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The acquisition of Spanish by third generation children

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Topic: Bilingual language acquisition and heritage speakers

Abstract: In societal bilingualism, the functionally restricted language evidences, among other phenomena, the simplification of some grammatical domains. In this context, a recurring question is whether this stage of grammatical simplification is due to incomplete acquisition in the early years of a bilingual's life, or a result of processes of attrition or loss. This paper point out similarities between the developing bilingual sibilings and adult heritage speakers in the preceding discussion.

Key words: bilingualism, acquisition, Spanish, English, simplification, children

Introduction

Studies of the Spanish of Hispanics in the USA have categorized speakers by country of origin and by immigrant generation. Accordingly, statements about Spanish maintenance or shift to English, and about the linguistic features that characterize US Spanish are made for Mexicans, Cubans, Dominicans, etc., and within these groups, for first, second, third, and even fourth immigrant generations.

I have examined the changes that Spanish in the US undergoes across three generations in Silva-Corvalán 1994. Generation 1 includes foreign-born immigrants who have come to the US after age 8, that is, they have achieved some level of literacy in Spanish in their home country; their offspring (born in the US or having come to the US before age 11) are included in generation 2, and those with at least one parent qualifying as a member of generation 2 encompass generation 3 (see Villa and Rivera-Mills 2009 for an interesting, novel definition of “generation”).

There are no clear-cut linguistic differences between these groups, but rather global trends that characterize each generation in general. One of these trends is the gradual preference for using English with family and friends across the three generations. Bilingualism may be common among second-generation children, but English monolingualism tends to be the predominant pattern by the third generation. Alba (2005) notes that even though the level of English monolingualism is lower among Hispanics than among other immigrant groups (e.g., Philippines, Koreans, Japanese), a clear majority speaks only English: “Sixty-eight percent of third-generation Cubans and 71 percent of third-generation Mexicans.”

There are exceptions to the average scenario of generational shift to English. One may come across generation 2 speakers who acquired Spanish and English from birth and speak both with a comparable level of proficiency, or who acquired Spanish and later lost it altogether, or stopped using it for years and are in the

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process of reviving it. Likewise, a generation 3 speaker may have acquired Spanish from birth and maintained it. Indeed, much third-generation bilingualism is found in communities along the border with Mexico (e.g., El Paso, Texas; San Ysidro, California) and in neighborhoods with a high density of Hispanics. Alba, Logan, Lutz, and Stults (2002), for instance, found that children from families and communities that support the use of Spanish will learn their ancestors' language regardless of the generation to which they may belong. Villa & Rivera-Mills (2009) cite current research that has found Spanish maintenance into the fourth and fifth generations in closely knit Spanish-speaking communities.

One of the factors that facilitates acquisition and maintenance of the heritage language is the presence of grandparents in the home. Grandparents create the necessity for communication in Spanish when they do not speak English, or even if they are proficient in this language they usually encourage their grandchildren to learn Spanish. This paper examines a situation of this type, and confirms that third-generation children are not destined to be monolingual. It focuses mainly on the language development of two brothers whose Spanish input was provided almost exclusively by their father and paternal grandmother.¹

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Two major patterns in bilingual language acquisition have been identified in studies of bilingualism: simultaneous and sequential bilingualism. In simultaneous bilingualism, the child acquires two languages at the same time from birth or, as some researchers propose, before 3 years of age. This is referred to as Bilingual First Language Acquisition (BFLA, or "2L1"). This article focuses on the grammatical aspects of BFLA.

A number of contextual factors play a crucial role in the development of bilingualism. Among them, the age at which the child is exposed to the two languages, the number of speakers of each language and their social status, the presence of other languages in the child's environment, the frequency with which

¹ See Silva-Corvalán (2014) for a comprehensive treatment of Spanish-English bilingual acquisition from birth.

the languages are spoken at home and in the community, family and community attitudes toward each of the languages and toward bilingualism.

Third-generation children may grow up in a bilingual family environment located in a community that makes regular use of both English and Spanish, or only one, or neither language. The family may be one where (a) both parents are bilingual and address the child in both languages at home and in public, or one language at home and the other in public; or (b) only one parent is bilingual and the child receives input in two languages, one from each parent (the “one parent-one language” approach). There are in fact many different configurations of the bilingual environment which give rise to different acquisitional paths and types of bilingualism (De Houwer 2009).

Social factors such as the prestige of the languages and political attitudes, which determine government and educational policies, also have an important impact on the extension and degree of bilingual development at the individual and societal level. Political changes in Spain, for example, have resulted in an increased number of bilingual children who can maintain the minoritized language until adulthood (Siguán 2008).

Differences in contextual factors result in the possibility to develop higher or lower levels of bilingual proficiency. This raises the question of how much exposure children need in order to gain a productive command of a construction. Some have argued that a *critical mass* of input data has to be accumulated for a child to generalize beyond stored or memorized instances; this has also been suggested for bilinguals (e.g., several contributions in Oller & Eilers 2002; Silva-Corvalán 2014). But the question of what constitutes “a critical mass” in BFLA is virtually unexplored.

