Cross-Linguistics Effects of InAppropriate Subject Use in Bilingual Children

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Bilingualism is a linguistic ability found commonly throughout the world, and all languages have specific rules that govern their usage. English requires the use of overt subjects, whereas Spanish prefers null subjects except to mark a discontinuous topic. This study expands on prior research on the representation of bilingual grammars. Using two types of comprehension tasks (a Forced-Choice Task in Spanish and an Acceptability Judgment Task in Spanish and English) we explore to what extent L1-Spanish-L2-English heritage bilingual children exhibit cross-linguistic influence in their representation of null subjects. We also explore the degree to which their environment affects their L2 using a background questionnaire encompassing general at-home language use. Our team focused on testing two variables: 1) null/overt subject and 2) (dis)continuous topics. The results should show that Spanish-dominant children have intact grammatical knowledge of appropriate subject use in their L1, and will carry that practice onto their L2 resulting in higher acceptability of ungrammatical utterances in English. These results will provide a better understanding of how cross-linguistic influence affects syntax and pragmatics. We hope that educational practices will have more tools to help children succeed with their unique bilingual abilities as opposed to treating individuals with a “one method fits all” approach.

Null subjects is a parameter (find an explanation of null subjects in a paper).

Heritage speakers (HS) are those who grow up speaking a language in the household that is different than that of the general society (Montrul xxxx). This study expands on previous research on children HS. A point of contention for bilingual grammars is at the pragmatic-syntax interface: in English, overt subjects are obligatory from the syntax; in Spanish, null subjects are preferred, while overt subjects are pragmatically required for discontinuous topics and emphasis.

Outline of abstract:

* Introduce null subjects
* Introduce heritage speakers
* Explain why null subjects is a difficult structure for heritage speakers; syntax-pragmatic interface & the variability of it (Hulk 1998b)
* Hypothesis: Potowski
* The current study compares (NUMBER) heritage speakers’ (IN LOCATION) performance on the BESA vs perceived proficiency from parents.
* Explain BESA
* Methods
* Results. One way anova.

In languages, subjects are either obligatory or optional. In English, subjects are obligated in every sentence; in Spanish, subjects are optional (Camacho 2013).

In languages of the world, subjects are either obligatorily or optionally overt. In English, subjects are obligatorily overt in every sentence; in Spanish, overt subjects are optional and licensed by pragmatic context, thus it is a null subject language (Camacho 2013). This study expands on previous research on null subjects in bilingual Spanish/English grammars.

In Spanish, subjects lie at the syntax-pragmatic interface, which is a particularly vulnerable position for cross-linguistic influence in bilingual heritage speakers (Hulk 2000). Unlike English, Spanish speakers use overt subjects to mark change of topic or emphasis.

In languages of the world, subjects are either obligatorily or optionally overt. In English, overt subjects are obligatory; in Spanish, they are optional (Camacho 2013). This study expands on previous research on heritage Spanish speakers in New Jersey, those who “acquired an L1 grammar (to some degree of success) of a language… [and] also attain a high degree of fluency in an L2, so much so that it becomes their dominant language throughout the remainder of their life” (Sanchez 2013). Unlike English, Spanish speakers use overt subjects to mark change of topic or emphasis, placing it at a syntax-pragmatic interface. This interface is particularly vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence in bilingual heritage speakers (Hulk 2000). This study makes use of previous data collected on grammaticality judgements and (in)felicitous production from heritage and L2 speakers of Spanish to compare to their parents’ quantitative perception of their Spanish fluency in comparison to a monolingual speaker and a bilingual speaker (both of their age).

**RESULTS (which will need to be changed once we have more results):** We have found that there is no correlation between parents’ perception of their child’s Spanish proficiency and the results on a verb production task.

**DISCUSSION (again, to be changed):** Do parents of heritage speakers have enough information to determine their children’s proficiency of Spanish?

This study makes use of previous data collected on (in)felicitous and (un)grammatical production and grammaticality judgements from Spanish heritage and L2 speakers ages 3 to 6. We compare results of tasks

**Look at this one:**

In languages of the world, subjects are either obligatorily overt (as in English) or optionally overt (as in Spanish) (Camacho 2013). This study expands on previous research on heritage Spanish speakers, those who acquire an L1 grammar and go on to acquire an L2 grammar so much as to become the dominant language for the remainder of their life (Sanchez 2013). Subjects in Spanish are licensed by pragmatics and realized syntactically, placing it at the syntax-pragmatics interface. This interface is particularly vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence in heritage speakers (Hulk 2000). This study makes use of data collected from a production and a comprehension task administered to heritage and L2 Spanish-speaking children ages 3 to 6 enrolled in bilingual education schools in NJ and compared to results to the parents’ perception of their child’s Spanish. **Results and discussion to be written.**

**Possible discussion, assuming that there are zero correlations:** The results show that there is no correlation between parents’ perceived Spanish fluency of their children (when compared to mono- or bilinguals of Spanish) with the results of production and comprehension tasks. This suggests different things for the L1 Spanish-speaking parents and the non-L1-Spanish-speaking parents. The former group does not conform their perception of fluency to the tests administered to a degree great enough to be perceived by the statistics. That is, syntactic aspects like verbal morphology and syntax-pragmatic aspects like the appropriate use of null subjects are not the main features that parents think of when they report fluency for their children. As for the L1-non-Spanish-speaking parents, they are not being informed of the previously mentioned information from the bilingual schools attended, or it is not a salient part of what they view as their child’s fluency in the target L2 language.