

UC Berkeley

Newsletters

Title

Winter 1999

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9dj8z45g>

Author

UC Language Minority Research Institute

Publication Date

1999



Reaction Time Studies of Lexical Processing in Young Second-Language Learners

Children who learn English as a second language in the U.S. school system are quickly becoming the rule rather than the exception. This is especially true among Latino children. Many Latino children are from homes in which Spanish is the sole or primary language spoken and English language learning coincides with the beginning of formal education.

Research has shown that second language (L2) learning by children is a complex process with multiple individual and environmental factors affecting the timeframe, efficiency, and ultimate attainment of skills. Not all children who are competent users of a first language (L1) will acquire the L2 in a timely manner or attain native speaker levels of proficiency. Further complicating our understanding of early sequential bilingualism is the frequent finding of "language reversal." In language reversal the L2 becomes the stronger or "dominant" language and L1 skills stagnate with relative disuse. The complexity of the L1/L2 developmental patterns invalidate direct comparisons of the bilinguals' language skills with those of their monolingual age peers. To date there has been little systematic research looking at normal performance in both languages of linguistic minority children to inform either theory or practice.

In a preliminary study supported by the UC LMRI we looked at language (Spanish/English) and context (blocked/mixed) effects on accuracy and production time during an object "picture naming" task. Results are reported for 80 individuals at four different age levels (5-7, 8-10, 11-13, and young adults). All participants learned Spanish as a first language in the home, with the formal learning of English coinciding with school attendance in the U.S. (mean age=5). There were gains made in both languages across age, with the advances in English greater than those made in Spanish. In terms of relative dominance, both accuracy and response time measures indicated that the youngest group was stronger in Spanish than in English, with a "balancing point" at 11-13 years, and the pattern reversing to English dominance prior to young adulthood. All groups experienced a greater slowdown in response times when asked to switch continuously between languages (mixed condition) relative to a single language (blocked) condition. There was a significant interaction, however, between the groups in the switching condition with the 11-13 year olds experiencing the greatest relative slowing and a clear speed/accuracy trade off. Naming accuracy in the younger two groups was reliably less in the mixed vs. blocked language condition, but maintained in the two older age groups.

The data we have obtained have a number of implications for researchers and educators alike. First, they provide indices of processing, which can aid in understanding the nature of language processing in bilingual children. Second, they provide additional normative data needed to adequately direct educational policy for non-native, English speaking children developing language in a normal fashion. Finally, they can serve as a diagnostic tool for children with developmental disabilities.

With respect to the last implication, there is a substantial subset of children who have central language impairment requiring alternative interventions. Children with specific language impairment (SLI) represent approximately 7% of the school-aged population. SLI is characterized by a deficit in the attainment of skills in a first language, despite relatively normal development in all other areas. Language impairment in SLI cannot be attributed to frank neurological, sensory, cognitive or emotional disturbances. However, recent evidence indicating the existence of subtle differences in cognitive processing in monolingual English speaking children with SLI relative to their non-language impaired peers has seriously undermined the accuracy of the limiting term "specific." These empirical findings of subtle cognitive differences in children identified as SLI have significant theoretical implications for the interaction of language processing and general cognitive mechanisms.

The timely identification of SLI in monolingual children is a difficult and inexact process at best. In the case of children who are acquiring two languages, the process of identifying SLI is complicated tenfold and has been described as a "nearly impossible task." This task 'impossibility' stems, in part, from a critical lack of basic research regarding the normal developmental profile of early sequential bilingualism. This bilingual profile necessarily includes both L1 and L2 as well as performance contexts which parallel the cognitive demands of being bilingual (i.e., one must maintain functional separation of the languages when speaking with monolingual listeners, and functional integration of the languages in settings requiring a "code-switch" or the real-time alternation between the languages). The increased cognitive processing demands inherent in being bilingual combined with the before mentioned findings of subtle processing differences in SLI present opportunities for the development of alternative experimental and diagnostic techniques that may be well suited for identifying linguistic impairments in bilingual children.

--Arturo E. Hernandez, Department of Psychology, UCSB

UC LMRI Awards 1999 Policy Research Grants

The UC LMRI, in conjunction with the UC LMRI Education Policy Center, initiated a new grant competition this year for Policy Research Grants. These grants are designed to support studies of current policy activities in California. This year the grants focused on the initial implementation and impact of Proposition 227 at the state and local levels. The UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee awarded 4 Policy Research Grants totaling \$51,873. The grant awards are for 6 months beginning January 1, 1999.