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The children

I have studied the differences in the development of English and Spanish in two of my grandsons, Nico and Brennan, who respond to the definition of third-generation children (Silva-Corvalán 2014). Nico and Brennan have greater proficiency in English and use this language significantly more than Spanish. Nico is three years older than his brother Brennan. They grew up in a dual-language home: the mother speaks to them mainly in English, the father mainly in Spanish, and I speak to them almost exclusively in Spanish.

I observed and recorded the siblings regularly in a variety of natural contexts and with different interlocutors. I kept detailed diary notes to age 3;0 for Nico, complemented with audio-recordings. Brennan was audio-recorded from age 1 year and 3 months when he was close to his brother. The diaries and recordings also include adults' speech addressed to the children.

The children's degree of proficiency in English is comparable to that of monolinguals. By contrast, their developing proficiency in Spanish is unequal. This inequality results from differences in the amount of Spanish language input they have been exposed to and their dissimilar opportunities for use of this language, which have been typically more reduced for the younger sibling, Brennan. This correlates with Brennan's lower level of productive proficiency compared with Nico.

Overall, Nico was exposed to Spanish about one third of his waking time (30 percent); Brennan, the younger brother, less than one third (27 percent). From about age 4;0, exposure to and use of Spanish are further reduced for both children to at most a quarter of the time (20 to 25 percent). It is indeed remarkable that with such limited input the children are able to develop conversational proficiency in Spanish.

The question arises of what has helped them succeed in attaining proficiency in their weaker language and maintaining it despite the reduced input and the effort that bilingual development requires. It seems to me that first and foremost is positive family attitude. Indeed, dual-language development was encouraged by the adults with such statements as *It's good that you learn both Spanish and English*. The family contributed importantly to the siblings' bilingual development by using both languages while conversing and playing with them, and at times even explicitly calling their attention to some aspect of the language, be it lexical, as in (1), or structural. Similar behaviors are recorded for English.

- (1) Nico: *Estoy empado.* (2;11.11)²
'I'm *empado*.'
Father: *Enfadado* [father corrects]. *Es igual que enojado.*
'Angry.' 'It's the same as annoyed.'
Nico: *Estoy enfadado un poquito.*
'I'm a little angry.'

From words to sentences to continuous discourse

Third-generation children do not differ from monolingual children with respect to stages of language development: they move on from babbling, to single words, to word combinations, to sentences, and to fluent conversations. Although there is interindividual variation, it is generally the case that by the end of the first year the children will understand words and simple sentences in their two languages. It has been observed that bilingual children start producing language later than monolinguals, yet this is not necessarily the case; it depends in great measure on the amount of input the child receives from his caretakers. Nico, for example, produced his first words toward the end of his first year of life: *papa* (for *papá* 'dad'), *mama* (for *mamá* 'mom'), *abú* (for *la luz* 'the light'), *aga* (for *agua* 'water') in Spanish; *ap^h* 'apple', *hot* in English.

² Age notation follows the convention of separating years and months with a semicolon, and months and days with a period.

Around the age of eighteen months monolingual children may have about 50 words. These children obviously receive language input in just one language and produce words in only one language. BFLA children share their waking time between two (or more) languages and, expectedly, also share their productive vocabulary between these languages. But similarly to monolinguals, the bilinguals may have fifty or more words in their two languages combined, and may soon start producing word combinations. Just as in the case of monolinguals, however, production of words and the rate of growth of vocabulary development may vary greatly from child to child.

BFLA children produce many mixed two-word utterances before age 2;0, and later on many sentences that incorporate words from both languages, i.e., code-switching. Two-language combinations produced by Nico and Brennan are “pushing *niño*,” “*más ice*” and “close *puerta*”. Early on, this type of mixing was considered to be evidence of confusion or a mixed lexical and morphosyntactic development (Volterra & Taeschner, 1978), but more recent studies have shown that mixing results from vocabulary gaps and the acceptance of mixing in the child environment rather than from a unified language system (Lanza, 1997; Montanari 2010). Example (2) illustrates a typical bilingual interaction. Indeed, in this bilingual mode both languages are activated, and the child needs to be cognitively alert in order to switch languages to accommodate to topic and/or addressee. It is no surprise that language mixing could occur in these conditions.

- (2) N = Nico (2;7.27); M = mother; F = father; C = grandmother.³
 F: ¿Le dijiste a la Bibi lo que hiciste anoche? [addressing the child]
 ‘Did you tell Bibi what you did last night?’
 N: Sí. [he responds to his dad]
 F: ¿Te acuerdas? ¿Dónde fuimos?
 ‘Do you remember? Where did we go?’
 M: *Where did you get those balloons?* [addressing the child]
 N: *From, Super Cuts.* [he responds to his mom]
 C: ¡Super Cuts!, ¿te fuiste a cortar el pelo con el papi?
 ‘Did you go with your dad to have your hair cut?’

³ These abbreviations, as well as “B” for Brennan, are used in all examples.

