

## Does the social context play a role in the acquisition of complex dative predicates by heritage and non-heritage Spanish bilingual children?

Key words: dative alternation, acquisition, heritage, social context, home context

The present proposal aims at shedding further light on whether heritage and non-heritage Spanish bilingual children exhibit analogous patterns (or lack thereof) in the acquisition of two types of complex dative predicate structures in Spanish, as examined in the spontaneous production data from corpora available in CHILDES (MacWhinney 2000). In particular, it examines whether the social context, that is, whether Spanish learnt at home (heritage Spanish bilingual children) or Spanish being the language of the community (non-heritage Spanish bilingual children) plays a role in the acquisition of the two types of dative alternation (DA) constructions, namely, *a/para*-datives (1a), and dative clitic doubled (DCLD) structures (1b).

- (1) a. Entregué las llaves al conserje [a-dative]  
give.1sg.past the keys to+the janitor  
'I gave the keys to the janitor'
- b. Le entregué las llaves al conserje [DCLD]  
him.cl.dat. give.1sg.past the keys to+the janitor  
'I gave the janitor the keys'  
[Demonte 1995: 6]

There are two opposing views on the grammatical relationship that exists between the two DA structures. Demonte (1995) argues for the derivation of DCLDs from *a/para*-datives, as marked by the presence-absence of a dative clitic, while Cuervo (2007, 2003) proposes two syntactic and semantic structures that differ in the status of the head that they project (i.e., a dative clitic in DCLDs and a verb in *a/para*-datives) and the thematic role assigned to the indirect object (i.e., a beneficiary in DCLDs and a goal in *a/para*-datives). The present study tests these formal accounts by using acquisition data. Previous works on Spanish monolingual (L1) acquisition have reported the early emergence of DCLDs (Torrens and Wexler 2000) which suggests they are the base structure. To date, no works on Spanish bilingual acquisition have addressed this issue. Along with the emergence of these structures, previous studies have also investigated the role played by adult input in child output. Although this issue has not been investigated in L1 Spanish child acquisition data, it has been widely studied in L1 English child data (e.g., Campbell and Tomasello 2000; Snyder and Stromswold 1997). These studies have observed the same preference for the use of double object constructions over prepositional DA structures in the adult input and in the child output. However, the frequency of exposure to these structures does not seem to correlate with the children's age of onset (Snyder and Stromswold 1997).

In order to fill this gap in the analysis of Spanish DA structures as well as in the acquisition process followed by heritage and non-heritage bilingual children, Spanish DA structures are examined in the spontaneous longitudinal production of 7 English-Spanish bilinguals and in the corresponding child-directed speech, as available different corpora in CHILDES (MacWhinney 2000). The English-Spanish bilingual children's social and home contexts have been taken into account: 2 of the children live in a Spanish social context and Spanish is their L1 (1;01-3;01) (the FerFuLice corpus); the other 5 live in an English social context and, thus, Spanish is restricted to the home context and is their heritage language (1;03-3;03) (the Deuchar corpus, the Perez corpus and the Ticio corpus).

Results show a fairly concurrent emergence of the two DA structures in the two groups ( $t(1)=-1.000$ ,  $p=.500$  in heritage Spanish,  $t(1)=-4.000$ ,  $p=.156$  in non-heritage Spanish). These findings suggest (i) that the status of Spanish as a heritage language does not make these children follow a different path from that of non-heritage

bilinguals; and (ii) that DCLDs and *a/para*-datives are not derivationally related, in line with Cuervo (2007, 2003).

Developmentally, an order effect in the incidence of these constructions is observed, as measured by the mean length of utterance measured in words (MLUw) (Figures 1 and 2).

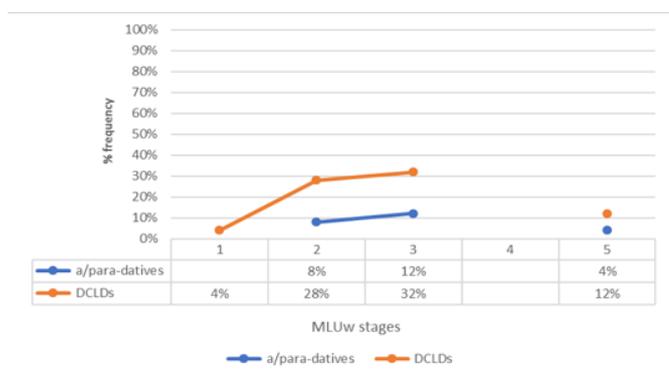


Figure 1. EN-SP bilinguals' SP DA structures per MLUw stage (HL SP)

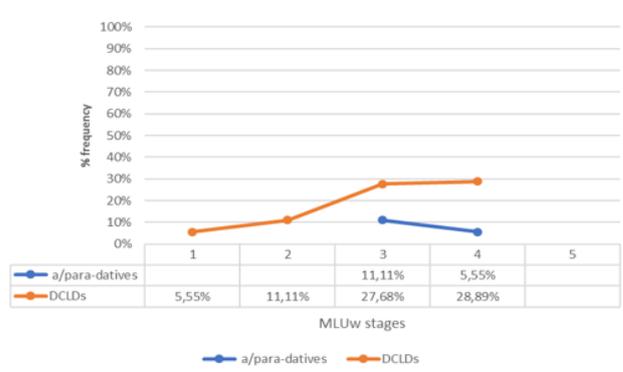


Figure 2. EN-SP bilinguals' SP DA structures per MLUw stage (L1 SP)

Such an order effect in the (non-)heritage bilinguals' use of these constructions is also seen in the input they are exposed to, as illustrated in Figures 3 and 4.

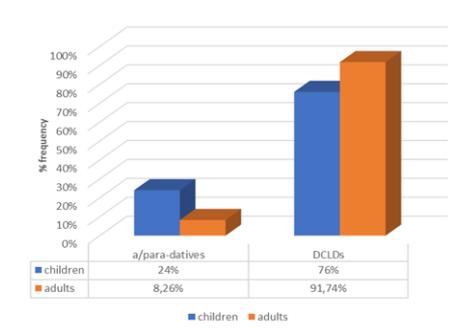


Figure 3. Adult input and EN-SP bilinguals' output (HL SP)

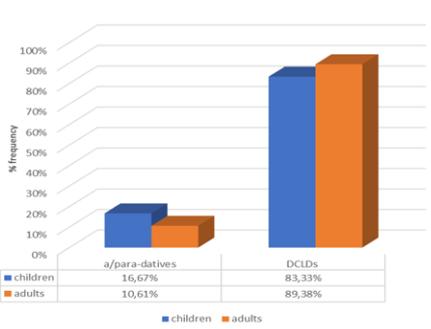


Figure 4. Adult input and EN-SP bilinguals' output (L1 SP)

The data displayed in Figures 1 to 4 provide further insights into the role played by adult input in child output since child output seems to correlate with their corresponding adult input. Therefore, the social context, that is, whether Spanish is learnt at home or as the language of the community does not appear to have played a role in these Spanish bilingual children's production of the two DA constructions under investigation.

## References

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