



Present tense morphology in Spanish heritage and second language children

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Early verbal morphosyntax

- In languages where a subject can be omitted, children learn present tense verbal forms during year two (Montrul, 2004).
- Heritage language (HL) children in English language instruction show attrition of first language (L1) Spanish (Cuza & Pérez-Tattam, 2016; Montrul, 2016; Polinsky, 2018).
- Earlier research on HL and second language (L2) has mostly dealt with adults.

Dual language immersion (DLI)

- DLI programs in the US integrate majority (English) and minority (Spanish) language speaking children.
- In Seattle Public Schools the DLI programs enroll both Heritage Language (HL) children whose first language is Spanish and Anglophone children who begin their second language (L2) Spanish in kindergarten.
- They are advantageous both linguistically and academically for both groups of students (Thomas & Collier, 2002; Collier & Thomas, 2017).

Core grammatical development

- Monolingual Spanish-learning children first master third person singular present forms of verbs and show person contrast soon thereafter (Grinstead, 2000).
- L2 children (9-10 years) in DLI are significantly less accurate in the present tense than crib learners, but above chance level.

HL, L2 Grammatical development

- In an English dominant environment HL Spanish-English bilingual children are less accurate in verbal inflection when compared to monolinguals (Montrul & Sánchez-Walker, 2015; Silva-Corvalán, 2014).
- Furthermore, inflectional morphology is difficult for L2 learners (Montrul, 2004; 2016).

Research questions

- Are HL and L2 children in a Spanish-English DLI program comparable to Spanish majority controls in mastery of **present tense verb morphology** in spontaneous written production?
- If there are differences, which characteristics of HL/ L2 variability might be involved?



Current study



Setting:

- English-Spanish two-way dual language immersion (DLI) program, 50:50, by subject

Participants:

- 21 Spanish HL children, 9-10 yrs. old, 5th year in DLI program
- 41 Spanish L2 children, 9-10 yrs. old, 5th year in DLI program
- 15 Spanish L1 children, 9-10 yrs. old, born and raised in a Spanish majority setting

Task:

- Meaning-focused writing task: email to a penpal

Escribe un correo electrónico (email) a un niño español que quiere ser tu amigo por correspondencia (pen pal). Háblale de ti y de tu familia: ¿cómo eres? ¿cómo son tus padres? ¿tienes hermanos o hermanas? ¿cómo son?... Háblale de tus hobbies y de tus amigos: ¿cómo son? ¿qué les gusta hacer en su tiempo libre? ¿qué deportes practican? ¿cuál es tu juego favorito?... todo lo que creas que él debe saber de ti para ser tu amigo.

Mensaje nuevo

Para amigo Cc Cco

Asunto Hola

querido amigo,
metlamo... stella
Hola me llamo [redacted]. Yo soy una niña de Seattle
Yo tengo nueve años. y quiero ser tu amiga yo
quiero saber mas de tu y aquí hay unas preguntas
que es tu nombre, que es tu color favorita?
que es tu animal favorita?, es una niña o una
niño?, donde vives?, que es tu persona
favorita que juega deportes? quantos años tienes?
y tiene hermanas o hermanos? yo tiene 2
hermanas, mi color favorita es azul o naranja
mi animal favorita es un hipopotamo, yo soy
una niña y mi favorita persona de deportes
es Alex Morgan. Adios amigo Porfavor responde

