

Bilingual Language Diversity of Latino Preschoolers: Profiles and Relations with School Readiness Skills

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Grant or Contract Number: 90YR0087

Period of Funding: September 30, 2015 to September 29, 2017

Project Description

The purpose of this project is to describe preschool Latino dual-language learners' language skills in various domains of both Spanish and English, and to examine the relations between language skills, home and classroom factors, and school readiness outcomes. In a context of rapidly increasing linguistic diversity in the United States, and especially a rapid growth of the Latino population, it is a societal problem that there is a consistent achievement gap between Latino dual-language learners (DLLs) and their monolingual English-speaking peers in various academic domains. As such, a more comprehensive understanding of the language skills of Latino DLL children, as well as how their language skills are related to school success, is necessary.

Research Questions

1. What are the language skill profiles of dual-language Latino preschoolers across Spanish and English domains, and how are those profiles related to home and classroom factors?
2. How are the language skill profiles of dual-language Latino preschoolers related to their school readiness skills at the end of the year?

Sample

163 Latino DLL children (56% girls) were recruited from two Head Start centers in New York City. One center was in Manhattan (1 site; 8 classrooms; n = 91) and one was in the Bronx (2 sites; 11 classrooms; n = 72). 58% of children were from Spanish-speaking homes, and 42% of children were from bilingual homes. Children's average age at the first assessment time point was 52.62 months. 49% of caregivers were immigrants from Mexico, followed by 15% from Ecuador, 13% from the Dominican Republic, 13% from other Latin American countries, and 10% of caregivers were born in the United States.

Methods

Three data collection phases occurred during the 2015-2016 academic year. During the first phase (fall-winter), caregivers and teachers completed demographic questionnaires as well as questionnaires about children's home and classroom language use, respectively. During the second phase (winter-spring), children's language skills in various domains of both Spanish and English were measured using the *Bilingual English Spanish Assessment* (BESA; Peña, Gutiérrez-Clellen, Iglesias, Goldstein, & Bedore, 2014). The BESA measures the language domains of morphosyntax, semantics, and phonology in both Spanish and English. During the third phase (summer), children's school readiness skills in their dominant language were measured using a science assessment, *Lens on Science* (English) or *Enfoque en Ciencia* (Spanish; Greenfield, 2015).

Progress Update

Language profiles were created from the six BESA scores (morphosyntax, semantics, and phonology in Spanish and English) using latent profile analysis (LPA). LPA was used to identify groups of children who have similar language skills, based on their BESA scores. The model that best fit the data was one with four profiles. Profile 1, the smallest profile with 16% of the children (n = 25), was named the *Below Average and Balanced Profile*. Children in this profile had relatively low scores on all of the six BESA subtests with below average scores on two of them, yet their scores were relatively equal across Spanish and English, suggesting more balanced language skills. Profile 2, with 20% of the children (n = 33), was named the *On Target and Balanced Profile*. Children in this profile had average scores on all of the six BESA subtests with relatively high scores on most of them, and their scores were relatively equal across Spanish and English,

suggesting more balanced language skills. Profile 3, the largest profile with 47% of the children (n = 76), was named the *Spanish Dominant but Developing English Profile*. Children in this profile had higher scores on all the Spanish subtests than the English subtests, suggesting Spanish dominance, but they also evidenced skills in English, most notably high English phonology scores. Profile 4, with 17% of the children (n = 27), was named the *English Dominant Profile*. Children in this profile had higher scores on all the English subtests than the Spanish subtests, suggesting English dominance, and had relatively low scores in Spanish.

Relations between children's profile membership and home and classroom factors were then explored. In terms of home factors, child age, caregiver age, caregiver immigrant status, caregiver years of education, caregiver employment status, number of children in the home, and home language environment were important factors in distinguishing children with the most advanced dual-language skills (in Profile 2) from children in the other profiles.

Implications for Policy/Practice

Knowledge about the distributed knowledge of Latino DLL children's language skills (i.e., their skills in various language domains of both Spanish and

English), as well as how those skills are related to home and classroom factors and school readiness skills, can inform the development of child care practices that aim to support the maintenance and development of Spanish as well as the acquisition of English, so that Latino DLL children can reap the full benefits of bilingualism and biculturalism.

Implications for Research

We shared our 3-year-old data with the authors of the BESA to include in their norming sample. Additionally, our successful use of LPA provides an adequate basis for establishing the suitability of LPA for these types of questions, and sets a strong precedent for future research about the language profiles of DLL children.

For More Information

<https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-lfeld/>

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