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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to test the effects of bilingual and monolingual school on the production of Spanish syntactic structures. The main hypothesis to be tested was that there was no significant difference in the development of Spanish syntactic structures between those children schooled bilingually and those children schooled monolingually in English. If such a difference existed, the children in the bilingual program should demonstrate greater syntactic development in their speech. The study was conducted using ninety-six Mexican-American children in two elementary schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. All of the children were Spanish-dominant and spoke Spanish at home, but also spoke some English. One school had a bilingual program and half of the children attended it. They were matched with forty-eight children who attended the second school which was located nearby and taught the standard curriculum in English. The children viewed a silent movie and discussed it individually with an interviewer. The interview was recorded and transcripts were made of the children's oral language production. One of the most interesting findings of this investigation was that the children in the monolingual school produced more language and more structurally complex language than did the children in the bilingual program. The bilingually schooled children did not perform significantly better than their counterparts on any of the eleven dependent measures. (Author/CLK)

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SPOKEN SPANISH OF MEXICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN:
A MONOLINGUAL AND BILINGUAL SCHOOL PROGRAM

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One of the main goals of bilingual education is to maintain and develop the mother tongue (i.e., Spanish in the case of the Mexican American in the Southwest). Yet, little has been done to see to what extent bilingual schooling is affecting the development of Spanish.

The purpose of this study was to test the effects of bilingual and monolingual school (Treatment) on the production of Spanish syntactic structures. The main hypothesis to be tested was that there was no significant difference in the development of Spanish syntactic structures between those children schooled bilingually and those children schooled monolingually in English. If such a difference existed, the children in the bilingual program should demonstrate greater syntactic development in their speech.

The study was conducted using ninety-six Mexican American children in two elementary schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. All of the children were Spanish-dominant and spoke Spanish at home, but also spoke some English. One school had a bilingual program and half of the children attended it. They were matched with forty-eight children who attended the second school which was located nearby and taught the standard curriculum in English.

All the children viewed a short movie without sound and talked about it afterwards individually with an Interviewer. The interview was recorded and transcripts were made of the children's oral language production. An analysis of the transcripts was made based on the T-unit. (A T-unit is defined as one main clause plus any subordinate clause or nonclausal structure attached to it.)

In addition to the effects of Treatment, the effects of two other potential sources of variability (which were not central to this study, but which may affect language production) were studied; namely: Sex and Interviewer.

One of the most interesting findings of this investigation was that the children in the monolingual school produced more language and more structurally complex language than did the children in the bilingual program. When a mixed factorial ANOVA with Treatment, Sex, Interviewer, and Grade as between-subject factors and repeated measures as a within-subject factor was run, it was found that monolingually-schooled children performed significantly better on those measures of complex language development such as Complete T-unit, Complex T-unit, Dependent Clauses, and Adjective Clauses. The bilingually-schooled children did not perform significantly better than their counterparts on any of the eleven dependent measures.

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Individual differences on the Interviewers' ability to elicit language from the children were statistically significant. The reason why they varied is difficult to explain. A careful examination of the transcripts does not reveal that Interviewers spoke differently from one interview to another.

In this study one dependent measure was significantly affected by Sex. Girls performed significantly better on the quantitative measure Mean Number of Words per T-unit.

The number of years in school was not significant for either group when looking at T-unit measures. However, when coordination and subordination were considered, growth over grade was apparent. The number of subordinate clauses increased, with adverbial clauses of time and reason evincing the most growth. The use of the coordinator y increased, thus indicating that children in succeeding years produce more sentences.

The most plausible interpretation of the findings is that Spanish is apparently a school subject to the children in the bilingual program. These children speak a dialect of Spanish at home, and yet, they come to school and are taught in standard Spanish and corrected if they do not use it. This seems to be causing their verbal fluency in Spanish to diminish.