# USVAJANJE DRUGOG JEZIKA KOD DJECE: STUDIJE SLUČAJA

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# CHILD SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: CASE STUDIES

Undergraduate thesis

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# Contents

# 1. Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) is defined as a field of applied linguistics that investigates the processes related to "learning of a nonnative language after the first language (L1) has been learned, either in a naturalistic setting or in a formal classroom setting" (Miao, 2015: 360). In Croatia, as in many other countries, acquiring English as a foreign language (in the formal classroom setting) usually starts from the first grade of primary school.[1] Along with the formal instruction in school, Croatian students have access to the English language through informal/out-of-school exposure to media input in English. The relationship between the exposure to the second language (L2) or foreign language (FL)[2] media input and SLA is often described as complicated and intriguing, especially when observing the influence of media input in English on L2 vocabulary acquisition (Vanderplank, 2016). This thesis thus describes the research studies investigating the extent to which widely available English-language media impact young language learners' L2 acquisition.

The thesis analyses three case studies that examined the connection between media input and young learners' L2 acquisition. It is divided into six chapters, the first one being the introduction. The second chapter describes the main characteristics of a case study, a research methodology frequently used in SLA studies. Chapter Three describes a case study conducted by Jylhä-Laide in 1994 titled "Learning by Viewing: Cartoons as Foreign Language Learning Material for Children – a Study." This study focused on a Finnish girl named Laura, who acquired a substantial English vocabulary solely through exposure to cartoons and videos, despite having no prior formal English instruction. Chapter Four discusses a study by Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, conducted in 2019, titled "Why do sparkles make a sound in English? The Impact of Media Exposure on Child L2 Vocabulary Acquisition." This research study examined the case of a nine-year-old Croatian girl who significantly improved her second language skills by watching various entertainment content on television. Chapter Five presents the final case study discussed in this

[1] In Croatia, students typically start learning English in primary school from the first grade, around the age of 6 or 7 with two contact hours (45 minutes each) a week. In some schools, students may begin learning English in the fourth grade (according to the Croatian National Framework Curriculum, 2011, in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019)

[2] According to Miao (2015: 360), a second language (L2) is a "nonnative language to which the learner has natural exposure." and a foreign language (FL) is "a language that is not the native language of the majority of the population, nor is it widely used as a medium of communication in the country." This thesis deals with the case studies involving participants who learned English as a FL and lived in a country where English was not the primary language spoken by the majority.

thesis: Da Silva's 2022 study, "Incidental English Learning and Linguicism: A Case Study of an Indonesian Child of a Multilingual Family." This study investigated a six-year-old Indonesian girl who incidentally acquired English, instead of Indonesian, as her first language due to regular exposure to English-language media.

The fact that all participants in examined case studies acquired English with the help of modern mass media was the main motivation for writing this thesis. As a digital learner, the author of this thesis had similar experiences as the children described in the case studies and was thus aware of the influence of technology in her English language learning process beyond the classroom.

# 2. Case study as a research instrument

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly explain what a case study involves. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018: 375) suggested that a case study might include "an experiment, action, research, survey, naturalistic research, participatory research, historical research, etc." The authors believed that, although it is difficult and perhaps not necessary to precisely define what a case study is, it can be said that "a case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018: 376). One of the main characteristics of a case study is the longitudinal research method that involves an in-depth, detailed examination of a subject over an extended period. Longitudinal observation is also the most frequent method in researching children's language learning (Da Silva, 2022). This method is used to observe changes, and developments over time, providing insights into how and why certain phenomena occur. The researchers examine a single case over an extended period, with the goal of applying the findings and conclusions to other similar cases or developing a new hypothesis is one of the aims of case studies.

Creating an effective case study involves several important steps. A case study usually begins with research questions that outline its goals. The author then introduces readers to the participants' background and explains the methods used to collect data. The findings are then analysed and interpreted, followed by a discussion that compares results with similar cases or theories. Finally, the case study proposes solutions of the discussed issue and justifies them. According to Ellis (1994), case studies are valuable because they allow researchers to explore the language learning process in context and focus on individual cases to understand the greater issues.

The three studies in this thesis can be described as case studies for several reasons. First, the authors focused on specific participants (children) in their natural environment. They also emphasized the importance of longitudinal observation of participants over time, particularly Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) who spent two months collecting data on the child under study. Each case was carefully defined based on factors such as time, location, and context, with the authors providing a rich description of the participants' backgrounds, including family members, social status, home environment, education, and interests. For example, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) examined parents' background and level of English-language proficiency. Finally,

case studies typically use qualitative methods like in-depth interviews. Jylhä-Laide (1994) and Da Silva (2022) followed that approach and conducted interviews with participants' mothers.

## 2.1 Key terms

This sub-chapter briefly explains the terminology that was used in the studies selected for this thesis. Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) thus mention the following terms in their paper – implicit, explicit and incidental L2 acquisition, formal classroom setting and natural setting. A second language can be acquired implicitly (unconscious learning) and explicitly (conscious learning); incidentally (unintentional learning) and intentionally. The term *incidental learning* is used in the sense of "acquisition of a word or expression without the conscious intention to commit the element to memory, such as 'picking up' an unknown word from listening to someone or from reading a text" (Hulstijn, 2013: 2632). By engaging with media content, young learners "pick up" new words and phrases through repeated exposure to media input and contextual clues. Therefore, incidental language acquisition learning is a "bonus" effect, not the intention of the learner (Bunting and Lindström, 2013). The key difference between implicit and incidental SLA is that implicit L2 learning emphasizes learning unconsciously and naturally through exposure. On the other hand, incidental acquisition involves picking up language skills as a secondary effect of an activity where the focus is not on language learning itself.

