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## **Mood selection in Spanish-English bilinguals in the U.S.**

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### Background:

Cross-linguistic effects have been reported in the language spoken by bilinguals. For example, Spanish-English bilinguals may often underuse the Subjunctive mood in Spanish compared to monolinguals arguably due to the limited use of the Subjunctive mood in English.

### Objective:

This project investigates the effects of bilingualism on mood selection in Spanish

### Research questions:

- (1) Do bilingual speakers differ from monolingual speakers in mood selection in particular contexts of use?
- (2) Does the acquisition path toward mastery of the subjunctive mood in particular contexts of use differ from that found for monolingual children?

### Participants:

Twenty-one Spanish-English bilingual children between the ages of 8 and 12 and a group of Spanish-English bilingual caregivers (N=4) participated in an experimental session and received a gift card in return. Participants were living in Waco, TX at the time of testing, were all from Mexican descent, had Spanish as their first language (L1), spoke Spanish with at least some of the members of their immediate family. The children were born in the U.S. (or arrived before the age 3) and the adults were born in Mexico and arrived in the U.S. after age 15.

### Procedure:

A Sentence Completion Task used in Requena et al. (2017) was administered to all participants. A sample trial for each condition is presented in Figure 1. Participants were presented large color drawings depicting situations involving two characters. Then, pointing at the characters in the image, participants listened to a brief story. Next, the experimenter provides participants with the start of a sentence which required participants to use a finite verb in either the Subjunctive or Indicative moods to complete it. Stories were grouped into four conditions which display different rates of selection of the Subjunctive mood in monolingual speakers: Volition (100% predicted Subjunctive use), Uncertainty (66-77%), Comment (96-100%) and Certainty (0%). The

participants were given two practice trials prior to being tested on 16 experimental trials. Parental written consent and child oral consent were obtained for each child participant and adult participants provided written informed consent for themselves.

Figure 1. Sample trial for one of the conditions

**Experimenter:**

*El papá y el hijo están en una fiesta. Al hijo le encanta bailar, y eso al papá lo pone contento. ¡Mirá su cara!*  
'Father and son are at a party. The son loves to dance, and this makes his father happy. Look at his face!'

*Completá lo que digo: Siempre, el papá está contento de que el hijo...*

'Complete what I say: Always, the father is happy that his son...'



**Participant (expected responses):**

*baila-IND /baile-SUBJ*

'dances.'

**Initial results:**

Preliminary results indicate that bilingual children often select Indicative mood in contexts when monolingual children would use the Subjunctive mood. Bilingual children selected the Subjunctive mood 75% of the time (as opposed to the expected 100% in monolingual children) in the Volition condition, 29% of the time (as opposed to 66%) in the Uncertainty condition, and 59% (as opposed to 96%). Bilingual caregivers did not show differences with monolingual adults in their mood selection preferences and both bilingual children and their caregivers displayed categorical selection of the Indicative in the control condition. These preliminary results point to an effect of bilingualism in the acquisition of Spanish mood selection by Spanish-English bilingual children who are dominant in English.

**Undergraduate student research and mentorship:**

Through this grant I supervised Alex Baadsgaard and William Patrick Jeffries, undergraduate researchers who transcribed and coded language data to support research questions under investigation.

**Products:**

Requena, P. E.; Dracos, M., & Miller, K. (2017). Variable use of the Subjunctive in L1 Spanish. In LaMendola, M. & J. Scott. *Proceedings of the 41st Boston University Conference on Language Development*. (Volume 2) pp. 563-575. Somerville, MA. Cascadilla.