Education of Limited English Proficient Students in California Schools: An Assessment of the Influence of Proposition 227

by Eugene E. García and
Julia Curry-Rodriguez, UC Berkeley

This study documents how 7 school districts have implemented Proposition 227. Intended as a pilot study, we have selected the districts to represent diverse responses in terms of region, size and language groupings throughout the state. Our objective is to gather evidence in three distinct areas; 1) how districts complied with the provisions of Proposition 227, 2) how professional personnel were informed, trained, and assisted to implement these provisions, and 3) to discern the impact of such provisions on the students, teachers, and related personnel. To this effect, we have begun the collection of primary data by using semi-structured, open-ended qualitative research instruments specifically designed for three groups of educational professionals. These are district administrators in charge of language programs, principals and teachers. Interviews are being conducted on the telephone. We have secured permission from participants to audio record our interviews. We began our fieldwork with group meetings of interested parties and researchers addressing Proposition 227. From these groups, we identified preliminary participants with whom we have established rapport. We are using snowball and referral sampling techniques. At this time we have conducted interviews with district personnel and are beginning to interview principals. We intend to interview a total of 49 subjects. Based on our preliminary interviews we make these very basic assertions: 1) Due to time restriction districts scrambled to put together implementation procedures immediately before the beginning of the 1998 school year. 2) Principals and teachers were informed of the changes toward LEP classrooms with very little time before the beginning of the school year. 3) Given the short notice teachers had little time to prepare prior to the first day of classes. 4) Districts organized a variety of assistance mechanisms for their teachers. These include workshops, curriculum guides, and continued teacher aide assistance.

Our interviews provide us with background knowledge about district provisions and implementation procedures. To discern the impact of these provisions at the basic level of classroom and teaching climate we have been engaged in participant observation at two schools within the San Francisco Unified School District. Here we have interviewed teachers and engaged in participant observation. The two sites were selected for their climate in terms of bilingual education provisions. This data brings into focus insight about common practices and relational conditions of teacher and school attitudes toward English language learners, bilingual education, and bilingual teaching.

Proposition 227 has placed a premium on English language development in a highly uniform and prescriptive manner. Our research provides important and thorough evidence about this intervention on the specific practices generated by this proposition. Moreover, we will gather evidence about the effects of Proposition 227 on the students themselves. This preliminary data will be developed into a comprehensive, longitudinal proposal to examine the long-term effects of Proposition 227 on bilingual educational in general. Such a study will enable us to evaluate, from an empirical base, the effect of this new set of state policy directions for LEP students.

Teacher Educator Perspectives on the Impact of Proposition 227 in defining the CLAD/BCLAD Student Teaching Field Experience

by M. Cecilia Colombi and Barbara Goldman, UC Davis

Proposition 227 was approved by the voters in June, 1998 and fundamentally changed California state law in the way that school districts provide instructional services to English language learners. The nature and scope of the changes are complex for two fundamental reasons. First, as a law created through the proposition process rather than a law produced by the Legislature, 227 did not cancel out previous law systematically, leaving in place many other elements of the Education Code. In addition, the propaganda rhetoric of 227 articulated as its central tenet an end to bilingual education, whereas in fact, the language is not that restrictive. Nonetheless, the law and the interpretive regulations approved by the State Board of Education provide more latitude for local districts to implement policy for English language learners. As a consequence, policy on key components of how programs models are defined and delivered are being articulated at the local level. Some school districts have left previous program models in place, others have changed radically. Although Proposition 227 said nothing about teacher preparation, the context in which teachers are prepared, the site for the field experience, is in the schools. The purpose of this study is to investigate how teacher educators define the field practicum for student teachers preparing for a CLAD/BCLAD credential and how this definition has been affected by the passage of Proposition 227. This study will be conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a survey of teacher educators' perspectives on the impact of 227 will be conducted surveying the Directors of Teacher Education of the UC system and partner CSU and private institutions. The principal research questions to be addressed in the first phase will include: What changes in program model definition and implementation have taken place in partnership school districts? How have these changes affected the field practicum for CLAD/BCLAD teachers in the teacher education program? In the second phase, focus groups of teacher educators will attend a mini working conference hosted by the Second Language Institute at UC Davis. The purpose of the focus groups will be to collect data and artifacts from participating institutions addressing the following questions: How have school districts involved in teacher education partnership schools redefined their policies on program models for language minority students? How did language minority program coordinators articulate and operationalize their role in developing program model definitions at their sites? How did cooperating teachers with whom student teachers are placed redefine their roles and organize instruction and parent communication under the stricture of the new law? How did teachers redefine the field placement as a result of changes in partner school policies?

Bilingual Teachers and Credentialing in a Post-227 California

by Reynaldo F. Macías, UCLA

The proposed project is designed to provide a current survey of the state's bilingual teacher work force, the pipeline for future bilingual teachers, and the school district policies for employing bilingual teachers, and meeting the instructional needs of limited English proficient students. The project will survey all teacher preparation programs in the state to assess changes or proposed changes in their preparation and production of bilingual teachers since the passage of Proposition 227. In addition, a selected sample of the school districts within the state will be surveyed to assess any changes regarding their employment policies and practices of bilingual teachers.

It is expected that the information collected in this project will provide policy makers and others with the impact that Proposition 227 has had or is having on the development of an adequately prepared teaching force in the state.