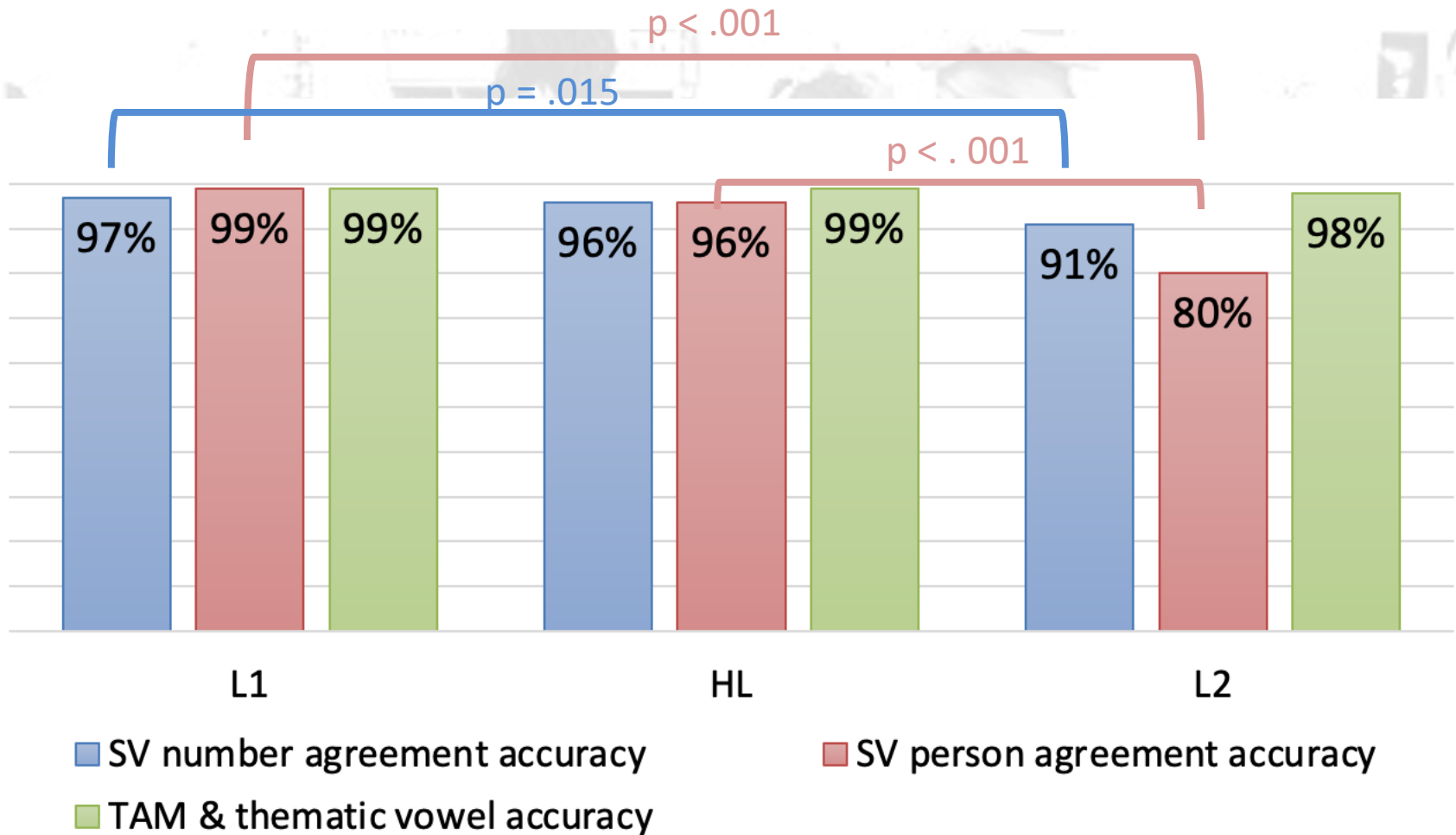
Data analysis

Simple present verbs

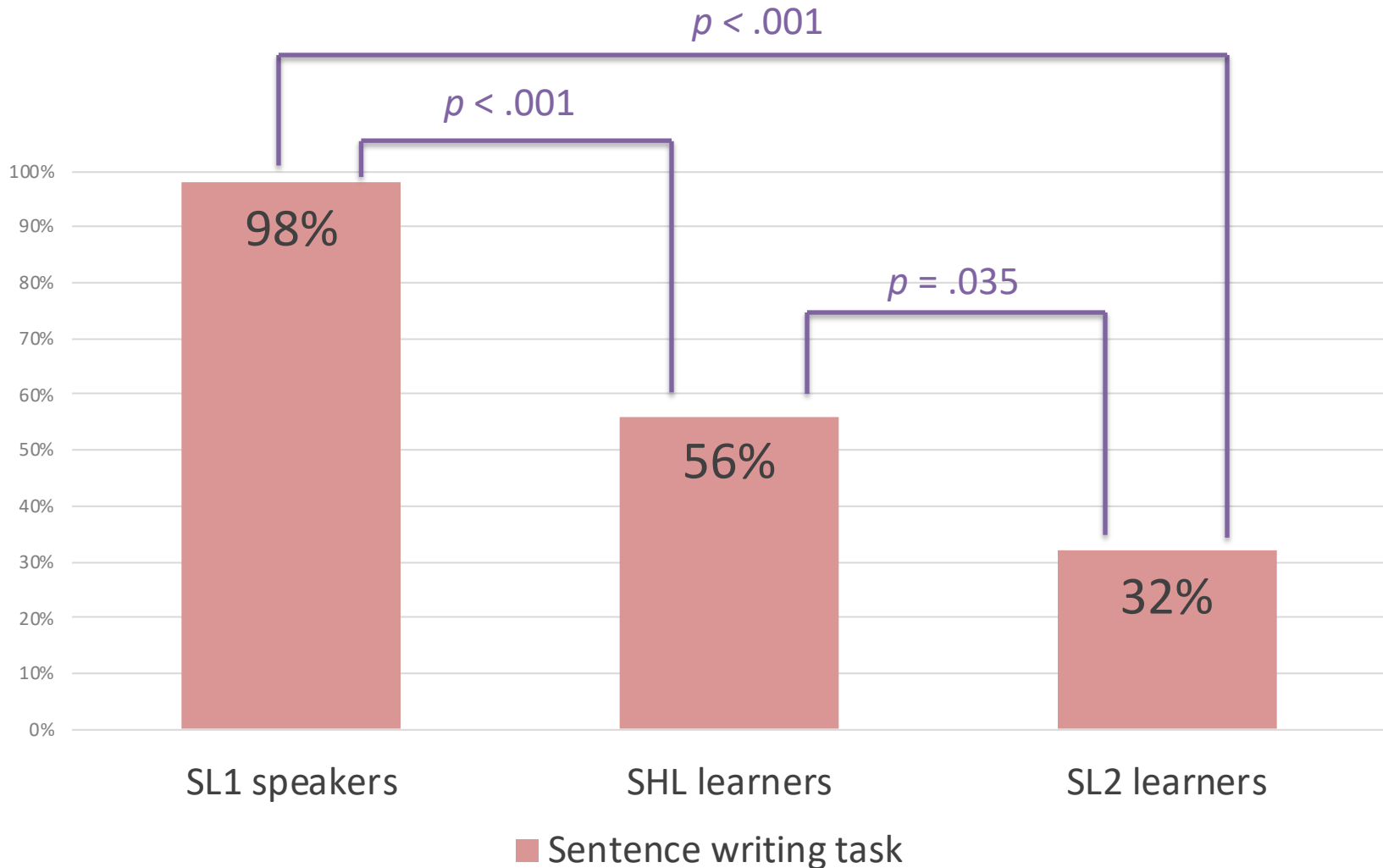
- SV number agreement accuracy
- SV person agreement accuracy
- Tense, aspect and mood (TAM) & thematic vowel accuracy

Present tense morphology

FIGURE 1. Present tense morphology



Production: stem accuracy for stem changing verbs



Discussion

- **HL children are comparable to majority controls** in mastery of **present tense verb morphology** in spontaneous written production, a fact that we attribute to the continuing input and literacy training of the DLI environment.
- **L2 children are significantly less accurate than HL and L1 children.** Still, they show relatively high levels of accuracy, well above chance, in all present tense verb inflection measures, which confirms the benefits of DLI for L2 acquisition.

Classroom activity

You are Pablo and need to write a response to your penpal using the following verbs and topics:

- Verbs: *tener* (have), *hablar* (speak), *jugar* (play), *pensar* (think), *poder* (can), *preferir* (prefer), *querer* (want), *comer* (eat), *gustar* (like).
- Topics: family members, hobbies, sports, favorite food, travel.

Classroom activity

- Collaborative writing project, penpal response
- Groups of four students (HL + L2)
- Each group is given information about a penpal
- Each group gets stem-changing verbs that they should use
- Group members work together to compose response

A faded background image of a classroom. In the center, a teacher is standing and addressing a group of students. The students are seated at desks, some looking towards the teacher. The overall scene is brightly lit, and the image has a soft, semi-transparent appearance.


Thank you

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If you are interested in participating in our research, please reach out.

We're seeking collaboration with DLI teachers!

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HL / L2 variability

Possible sources of the variability observed:

- **Limited quantity** (amount) and **quality** (variability) of **input** received by HL and L2 in DLI.
- **Protracted development** that will eventually come closer to majority Spanish norms (Sorace et al., 2009).
- **Transfer** from dominant language English