N: El papi primero, y y y la mami dijo “No puedes ir allá con con el papi”. [he responds to grandma]
‘First dad, and and and mami said “You cannot go there with with dad”.’

Some of the phenomena I have studied differentiate the two siblings, but in general, there are more similarities than differences between them (Silva-Corvalán 2014). However, as observed in family after family, the older child normally receives a larger amount of direct input and achieves a higher level of bilingual proficiency than the younger siblings. This is indeed the case for Nico and Brennan, as we will see it reflected in my brief discussion of their verbal system.

By age 2;0 BFLA children typically start producing complex constructions. Combinations of two or three clauses are normally produced in the fourth year of life or even earlier, as in (3) and (4).

- (3) *Cuando el papi frenó se me cayó la silla para el otro lado.*
(Nico, 2;10.26)
‘When daddy stopped the car my seat fell to the other side.’
- (4) *Si lo sueltas, no puede vivir [a bird].* (Brennan, 3;4.14)
‘If you let it go it won’t live’

In their fifth or sixth year of life (i.e., after their fourth or fifth birthdays), the children move on to re-telling stories that have been read to them, or to narrating anecdotes about themselves or others. How soon and how often they perform these communicative activities depends to a large extent on the quality and quantity of input they receive in each language. There seems to be a close correlation between amount of input and caretakers’ attention to the child’s bilingual learning experience and success in achieving proficiency in two languages (De Houwer 2009). By age 5;6, Nico and Brennan are able to tell the story in a picture book in Spanish, with only some lexical items inserted in English to fill in vocabulary gaps (e.g., *Y el niño dis, dijo, "Sapo, Sapo, ¿estás aquí?" Pero*

no, solamente era un groundhog. ‘And the boy said, “Frog, frog, are you here?” But no, it was only a groundhog’. Likewise, in a study of a Spanish-English bilingual child whose bilingual development is encouraged by the parents, Alvarez (2003) shows no developmental lag in either of the two languages in data obtained from story telling from ages 6;11 to 10;11.

When a bilingual attains unequal levels of proficiency, the dominant language may show no negative effects, but reduced language resources in the language that has received less input and fewer possibilities of use by the child appear to have a negative effect on narration. Two narrative components that are considered to reflect level of cognitive maturity: the structure and the evaluation of a story, are well developed in the dominant language, but less developed in the weaker one (Silva-Corvalán 2014). Obviously, this outcome has implications for education inasmuch as testing bilingual children in their weaker language in school may run the risk of viewing them as cognitively deficient, a risk that would be avoided if both languages were taken into account in any evaluation of cognitive and linguistic levels of development.

The prevalence of code-switching in the bilingual’s language depends on both its occurrence in the adult input, and adult attitudes to it (Lanza 2004). When adults code-switch themselves or accept the child’s language mixing by showing that mixed utterances are understood and that the use of another language is permissible, then children will feel freer to code-switch and thus develop a colloquial communicative style that incorporates switching. Otherwise, children may refrain from saying something or find roundabout ways of expression, as Brennan does when he refers to the cannon of a tank as “*la trompa del camión verde*” ‘the trunk of the green truck’, thus illustrating as well a metalinguistic ability: the creation of metaphors. This is only one example of the metalinguistic skills that bilingual children develop at a very early age. Bilingualism seems to be a good foundation for the development of more sophisticated forms of language awareness once schooling begins.

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Lexical innovations

There is general consensus that bilingual lexical access is characterized by non-selectivity, that is, at least in test situations bilinguals non-selectively activate lexical representations in both languages, regardless of the language currently in use (see, e.g., several in Pavlenko's 2011 volume). It should be no surprise, therefore, that lexical representations in one language could affect how words and word combinations are learned and used in a contact language. The siblings' bilingual development provides plenty of evidence that this is the case. Two mechanisms are manifest in the lexical innovations attested in their data: 1) transfer of single words from English that are adapted to the morphophonology of Spanish (I call this "morphological mixing"); and 2) subconscious translation or equating of words, (bound) collocations, complex verbal structures, or idioms from English with lexical units from Spanish, which result in unusual constructions in this language.

Cases of morphological mixing are of interest because they indicate that children are sensitive to structural clues and have acquired implicit knowledge of some aspects of Spanish morphology at an early age. This is illustrated by Nico's creation of *lifa* (in example 5), from leaf plus the ending *-a* characteristic of many feminine nouns, and later of *lipo* from lip, which replicates the gender of the Spanish word *labio*-masc 'lip'. Examples (6) and (7) illustrate interesting adaptations of English verbs to Spanish morphology from age 2;7.

(5) N: Pongamos la *lifa* en el agua. (2;6.25)
'Let's put the leaf in the water.'

(6) N: Bibi, *cómbete* con tu cepillo. (2;7.25) [from *comb*, instead of *péinate*]
'Bibi, comb-yourself with your brush.'

(7) B: ¡Ah, estoy *pulando* tu cadena! (3;4) [chain for eye glasses] [from *pull*]
'Ah, I'm pulling your chain!'
A: Me estás tirando la cadena.
'You're pulling my chain.'

