



Dual language development of Latino children: Effect of instructional program type and the home and school language environment



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ABSTRACT

Latino dual language children typically enter school with a wide range of proficiencies in Spanish and English, many with low proficiency in both languages, yet do make gains in one or both languages during their first school years. Dual language development is associated with how language is used at home and school, as well as the type of instructional program children receive at school. The present study investigates how changes in both Spanish and English proficiencies of Latino, second-generation immigrant children ($n = 163$) from kindergarten to second grade relate to instructional program type as well as language use at home and school. A series of MANCOVAs demonstrated significant dual language gains in children who were in bilingual classrooms and schools where Spanish was used among the teachers, students, and staff. Furthermore, only in classrooms where both Spanish and English were used did children reach age-appropriate levels of academic proficiency in both languages. Home language use was also significantly associated with dual language gains as was maternal Spanish vocabulary knowledge before controlling for maternal education. Educational implications and potential benefits associated with bilingualism are discussed.

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Introduction

Approximately one in four children in the U.S. is Latino, the majority (71%) are from immigrant families and live in Spanish-speaking homes (Garcia & Jensen, 2009; Hakimzadeh & Cohn, 2007; U.S. Census, 2010, 2011). In the past decade alone, the proportion of Latino children in U.S. schools has risen from 11 to 23 percent of all students (NCES, 2010). This demographic change has had an enormous impact on schools where an increasing number of students are still developing language skills in Spanish, while at the same time learning how to speak, read and write in English. This population of students has been described as Latino dual language learners (DLL). Despite growing numbers, there is continued debate on how to best educate this rapidly growing school population and how to adapt instruction to best meet their needs and support their healthy development.

Latino dual language learners are understudied and underserved (Gutiérrez, Zepeda, & Castro, 2010; Tienda & Haskins, 2011; Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). Empirical research addressing the early development and education of DLLs is imperative to

increasing our understanding of the individual and contextual forces shaping their school functioning. This study aims to investigate the development of Spanish and English proficiency in a sample of Latino children during their first years of school. In addition, factors from the language environment at home and school, which are associated with dual language development, are considered.

Emerging bilingualism in the critical early school years

The transition from home to school is considered one of the most fundamental and influential developmental periods for all children (Pianta & Cox, 1999). For Latino DLLs, the transition to school is critical because it demands negotiating a new culture with a unique system of rules and behaviors, and, in most cases, a distinct new language (Crosnoe, 2005). The magnified difference between the linguistic environments of the school and homes could be enriching or potentially overwhelming (Collins, Toppelberg, Suárez-Orozco, O'Connor, & Nieto-Castañón, 2011). Latino DLLs often abruptly shift from using Spanish at the home language to using English in the early school years (Portes & Hao, 1998). Making such a rapid change to favor the school language without having yet developed substantial home language competence may limit children's

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development of both languages (Sparks, Patton, Ganschow, & Humbach, 2009).

Due to the assimilative forces that propel children to learn English quickly, a shift away from the home language is likely to occur shortly after beginning school (Hakuta & Pease-Alvarez, 1994; Worthy, Rodriguez-Galindo, Assaf Czop, Martinez, & Cuero, 2003). Latino children of immigrants are more likely to become English dominant than to develop proficiency in both Spanish and English (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Earlier research has evidenced this shift toward English language use primarily during the adolescent years as youths spend more time in contexts outside of the home (Veltman, 1983). However, more recent research shows that a hyper-accelerated language shift is often occurring much earlier, when children begin school and develop proficiency and general preference for English (Tse, 2001). Latino DLLs often start using English almost exclusively outside of the home and as much as possible inside of the home (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Language shift has been documented as early as preschool or kindergarten and is evident through the elementary grades (Pease-Alvarez & Winsler, 1994). Wong-Fillmore (1991) found that children who attended preschools where English was primarily used were subsequently less likely to speak their home language than children who attended preschools where the home language was used. However, many of these studies used parental and self-reports as a measure of language proficiency which can be more objectively measured through direct assessments (Valdes & Figueroa, 1994). Studies that have used standardized, direct measures of dual language proficiencies have shown that children do not necessarily lose their home language while learning English (Winsler, Diaz, Espinosa, & Rodriguez, 1999). Rather, the development of both languages is often interdependent and related to the quality of language support and exposure in distinct contexts (Hammer et al., 2012). For DLLs, the home and school linguistic environment, and how language is used in each context, account for substantial variability in development of both languages.

