Mitigating and Miscommunicating: Analyzing and Visualizing Discourse Markers From Bilingual Children Across the United States

Cappelletti, Natalie (School: Fairview High School)

The United States is linguistically diverse. Approximately 23% of individuals in the United States speak a language other than English at home. Of those same individuals, 61% speak Spanish. Language variation can be understood through several linguistic phenomena. Discourse markers are words and phrases that absorb contrast and facilitate action. Discourse markers are an indication of language acquisition because of their role in structuring conversational interactions. Discourse markers are related to bilingualism, in which individuals possess two or more languages. Bilingual individuals borrow and switch discourse markers across languages in conversation, contributing to enhanced speech acts. Previous studies have not linked these concepts to language development in children within two separate linguistic contexts in the same research until this investigation. This study utilized transcripts from the CHILDES database, all originating from studies with children who were bilingual in English and Spanish from Florida, Utah, and Michigan. The process of conversation analysis was utilized, in which transcripts were annotated for discourse markers in either (a) narrative competence or (b) everyday speech for children aged two to eleven. Conversation analysis involves the utilization of the Jefferson Transcription System, a series of symbols and markings that illustrate speech patterns. This project has significant implications across educational and cognitive domains. Understanding discourse markers and bilingual processing supports critical outcomes. This research can enable the improvement of educational curricula to promote bilingual development and reshape established principles regarding the cognitive and neural processing of language.

Awards Won: