

Does English impact Spanish in the U.S.? Evidence from bilingual children's patterns of morphosyntactic variation.

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The extent to which knowledge of English impacts the Spanish grammar of U.S. bilinguals is a topic of ongoing debate. This talk examines whether English influences patterns of morphosyntactic variation in the Spanish spoken by school-age bilingual children in the U.S. Northwest. Consider Spanish subject personal pronouns (*yo, tú, él, ella*, etc.). These pronouns can be expressed or omitted, resulting in variation between utterances like *yo voy* and *voy* (both meaning 'I go'). Although there are a few contexts in which the pronoun is always expressed or always omitted, most contexts are 'variable', i.e., both options are possible. The alternation between pronoun expression and omission in variable contexts is probabilistically constrained. That is, there are linguistic factors that increase the likelihood that a speaker will include a pronoun, and there are factors that decrease that likelihood. For example, switching reference increases the likelihood of pronoun expression, whereas maintaining reference decreases it. Is such morphosyntactic variation subject to contact-induced change in the U.S.? I focus here on two patterns of variation: subject pronoun expression and variable clitic placement (*la quiero ver ~ quiero verla*).

Previous research suggests that English permeates these features of Spanish, and that, as a result, bilingual children in the U.S. overuse subject pronouns in Spanish (e.g. Montrul & Sánchez-Walker 2015; Sorace 2011:4, Silva Corvalán 2014:163) and overproduce enclisis (*quiero verla*) (e.g. Pérez-Leroux, Cuza, & Thomas 2011). Yet, my research indicates that the bilingual children's patterns of morphosyntactic variation are remarkably similar to those of monolingual children in Mexico. For both, subject pronoun expression is constrained by Person/number of the pronoun and whether or not there is a switch in reference. Clitic placement is constrained by the finite verb lexeme in the [finite + nonfinite verb] construction. I offer two possible reasons for the divergence between my findings and those of previous research. First, differences in methodology may help explain the conflicting results. Second, the bilingual children in the U.S. Northwest reside in rural areas and are part of a farmworker community. Compared to Hispanic communities in large, urban metropolises, rural communities generally have tight-knit social networks, which increases the likelihood of retention of linguistic patterns. I conclude that knowledge of English is a necessary but insufficient condition for contact-induced change to impact morphosyntactic variation in Spanish in the U.S. Finally, I address the implications that this research has for understanding how children acquire complex patterns of morphosyntactic variation. Although these patterns are probabilistic, there is apparently enough systematicity in the input to make them accessible and learnable for both monolingual and bilingual children alike.