Home linguistic environment

The home environment is particularly important for language development as it is where children are first exposed to language and provided with the experiences needed for the growth and advancement of linguistic skills (Snow, 1999). Substantial research has demonstrated that the quality, frequency, and type of language used in the home are associated with large differences in children's language competences (De Houwer, 2007; Hammer et al., 2012; Hart & Risley, 1995). The home linguistic environment of DLLs is shaped by the amount of language exposure to both languages across multiple dyads of siblings and parents (De Houwer, 2007; Garcia & Jensen, 2009; Place & Hoff, 2011; Quiroz, Snow, & Zhao, 2010). The proportional amount of exposure to each language at home has a significant effect on language development in English-Spanish bilingual children (Pearson, Fernández, Lewedeg, & Oller, 1997). DLLs who have rich home language experiences tend to develop strong competences in that language and, in turn, are likely to develop strong second language competences (Sparks, Patton, Ganschow, Humbach, & Javorsky, 2008). Maternal vocabulary knowledge is also associated with children's vocabulary growth and may mediate the effect of maternal education on children's language ability (Pan, Rowe, Singer, & Snow, 2005).

In contrast, the use of the second language at home may have an inverse effect on the development of the home language. In a recent study of DLLs, increased use of English at home was not associated with gains in children's English proficiency, but rather with decreases in children's Spanish proficiencies (Hammer, Davison, Lawrence, & Miccio, 2009). Furthermore, research suggests that because socioeconomic status (SES) is closely related to the home

language environment, there is an association between increases in SES and the quality and quantity of linguistic input that the child receives (Sparks et al., 2008). There is empirical evidence for the effect of SES on children's home language development as well as long-term effects on dual language development as children enter school (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

School linguistic environment

The linguistic environment at school also plays a crucial role in children's dual language development (Páez, Tabors, & López, 2007). How each language is used in the school and the within-school interactions between students and teachers shape how children develop both languages (Gámez & Lesaux, 2012). When the home language is used at school among peers and teachers, there is an associated improvement in home language proficiency among DLLs (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). The language used and supported during instruction of DLLs is critically important. While virtually all U.S. school programs include some amount of English language instruction (Saunders, Foorman, & Carlson, 2006), some programs use varying amounts of children's home language for instruction (Brisk, 2005). The language of instruction of DLLs varies from using English exclusively (mainstream English and immersion programs) to programs where literacy and content-area instruction are delivered in both the home language and English (bilingual programs). It is important to point out that educational support for the home language is not typically associated with delays or limited development of English (Collier & Thomas, 2004; MacSwan & Pray, 2005). In many cases, a more fully developed home language is associated with increases in the rate and level of development of English, as well as academic achievement (Burchinal, Field, López, Howes, & Pianta, 2012). Latino DLLs in bilingual programs have demonstrated comparable gains in English, and greater gains in Spanish, as compared to Latino DLLs in English-only schools (Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung, & Blanco, 2007). For example, in a longitudinal study, Barnett et al. (2007) found that Spanish speaking, low-income, preschool children who attended high-quality bilingual schools made significant gains in both languages each year. These gains were greater than those made by a control group who attended schools with English-only programs.

Numerous studies suggest the effectiveness of bilingual instruction on increasing proficiency in both the home language and English (Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005). Yet, there is an ongoing need for research that examines dual language development and the relationships between both languages over time (Hammer, Jia, & Uchikoshi, 2011). To date, most dual language studies have focused on children's abilities in each language separately with much of the extant work investigating specific aspects of language abilities (mainly vocabulary). Thus, there is a need for approaches that address language abilities in a more comprehensive way that include multiple components of each language (e.g. vocabulary, morpho-syntax, oral comprehension). Furthermore, consideration of home and school factors that support the development of dual language proficiencies is needed in order to prepare children to adequately meet the linguistic demands of academic contexts.

In order to extend the existing body of literature and address these needs, the present study investigates the development of dual language proficiencies of Latino children in kindergarten and second grade. Particular attention is paid to the effect of instructional program types on dual language proficiency as well as home and school factors in the linguistic environment. Specifically, this study explores the following research questions: (1) How do children's dual language proficiencies (Spanish and English) change from kindergarten to second grade?; (2) How does the home language environment relate to changes in children's dual language

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