Double Subjects in the Spanish-Influenced English of Preschool Dual-Language Learners

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Disclosure

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Double Subjects (DS)

Examples
1. The boy the dog they walked. Female, 4;6
2. And the cat he was catching her. Female, 4;6
3. It was because the frog had it the bottle. Female, 5;1
4. And the frog he was in their juice. Male, 4;3
5. And then all the butterflies they hear the bee right there. Male, 5;6
Double Subjects and Language Development

- Are they grammatical?
- Are they part of typical development?
- Should educators and clinicians make note of them?

Conclusion: Not enough information in the literature. A full investigation is needed.

Double Subjects and Grammaticality in English

The girl, she sat on the swing.

- Expectation – syntactically one subject and one object.
- Numerous websites state that subject doubling is ungrammatical and should be avoided.
  - For example, “Thoughtful Learning” (www.k12.thoughtfullearning.com) states that “a sentence is incorrect if it contains a double subject.”
  - Define DS as “a subject with a pronoun right after it.” Solutions generally require keeping the named subject or the pronoun, but not both.

Double Subjects

- This doubling is most common in subject position, but could also occur in object position or adjunct position.
  - The girl, she skipped down the street.
  - The girl bought it, the cake.
  - The family ate dinner there, at the table.
- Noun-Pronoun pairs are most common, but other combinations of common nouns, proper nouns, and pronouns are possible.
  - The frog, he jumped.
  - The girl with pigtails, Harriet walked in the park.
- Other related terminology:
  - Dislocation (left and right)
  - Appositive
Double Subjects and Grammaticality in English

The girl, she sat on the swing.

- But, DS are not really ungrammatical.
- Adding context and using certain intonation patterns helps.
- So, the question becomes, if DS are grammatical, why are they unexpected in the narratives of dual language learners? Why don’t they occur in equal frequency across children of similar age and language development?

Evidence of Double Subject Production in Typical Development

- Gruber (1967)
  - Two year old acquiring English
  - Produced sentences with topics followed or preceded by full sentences
    - Car, he take the wheels.
- Bates (1976)
  - Italian
  - One-word stage = comment
  - Following stage = comment followed by topic
  - Both posit topic-comment, not subject-predicate stage for L1 acquisition

Universal Grammar and L2 Acquisition

- Interlanguage is topic prominent (Fuller & Gundel, 1987)
- L2 adult learners of English
- Examples:
  - I thought the cat he want to eat the bird (Arabic L1)
  - Is it pity that the boy he didn’t see the cat? (Chinese L1)
  - But the old man he like this – this fish. (Spanish L1)
- Examples of dislocation in L2 adult English, but not in L1 adult English.
Double Subjects in English from Varied L1 Backgrounds

- Arabic, Chinese, Spanish (Fuller & Gundel, 1987)
- Basque/Spanish L3 (Mayo, Ibarrola, & Liceras, 2005)
- Canadian French (Nagy, Blondeau, & Auger, 2003)
- Mexican American Spanish (Politzer & Ramirez, 1974)

Corpus Studies of Double Subjects in the English of Spanish-English Dual Language Learners

- Corpora are from two larger collections (see Hammer, et al, 2007; 2008; 2009; 2012)
- Participants were recruited from Head Start programs, school districts, and community-based preschool programs located in:
  1. Urban areas in central and southeastern Florida and New York (Corpora 1)
  2. Central Pennsylvania (Corpora 2)
- Children were Spanish-English DLLs of Puerto Rican, Cuban and Mexican heritage
- Participation requirements:
  - no parent or teacher concerns about their development
  - score within the typical range on the Denver II (Frankenburg et al., 1990)
  - passed a hearing screening administered by Head Start nurses

Research Questions

- How prevalent are DS in pre-school aged Spanish-influenced dual language learners?
- What are the characteristics and patterns of DS in this population?
Elicitation Methods

1. Pretend play with Elmo doll
2. Fictional tell
   - with visual support from a wordless picture book with prior modeling of unrelated story
3. Fictional Retell
   - with visual support from a wordless picture book with prior modeling of same book

Participants and Data Collection

267 participants
(Corpora 1: 161 participants, Corpora 2: 106 participants)

Age Range: 3;1 to 5;7

- Pretend Play = 135 samples
- Narrative Tell = 381 samples
- Narrative Retell = 360 samples

Fewer pretend play samples because one corpora (Corpora 1) only had narrative collections and older children did not play with the Elmo doll.

Results

- Corpora 1 (Tells Only): 77 of 161 (48%) samples contain at least one DS
- Corpora 2 (All methods): 75 of 708 (11%) samples contain at least one DS

- Of participants who do produce DS:
  - Range 1-17 per narrative (Mean 2.2, SD 2.4)

- Participants who produce DS have significantly higher MLUw and subordination index (p < .05).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DS</th>
<th>No DS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MLUw</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.86</td>
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</table>
DS Frequency: Across Elicitation Methods

- Tell (n=349): 79.1%
- Elicit (n=85): 19%
- Play (n=7): 1.6%

Dislocation Types: Across Elicitation Methods

- Right (n=126): 28.5%
- Left (n=315): 71.4%

Dislocation Types: Across DS Utterances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Right Dislocation</th>
<th>Left Dislocation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.5% (126)</td>
<td>71.4% (315)</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“The dog eat the frog.”</td>
<td>“And the frog was in their juice.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“And he a boy hear a noise.”</td>
<td>“The dog he won’t bite her tail off again.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“He the cat get the dog”</td>
<td>“The dog it was in the seat.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dislocation Types: Tell vs. Retell

Results: There is a significant association between elicitation type and whether they produce more left or right DS (p < .05).

Position/Direction Types across DS

Case Study: High Frequency DS Pattern

And the dog he was in the window. The frog it was jumping. The frog it was in the water. The boy he was some water in. The boy he was cleaning. The dog he was down there. The boy he was climbing to the dog. The frog he went up there. The boy he was um the frog he was down there. And the boy he was in the water.
Case Study: High Frequency DS Pattern

Across Time Points, from 3:9 – 8:1

Case Study: Assessment Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Point</th>
<th>SEC Avg.</th>
<th>SEC Child 014</th>
<th>Ref DS Produced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS Fall Year 1</td>
<td>9.9 (4.26)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS Spring Year 1</td>
<td>14.12 (6.7)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS Fall Year 2</td>
<td>17.84 (6.09)</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS Spring Year 2</td>
<td>21.39 (4.27)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>

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Conclusions

- DS are more frequent than expected, but vary in quantity across speakers.
- Doubling is most often in subject position and early at the left edge of the sentence, but can occur in other positions.
- A model and retell narrative may reduce DS overall, but increase right dislocations, which could suggest attempts to stabilize use of noun-pronoun in DLL.

Clinical Implications:

- The grammaticality difference may indicate emerging English L2 language skills.
- Monitor right dislocation and object position patterns in English language samples, since left subject position appear most frequently.
- Consider narrative elicitation types, since retells (with modeling) has shown decreased instances of DS.

Future Directions

- Compare English language samples with Spanish productions during play and story tell/retell.
- Investigate other variables which may further explain DS use, such as gender and HEC vs SEC groups.
- Collect additional data to determine if L1 dialect or language influences presence of DS in L2 English or if this is an expected stage of L2 acquisition as proposed by Fuller & Gundel (1987).
- Document patterns of use and acceptance in adult speakers of Spanish-influenced English.

Citations


