Grammatical Skills in Monolingual Spanish Speakers

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Introduction

• Spanish is the second most spoken language in the U.S., and also one of the fastest growing.1
• Hispanic parents and caregivers in the U.S. speak to their children in Spanish at home, resulting in Spanish becoming their first language and then learning English when they enter school.2
• Spanish-speaking children are often both under and over-identified in special education classrooms3 in large part due to a lack of valid assessments and norms.

Current Study

Language Sample Analysis was used to address the following questions:
• How often are Specific Language Impairment (SLI) grammatical markers evident in narratives of monolingual Spanish speakers?
• What is the relation between grammatical structures and mean length of utterance in words (MLUw) and does accuracy increase as a function of MLUw?

Methods

Population sample
• Participants: 126 monolingual Spanish children in second grade, aged 6;11 to 9;0 (years,months)
• Language Samples: Narrative retell of “Frog, Where Are You?” selected from one larger parent study

Procedures
• Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT) to code for nine grammatical structures: preterite (P), imperfect (I), singular article (SA), plural article (PA), plural noun (PN), subjunctive (S), preposition (PP), conjunction (C), direct object clitic (D)
• The present study was compared to a study by Baron et al. (2018), which analyzed how Spanish grammatical morpheme production is correlated to the MLUw

Results

Tables 1 and 2: Correlations of percent accuracy of grammatical structures and MLUw.

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Table 2: Children’s percent accuracy of grammatical structures by MLUw group compared to Baron et al. (2018) study of the Spanish dominant group.

Discussion

• Narratives can be used to elicit most SLI grammatical markers in monolingual Spanish second graders.
• The direct object clitic and subjunctive were not used as often by participants.
• Singular article, preterite, and preposition were most frequently used by all speakers.
• Percent accuracy was lowest for direct object clitic and subjunctive.
• Only one significant correlation between MLUw and percent accuracy of grammatical morphemes suggests that MLUw may not be a beneficial way to measure syntactical complexity.
• Percent accuracy was always higher for all structures compared to the Baron et al. (2018) study.
• There was no shift in percent accuracy as a function of MLUw across groups.
• Differences may be due to what is considered an error.

Additional research is necessary to compare the Spanish language skills of Spanish monolinguals and Spanish-English bilinguals.

References


Figure 1: Percent of children who used grammatical structures.

Figure 2: Number of times children used grammatical structures.

Figure 3: Percent accuracy of grammatical structures of children who used the structures.