

## Charting the Acquisition of Differential Object Marking in Two-Way Immersion: Evidence from Simultaneous Spanish-English Bilinguals

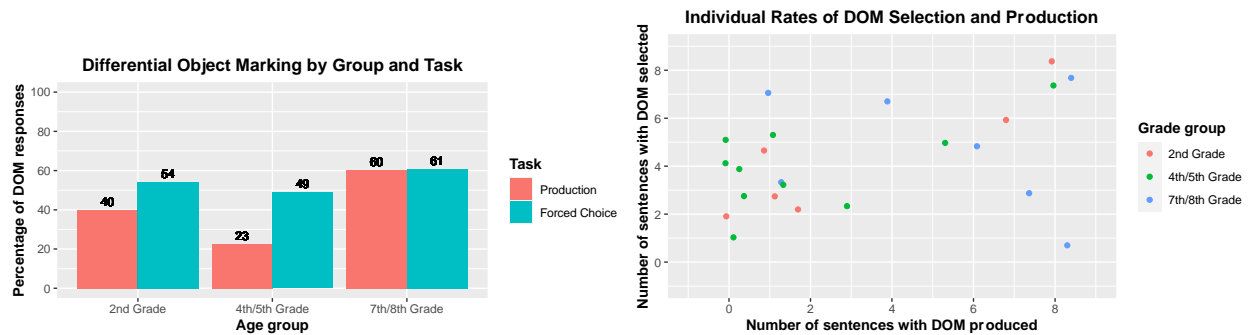
School-aged children are a “missing link” (Montrul, 2018, p. 434) in research on Spanish heritage speakers (SHS). In the present project, 24 simultaneous SHS attending a two-way immersion school in second through eighth grades completed oral production and forced choice tasks addressing their productive and receptive knowledge of differential object marking (DOM). Research on DOM has been extensive on adult SHS (e.g., Hur, 2020; Montrul & Bowles, 2011; Montrul & Sánchez-Walker, 2015), but there is not yet a study of its development across the childhood years.

The descriptive results (see Figure 1) show U-shaped behavior in SHS’ command of DOM, whereby their use of this structure decreased concurrently with a drop in exposure to Spanish in the immersion program, but then increased again by grades 7/8. However, inferential statistics do not find a statistically significant role for grade ( $\beta = 0.19, p = 0.246$ ). Both the descriptive and inferential statistics reveal that children were more likely to select DOM on the forced choice task than to produce it ( $\beta = 2.06, p = .005$ ). There is a great deal of individual variability, as shown in Figure 2, which will be addressed at greater length in our presentation.

Therefore, our participants’ receptive knowledge of DOM was more robust than production, which aligns with Putnam and Sánchez’s (2013) activation-oriented approach to heritage languages. However, it should be noted that SHS continue to perform around chance level on both tasks by the end of the immersion years, despite receiving up to nine years of bilingual education. Although the present project contains a small sample, it highlights that exposure to Spanish at school does not guarantee SHS’ acquisition and maintenance of certain areas of their inflectional system without explicit instruction.

## References

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**Figure 1 (left).** Rates of DOM production and selection by age group.

**Figure 2 (right).** Individual rates of DOM production and selection by participant.