

Direct Object Pronominalization in Bilingual Catalan Children

Adriana Soto-Corominas (Universitat Internacional de Catalunya)

Sílvia Perpiñán (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)

The acquisition of accusative clitics has been widely investigated in Romance languages (Varlokosta et al., 2016), with evidence showing that these are mastered by age 5. However, few studies consider all morphological forms that direct object pronominalization can take depending on the semantics of the argument. This study investigates the acquisition of three direct object clitics in Catalan by Catalan-Spanish bilingual children: *el* /l/, *ho* /u/, and *en* /n/. The distribution of these clitics is determined by the semantics of the referent: /l/ refers back to definite accusative forms in third person (1), /u/ refers back to neutral or non-specific referents (or [-definite] according to Roca, 1992; Perpiñán, 2018; (2)), and /n/ refers back to quantified, indefinite, or bare NPs (3).

(1) Veig aquest objecte. El veig.
see.1SG.SUBJ this thing.MASC *l* see.1SG.SUBJ
'I see this thing. I see it.'

(2) Veig això. Ho veig.
see.1SG.SUBJ this *ho* see.1SG.SUBJ
'I see this. I see it.'

(3) Veig 5 objectes. Només en veig 5.
see.1SG.SUBJ 5 things only *en* see.1SG.SUBJ 5
'I see 5 things. I only see 5.'

Spanish presents crucial differences: definite accusative forms in third person and neutral/non-specific pronominals are both replaced with clitic *lo* (4). On the other hand, quantified [-definite] objects are referred back to via quantifier-licensed ellipsis, i.e.: a null *pro* or null variable (Campos, 1986), as in (5).

(4) Veo esto / este objeto. Lo veo.
see.1SG.SUBJ this this thing.MASC *lo* see.1SG.SUBJ
'I see this. I see it.'

(5) Veo 5 objetos. Solo veo 5 \emptyset .
see.1SG.SUBJ 5 things only see.1SG.SUBJ 5
'I see 5 things. I only see 5.'

Given these differences between the two languages, we ask two questions: (i) whether these semantic contrasts are appropriately mapped onto the child's early morphology, and (ii) whether the emergence and development of these clitics are determined by Catalan-Spanish language dominance.

This study presents the data of 338 bilingual Catalan-Spanish children ages 4-8 who were classified into Catalan-Dominant (CDm), Balanced Bilingual (BB), and Spanish-Dominant (SDm), according to a parental report. We elicited the clitics using an oral production task (Figure 1, (6)).

Results in terms of target responses, omissions of the clitic, and clitic replacements show clear differences by clitic and by language dominance (Figure 2). Specifically, partitive *en* is omitted significantly more frequently than *ho* and *l* and these two clitics are, in turn, replaced more frequently than *en*. Additionally, CDm bilinguals produced significantly more target responses than the other two groups. BBs outperformed SDms only with respect to *en*, the only clitic that has no overt counterpart in Spanish. Implications in terms of language dominance and input effects in early bilingual development are discussed.



(6) Q: Jo no he trencat el gerro però el gosset sí...
'I haven't broken the vase but the doggy...'

Target: Que l'ha trencat.
That I have.3SG.SUBJ broken
'...has broken it.'

Figure 1. Stimulus from oral production task

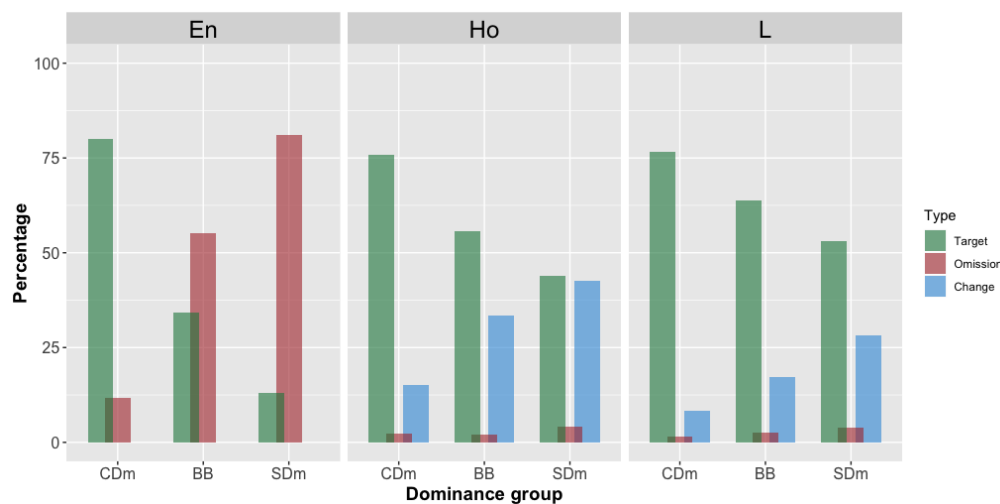


Figure 2. Oral production task results

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