

# **Language, Cognition, and Context: Multiple Dimensions of Early Bilingual Development**

**Chair:** Sandra Barrueco

**Discussant:** James L. Rodriguez

**Presenters:** Lisa Lopez, Mariela Páez, Rebeca Valdivia

**Barrueco:** This symposium provided a multifaceted perspective on language development within multilingual Head Start populations. The first presentation described an investigation of the environmental contributors to young children's expressive lexical development within the languages spoken by bilingual Head Start children. Using a longitudinal perspective, the second presentation addressed the internal structures underlying and distinguishing two languages and their related literacy systems among a sample of Latino Head Start students by examining the changing nature of cross- and within-language and reading development. The final presentation, also longitudinal in nature, widened the lens on early bilingualism to the pragmatic level and to the language development of language-minority preschoolers with Down's syndrome. The symposium concluded with discussant comments and participant discussion.

- **Investigating the Ecological Perspective: A Look Into the Context of Home and Classroom in the Development of Language for Latino Head Start Children**

Lisa Lopez

This paper focused on a subsample of 50 Latino Head Start children and their families living in Massachusetts who participated in The Early Childhood Study of Language and Literacy Development in Spanish-Speaking Children. Along with the home and classroom visits, each child was assessed on a battery of language and literacy measures in both English and Spanish. A series of correlations indicated that children with the best performance on the English picture vocabulary subtest were those children in homes with a large number of children's books in English, mothers reported to be fluent in English, and children were being read to in English. These children were also in classrooms which measured high with regard to oral language facilitation, book reading, and curriculum integration. Children with the best performance on the Spanish picture vocabulary subtest were those children in homes where the mother was a recent immigrant and reported low levels of English fluency. These children were also in classrooms that measured high in presence of books and the use of Spanish by the teachers and in the classroom as a whole. Multiple regression analyses showed the home factor of reading to the child in English and the classroom factor related to curriculum integration as predictive of English vocabulary and remained significant when accounting for the other home and classroom factors.

- **Interlinguistic Relationships in the Language and Literacy Development of Spanish-English Bilingual Children**

Mariela M. Páez

This study investigated several language skills that have been identified as important during the early childhood years and fall in three broad categories: (a) phonological awareness skills; (b)

early literacy skills, as expressed in letter and word recognition, and writing and spelling skills; and (c) oral language abilities, as expressed in vocabulary and language recalling skills (Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The sample included 315 bilingual children in Massachusetts and Maryland from The Early Childhood Study of Language and Literacy Development of Spanish-speaking Children (ECS) and a comparative group of 140 monolingual Spanish-speaking children in Puerto Rico (PRC). The sample was recruited when children were 4 years old in Head Start programs and followed through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Data collection occurred in both English and Spanish. Results from the study showed that this group of bilingual children demonstrated a wide variety of language and early literacy skills and these skills showed differing patterns of growth over time. Children's early literacy skills started higher and showed more gains over time than their oral language abilities. Oral language skills in both English and Spanish were below average compared to monolingual students of the same age and this continued through first grade. Results also showed that the PRC sample performed significantly better than the ECS sample in early literacy and oral language skills.

### **References**

- Dickinson, D. K., & Snow, C. E. (1987). Interrelationships among prereading and oral language skills in kindergartners from two social classes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 2, 1-25.
- Whitehurst, G. J., & Lonigan, C. J. (1998). Child development and early literacy. *Child Development*, 69(3), 848-872.

### **• A Study of Communicative Competence of Bilingual Preschoolers With Down Syndrome: Findings and Implications for Practice**

Rebeca Valdivia

This case study examined the communicative competence of four Mexican American preschoolers with Down syndrome (three girls and one boy) growing up in bilingual contexts. Hence, it provided critically needed information on the capabilities of preschoolers with Down syndrome to learn more than one language, how these bilingual preschoolers compare to their monolingual same-age peers in their communication development, and offers some guidance as to what teachers in Head Start programs serving children with Down syndrome and other cognitive delays can do to support the language development of children with special needs. Findings showed the children performed at a minimum comparatively to peers with Down syndrome who came from monolingual homes. The results of this study suggest young children growing up in bilingual contexts were better served in inclusive, developmentally appropriate preschool settings in which their individual learning goals were embedded as part of the classroom routine and curriculum (Rafferty, Piscitelli, & Boettcher, 2003; Tabors, 1997).

### **References**

- Rafferty, Y., Piscitelli, V., & Boettcher, C. (2003). The impact of inclusion on language development and social competence among preschoolers with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 69(4), 467-480.
- Tabors, P. (1997). *One child, two languages: A guide for preschool educators of children learning English as a second language*. Baltimore: Brookes.