

L2 Vocabulary Learning in Young and Adolescent Learners



Conference

Prof. Dr. Vanessa De Wilde
University Ghent

Monday, 26 October 2026, 15:15 - 17:00

as part of the course “Mehrsprachige Kompetenz”
University of Fribourg
Avenue de l'Europe 20, 1700 Fribourg
➔ MIS02, Room 2118 (subject to change)

Abstract

Vocabulary knowledge is a cornerstone of second language (L2) development and plays a crucial role in learners' ability to communicate effectively. This lecture examines how young and adolescent learners acquire L2 vocabulary across a variety of learning contexts, with particular attention to language learning beyond the classroom, before or alongside formal instruction. The lecture will compare vocabulary learning across different foreign languages and learning contexts, highlighting similarities and differences in the opportunities learners encounter and the outcomes they achieve. Attention will also be given to developmental trajectories, examining how vocabulary knowledge evolves over time from childhood to adolescence and what factors help explain variation between learners. Finally, the lecture considers why some words are learned more easily than others by examining the role of word-related variables (e.g. frequency and cognateness). By bringing together evidence from longitudinal and cross-sectional studies, the lecture tries to shed light on L2 vocabulary learning in young and adolescent L2 learners.

Bionote

Vanessa De Wilde is Assistant Professor of English at Ghent University, where she teaches courses in second language teaching methodology, research methods and English language proficiency. She obtained her PhD in Linguistics from Ghent University and conducts research on second language acquisition, with a particular focus on language development in children and adolescents, vocabulary learning, extramural language learning, and second language teaching. Her work has been published in various journals including *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *Language Learning*, and *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*. She serves as Treasurer of EuroSLA (the European Second Language Association) and is co-editor of the *Second Language Acquisition* book series published by Multilingual Matters.