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B: Sí, estoy tirando tu cadena. [repeats correctly]
'Yes, I'm pulling your chain.'

Transfer is evident also in word combinations that do not alter the surface syntax of Spanish, but do affect the way in which words collocate in this language.

<i>Innovative form</i>		<i>English source</i>	<i>Spanish form</i>
no puedo esperar	from	[I] can't wait	'tener muchos deseos de X'
cambiar mi mente	from	change my mind	'cambiar de opinión'
hacer contento	from	to make happy	'alegrar / poner contento'

I cite just two examples:

(8) N: El Galaxia ganó, y eso me hizo tan contento. Eso me hizo muy contento. (4;0.12)

Instead of "Me puso muy contento." or "Me alegré mucho."
'Galaxy won, and that made me so happy. That made me very happy.'

(9) N: No puedo esperar hasta que el tío Diego me enseñe [a andar en bicicleta]. (4;6)

[I] can't wait till tío Diego to-me teach
'I can't wait for tío Diego to teach me [to ride a bike].'

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Examples (8) and (9) are instances of direct transfer from English of the semantics of an idiomatic combination which results in the creation of an idiomatic combination in Spanish. They serve to illustrate the equating or translation mechanism that generates them. In (8), *hacer contento* replicates the English 'to make happy'. In (9), Nico transfers the idiomatic combination "[I] can't wait" with its meaning of 'keen anticipation' to a perceived equivalent in Spanish: "No puedo esperar," which in the monolingual Spanish norm has the meaning of "wait" ('stay around, hold on'), as in *No puedo esperar hasta que llegue tu papá. Tengo que irme ahora*. 'I can't wait until your dad comes home. I have to leave now'. Nico uses the "can't wait" expression in English. This combination and the created idiomatic expression in Spanish occur regularly in his speech and continue to be used in his adolescent years.

What I consider important to highlight about the equating of bound collocations, be they idioms or complex verbal structures, is that the reproduction with lexical units from Spanish does not violate the rules for the surface arrangement of these units in this language. Nonetheless, this type of transfer alters collocational features and consequently the semantic interpretation of the innovative complex structure in Spanish. If bilingual lexical access is characterized by non-selectivity, it is no surprise that cross-language effects are evident in the lexical component.

Morphosyntactic development

Nico and Brennan attained monolingual-like knowledge of numerous syntactic structures in Spanish. Nico's knowledge of the conditions on subject realization and placement, of the copulas *ser* and *estar*, and of some of the more complex tenses showed more stability than Brennan's. But in these specific grammatical aspects both children's grammars differ from those underlying their Spanish input. Compared to this adult model, therefore, the siblings evidence incomplete acquisition of some aspects of Spanish. This should not be remarkable, however, since incomplete acquisition is also typical of monolinguals' developing grammars by kindergarten age. But what is notable about the bilingual children is that around the ages of 3;6 to 4;0, when exposure to English increases considerably to the detriment of Spanish, they begin to diverge from the typical monolingual development.

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Similarities between the siblings and bilingual adults are identified as well in the domain of copula use. In previous work I showed that adult English-Spanish bilinguals in Los Angeles overuse *estar* in predicate adjectives, and so do the children, as example (10) illustrates.

- (10) B: Y un oso grande vino.
C: ¡Wow, qué miedo!

B: No. ~Estaba bueno.⁴ (2;10.26) [Target: *era* (*ser*)]
B: And a big bear came.
C: Wow, how scary!
B: No. He was [*estar*] good. (2;10.26) [Target: *era* (*ser*)]

Conversely, other off-target constructions, such as the placement of adjectives before the noun (*verde hoja* ‘green leaf’), preposition stranding (*¿Qué es esto para?* ‘What is this for?’), and copies of the English genitive (*Cuando yo esté a Kiko’s escuela* ‘When I am in Kiko’s school’ [B, 2;8.25]) were no longer used beyond the age of 4;1. In this regard, the siblings’ grammars are closer to those of second generation heritage speakers.

Also, gender marking and agreement were acquired smoothly by the siblings. Some examples produced by them are: *la noche* ‘the night’, *nuestra voz* ‘our voice’, *un pie* ‘a foot’, *los árboles* ‘the trees’, *la piel* ‘the skin’, *un mapa* ‘a map’; *tengo la boca cansada* ‘my mouth is tired’. I have argued that this result may be facilitated by the early learning of nouns and determiners as lexical units. Interestingly, while gender marking and agreement does not seem to cause difficulties to monolinguals (Hernández Pina 1990) nor to heritage speakers who have attained advanced proficiency in Spanish (Alarcón 2011), it presents problems to even advanced learners of Spanish as a second language (Montrul, Foote, & Perpiñán 2008).

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Ser and estar

The difficulties that English-Spanish bilingual children face in the process of acquiring the two Spanish copulas (*ser* and *estar*, both translated as *to be*) are illustrated by example (11) from Nico’s data.

⁴ The symbol ~ is used to indicate that the construction is not acceptable in the children’s adult input grammar.

