

## BI-SLI 2015

### Title: Comparing morphosyntactic abilities in a group of TD, Dyslexic and Bilingual Children

#### Abstract proposal for: Poster

SLI and Dyslexia are both developmental disorders: the first one affects the acquisition of oral language and it is often characterized in terms of problems with morphosyntax; the second one is a specific impairment in the acquisition of reading and spelling skills despite normal or above-average intelligence. The results found by Jakubowicz et al (1998) show that SLI children have a specific grammatical disorder that makes them unable to use some computational operations. Novogrodsky and Friedmann (2010) tested the comprehension of Wh-object questions and reflexive pronouns in a syntactic-SLI population and they found that in SLI, at least for school aged children, syntactic structures are created, but the assignment of thematic roles from the trace to the moved element is impaired, leading to a deficit in the comprehension of movement-derived sentences. The purpose of this study is to discuss data on the production and comprehension of a set of particular syntactic agreement configurations and functional items, such as clitics pronouns, in different group of children so as to assess their oral language skills. In order to do this, we have administered an agreement test (in two modalities: listening and reading) and a test of production of object clitic. 203 children took part in the experiment. 108 third and fourth graders (50 females and 58 males), between 7;1 to 10;1 (M= 8,8; SD= 7,0). 2) A group of children with developmental dyslexia (S)DD (including both children with developmental dyslexia DD and children with 'suspected dyslexia' SD): 29 children, between suspected and diagnosed dyslexia, of third and fourth grade (17 males - 12 females), age range 7;1-10;1 (M=8,8; SD= 7,7). 3) First graders' group (FG): 44 children (21 females and 23 males), between 5;7 - 6;9 (M=6,3; SD= 3,5). 22 TD bilingual children (BG) 9 females, (M= 8,3; SD=107,8); all children were born in Italy but, at home, they speak the family's language: 9 Arabic, 1 Arabic/ French, 3 Spanish, 2 Chinese, 1 Filipino, 1 Russian, 1 English, 1 Albanian, 1 Croatian, 1 Romanian, 1 French. In the agreement test 26 sentences have been used, 13 correct and 13 manipulated, through which 5 syntactic agreement configurations were tested: D - N agreement, Subj. - V agreement, V - Subj. agreement, Cl. - PastPart agreement, Subj. - Unacc. PastPart agreement. The test was administered on an individual basis, the task of the test was to help Teddy Bear to learn Italian giving a grammaticality judgement of the sentences that the little bear had said (or written) previously, and providing a correction of the sentence (if it was considered 'wrong'). In the listening mode, the sentences were recorded and children listened to the sentences in random fixed order. After listening to the sentence, each child had to express his grammaticality judgment. If the child judged the sentence wrong, she/he had to correct the sentence. Morphosyntactic and syntactic competence were assessed also through a test of elicited production of 3rd person direct object clitics (Prévost 2012, COST bi-SLI). Groups' data analysis showed that Clitic/Past Participle was the most problematic agreement configurations (consistent with Moscati e Rizzi 2012). In V/S configuration indefinite subject was well-identified by all the groups (much more than focused subjects). The most interesting data was the common tendency to correct sentences with clitic-pp agreement without manipulations (E.g.: After hearing 1) *il ragazzo lo ha raccolto*, some children judged the sentence ungrammatical and they corrected it with: 1b) *il ragazzo ha raccolto*, omitting the object clitic). In the light of some unexpected data, we made an individual analysis of each group. Analysis revealed a subgroup in (S)DD (about 30%) group and in BG (about 20%) that show more difficulties than their peers in agreement test and clitic production (Fig.1). Production of clitic is a clinical marker of SLI in Italian and in other Romance languages at the age of 5 and, as data shows, it can persist beyond 5 years. This study shows that a fine-grained linguistic analysis can be really useful to identify possible cases of atypical development: both agreement and object clitic assessments indicate that the presence of morphosyntactic difficulties expressed in terms of Cl/Pp agreement and in object clitic

production. These data might well indicate that some child in (S)DD group and in BG presents a latent SLI syndrome that can not be diagnosed using conventional tests.

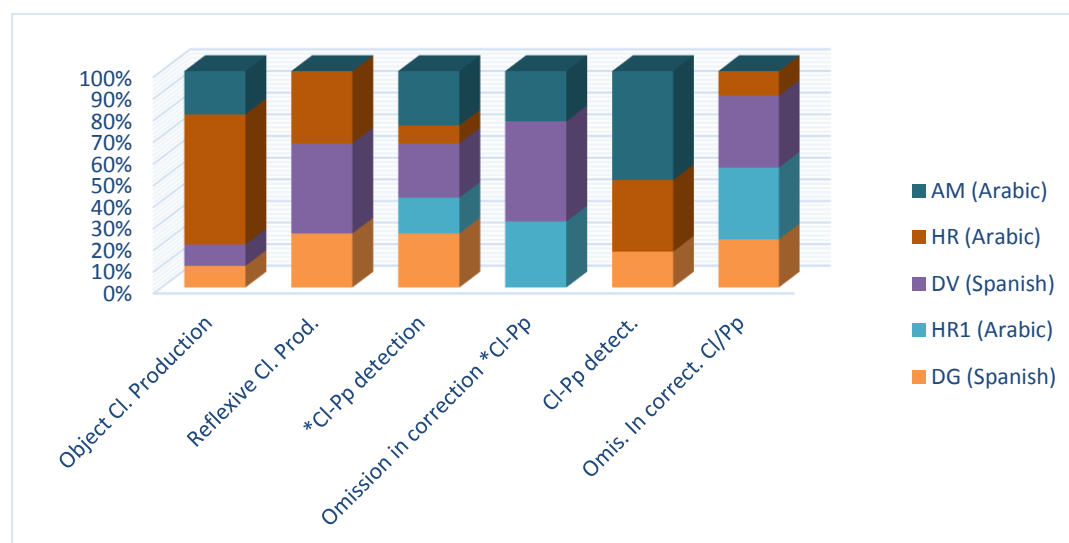


Figure 1: Individual analysis of BG. After identifying the most critical syntactic structures, object and reflexive clitics 'production, correct identification of Cl-PastP agreement with and without manipulations, and clitics' omission in the correction of sentences judged ungrammatical were assessed in each child. Analysis reveals a subgroup in BG that shows more difficulties than their peers do.

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