Furthermore, SLA occurs in different settings: in foreign or second language settings and formal or informal, naturalistic environments. Naturalistic setting usually refers to different places where individuals naturally spend their time, such as the home environment, whereas formal classroom setting here refers to language learning under the teachers' guidance in the school environment.

According to Ellis (1994), second language is usually acquired in an informal, natural setting where it is frequently spoken (such as the home environment, workplace, playgrounds, travel, social gatherings, etc.) On the contrary, foreign language is typically learned in a formal classroom setting with limited opportunities for use beyond that setting. All in all, L2 acquisition can occur under many conditions and in a variety of settings. Out of many non-linguistic factors that influence L2 acquisition process, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) emphasized resources at

the child's disposal, and parents' socioeconomic and sociocultural status, while Da Silva (2022) mentioned personal motivation as a great influence on children's SLA outcomes.

# 3. Jylhä-Laide (1994)

In 1994, Jaana Jylhä-Laide published a case study entitled "Learning by Viewing: Cartoons as Foreign Language Learning Material for Children - A Study" in the *Journal of Educational Television.* The focus of the study was the effect that animated films have on young viewers' SLA. The main participant of this case study was a Finnish girl named Laura (pseudonym) who began to watch, and later rewatch English-language videotaped animated films when she was just six years old. Laura was a child of a Finnish family of four. Her mother worked as a university professor and her father was a trained nurse. They did not have any relatives or friends who spoke English as a first language, and she had never visited an English-speaking country. Additionally, although Laura did attend primary school at the time the study was conducted, she had never gone through any formal English instruction in school[3] and the only consistent input in English that she had ever received was through exposure to videotaped cartoons in English.

In the first research question Jylhä-Laide tried to establish the similarity between viewing media content and naturalistic language acquisition. The author investigated whether video input provided the viewer-learner with elements of a naturalistic learning situation. Additionally, although Laura only watched videotaped cartoons, Jylhä-Laide was interested in the differences between exposure to video and television to determine which medium (in theory) more closely resembles naturalistic second language acquisition. Therefore, she outlined some advantages of watching cartoons on video rather than on television. The second research question examined how and to what extent the modified language of cartoons influenced Laura's L2 acquisition. To find out if the learning process followed the rules of naturalistic language acquisition, the language of cartoons that the participant watched was in the researcher's centre of attention.

The study took place between the spring of 1988 and the autumn of 1990 when Laura was an eight-year-old girl. The method of data collection consisted of observation of the participant's behaviour and interviews. First, Laura's mother provided a description of her early childhood, and her previous class teacher gave insight into Laura's behaviour and skills in school. Second, Laura

[3] In 1994, the Finnish education system mandated that English language instruction must begin in the first grade. However, at the time the study was conducted (1988-1990) Finnish pupils would start learning English in the third grade of primary school, at the age of nine. (Vitikka et al., 2012)

completed a WISC-R test[4] to check if she had any special talents that could have contributed to her language learning process. The results revealed that she was an average pupil who was very good at logical thinking but showed no other special talents. Third, language tests and recorded conversations with Laura supplied resources for the analysis of her English skills. She undertook a series of standardized tests to assess her listening comprehension and vocabulary skills, including the well-established tests developed by Takala (1982, in Jylhä-Laide, 1994) and Pitkänen (1992, in Jylhä-Laide, 1994). Additionally, she completed the Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM) created by Burt et al. (1975, in Jylhä-Laide, 1994), which was specifically designed to evaluate the syntactic development of bilingual learners. These assessments provided a comprehensive evaluation of Laura's language abilities across multiple domains, offering insight into her receptive skills (listening comprehension) and her productive knowledge (vocabulary usage and syntactic structure). To measure her progress, she repeated these tests after two years of exposure to English-language media input, allowing for a comparative analysis of her initial and final results. This approach enabled a more precise measurement of her development over time, offering quantifiable data to track improvements in her language proficiency.

The data on the video input that Laura had received (i.e., the language of the cartoons) were collected by video recording multiple episodes of The DJ Kat Show on broadcast television and analysing six animated films*: Captain Caveman, Sport Billy, Transformers, The Gobots, Super Chicken* and *Tom Slick*. Finally, the interviews about her viewing habits and preferences revealed that Laura enjoyed watching animated films since she was a preschooler and with time it became her favourite outside-of-school activity. She spent two to three hours a day watching, videotaping, and reviewing her favourite parts. Whenever she encountered an unfamiliar word, she would stop the video, rewind, and watch it again in search of clarification. She enjoyed memorizing what each character said and later practiced the lines before rewatching until she managed to learn them by heart.

To answer the first research question, Jylhä-Laide (1994) investigated the differences between naturalistic language learning and learning by viewing media content. She argued that, in naturalistic language learning situation, language learners actively try to unravel the meaning behind words, communicate and receive feedback from their teacher by using their previous

[4] The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) is a well-known intelligence test designed for children between the ages of 6 and 16.

knowledge of the world and relying on the contextual information that they receive. This is usually not the case with learning by viewing, which is generally passive and lacks several components of naturalistic language learning such as active interaction and practice of the language. However, the author argued that watching videotaped cartoons (in theory) more closely resembles naturalistic L2 acquisition than, as an example, viewing TV content. Hence, Jylhä-Laide outlined some advantages that, she believes, video viewing has over TV viewing. She argued that television viewing deprived the learner of the crucial feedback that verifies and clarifies information the learner acquires. The author reasoned that both TV and video provide learner-viewers with contextual information using auditory and visual channels which, ultimately, leads them to guess the meaning of an utterance even when they do not understand the idea behind it. However, Jylhä-Laide (1994) concluded that video possesses two valuable distinctive features that TV does not. First, the repetition (that provides learners with feedback and clarification), and second, the independence of transmission time. Hence, viewers have more control over the input, more time to process the information and therefore, receive clarification by rewinding if needed. In conclusion, the author suggested that, although learning by viewing has bad reputation among SLA researchers, watching videotaped, age-appropriate content can positively influence young beginner language learners' L2 acquisition.

