



# The Effect of Acculturation on the Meaning of Mothers' Behaviors

Ashley A. Jarvis, Michelle A. Culver, Susan G. Timmer, and Anthony J. Urquiza

UC Davis Children's Hospital



## ABSTRACT

- ❖ The purpose this study was to examine the effects of culture and acculturation in the way depressive affect manifests itself in parent-child interactions and affects child behavior problems.
- ❖ The sample consisted of 82 English-speaking and 48 Spanish-speaking Latino mother-child dyads. The children, aged 2 through 8 years, were all referred to Parent-Child Interaction Therapy for treatment of disruptive behaviors.
- ❖ Results of analyses showed that symptoms of depression influenced Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Latinos differently. It also showed that there were significant group differences for both child risk and socio-economic risk elements.

## INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Acculturation has consistently been found to be challenging for Latino/a immigrants, increasing stress due to differences in the native versus the new culture, removal from family and friends, language barriers, and various elements of discrimination (Flaskerud & Uman, 1996).
- ❖ Spanish-speaking Latinos have been found to have a higher proportion of depression diagnoses than English-speaking Latinos, thought to result from their greater social isolation and socio-economic risk (Ruiz, 2007). Less acculturation is associated with more parental stress and marital problems, which increases the likelihood of negative outcomes for the child (Kim, 2001; Shahbaznia, 2002).
- ❖ Research has found that recent immigrants are at risk for developing anxiety problems (Lee, Lei, & Sue, 2001). Elements that influence depression in immigrants include the age of immigration, and the ability to understand and speak English (Chiswick & Miller, 1999; Takeuchi, Chung, Lin et al., 1998).
- ❖ However, key to cultural competence is understanding the different meanings behaviors have for people from different races and cultures. For example, Spanish-speaking mothers have been found to be more strict (Buriel, 1993), use more physical guidance, and implement more rules than English-speaking Latino moms (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). But, this behavior may not be interpreted as coercive to their children because it is "normal" for them.
- ❖ The purpose of this research is to compare the parenting behaviors of English and Spanish-speaking Latino mothers of children referred for mental health treatment because of disruptive behaviors and discover whether their depressive symptoms are likely to have different effects on their children's mental health.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- ❖ Using mothers' language as a proxy for acculturation, the purpose of this study is to explore differences between English and Spanish-speaking Latino mothers and their clinic-referred children, tracing the role maternal depression plays in the parent-child relationship and child behavior problems.

## METHOD

### Participants

- ❖ Mother-child dyads were referred to Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) for treatment of the child's disruptive behaviors. Dyads were categorized according to what language the mothers spoke: 82 English-speaking or 48 Spanish-speaking.

### Procedure

- ❖ Mother-child dyads were assessed before entering PCIT treatment. Videotapes of a 15-minute observational assessment were coded for the mothers' verbalizations using the Dyadic-Parent-Child Interaction Coding System-II (DPICS-II; Eyberg, Bessmer, Newcomb, Edwards, & Robinson, 1994): questions, reflections, acknowledgments, descriptions, praises, commands, and critical statements. Based on previous research, we examined neutral verbalizations (information and behavior descriptions, and reflections), directives and questions (direct commands, indirect commands, critical statements, and questions), positive verbalizations (praises). For purposes of this study, we calculated percents of total verbalization for use in statistical analyses.
- ❖ A variable evaluating child risk was created by combining presence or absence of the following: physical abuse history, neglect history, history of being in foster care, and prenatal exposure to drugs and/or alcohol.
- ❖ A variable evaluating socioeconomic risk was evaluated by the following: mother having less than a high-school education, being single, and being 26 years old or less.

### Measures

- ❖ Children's behaviors were rated using the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI; Eyberg & Pincus, 1999).
- ❖ Dyads were categorized as depressed or non-depressed based upon the mother's self-report of depressive symptoms on the SCL-90-R (Derogatis, 1983) or the BSI (Derogatis, 1993).
- ❖ Stress levels were evaluated based upon the mothers' self-reported symptoms on the Brief PSI (Abidin, 1995).
- ❖ Demographic information was obtained through caregivers' reports on a questionnaire administered prior to treatment and through court reports and/or social workers' reports.