- (11) Adult: ¿Qué vas a **ser** cuando **seas** grande y **tengas** 19 años?
 ‘What will you **be** (ser) when you **are** (ser) grown up and **are** (tener) 19 years old?’
 Nico: Voy a poner viejo.
 ‘I’m gonna become old.’
 Adult: Uh, uh todavía no, pues vas a **estar** joven, grande y joven, sí.
 ‘Uh, uh, not yet, you’re going **to be** (estar) young, grown up and young, yes.’
 Nico: Cuando **soy** 20.
 ‘When I’m (ser) 20.’ [Target: tener ‘have’]

In this short exchange, the adult alternates between the two copulas with the same adjective, *grande* ‘big, grown up’ and the child gives us a glimpse of further troubles with expressions of age.

In previous publications (e.g., Silva-Corvalán 1986) I have shown that *estar*, a historically aggressive copula in Spanish, continues to extend to contexts of *ser* in the speech of generations 2 and 3 in Los Angeles, beyond its attested extension in Mexico (Gutiérrez 1994). I have also shown that these speakers use the imperfect tense instead of the preterite of *ser* and *estar* and other stative verbs (e.g., *tener* ‘have’, *saber* ‘know’). These features are also characteristic of the speech of Nico and Brennan, as examples (12) and (13) illustrate. And although the siblings also make a few errors by using *ser* instead of *estar*, it is *estar* that more frequently substitutes for *ser*, evidencing a behavior similar to that of bilingual adults of second and third generation. Interestingly, this does not correspond to the input the siblings have received from their family.

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- (12) N: El gato estaba malo. (2;7.16) [*estar* instead of *ser*: ‘era malo’]
 Literally: the cat was sick ‘The cat was bad.’

- (13) N: Edwin sólo le, le destruyó algo a Anthony y **era**-Imperfect un accidente y él, y él le pegó y le dijo estúpido. (5;7) [instead of Preterit: ‘**fue** un accidente’]

Furthermore, adult bilinguals use *ser* instead of *tener* in expressions of age, height, and weight, as in (14).

(14) [la planta] ya **es** como dos, tres años. (Gen. 2) [instead of ‘**tiene** como dos...’]

By now it [the plant] **is** about two, three years old' [Spanish: ‘it **has** about two...’]

This type of calque is also attested in the siblings’ data, as in examples (15) and (16).

(15) N: Yo no **soy** nueve. (5;1) [**ser** instead of ‘tener’: ‘no **tengo** nueve’]
‘I’m not nine.’ [Spanish: [I] do not **have** nine]

(16) N: **Está** frío, papi. ‘it is cold’ (1;10) [instead of ‘**Hace** frío’]
F: ¿Hace frío? [correct Spanish idiomatic expression]
Literally: makes cold? ‘Is it cold?’

By the age of 5;11, the siblings have not stabilized their knowledge of the semantic and pragmatic factors that underlie the selection of copula in Spanish, nor of idiomatic constructions involving the use of age expressions. Adult bilinguals evidence these uses in their speech, thus suggesting the target constructions were never completely acquired by third-generation children.

Grammatical subjects

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One of the more studied grammatical aspects for the examination of hypotheses about the interaction of syntax and discourse in monolingual Spanish, in L1 and L2 acquisition, and in BFLA has been the expression and placement in the sentence of grammatical subjects (e.g., various in Carvalho, Orozco & Lapidus Shin 2015; Otheguy & Zentella 2012; Silva-Corvalán 2003). English differs from Spanish with respect to these grammatical features: (i) English is non-null-subject with Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order. (ii) Spanish is a flexible null-subject SVO language; when expressed, subjects may be placed after the verb. The expression of subjects and the order of major arguments in Spanish are mainly constrained by discourse-pragmatic factors; they are syntacticized in English. The differences between English and Spanish, then, present a challenge to the bilingual child.

Nico and Brennan realize at a very early age that English requires overt subjects and Spanish does not, thus providing clear evidence that the model of the input languages guides the development of autonomous syntactic systems in BFLA. But is there crosslinguistic influence in this domain of the grammar of Spanish and do third-generation children acquire the knowledge of the discourse-pragmatic rules for subject use in Spanish? The answer to both questions is “yes”, but with some caveats.

I have examined thousands of utterances starting with the first identifiable verb that could have had a subject expressed. I do not refer further about the acquisition of English subjects, except to say that the siblings’ use of subjects in this language does not differ from what is typical for English-speaking monolinguals. In Spanish, by contrast, use of subjects appears to be affected as exposure to this language becomes more reduced.

Age	Nico		Brennan	
	%	N	%	N
2;0-2;11	36	329/912	51	397/775
3;0 to 3;11	28	178/636	71	503/711
4;0-6;0	42	428/1030	69	411/598

Table 1. Subject pronoun realization in Spanish at ages 2;0-2;11, 3;0-3;11 and 4;0-5;11.⁵

As shown in Table 1, the younger child, Brennan, uses a much higher proportion of overt subjects than his brother from early on. He also gives evidence of inappropriate discourse-pragmatic uses. By contrast, the older child’s quantitative results are comparable to those of Spanish monolinguals, but beyond age 4;0 even this child increases the percentage of use of pronouns and also gives some evidence of inappropriate discourse-pragmatic uses.