To answer the second research question, the author investigated the features of cartoons that Laura watched. Jylhä-Laide (1994) listed the following features as of prime importance: strong picture-word interconnection, simple and complete sentences, very few disfluencies in the dialogue, frequently used repetition, and relatively low rate of speech. According to the author, cartoons successfully entertain young viewers because they offer simplified input, vivid images, dynamic movement and attention-grabbing stories in a highly motivational environment. She added that programs with more contextual clues, such as cartoons, were ideal for L2 learning. On the other hand, programs with less contextual clues, such as news broadcast, would not be considered optimal for beginner language learners as much as animated films. Bahrani and Tam (2012) conducted an experiment on that topic and discovered that participants (30 low level and 30 upper-intermediate level language learners aged 21 to 26) who were exposed to news broadcast did not significantly improve their L2 proficiency levels compared to those who watched cartoons.

Lastly, the author presented the results of Laura's exposure to English-language media input. Laura's family members were surprised to see that, in the first year of being exposed to videotaped

cartoons, she had started using English words in everyday life. Initially, this meant only producing single words but later she was able to communicate longer chunks of speech. She interacted with her mother in English on a daily basis. After a few years, Laura exceeded all expectations. Without any previous knowledge of English, she managed to acquire the language solely by watching English-language cartoons. Laura repeated tests that she initially took and her scores were significantly higher. The Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM) results clearly showed that she could be placed at the fifth level, which is the highest level of proficiency as defined by Burt et al. (1975, in Jylhä-Laide, 1994) in the BSM Manual[5]. Hence, the author concluded that Laura's proficiency level was now as high as that of the native speaker of English of her age. She used English creatively and her pronunciation showed no traces of her Finnish accent, unlike that of her peers. Jylhä-Laide (1994: 98) concluded that this was the case because "learning the correct pronunciation and intonation may have been easier for Laura than for pupils taught at school because she has been able to hear the correct model from the beginning while watching the programmes, whereas in classroom language learning the teacher is normally a non-native speaker of the language, and learning often based on written texts." It must be emphasized that although Laura's vocabulary and grammar skills developed in an extraordinary way, she did not learn to read and write in English.

Jylhä-Laide (1994) concluded that, as the only source of the English language input, off-air cartoons were responsible for Laura's language learning success. She added that cartoon facilitating features and modified language of animated films contributed to Laura's results However, the author underlined the danger of generalizing children's SLA results. Based on the data presented, it can be concluded that the unique advantages of video viewing, such as self-paced study, a safe and controlled environment, and the ability to endlessly review content—something children particularly enjoy—distinguish it from simply watching cartoons on television. Unlike traditional TV viewing, where content is linear and not always accessible for repeated watching, video viewing allows learners to revisit specific scenes, dialogue, or language patterns as many times as needed, reinforcing understanding and language acquisition. The flexibility to pause, rewind, and replay content gives children a sense of control over their learning, catering to their

[5] BSM Manual described this level of English as *Proficient English*: Children in Level 5 demonstrate native or near-native proficiency in English. They control most of the basic grammatical structure of English, and their speech is comparable to native English speakers their own age.

curiosity and enhancing retention. Additionally, the author suggested that the interactional modifications available in video viewing, such as on-demand subtitles, language settings, and guided pauses, could be a key factor that makes this out-of-school activity particularly beneficial for language learning. Considering these advantages, Jylhä-Laide (1994) proposed that integrating video viewing into school curricula could offer significant benefits. By incorporating this approach, schools could bridge the gap between formal education and students' natural, self-directed learning habits, creating a more engaging and effective language learning environment. However, as Kuppens (2010: 80) points out: "… an important mission for teachers of English as a foreign language lies in providing pupils with skills, strategies and viewing behaviours that optimize their incidental language acquisition from media exposure outside the classroom."

# 4. Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019)

In 2019, Mateja Hendrih and Stela Letica Krevelj published a case study titled "Why do sparkles make a sound in English? The impact of media exposure on child L2 vocabulary acquisition" in the Croatian journal *Jezikoslovlje*. The study described a case of a nine-year-old Croatian child who significantly improved her second language skills by watching TV content in English. Primarily, the authors focused on the influence of media exposure on the young learner's L2 learning process.

Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) pointed out the negative and positive sides of media and the role they play in second language learning. Among positive aspects, the author suggested that media are widely available, highly context-dependent, self-governed, and audio-visual, meaning that they require simultaneous attention to both image and sound (Postman, 1979, in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019). The child must process this information and then figure out, or "translate" the content into language. A lot of linguistic and non-linguistic factors influence the success of this process, which is highly individual and depends on the child's skills and talents. However, it is not disputed that media efficiently attract children's attention. Originally, the goal of television viewing was not primarily educational. TV content was meant to be entertaining and enjoyable to catch viewer's attention. To understand the message, the viewer must try to learn the language in which the message is presented. Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) suggest that non-linguistic cues (visual and oral) assist the child in unraveling the meaning behind different words and phrases. They claim that the lack of grading systems, tests, homework assignments, teaching materials, or any source of stress that could potentially cause language learning anxiety, along with independent viewing of the diverse TV content is what makes TV input appealing to young viewers. The child therefore receives an invisible 'reward' that can be explained by the gratification theory**,** which argues that frequent exposure to television makes children accustomed to "immediate satisfaction" (instant gratification) of their need to be entertained, which consequently makes them less interested in activities which resemble those in school settings (Lemish, 2007, in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019).

