really nice and she is fun to play with”. When comparing the various answers, one can see that the amount of words used to explain why they loved their favourite persons differed widely between the groups: The children from Group B listed many persons as their favourites; they listed everyone in their class, their families or everyone on their street, etc. However, when answering why, they just said that “they’re nice”, as opposed to the long explanations provided by Group A.

5.1.6 What is space?

A1 and A2 answered what space is briefly. A2 answered that Earth is very small, something that A1 did not understand and asked for A2 to explain. A2 provided the explanation that “Earth looks big down here, but if you look at a map over space, you see that Earth is tiny compared to other planets”, an answer that A1 was happy with and did not wish to discuss this further. A4 provided a long answer as well as an insight of a vivid imagination:
There are aliens. They are green and sometimes a little strange. And they have a strange gun. And they have a space ship. And they have a teddy bear. Hah, you never know, maybe they sleep with a teddy bear? They are strange. They have very many legs, perhaps six. That’s it. Period.

A3 also spoke of aliens and answered that “that is where there are planets and aliens, who are red. They fly around in space ships. They have a planet where they live. That’s enough”. One can see that the first answer inspired much of the second, concerning the topic as well as the structure. A3’s ending is very similar to A4’s, although it is, again, not plain imitation.

The answers from Group B ranged from the very short: “I know! Planets!” provided by B4, to a list of all the planets in our galaxy (B2). B2 also named our galaxy and several stars. This large range can be connected to Foster- Cohen and her idea that in order to analyse children’s language the children must be allowed to “demonstrate the extent of their knowledge” (1999, p. 80). The answers above show a vast difference in knowledge and interest about planets and thus the amount of data from the various children differs and creates a reliability problem with the analysis. Lack of interest might be the reason for straying from the topic and introducing one or more topics. One example is when B4 was asked what space is and answered after B3’s short “err, stars and the moon”:

…and there is a teddy bear (A3 and A4 had shouted this to B3 and B4 when passing in the corridor), and there is a dog named Pluto. He belongs to Mickey Mouse, Or Minnie Mouse, or Donald. He is married to Daisy, and Clarabelle Cow is married to Goofy. Or…he loves her, so they might get married soon. And there is a baby, and a human who takes care of it. Her name is Evelina.

This answer is long and has a few longer sentences and shows a rich language, however, this was the longest answer from B4 during the interview, and it was not only off topic, it was also not as much aimed at me as at B3, who contributed with more Disney characters. When looking merely at B4’s actual answer relevant to the question, only the initial “I know! Planets” ought to be taken into account and be part of the analysis. However, the interaction between the children is an essential part of the analysis of the peer influence and the “peer talk” that Slobin (1986) speaks of.

5.2 Summary of part one
When analysing the vocabulary, it shows that children with a specific interest, such as planets, dinosaurs or kings, have larger vocabularies concerning that topic and are happy to share and discuss that topic. One can see that that Group A tended to provide longer answers and more
complex sentences, while the children from Group B tended to give shorter answers and discuss between themselves before giving an answer. The peer influence was clearer with Group B, although it could be detected in Group A as well, as A4’s answer on question 3, on what a king is. When looking at sentence lengths, group A used longer sentences with a higher rate of sub-clauses, while group B tended to only use main clauses. The children from group A did, however, use more main clauses than sub-clauses.

5.3 Visual material

After the questions, the pictures for part two of the investigation were shown to the children (for the pictures, see Appendix II). The children were able to look at the pictures while I read the story with the present tense verbs to them, in order to make it easier for them to remember the story and to tell it back. Out of the nine verbs in the investigation, only two are regular: vakna (wake) and borsta (brush). The table below shows the use of the correct past tense verb form in Swedish. An X in the table represents a correct answer and a - represents an incorrect form. The numbers mean that other words or forms were used and are explained below.

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1. A1, B1 and B2 answered gick (went) and not sprang (ran), although they did use the correct past tense form and their answer is also linguistically correct.

2. B1 used the wrong word: kom (came) and not klev (rose), although the form was correct.

3. A1, A2, A4, B1 and B2 did not use the word given, but answered that the girl in the story “got out of bed” (gick upp ur sängen), which is also linguistically correct and the more commonly used form.

4. Wrong word and wrong past tense form.
5.4 Summary of part two
Foster-Cohen (1999) stated that the use of verb forms is an area where one can see the differences in children’s language development, and the results from this study points to the same conclusion. When it comes to the use of past tense verb forms, Group A delivered more correct answers than Group B. A3 was the only one that got all the given verb forms right, although the other children from group A provided answers that were grammatically and linguistically correct. None of the children from Group A provided incorrect past tense forms.