⁵ There are fewer tokens for Brennan at 4;0-5;11. He did not want to speak Spanish between the ages of 4;6 and 4;11.

At first glance, the results in Table 1 confirm the hypothesis that a lower amount of exposure to the weaker language and consequent lower proficiency in this language make Brennan more vulnerable to influence from English in the domain of subject use. His rate of expression of pronominal subjects is 15 percentage points higher than that of his brother (36% to 51%) from 2;0 to 2;11, and the difference between the brothers deepens as time goes by.

Nico's rate of overt pronouns is comparable to those of Juan, a Spanish monolingual studied in Madrid who uses explicit subjects 42 percent of the time between the ages of 1;7 and 2;11 (Liceras, Fernández Fuertes & Alba de la Fuente 2012).

But the steady increase of subject pronouns in the speech of Brennan, the child with a lower level of proficiency in Spanish, suggests that as English patterns become more entrenched, he may subconsciously replicate the [subject + verb] pattern of English onto Spanish. Brennan surpasses his brother's rate of expression by 27 percentage points (see Table 1), thus showing a more intense effect from reduced exposure to Spanish, and from the stronger language.

But it is also possible that the children have learned the pragmatic value of subject pronouns and are using them as foci of contrast. An examination of some of the children's utterances in their larger discourse context indicates that although there are some contexts that support a clear contrastive interpretation with an overt pronoun, there are also many that do not, as in (17b)

(17) C: Este sí que es un awi grande este del pie.

B: (a) Yo sé, pero esto [una curita] va a salir después cuando (b) **yo** lavo mis manos. (4;2)

'C: This really is a big booboo, this one on your foot.

B: (a) I know, but this [the band-aid] will come off later when (b) I wash my hands.'

Beyond age 4;0, the siblings' frequent expression of coreferential subjects not justified by another favoring factor, as in example (18), is interpreted as

redundant by native speakers of Spanish. No factors validate the overt coreferential pronoun in (18b): its referent is activated, non contrastive, unnecessary for identification; its informative value is very low.

(18) Nico: 4;6 [playing with puppets]

C: Muchas gracias, policía, en la cárcel él va a aprender a ser bueno.

N: Porque él va, él, cuando (a) él sale de ahí, (b) **él** va a estar muy perdonado.

'C: Thank you, policeman, in jail he will learn to be good.

N: Because he is, he, when (a) he leaves from there, (b) **he**'s gonna be very forgiven'.

There is variability in this domain of the grammar when the syntax allows an alternative and the choice depends on mostly subjective discourse-pragmatic factors. It is no surprise, then, that the so-called "syntax-pragmatic interface" is vulnerable and open to change. The child does not receive a consistent input that would facilitate learning the discourse-pragmatic conditioning factors.

Clearly, as the siblings grow up, the evidence is in favor of an increase of subject pronouns that are not pragmatically validated. Spanish variable rules of subject realization are difficult to acquire due to their subjective nature; gradual simplification implies eliminating the null alternative. I arrived at similar conclusions in my study of adult bilinguals in Los Angeles (Silva-Corvalán 1994). I noted there that the restrictions on subject expression remained to a large extent intact in second and third generation bilinguals, except for a decrease in the strength of the coreferentiality constraint, as it is the case for the siblings, and especially for Brennan. Obligatory constraints are maintained in Los Angeles, namely focality and contrast. Brennan and Nico's behavior is comparable to that of the Los Angeles bilingual adults, even though their input has been different.

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The verb system

Silva-Corvalán (2014) studies the acquisition of verbs and of verb morphology in Spanish and English from the first appearance of a verb before age 2;0 until the

end of the siblings' sixth year of life. Here, I focus only on the last age period studied. In English, no differences are observed between the bilingual siblings and English-speaking monolingual children. In Spanish, more complex tenses pose difficulties to the children.

Let us consider the hierarchy of complexity for verb tenses in Table 2.

Less complex		<----->		More complex	
Level 1	<	Level 2	<	Level 3	< Level 4
Present		Present progressive		[Imperfect]	Compound
Past/Preterite		Periphrastic Future		Future	perfect tenses
Present participle				Conditional	
Imperative				[Present & Imperfect Subjunctive]	

Note: Tenses in square brackets are marked morphologically only in Spanish.

Table 2. Relative hierarchy of tense complexity in Latin American Spanish and American English.

Most of the simple indicative mood tenses were not problematic for the siblings. They were able to talk about the present, the past and the future with little difficulties. But the less frequent and more complex tenses that refer to non-experienced and hypothetical situations were either unstable or not acquired. By the end of the first six years, Nico had reached command of the tenses in the first two levels of complexity. His command of tenses in level 3 was unstable, as evidenced in example (19). Of the tenses in level 4, Nico used only one, the present perfect.⁶

(19) N: Porque él quería que la gente mala encontrara-ImpSub [on target] pedazos de él para que ellos ~**hacía**-Imp más robots. (5;6) [ImpSub required: *hicieran*]

⁶ The following abbreviations are used in the examples and elsewhere: Imp = Imperfect Indicative; ImpSub = Imperfect Subjunctive; PresSub = Present Subjunctive; PresInd = Present Indicative; Sub = Subjunctive.

