

# Bilingualism and Specific Language Impairment: Similarities and Differences\*

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*"Adriana has been a teacher, a colleague  
and a source of inspiration in many different ways"*

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It is known that bilingual or Early L2 individuals (EL2), both children and adults, perform more poorly than monolinguals in specific language domains, such as in vocabulary, lexical access and morphosyntax (Bialystok 2008, 2010, Gollan and Kroll, 2001, Serratrice et al. 2004, Sorace 2011). Moreover, similarities are found between their language characteristics and those shown by children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI), making it difficult to distinguish properly between these populations.

Aim of this study is to provide further insights in this discussion, analyzing the performance of Early L2 (EL2) children in those areas that are known to be particularly challenging for Italian SLI children, such as the production of direct object clitic pronouns and the repetition of nonwords, which are considered two of the most sensitive clinical markers for SLI in Italian (Bortolini et al. 2002, 2006, Arosio et al. 2014).

An experimental protocol was administered to 120 preschool Italian EL2 children and a control group of 40 age-matched monolingual Italian children.

Results show that, similarly to SLI children, EL2 learners underperform in comparison to their monolingual peers in the production of clitic pronouns, even though they display a different error pattern: the most frequent error displayed by our EL2 children is producing an incorrect clitic, committing agreement errors, whereas SLI preschool children typically omit the pronoun.

For what concerns nonword repetition no significant differences have been found between the two groups.

To conclude, our research revealed that EL2 children present a linguistic profile which is qualitatively and quantitatively different from that typically shown by SLI children both in clitic production and in nonword repetition, suggesting the possibility to discriminate properly between the two populations.

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