

How maternal education affects linguistic abilities in monolingual Spanish-speaking children with and without Language Impairment

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A big number of Spanish-speaking children from low socioeconomic status grow in families where the mother usually has a low educational level (LEL). This factor affects language interaction promoting diverse grades of vocabulary and grammar abilities in children (Forget-Dubois, Dionne, Lemelin, Pérusse, Tremblay & Boivin, 2009; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hoff, 2003; Law, McBean, & Rush, 2011; Vernon-Feagans, Bratsch-Hines, 2013). Linguistic abilities of children from a LEL are frequently confused with those of children with Language Impairment (LI), being crucial to analyze how the groups differentiate from each other. The aim of this research was to compare lexical and grammatical abilities in monolingual children with and without LI. The particular aim was to analyze differences in the total number of words, total number of different words and the percentages of ungrammatical sentences committed on a story retell task. Participants were 631 monolingual Spanish-speaking children (4;0 to 6;11 years of age) with and without LI classified in groups according to maternal education. They were recruited from public and private schools in Mexico. Children were assessed with clinical tests; a parent report of language history and concern for LI; and the clinical opinion of a native Mexican speech-language pathologist. A retell task, based on the story "One frog too many" (Mayer & Mayer 1975) was collected and transcribed with SALT (Miller & Iglesias, 2010). Statistical regression analyses revealed that maternal education and age contributed to the greatest amount of variance in vocabulary but not in the percentage of ungrammatical sentences. Children with LI pertaining to the same educational level as children with TLD had significantly lower vocabulary. Independent analyses of variance were also carried out to observe the differences between the LEL groups. The discussion is centered on the importance of considering maternal education as a proximal factor that affects linguistic abilities.