



# Two clinical markers for DLD in monolingual Italian speakers: what can they tell us about second language learners with DLD?

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## ABSTRACT

A large number of children worldwide are only exposed to their L2 around 3 years of age and can exhibit linguistic behaviours that resemble those of a child with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). This can lead to under- or over-identification of DLD in this population. This study endeavors to contribute to overcoming this problem, by determining whether two specific clinical markers used with the Italian monolingual population can also be used with early L2 acquiring children, namely clitic production and non-word repetition. Our study involved two groups of 5-year-old L2 learners of Italian from various language backgrounds; 18 children had been referred to Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) services (EL2\_DLD), and 30 children were typically developing (EL2\_TD). The participants completed an Italian clitic production task and a non-word repetition task based on Italian phonotactics. Data was also collected from the participants' caregivers with the ALDeQ Parental Questionnaire to obtain information about the children's L1. Our results suggest that non-word repetition and clitic production in Italian are potentially useful for identifying L2 learners of Italian with DLD, at the age of 5 years. The repetition of non-words is highly accurate in identifying children with DLD among the participants, while clitic production is somewhat less discriminative in this sample. This study is a first step towards uncovering clinical markers that could be used to determine the presence of DLD in children acquiring their L2.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 July 2020  
Revised 25 September 2020  
Accepted 26 September 2020

## KEYWORDS

Developmental language disorders; second language acquisition; Italian; nonword repetition; clitics

## Introduction

Many children worldwide are bilingual, learning a first language (L1) at home and subsequently a second language (L2) at preschool. Encountering the L2 at preschool for the first time can be regarded as delayed exposure, which may have a long-term impact on literacy achievements (see Bonifacci & Tobia, 2016; Kovelman et al., 2008). In typically developing early L2 (EL2) children, the amount of language input and the age of first exposure to the L2 are generally acknowledged to be good predictors of L2 proficiency (e.g., Dos Santos & Ferré, 2018), yet proficiency in the L2 is also influenced by other factors (e.g., the child's L1).

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