‘Because he wanted the bad people to find pieces of him so that they **made** more robots.’ [expected: *could make*]

Brennan does not have productive command of any tenses in levels 3 and 4 by the end of the first six years, even though before the age of 4;0 he had produced utterances with appropriate present subjunctives, as in (20). Reduction in exposure to Spanish has led to losing, not learning, or weakening of the on-line command of this tense by age 5;0, as illustrated in (21).

(20) B: Yo quiero que tú **seas**-Sub la policía. (3;2)
‘I want that you be the police.’

(21) B: ~No cuando ya **tengo**-PresInd dieciséis años. (5;4)
[expected: *tenga*-PresSub]
‘Not when [I] **am** sixteen years old.’

Clearly, reduction in the amount of exposure has negative linguistic consequences. Consider Table 3 summarizing the tense-mood-aspect (TMA) forms used by four children: Daisy, Mike, Nico, and Brennan, and two adults (V21 and A 46).

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Daisy and Mike (both 2nd generation) live in neighborhoods in which Latinos approximate 70 percent of the population, but they are attending kindergarten in English-only schools. Daisy’s home language is Spanish and this is her dominant language. Mike acquired English and Spanish from birth and speaks both languages at home; his stronger language is English. Nico and Brennan interact mostly in English at home. The two adults also live in predominantly Latino communities and have not studied Spanish at any school. V21 (2nd generation) has native-like proficiency in English, but only intermediate proficiency in Spanish. A46 (3rd generation) started acquiring Spanish and English from birth, but became English-dominant at an early age. She speaks Spanish only rarely.

The symbols in Table 3 mean the following: “+” stands for a tense form which is used according to the norms of general spoken Spanish (regardless of whether it has acquired expanded uses as other forms are simplified and lost in the data); a

blank indicates that the form is not part of the verb system underlying the speaker's spontaneous use of spoken Spanish; an asterisk “*” is used to indicate that a closed list of stative verbs appears with imperfect morphology in preterite-perfective contexts; the at sign “@” signals that a speaker has used a number of preterites instead of imperfects; “0” signals that the form has failed to occur in a high number of obligatory contexts and appears to be non-productive.

G2 refers to immigrant generation 2 and G3 to generation 3. The information in this Table is based on at least three hours of recording for each speaker.

	Daisy Sp	Mike Bil	Nico Bil	Brennan Bil	V21 G2	A46 G3
<i>Ind mood:</i>						
Present	+	+	+	+	+	+
PresProgressive	+	+	+	+	+	+
PeriphFuture	+	+	+	+	+	+
Preterite	+	*	*	*	*	*
Imperfect	+	@	+	@	+	@
ImpProgress	+	+	+	+		
PastPeriFuture	+		+			
Conditional		1				
PresPerfect	+	+	+		+	
<i>Sub mood:</i>						
Present	+	+	+		0	
Imperfect	+		+		0	

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Note: Periph, Peri = periphrastic

Table 3. Spanish TMA usage compared across bilinguals and a (near) monolingual child (5;0-5;11), and two bilingual adults.

Table 3 shows visually that the simpler and more frequent tenses, Present, Present Progressive and Periphrastic Future of the Indicative are used in the same manner by all the speakers. Also, regardless of language dominance and home language, the children have not yet acquired several tenses that are, therefore, not included in this Table. In addition, the simple conditional is used only once by one child. Be that as it may, it is indeed remarkable that despite

their reduced exposure to Spanish, Mike and Nico have developed a tense system which is as complete as that of the near Spanish-monolingual child.

Differences among the children and adults correlate with home language and consequent amount of exposure to Spanish. Daisy, who is generation 2 but speaks only Spanish at home, is the only one who uses stative verbs with Preterite morphology consistently in perfective contexts. The other children and the adult bilinguals use a closed list of stative verbs in the Imperfect instead of the Preterite, as illustrated in (22). The TMA system of the children and the heritage speakers match in this respect (see Silva-Corvalán 1994: Ch. 2).

- (22) N: Estaba pateando la pelota a un hombre y alguien pateó la pelota a mi pierna y (a) fue-Pret un awi grande y (b) eso ~**estaba**-Imp terrible. (2;8.15) [expected: *estuvo*-Pret]
'He was kicking the ball to a man and someone kicked the ball to my leg and (a) it was-Pret a big boobo and (b) that **was**-Imp terrible.'

Three of the bilinguals also evidence unstable Preterite morphology, as illustrated in (23).

- (23) B: ¿Algunas veces peleaban-Imp [mis tíos] con los juguetes? (5;5)
C: Sí, con los juguetes.
B: ~¿Quién **ganó**-Pret? ¿El tío Diego? (5;5) [expected: *ganaba*-Imp]
C: Yo creo, sí, porque el tío Diego era el más grande.
'B: Did they [my uncles] fight-Imp sometimes with the toys?
C: Yes, with the toys.
B: Who **won**-Pret? Uncle Diego? [expected: *used to/would win*-Imp]
C: I think so, because uncle Diego was the oldest.'