On the other hand, using media for incidental, implicit SLA is often criticized among the researchers[6] in the language learning field who support the Interaction Hypothesis[7] (which promotes explicit, intentional SLA in a natural language learning environment).

Among negative sides of learning while watching media content, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj suggested that it lacks the two-way interaction that face-to-face, natural communication includes. Additionally, the content can be easily misinterpreted, and easily guessed words can also be easily forgotten, whereas difficult words can be commonly ignored. What is more, children do not practice what they learn through media unless they deliberately decide to do so, which turns incidental language learning to intentional language learning that usually takes place in the classroom (Laufer, 2005, in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019).

Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) presented the case of a Croatian girl Lana (pseudonym) who started watching English language television programs when she was only three years old. At the time the study was conducted Lana was nine years old, in the third grade of primary school. Her English instruction in school began when she was seven years old (in the first grade) and continued for two and a half years before the study was conducted. Although their native language is Croatian, her mother and father spoke English as their second language, especially her father who actively used it while working in the aviation industry. They provided answers for all her language dilemmas that she encountered through watching television content, encouraging her along the way. Among all the media choices available to her, Lana preferred television.

The authors aimed to answer one main research question: "To what extent can a child learn a second language through watching TV content for an extensive time period?" Essentially, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj wanted to establish whether long exposure to TV content in English could influence the child's L2 vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language learning setting.

The method of data collection consisted of play dates that Lana had with the first author. Each play date lasted 60 minutes and was a regular weekly occurrence for three and a half years before the study was conducted. The play dates were carried out in English and only occasionally were some lexical items translated into Croatian. The conversations evolved around topics Lana enjoyed

[6] Researchers who support Long's Interaction Hypothesis include S. Gass, T. Pica, A. Mackey, R. Ellis, L. Ortega, et al. (Gass and Mackey, 2007)

[7] "The Interaction Hypothesis states that interaction facilitates SLA because conversational and linguistic modifications in discourse provide learners with necessary comprehensible linguistic input. This approach is credited to Long (1996) … who believes that what makes any input to be comprehensible is modified interaction or negotiation of meaning" (Muho and Kurani, 2014: 47)

and initiated, such as retelling the fun events that happened in the recent past, plans for the future, music, animals, and technology, all of which generally matched the type of programs she watched the most on television. Almost all these diverse shows, documentaries, and cartoons, had one thing in common: they were all in English, without Croatian subtitles. Lana spent about three hours a day watching TV on weekdays and half that amount on weekends. The data on Lana's language background were gathered from her parents and through feedback the first author received from questions and observations noted during sessions. The first author strived for spontaneous, unstructured conversations on everyday topics in the safe, stress-free environment of Lana's home. Lana was, however, aware of the purpose of the audio-taped sessions and agreed to participate in them. Her reading and writing skills were not examined.

The authors reported outstanding results in Lana's oral production. The play date conversations confirmed that Lana had above-average proficiency in English, which was clear from the complex grammatical structures that she used, as well as the use of rare vocabulary items that indicated a high lexical level. The data pointed to the conclusion that Lana's learning skills were the result of incidental language learning.

The primary conclusion of this study was that Lana was highly aware of the various sources of language input available to her. According to Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019), she valued the teacher's efforts at school and recognized TV as a genuine opportunity to learn English. Her parents were always there to clarify the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary items. Lana often used informal language expressions that are characteristic of TV content. She was, however, aware of the "proper*"* ways the words should sound which suggests a high level of pragmatic and grammatical competence. Despite being familiar with the fact that contractions such as *gonna* and *gimme* (instead of *going to* and *give me*) were not grammatically correct, Lana did not know the explanation behind why some utterances were correct or not; she relied on her parent's and teacher's word and the way the words "sounded*"*. This observation led the authors to the conclusion that Laura learnt English implicitly, which, according to some researchers, can deprive the learner of explicit language knowledge and awareness (Ellis, 2009, in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019). The following excerpt taken from the study is an example of Lana knowing the correct or "proper" choice of the two forms of the indefinite article by relying only on the way they sounded:

R: Why do you say "an egg"?

L: An egg, um, it's better.

R: It's better. Why is it better?

L: "A egg" - it doesn't sound proper, but "an egg", it does.

R: … But why do you say this "a" or "an" at all? Why do you say it in front of-?

L: I don't know.

R: You don't know? Did you hear it somewhere?

L: My teacher says it so.

(Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019: 461)

When asked how or where she heard certain words and phrases which were often low-frequency vocabulary items, Lana was able to recall what show/animated film she was watching when she encountered the unfamiliar word. This was particularly evident when discussing her favourite topic, the animal world. The first author reported that Lana used many advanced and complex words and expressions, such as snake *venom* instead of *poison; wolf pack* instead of simply *wolves*; *rodent* instead of *mouse*, *animal enclosures* instead of *animal houses/homes/rooms* etc. To an extent, this can be attributed to contextualized communicative situations that she encountered through audio-visual input.

Lana memorized only utterances connected to her favourite topics (such as animals), which explained why she did not know much terminology on topics she did not find amusing (e.g. food). Lana also avoided metalinguistic questions by ignoring them, switching to another topic, or calling them annoying. Here is an example of such behaviour:

R: You don't know? You've never thought about it? What about Lunding?

L: Oh, this is getting tiring. [gets up to fetch the toy]

(Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019: 463)

Hendrih and Letica Krevelj explained that such behaviour is normal in young learners who feel criticized, shamed or anxious when their knowledge is questioned, and they do not know the correct answer. To cover up this feeling, Lana spoke quietly or in an incomprehensible way, similar to when she was given corrective feedback. Such behaviour confirms the previously mentioned gratification theory (Lemish, 2007, in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019) on an individual level: Lana was used to the immediate satisfaction that is granted when watching TV content. As it

happens, anything characteristic of school settings, such as negative reinforcement, is not appealing to young learners.

