

Title:

Understanding Language Growth in Bilingual Children with and without Developmental Language Disorder: A Longitudinal Perspective

Abstract:

What does developmental language disorder (DLD) look like when two languages are developing simultaneously? In this presentation, I synthesize findings from a longitudinal research program examining morphosyntactic growth in Spanish–English bilingual children with and without DLD, interpreted through the perspectives of bilingual acquisition, language proficiency shift, and protracted development. Children were followed over two years across three waves of data collection using standardized assessments, spontaneous language samples, and elicited morphosyntactic probes.

Across measures, children demonstrated continued growth in English, alongside patterns of maintenance or domain-specific growth in Spanish depending on the construct examined. Children with DLD consistently remained behind their typically developing peers in overall level of attainment across methods and time points. These findings indicate that although bilingual development is shaped by shifting proficiency and input, DLD reflects persistent limitations in language ability.

I also integrate findings from a mixed-method study examining parents' retrospective reflections on their children's bilingual development and the ways these perceptions shape home language practices. Together, these studies support a developmental account of bilingual DLD in which disorder explains differences in overall level of attainment, while bilingual trajectories vary as a function of changes in input over time. This framework moves the field beyond static descriptions of bilingual proficiency toward a dynamic model that integrates limitations in language ability with bilingual change across development.