The answers from Group B were not as unified, and several incorrect verb forms were provided. B3 initially used the correct verb form for *slept* (sov) but after B4 used the incorrect form (sovde), B3 changed to the same wrong form. On the rest of the questions, B3 and B4 provided the same verb forms, both correct and incorrect. The peer influence was very clear with this pair.

To sum up this part of the investigation; the answers suggest that the children who have spent most of their days with an adult use more correct past tense forms than the children who have been to day care although one can also see that everyone provided the correct form for the regular verbs, as well as the irregular *ät* (ate). It is when it comes to the irregular forms where one can see differences.

6 Summary and conclusion
The children were all positive and happy to be interviewed. They did not show any particular shyness or restriction and they spoke freely and spontaneously, which gave me a large amount of data to analyse and interpret.

After analysing and comparing the interviews, the conclusion that I have come to is one that I expected; that there is a difference in the language between the two groups, although it is very small. After being told growing up that I sounded precocious as a child; that I used bigger words or sentences than one would expect from a child my age, I believed the reason for this to be that I spend most parts of my days alone with my mother before I started school. This is why I chose this particular subject for this study; to see if my reasoning had any substance to them.

Interests and social environment plays a large role in the children’s vocabulary and makes it more difficult to analyse. However, a few sentences from Group A stood out as being more
sophisticated than others, such as A4’s answer about the favourite book and film and A1’s answer that dinosaurs can be of a green colour and not that they can be green. In the interviews, the children who made up Group A tended to use more complex sentences in general and had the highest rate of correct past tense verb forms. On the other hand, the children from Group B discussed among themselves and influenced each other much more than their counterparts. They asked for input from their friend before answering and in one case changed a correct answer into an incorrect after hearing the friend’s answer. The children from Group B also strayed from the topic several times while discussing with each other, something that none from Group A did. When looking back on previous research, one can see that Group A supports Beller (2008), who writes; that “children whose educators used complex sentences more frequently were more advanced in the use of complex sentences”, while Group B supports the research of Stenemalm et al (2010), where peer interaction is suggested as trigger for discussion and source for contemporary language among children at day care.

To sum up, the conclusion drawn is that there is a small difference in the language of these six-year-olds, but also a difference in the language use. Group A provided monologue type answers that in a few cases appeared very mature and correct, almost sounding precocious. Group B, on the other hand, interacted more with their friends and conversed in a different way than Group A, and the conversation itself was more important than the use of the correct forms. This suggests that adult input is important for correctness in the child’s language, but also that in order to learn to discuss and interact properly as well as to learn contemporary language; the child needs input from peers as well. However, the child will use the forms used in its surroundings and if the adults use the wrong forms or dialects, the child will use these as well. If a parent, for example, use an incorrect past tense verb form or grammar, this will most likely be transmitted to the child, as suggested by Foster-Cohen (1999) in the example above with the tape recorder. The wrong verb forms used by Group B thus might not be the result of peer influence, but incorrect adult input to one child and then transmitted from one child to another.

One must remember that this was a very small case study, with only four children from each group. In order to come to a real conclusion about the differences in the language of these two groups, one would have to do further research, using a larger number of participants and also more questions and control for variables. I also believe that if the children had been one year younger, the differences would have been easier to detect. The children used for this study
had been to pre-school for almost a year together and thus the differences had probably been somewhat smoothed out. The results from this study point to a difference in the language use of children with different amount of peer/adult input, however, further research needs to be done.
7 References


Appendix I

Questions asked:

1. What does a dinosaur look like?
2. Why do you go to school?
3. Which is your favourite book/film? Why?
4. What is a king?
5. Who is your favourite person? Why?
6. What is space?

Story told:

Swedish:


(At first, the girl is sleeping. Then the sun rises. Then the girl wakes up and rises from the bed. After that, she puts on her clothes and runs down the stairs. There she eats breakfast before she brushes her teeth. At last, she rides in the car to school)
Appendix II
Appendix III

Kära målsman,

jag heter Melindah Lavesson och jag skriver examensarbete i lingvistik på Mittuniversitetet. Min uppsats handlar om skillnader i språket mellan barn som dagligen gått på dagis/förskola och barn som spenderat mestadels av tiden hemma med en vuxen (förälder/barnflicka/mor-farförälder etc.) innan skolstarten. Min huvudsakliga målgrupp för min studie är barn i förskoleklass, och vill därför ”låna” just Ert barn för en liten intervju på skolan, under skoltid.
Om Ni skulle ha några frågor är Ni välkomna att ringa mig, på nummer 0435-53116

Med vänlig hälsning, Melindah

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Mitt barn, som heter: _____________ , får vara med i studien: Ja [ ] Nej [ ]
Om ja: Mitt barn har gått på dagis [ ] Varit hemma med förälder/annan vuxen [ ]
Målsmans underskrift ____________________________

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