The fact that Lana was able to recall the exact episode of her favourite TV programs from which she gathered rare lexical expressions can be attributed to the dependence on contextual information that is crucial in conveying and acquiring knowledge via TV content. The examples of this context- and content- specific features[8] were noted on multiple occasions in Lana's production such as the word *barnacles* in the following excerpt taken from the study:

L: What number did I get?

R: Two.

L: Oh barnacles!

R: Barnacles? What's that?

L: [blows a raspberry]

R: You don't know what that is?

L: No.

R: Then why did you say it?

L: I don't know why.

R: Where did you hear it?

L: SpongeBob SquarePants.

(Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019: 464)

Therefore, the word *barnacles* can exclusively (or originally) be found in the context and content of the cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Lana was aware that she 'picked up' the expression there. This highly contextual word used outside of the cartoon context shows that Lana can elaborate on the word and apply it to a completely new context.

Examining the context-, and content-specific features, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) presented a few cases of modality-specific features of Lana's oral production. One such feature is the backstory behind the title of this study which is taken from the following excerpt:

R: Sparkle? What does it mean?

L: Šljokice. (eng. *glitter*)

[8] Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019: 448) explained that "…content-, context-, and modality-specific features are used as theory-neutral terms to represent the characteristics/features of TV as a symbol system."

R: …What does it mean when something sparkles?

L: It means you see a glow.

R: Aha.

L: And it's in a lot of colours.

L: And I think it makes a sound?

R: It makes a sound?

L: Ts-ts-ts, something like that.

(Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019: 466)

According to the authors, the audio-visual features of TV influenced Lana's mental image of certain vocabulary items in English, in this case, the word *sparkles*. Lana was able to visually describe the word, translate it to her native language and interestingly, add a sound which usually accompanies sparkles in cartoons that is similar to the sound of bells or cymbals. In addition, she used the epistemic modality marker *I think* which suggests that after elaborating the word she began to have doubts about her previous statement about sparkles making a sound. Her mental elaboration points to the conclusion that since Lana consciously made an effort to process the information TV provides, the language she acquired implicitly can also be intentional.

Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) highlighted that the study was carried out in a highly motivational environment which played a crucial role in the language learning process. This environment offered abundant and diverse exposure to the second language, allowing Lana to engage with English in various contexts both inside and outside of formal learning. Additionally, the presence of strong parental support, coupled with the parents' medium to high proficiency in English, further enhanced the effectiveness of the learning experience. The authors noted that such favourable conditions - sufficient language input, consistent encouragement, and the availability of knowledgeable language models at home - significantly contributed to Lana's success. However, they also pointed out that these ideal circumstances might not reflect the conditions faced by all language learners, especially in less supportive settings.

Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) proposed that further empirical studies focusing on incidental language learning in more controlled and less ideal environments were necessary. Such studies could provide important data on how effective language learning strategies might be

adapted and applied in schools worldwide, particularly in situations where students do not have the benefit of rich linguistic exposure or supportive home environment.

# 5. Da Silva (2022)

In 2022, Anna Marietta da Silva published a case study titled “Incidental English Learning and Linguicism: A Case Study of an Indonesian Child of a Multilingual Family” in the *Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. The study aimed to investigate incidental language learning among Indonesian children from exposure to home television programs.

First, the author suggested that a surprisingly high number of pupils, particularly in highly populated urban areas, already have an excellent knowledge of English by the time they enter the Indonesian school system. In this case study, Da Silva (2022) described the advantages and disadvantages that such bilingual children face in the monolingual Indonesian community.

The main participant of this case study was an Indonesian girl named Jane (pseudonym) who was six at the time the study was conducted. She was raised in a multilingual household by her Russian mother (Kate, pseudonym) and Indonesian father (Karl, pseudonym) who agreed on the family’s language policy: mother was to use Russian, father was to use English and grandmother (Mary, pseudonym) and the rest of the extended family were to use Indonesian when communicating with children. Essentially, the aim of introducing English to children was to give them access to possibly the most prestigious foreign language in Indonesia, as early in their life as possible.

Furthermore, the author described the family background and Jane’s early childhood. When the eldest daughter Jill was eight months old, an Indonesian babysitter joined the household. The family adjusted their language habits and had to use Indonesian as a primary family language, mixed with Russian and English. Therefore, the family policy was not respected, and it left the father upset since he believed that English was the road to financial success and security.

When Jane’s older sister Jill was one and a half, Jane’s older brother Jack was born. Their mother was still in the process of acquiring Indonesian at that time. Consequently, Indonesian continued to be the dominant language in the house during Jack’s early childhood. Again, the father was not pleased that English was neglected and therefore continued to persistently use English with the children but the mother preferred Indonesian (it was the required language of everyday communication in their monolingual Indonesian community). When Jane was born, the family situation significantly changed. Her sister Jill was six years old, her brother Jack four and a half and they were both students, the first in primary school and second enrolled in a nearby

kindergarten. The mother was very busy with three children and could not give Jane the same attention as she did with her sister and brother before. Kate entertained her youngest daughter by regularly exposing her to English-language animated movies, such as *Mickey Mouse, Elmo, Sofia & Friends, Teletubbies, Oggi & the Cockroaches,* and *Fin and Jake.* Ever since she was four months old, every day, from 9 to 12 in the morning, Jane watched cartoons and played with her toys. When the shows were over, her mother maximized the TV volume while Jane continued to play. All in all, Jane was exposed to TV input for four hours every weekday. The babysitter was still a part of their routine, and she confirmed all statements made by the parents.

