

## The Development of Inalienable Possession in Child Heritage Speakers of Spanish

We examine the production of inalienable possession in Spanish among child heritage speakers born and raised in the US. While in Spanish the clitic *se* and a definite determiner are often required to express inalienable possession (1a), inalienable nouns in English must be headed by a possessive determiner (1b) (Bosque & Gutiérrez-Rexach, 2009; Guéron, 2003):

- (1) a. *María se lavó la mano.* SPAN (SE+DefDet)  
b. Mary washed **her** hand. ENG (Null Se+PossDet)

Previous work among English-speaking L2 learners and adult heritage speakers has shown divergences with inalienable possession in both production and interpretation compared to monolingual speakers (Solano & Cuza, 2021; Giancaspro & Sánchez, 2021; Montrul & Ionin, 2010). Crosslinguistic influence, linguistic proficiency and experience seem to play a role in the degree of inalienable possession use and interpretation. We add to previous work by examining the extent to which heritage Spanish children have sensitivity to this structure, and whether their divergences, if any, can be accounted for in terms of crosslinguistic influence from English and bilingual dominance.

20 Spanish heritage children (5;5-12;1,  $M=9.0$ ) and 11 of their parents (22-50,  $M=36$ ) participated in the study (data collection in progress). Most of the children (86%) were English dominant, according to the MINT test (Gollan et al, 2012). The parents (baseline group) were long term-immigrants of Mexican background (mean LOR, 17 years), and the majority reported to be Spanish dominant (90%). Inalienable possession was elicited via an Elicited Production Task conducted orally and visually with the aid of PowerPoint. It consisted of 20 test items (10 inalienable and 10 alienable) counterbalanced across participants and randomized. The responses for inalienable contexts were coded for 4 structure types: i) SE+DefDet (*Se rompió el brazo*, expected response); ii) NullSe+DefDet (*#Tapó la nariz*); iii) SE+PossDet (*#Se rompió su brazo*); and iv) NullSe+PossDet (*#Cortó su dedo*). Unrelated responses (“other”) were excluded from the analysis.

Results from a Generalized Linear Mixed Model analysis showed significant differences between groups in their use of the expected response ( $\chi^2 = 5.4154, p < 0.019$ ). Furthermore, the results showed a significant association with Spanish dominance (Z-Wald = 3.6209,  $p < 0.000$ ). The more dominant the children were in Spanish, the more they approximated the adult norm in the use of the expected response. Compared to the parents, the children showed significantly higher use of SE+PossDet structures (22% vs. 13%) ( $p < 0.000$ ), which suggests alignment with English morphosyntactic features. However, the two groups showed similar use of NullSe+PossDet and NullSe+DefDet structures (Figure 1 and Table 1). Regarding alienable nouns, both groups behaved at ceiling ( $\chi^2 = 1.854, p = 0.1733$ ).

The findings suggest a pattern of protracted development in child heritage Spanish stemming from crosslinguistic influence from English and language dominance. We account for the results following Sánchez’s (2019) *Bilingual Alignment Approach* which argues for the coexistence of new alignments containing morphosyntactic features of both languages in heritage language grammars.

## Elicited Production Task



romper / brazo

**Preamble:** *Juan se subió a un árbol y se cayó.* “John climbed a tree and he fell”.  
**Prompt:** *¿Qué le pasó a Juan?* “What happened to John?”  
**Expected response:** *Juan se rompió el brazo.* “John broke his arm”.

Figure 1: Mean percentage of responses by structure type and group for inalienable contexts

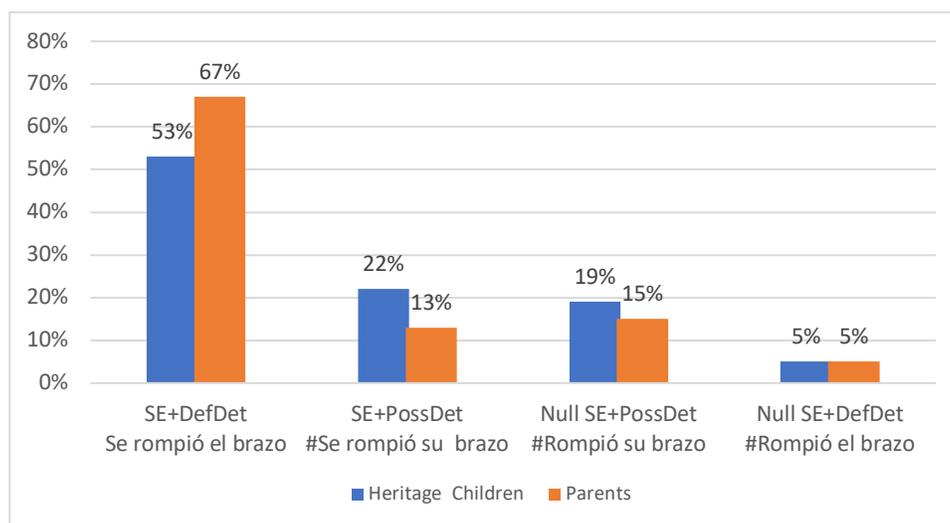


Table 1: Total number of items by structure and group for inalienable contexts.

Group	SE+DefDet	SE+PossDet	Null SE+PossDet	Null SE+DefDet
Heritage Children	100/187 (53%)	42/187 (22%)	36/187 (19%)	9/187 (5%)
Parents	74/110 (67%)	14/110 (13%)	17/110 (15%)	5/110 (5%)

## References

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