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Nico's system is the closest to that of Daisy. Brennan, the younger sibling, has developed a system that is almost the same as that of the generation 3 speaker; irrealis tenses are absent in this system.

The children use past tense morphology adequately, but have difficulties with irrealis morphology. Example (24), obtained in answer to questions related to the picture-book story *Frog, where are you?* is illustrative. Brennan simply ignores the hypothetical question about having a little frog.

- (24) C: Brenny, ¿tú crees que tu mamá te dejaría-Cond tener un sapito en tu casa? Porque tú ¿qué tienes en tu casa? Tienes un, una culebra y un/
 B: Lagarto. (5;6)
 C: Y un lagarto. ¿Y un sapito?
 B: Bibi, mira. [B ignores A and starts drawing.]
 'C: Bren, do you think your mom would let you have a little frog at home? Because you, what do you have at home? You have a, a snake and a/
 B: Lizard.
 C: And a lizard. And a little frog?
 B: Bibi, look.' [B ignores A and starts drawing.]

The use of irrealis forms in English, on the other hand, makes it clear that the lack of these forms in Spanish is a linguistic question and not a cognitive one. In English, Mike, Nico and Brennan can easily converse about non-factual past and future situations, as example (25) shows.

- (25) M: That's a good story, huh? The little froggie. Do you think he should have taken the frog?
 B: No. (5;6)
 M: No? What do you think?
 B: He **should've left** him with his family.
 M: He should've? Why?
 B: Because frogs are wild.

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Of great interest is the comparison of the children with the two adults in Table 3. Clearly, when bilingual US-born children start kindergarten, they have not yet acquired the complete TMA system in Spanish. The speaker in generation 2 evidences a system similar to those of Nico and Mike; while Brennan's is closer to that of the speaker in generation 3. Reduction in exposure and use leads to losing, not learning, or weakening of the on-line command of the less frequent tenses.

Speaker A46 in Table 3 represents the least grammaticalized system. Nico and Brennan, from a mostly English home at this age, would not have advanced

beyond this reduced system had they not received formal instruction in Spanish in a two-way bilingual school.

Conclusion

In societal bilingualism, the functionally restricted language evidences, among other phenomena, the simplification of some grammatical domains (e.g., Lipski 1993, Silva-Corvalán 1994; Zentella 1997). In this context, a recurring question is whether this stage of grammatical simplification is due to incomplete acquisition in the early years of a bilingual's life, or a result of processes of attrition or loss (Cuza 2010, Montrul 2005). Note that I have pointed out similarities between the developing bilingual siblings and adult heritage speakers in the preceding discussion.

Interestingly, the siblings' linguistic behavior in Spanish shows some similar language contact features with those of second and third generation adult bilinguals in Los Angeles, even though they had very rarely been exposed to the speech of these speakers. Compared to first generation immigrants, the siblings and adult heritage speakers who have not received formal education in Spanish have:

- * an increased production of overt subject pronouns and preverbal subjects;
- * a reduced TMA system;
- * the preference for marking possession with a possessive adjective, as in English, rather than using an article and/or a clitic pronoun, as in Spanish, as illustrated in (26).

(26) N: A mí me gusta el sol en **mi cara**, en **mis ojos**. (2;10.14)
'I like the sun on my face, on my eyes'

- * the reproduction of the meaning of word combinations from English into a perceived equivalent combination in Spanish (e.g., *no puedo esperar* in (10?)).

Similarities between the siblings and adults are identified also in the domain of copula use. In previous work I showed that adult English-Spanish bilinguals in Los Angeles overuse *estar* in predicate adjectives, and so do the children, as example (11) illustrated.

The parallels identified between the siblings' linguistic behavior in Spanish and that of adult heritage speakers have two important implications: firstly, they suggest that some of the changes that have been identified across generations of bilinguals (e.g., by Gutiérrez 2003, Lynch 1999, Silva-Corvalán 1994, Zentella 1997) develop naturally in the acquisition of the heritage language, seemingly regardless of the quality of the input; secondly, they imply that some aspects of the heritage language of adults are the outcome of an interrupted process of acquisition of this language between the ages of 3;0 and 5;0, when more intensive exposure to another language, English in our case, reduces exposure to the heritage language and diminishes the opportunities to use it.

But while it is certainly the case that the siblings' grammars showed similarities with those of heritage speakers by age 6;0, it is also the case that Nico and Brennan were affected once the amount of exposure and use of Spanish became more reduced beyond age 4;0. It is necessary to keep in mind, furthermore, the dynamic nature of natural bilingualism, since processes of development may take place if exposure and use are enhanced. I believe that if the siblings had not attended a Spanish-immersion school, their development in Spanish would have halted at about age five and a half. But in spite of the setbacks, with the help of schooling these two third-generation children have developed into successful English-Spanish bilinguals.

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