Da Silva (2022) focused on two research questions. The first question investigated the root cause of Jane's incidental English language acquisition. The second question dealt with the effects of English on Jane's results in school. The study focused on incidental language acquisition, along with the concept of linguicism in the school environment. Since Jane experienced several issues in school due to the lack of Indonesian language knowledge, the author briefly touched upon the concept of linguicism. Da Silva (2022) referred to Skutnabb-Kangas' (1988: 13 in Da Silva, 2022) definition of linguicism and described it as "ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language". Therefore, linguicism can be described discrimination directed towards individuals based on the languages they do or do not speak. Da Silva emphasized the detrimental effects that linguicism can have on children's psyche.

Da Silva (2022) followed a methodological approach commonly used in case studies investigating young children's behaviour, that is, the longitudinal observation of the child under study. This case study was initiated in January 2017 when Jane was still a student in a private Indonesian primary school in West Jakarta. The primary data for this study was collected through face-to-face interviews with Jane's parents and grandmother who lived nearby. The data was collected from January to October 2017, with additional interviews conducted via WhatsApp chats in July and December 2019 and January 2020. The author asked Jane's caregivers about the family's policy on language use in the household. She was also interested in the effect of English on Jane's education and social life. The secondary data focused on Jane's IQ test score, report card and some video/audio recordings of her speaking English. Other than that, there were no examples

of Jane's oral production in the article and most of the information on Jane's SLA were gathered from the interview with her mother.

The author was surprised by Jane's extraordinary results. Despite her family members prevalently using Indonesian as a first home language and Russian as a second home language, Jane acquired English as her mother tongue. However, her two older siblings who grew up in the same household, Jill and Jack, spoke perfect Indonesian but were not nearly as fluent in English as Jane was. She faced many obstacles because of her inability to speak Indonesian during her education in kindergarten and private schools (School Y and School Z). She had a hard time passing all subjects (in Indonesian) in School Y and ended up repeating the first grade in January 2017. School Y did not provide adapted curriculum for students like Jane and a year later decided that she must repeat the second grade in 2019 if she desired to continue attending that school. Although English proficiency was praised in her local community, Jane was paradoxically shamed for her extraordinary competence in English because of her lack of understanding of Indonesian, which is considered superior in her community.

The findings of the study were presented following the order of research questions. The author attempted to find an answer to why Jane incidentally learnt English as her mother tongue, since her siblings did not follow that path. First, according to the author, one of the obvious reasons behind this language dilemma was a different family situation after each of the children was born. The mother had more time with her older siblings were born and therefore, communicated more in Indonesian with them. Jane, however, was more exposed to English language TV input than her brother and sister simply because her mother lacked time to engage with her as much as she did with her siblings. She started producing English words and developed a native-like pronunciation Consequently, Jane acquired English as her mother tongue. One can conclude that after such a regular exposure to a language and in a period of such a rapid development of children's oral language capabilities[9], a child almost inevitably adopts the language as a native tongue (like Jane did). What was very intriguing, Kate noticed that Jane had a tendency to listen, rather than watch TV content. She attributed her preference for listening to her being busy playing with her toys. The mother also pointed out the fact that most TV programs that Jane watched were cartoons, which led her to "suddenly speak fluent English". This led the author to conclude that the answer to the

[9] Rice, Huston, Truglio and Wright (1990) marked the age of three to five years as an intensive period of language skills development in children.

first research question on what made Jane learn English incidentally was hidden in many years of regular exposure to TV input in English, animated films specifically.

The second research question focused on the effects of incidental English language learning on Jane's school experiences. In the beginning, Jane's extraordinary knowledge of English was praised and encouraged. The family and teachers thought she would eventually "grow out of it". However, according to Da Silva (2022), ever since Jane left kindergarten, they started to worry about her inability to understand Indonesian, which was required for all subjects in a national school. Whenever she started to speak in Indonesian, she would end the sentence in English and vice versa. Indonesian was also the primary spoken language in the house, which meant that everything had to be translated into English for her to understand. At times, her siblings even ignored her English to encourage her Indonesian language learning which she was actively practicing.

Nonetheless, Jane's preference for English was growing stronger as she got older. Her linguistic confusion grew bigger when she enrolled in the same national school as her brother and sister. School Y had no special programs or adaptations for Jane's needs. Her mother noticed that her behaviour changed when she entered the first grade. Jane found the school materials to be difficult, as well as all the homework and extra hours that she had to practice after school. This left her feeling depressed, tired and weary. What is more, all her leisure time was occupied with extra-curricular weekly activities for repetition of previously learnt lessons at school. Additionally, the school psychologist advised her parents to limit her exposure to English-language TV input and maximize the use of Indonesian in her home environment. This took away one of her favourites out-of-school activities, watching Disney Channel animated films. To sum up, Jane's experience exemplifies the dangers of structural linguicism and the negative effects it can have on children's language development and mental health and wellbeing.

Jane did after all improve her grades, but slowly. It was a shock to her family that the language she learnt accidentally could be so difficult to "replace" with another one. The author concluded that it was not her intelligence (that was tested and rated normal/average) that caused her issues, but rather incompetence in Indonesian that she had to learn as a second language. Her (unconsciously acquired) mother tongue was English. School Y failed to recognize her problem and after repeating the first and the second grade, Jane had to transition to another, faraway school, to enter the third grade.