Research on the Initial Implementation of Proposition 227

by Maureen McMahon and
Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo, UC Davis

A group of UC researchers and graduate students are working collaboratively with a team of bilingual and English only teachers to document the interpretation and implementation of Proposition 227 during the 1998-1999 school year. The setting is a large, rural, grades 1 through 5 school (approximately 800 students), with a 45% percent native Spanish speaking student population in a small, agricultural community of fewer than 6,000 people. The community in which the school is located is in many ways emblematic of the state, where the socioeconomic condition of the largely Latino population is in contrast to that of the Anglo population. Prior to passage of Proposition 227, the school had a late exit bilingual program where many students transitioned to English during fifth grade. This study documents how the school district, administrators and teachers in the setting are interpreting Proposition 227 and what in fact teachers are doing in classrooms in terms of implementing the provisions of the proposition, namely to instruct "overwhelmingly in English." This study examines both the difficulties of implementing an English language program quickly, e.g. without the benefit of planning or purchasing appropriate materials as well as the ways in which grade level content is made accessible to the English Language Learners in the setting. There is a lack of research literature about how teachers successfully "shelter" or otherwise make comprehensive content are material, while promoting uninterrupted cognitive development, where that means drawing on what students know in the native language. This study contributes to such a body of literature while suggesting particular educational policy implications at the local and state level, while highlighting the tensions inherent in determining language of instruction policies at various levels.

1999 UC LMRI Annual Conference "Schooling of English Language Learners in the Post-227 Era"

Co-Sponsored by the California Policy
Research Center

May 13-15, 1999
Doubletree Hotel
Sacramento, California

For Information:
Phone: 805-893-2250
Web: lmrinet.ucsb.edu/confs/lmri99.htm

Publications

Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents

~
*Centro para el estudio de libros infantiles
y juveniles en Español*

Users can query access our database of more than 400 recommended books in Spanish for children and adolescents published around the world. In addition, this web site gives librarians, teachers, parents, and others information about the Center's workshops, publications, and special activities as well as links to its sponsors' and other related sites' homepages. Visit <http://www.csusm.edu/campus_centers/csb/>

Grant Announcements UC MEXUS 1999 Call for Proposals

Small Grants

- Due February 5, June 4, October 1, 1999; \$1,000 Maximum, for One Year (three competitions each year)

Grants

- Due March 1, 1999; \$15,000 Maximum for One Year
CONACYT Grants for Collaborative Projects

- Due March 1, 1999; \$25,000 Maximum of One Year
Dissertation Research Grants

- Due April 2, 1999; \$7,000 Maximum for Two Years

Applications are available on-line at
<http://www.ucr.edu/ucmexushom.htm>

Kathryn Vicent, Assistant Director
3324 Olmsted Hall

University of California, Riverside, CA 92521
Tel: (909) 787-3319; Fax: (909) 787-3856
Kathryn.Vincent@ucr.edu

Conferences

June 27-July 11, 1999

California State University, Stanislaus and the Mexican Secretary of Public Education, IEEPO, Oaxaca

“The 5th Annual Seminar on Transformative Literacy” CSU, Stanislaus. Contact: Dr. Nancy Jean Smith njsmith@toto.csu.edu
Phone: (209) 467-5337 Fax: (209) 467-5389

UC People in the News

Giorgio Perissinotto, Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at UC Santa Barbara and a member of the UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee has just-published “Documenting Everyday Life in Early Spanish California: The Santa Barbara *Presidio Memorias y Facturas*,” a book edited and researched in conjunction with a team of graduate students at UCSB. By translating requisition and invoice papers from 52 merchant ships that delivered goods to the Santa Barbara Presidio from 1779 to 1810, the research team was able to make inferences about how the early settlers lived.

Four members of the UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee—**Patricia Gándara, Bud Mehan, Russell Rumberger, and David Sánchez**—have been appointed to the UC Outreach Evaluation Advisory Panel. The panel will advise the UC Office of the President on the evaluation of its outreach activities.

UC LMRI News Staff

Russell W. Rumberger.....Editor
Mónica Figueroa Landeros.....Assistant Editor

UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee

Adalberto Aguirre Jr.....UC Riverside
Margarita Azmitia.....UC Santa Cruz
Lily Wong-Fillmore.....UC Berkeley
Kris Gutiérrez.....UC Los Angeles
Hugh B. Mehan.....UC San Diego
Barbara Merino.....UC Davis
Giorgio Perissinotto.....UC Santa Barbara
David J. Sánchez.....UC San Francisco
Robin Scarcella.....UC Irvine

* * *

Russell W. Rumberger (Director).....UC Santa Barbara
Patricia Gándara (UC LMRI Education Policy Center).....UC Davis
Dante Noto.....UC Office of the President
Roland Tharp.....CREDE

UC LMRI Staff

Russell W. Rumberger.....Director
Valery Rivera.....MSO
Jesse Aukeman.....Undergraduate Asst.
Mónica Figueroa Landeros.....Publications Editor

**University of California
Linguistic Minority Research Institute
Building 528, Room 4722
Santa Barbara, CA. 93106-3220**

In this issue:

- < New Study on Lexical Processing
- < UC LMRI Awards Policy Grants
- < 1999 Conference on Proposition 227