

## Expression of Accusative and Dative Clitics in Bilingual Children

This study investigates the production of clitic pronouns in Spanish-speaking children raised in the US. When two languages are in contact, many bilingual speakers adopt grammatical structures of the majority language into their minority language (Polinsky, 2006). Some aspects of syntax and inflectional morphology are more vulnerable to incomplete acquisition or language attrition in the minority language than others (Montrul, 2004, 2008). For example, while the expression of subjects and objects in Spanish are typically affected in Spanish in the US, clitic pronouns appear to be quite resilient. Studies have found little-to-no influence of English on the expression of object clitics (dative and accusative) in the Spanish of adult heritage speakers. (Silva-Corvalán 1994; Montrul 2004). Montrul (2004) found native-like production of object clitic placement and expression in young adult bilinguals (avg. 21.5yo).

Monolingual Spanish speakers have been shown to acquire clitics in Spanish by age 3;00 (López Onat). Omission errors are very few, and the errors that persist a bit longer are related to gender and number (Domínguez 2003). The present study focuses on mastery of clitic pronouns in younger bilingual children, and addresses whether such knowledge of clitics is robust in bilingual children as well. If bilingual children master Spanish clitics like adult Spanish heritage speakers, this would suggest that this morphosyntactic feature is acquired at a young age and not subject to crosslinguistic influence and potential incomplete acquisition. However, if the children show lower accuracy in clitic production, this results would suggest that bilinguals may take longer to acquire the distribution of clitics in Spanish, in contrast to monolingual children.

In this study, we examined the use of clitics in the speech of 20 school-age (5-17yo) bilingual children tested in New York. The children were administered the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Task in English and the Test de Vocabulario de imágenes Peabody in Spanish, and according to the scores, the children were more proficient in English than in Spanish, as also confirmed by parental reports. The main task eliciting clitics was an oral narrative retelling the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* in Spanish, as in Montrul (2004). The transcribed narratives were coded and analyzed using the SALT software. According to the overall results, accuracy on clitics was nearly 90%. There was 2% of clitic omissions in obligatory contexts, and the rest of the errors were related to gender and number, as has been found in monolingual acquisition. Despite the wide range of ages included, the results showed very little variation among the participants when the group was divided into smaller segments. We conclude that bilingual children seem to achieve complete acquisition of object clitic expression at an early age, in a similar way to monolingual Spanish speakers. Unlike the expression of subject pronouns and other aspects of object expression (such as differential object marking) (Montrul 2011), these results suggest that clitics in Spanish are not susceptible to incomplete acquisition and/or language attrition in Spanish in the US.

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