The case study concluded with two main findings. The author's first conclusion was that television can be a powerful tool for children to incidentally acquire first and second languages. However, it is frequently underestimated as an effective language learning source for very young children. According to Da Silva (2022), cartoons cater to children's developmental needs and preferences, offering a blend of visual excitement, humour, and imaginative storytelling that keeps them engaged and entertained. The second conclusion regarded the school's perception of English. Although English is valued and required for attending private educational institutions in Indonesia, School Y did not perceive Jane's fluency as a personal asset but rather as a hindrance to learning other subjects and achieving standard scores. The study proposed several pedagogical recommendations for handling cases like Jane's at School Y, such as offering support of bilingual teachers, valuing and embracing the linguistic competencies of all students and formally acknowledging their status as an emergent bilingual learner.[10] The author also emphasized the role of schools and teachers as agents of change, adapting to rapid shifts in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. She emphasized the critical need for schools and educators to show empathy and understanding towards students learning the national language as a second language. She also highlighted the importance of including specialized training in teacher education programs to help current teachers support students who do not speak the local language.

[10] The author suggested that Jane should have been considered an emergent bilingual learner and her existing language competencies acquired at home should have been acknowledged. This approach should have been applied to her learning Indonesian as a second language in accordance with her educational rights under the law.

# 6. Comparing the studies

The case studies described in this thesis focus on one key discussion point, that is, the impact of English-language media input on young language learners L2 acquisition in out-of-school environments. In this chapter the case studies are compared in terms of research questions, participants, methods, results and conclusions.

## 6.1 Overview of research questions

All three studies investigated the influence of English-language media input on young language learners' (incidental) L2 vocabulary acquisition or the extent to which a child can learn a second language through watching TV content for an extensive period. However, each study placed a slightly different emphasis on different research questions. For example, Jylhä-Laide's (1994) study aimed to compare learning by viewing media content and naturalistic language acquisition, which makes her study different from the other two case studies discussed in this thesis. Da Silva's (2022) study explored how a participant's advanced English language skills influenced her school experience and performance, which is a research question unique to this case study. Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) focused on the positive and negative effects of media exposure on young language learners and compared formal classroom learning and learning from the media.

## 6.2 Participants

All three case studies involved young language learners aged between six to nine. The participants were exposed to English-language TV input for multiple hours almost every day. Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) described the case of a nine-year-old Croatian girl Lana who had been watching English-language TV shows since she was three years old. Her proficiency in English was above average; she used complex grammatical structures and had a rich English vocabulary. Jylhä-Laide (1994) focused her case study on an eight-year-old Finnish girl named Laura. She was particularly good at logical thinking but other than that did not show any specific talents. Laura had never received any formal English language instruction. Only exposure to the English language she had was through TV input that she regularly watched since she was six years old. Da Silva (2022) investigated the case of a six-year-old Indonesian girl named Jane, who had been exposed to Disney Channel movies since she was just four months old. Unlike Laura and Lana,

who received support from their communities, Jane faced criticism and discrimination, which was a key difference in her L2 learning experience compared to the other two children.

## 6.3 Overview of methodology

Longitudinal observation of child's behaviour along with the interviews with their caretakers was a common methodological approach to data collection that was used in case studies described in this thesis. As mentioned before, the key characteristic of a longitudinal study is that individuals' knowledge and experiences are investigated repeatedly through time (Diggle et al., 2002).

The authors of all three studies initially collected information from the participants' caretakers, family members, and teachers regarding the children's prior knowledge of English. They then observed the participants' language acquisition processes and subsequently analysed the gathered data. The main participant of Hendrih and Letica Krevelj's (2019) study had play dates with the first author at home that went on for two months. This was the only study that recorded linguistic data through direct play dates at child's home. Jylhä-Laide (1994) and Da Silva (2022) mostly relied on information gathered from participants' caretakers. However, Jylhä-Laide's study included some recorded conversations with the participant to test her English-language skills. Likewise, Da Silva's secondary data collection included some video/audio recordings of participant's oral production in English. However, none of the studies provided as many examples of children's proficiency in English or observed speech production as thoroughly as Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019).

Additionally, Laura and Jane underwent different types of language and intelligence tests. Laura took the WISC-R test, along with tests for listening comprehension and vocabulary, both before and after the observation period to gain developmental insights. Similarly, Jane completed IQ tests that showed comparable results, with both participants scoring at an average level. In contrast, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) did not include any language proficiency or intelligence tests in their research, either before or after the sessions with the child under study.

## 6.4 Comparing results and conclusions

Similar research questions, methodological approaches and profiles of participants inevitably influenced the study results. All three analysed studies agreed on one primary conclusion – the knowledge of the English language that participants gained through exposure to L2 media input

was a result of incidental learning. The learning that took place was not an intentional and conscious process.

The positive effects of exposure to L2 media input were evident in various aspects of the children's oral production. Jylhä-Laide (1994) reported that Laura began using English daily, and her vocabulary gradually expanded with each passing year; her proficiency level was as high as a native speaker's proficiency of English of her age. The author also explored features of animated films which facilitate language acquisition. Similar features can also be found in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj's (2019) study when Lana used informal spoken expressions (such as *shoo shoo* to send someone away), omitted the subject and used intonation to make questions. Jylhä-Laide (1994) suggested that cartoons have incorporated modifications not found in programs aimed at adult audiences but are frequently used in caretaker speech and foreigner talk. Additionally, she concluded that one of the main distinctive features of cartoons was the abundance of contextual clues that can be extremely helpful to beginner language learners.

Hendrih and Letica Krevelj's (2019) study found results consistent with those of Jylhä-Laide (1994). The main participant, nine-year-old Lana, reached similar proficiency levels as Laura did. The only significant difference was that Lana was exposed to TV input, whereas Jylhä-Laide's (1994) Laura only used video as a medium, which the author presented as superior or more useful to young learner viewers (particularly because of the ability to revisit the same content). Lana also used rare lexical items that were not typical of her age, and she was able to apply words and phrases that she encountered on TV in different contexts. Interestingly, she differentiated formal from informal speech, and she knew the "proper way of saying something, which suggests a high level of pragmatic as well as grammatical competence" (Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019: 463). The authors' main conclusion was that "frequent exposure to age-appropriate and interesting TV content in L2, together with proper parental support, positive attitude towards L2, but also opportunities for informal interaction in L2, provides an opportunity to develop substantial L2 vocabulary knowledge at an early age" (Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019: 469). Similarly, Jylhä-Laide (1994: 107) concluded that "Laura's case proves that even a beginning language learner may benefit from viewing 'ordinary' television programmes, in the case of young learners, at least from programmes aimed at their own age group."

Da Silva's (2022) study relied on previous research by Poštič (2015, in Da Silva, 2022) and Prosic-Santovac (2017, in Da Silva, 2022) who suggested that animated films can be the

primary source of L2 input in a home environment “where television use is pervasive, part of a routine, and available during regular time periods (Linebarger and Walker, 2005, in Da Silva, 2022). Similar to other analysed studies in this thesis, Da Silva (2022) described the phenomenon of incidental English language acquisition that takes place in a positive home environment.

However, Da Silva’s (2022) research differed from the other two analysed case studies. Jane, the child in focus of the study, did not acquire English as a second language but as her mother tongue. For that reason, she experienced discrimination based on her incapability to speak the language of her local community (linguicism), whereas Laura and Lana were encouraged and praised for their linguistic achievements. While Laura and Lana started watching English cartoons only when they started school, Jane was the only child who was exposed to English-language media content ever since she was an infant, which could have contributed to her success.

In conclusion, the authors of the studies described in this thesis (Jylhä-Laide, 1994, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019, Da Silva, 2022) emphasized the positive influence that television programs can have on second language acquisition, particularly for young learners. The authors argued that audio-visual cues, simplified language, and contextual language in cartoons improve children’s L2 vocabulary, listening skills, and pronunciation. Overall, these studies show that well-chosen TV content can effectively support language development in a fun and immersive way and that children's animated films can be powerful tools for L2 learning.

# 7. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to describe three case studies on young language learners and examine the relationship between L2 acquisition and exposure to L2 media input. After describing each study's research questions, participants, methodology, and results, this chapter will provide a summary of the analysed data.

According to Hendrih and Letica Krevelj (2019) and Jylhä-Laide (1994), the exposure to FL media input is directly related to improvement in L2/FL vocabulary acquisition. The participants in both studies achieved an almost native-like proficiency in the English language and the authors believed that animated films specifically had an extremely beneficial impact on their language acquisition process. For such extraordinary results, the authors give credit to cartoon facilitating features that, by modifying input, allow children to comprehend the message more easily. The idea behind this is that all children can learn (in controlled conditions) a new language as a "bonus effect "of watching entertaining content in a stress-free environment (Bunting and Lindström, 2013).

According to Da Silva (2022), television can serve as a potent medium for children to inadvertently pick up both their first and second languages. However, the author suggested that media use for SLA in school has earned a bad reputation and is often viewed as a distraction, not a language-learning asset. The results of Da Silva's (2022) study are relevant to language teacher practices in the education of young children. Da Silva concluded that specialized training in teacher education programs for emergent bilingual learners is necessary for children who do not speak the local language.

In addition, when it comes to creating language teaching programs for young learners, authors of all three investigated studies agree that animated television films appear particularly appealing to preschool and primary school-aged children. As such, they could be used for educational (language learning) purposes in a supportive school setting.

To conclude, all research studies described in this thesis give an insight into the relationship between technological progress and young learners' L2 acquisition. The studies provide a deeper understanding of the positive and negative aspects of learning an L2 through media and encourage a re-evaluation of the role media play in the English language learning experience.

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# Summary

This thesis examined three case studies (Jylhä-Laide, 1994, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019, Da Silva, 2022) that investigated the relationship between young learners' L2 acquisition and exposure to English-language media input in out-of-school environment. Following a brief discussion on the concept of a case study, three studies were examined according to the following framework: research questions and aim of the research, participants, methodology and data analysis, results, and conclusions. In the last part of the thesis, studies were compared following the same framework. All studies described beneficial results of exposure to L2 media input on students' L2 skills. The participants were unaware of L2 learning that took place while they were exposed to media in English. According to the authors, this suggests they acquired English incidentally or unintentionally. The main conclusion was that supervised media-assisted language learning could provide students with interesting educational content, improving their overall language learning experience.



Key words: case study, second language acquisition, media exposure, second language learners, animated films



# Sažetak

Ovaj rad opisuje tri studije slučaja (Jylhä-Laide, 1994, Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019, Da Silva, 2022) u kojima je ispitivan odnos između procesa usvajanja drugog jezika kod djece i izloženosti medijskom sadržaju na engleskom jeziku u izvanškolskom okruženju. Nakon kratkog objašnjenja definicije studije slučaja, slijedi opis istraživačkih pitanja i cilja istraživanja, sudionika, metodologije prikupljanja i analize podataka, rezultata i zaključaka analiziranih studija. U posljednjem su dijelu rada istraživanja uspoređena po istom obrascu analize. Svim istraživanjima zajedničko je da spominju pozitivan utjecaj stranih medijskih programa na jezične vještine kod djece. Sudionice nisu znale da zapravo uče strani jezik dok gledali medijski sadržaj, zbog čega su autori zaključili da su engleski naučili „slučajno" ili „nenamjerno". Glavni zaključak autora prikazanih istraživanja je bio da gledanje stranih medijskih sadržaja u svrhu učenja jezika može pružiti djeci raznovrstan i zanimljiv sadržaj za učenje i poboljšati njihovo cjelokupno iskustvo učenja jezika.

Ključne riječi: studija slučaja, usvajanje drugog jezika, izloženost medijskom sadržaju, učenici stranog jezika, animirani filmovi

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