## RESULTS

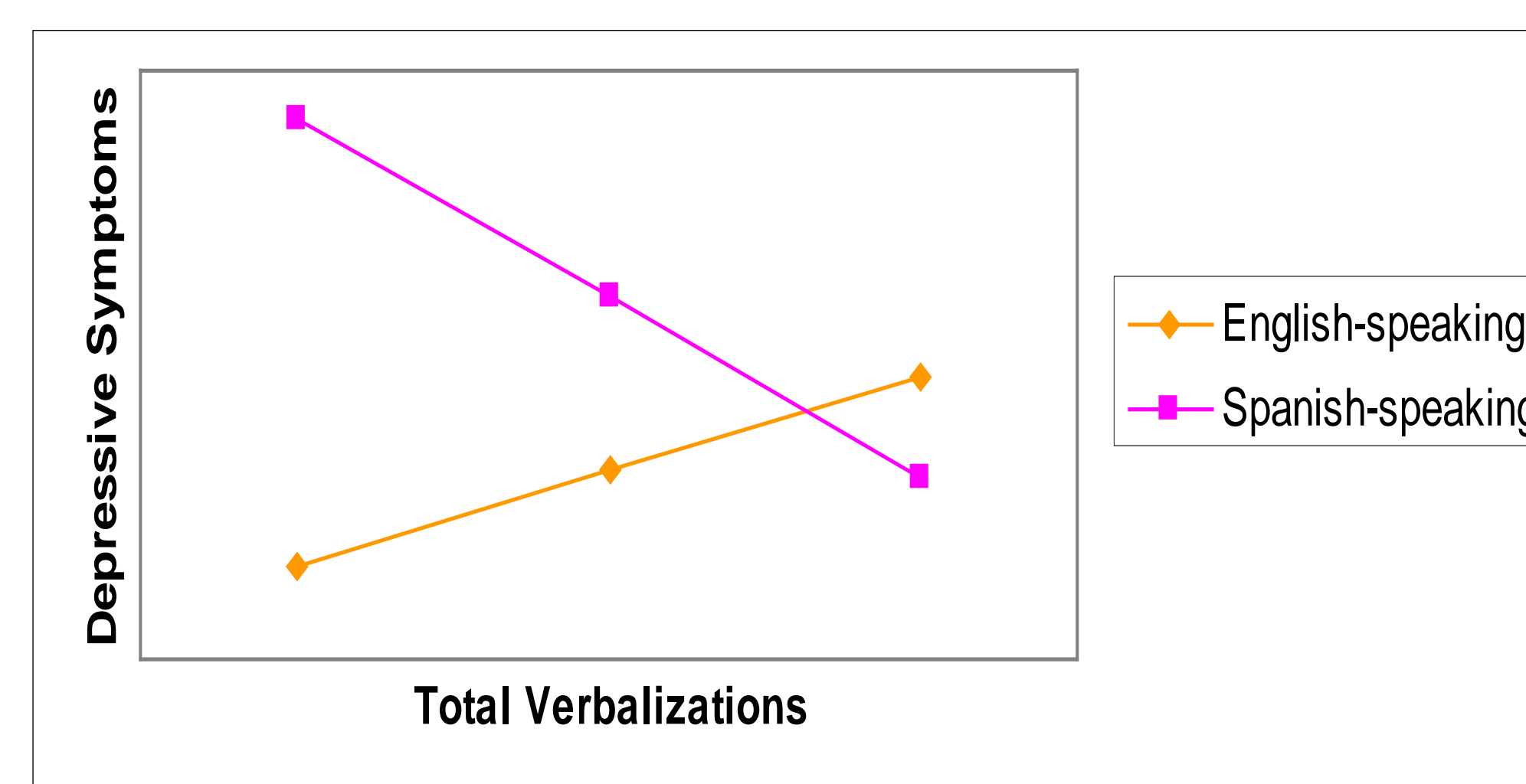
### Demographic Differences

Demographics	English (N = 82)	Spanish (N = 48)
Sex of child (% male)	63.4	65.8
Mean age of child years (SD)	4.8 (1.5)	4.1 (1.6)
Mean age of mother years (SD)	30.8 (9.1)	34.4 (8.8)
Prenatal Exposure to AOD (%)	56.4	13.5 ***
DV History (%)	54.4	55.9
Foster History (%)	69.1	35.0 ***
PA History (%)	29.3	14.6
Neglect History (%)	62.3	16.6 ***
Mother's Education (% high school or less)	87	85
Marital Status (% single)	67.1	50.0 *
Depression (SD)	53.32 (10.22)	54.04 (10.87)
Child Risk (SD)	2.68 (1.51)	1.10 (1.24) ***
Socio-Economic Risk (SD)	1.50 (.95)	1.00 (.92) ***

- ❖ There was a significant difference between the dyads in the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking groups for neglect history,  $\chi^2 = 25.32$ ,  $df(1, 130)$ ,  $p < .001$ ; substance abuse history,  $\chi^2 = 18.88$ ,  $df(1, 115)$ ,  $p < .001$ ; marital status,  $\chi^2 = 3.70$ ,  $df(1, 130)$ ,  $p = .05$ ; history in foster care,  $\chi^2 = 12.81$ ,  $df(1, 121)$ ,  $p < .001$ ; child risk,  $F(1, 129) = 37.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and socio-economic risk,  $F(1, 129) = 8.61$ ,  $p = .004$ .

### Group Differences in Verbalizations

- ❖ Results of a multivariate analysis of covariance of parent verbalizations, with mothers' language and depressive symptom levels as independent variables and child risk, child age as covariates, showed a main effect for language on total verbalizations,  $F(1, 62) = 9.05$ ,  $p = .004$ . Spanish-speaking mothers spoke less than English-speaking mothers.
- ❖ The two groups of mothers did not significantly differ in the percentage of directive, positive, and neutral statements.

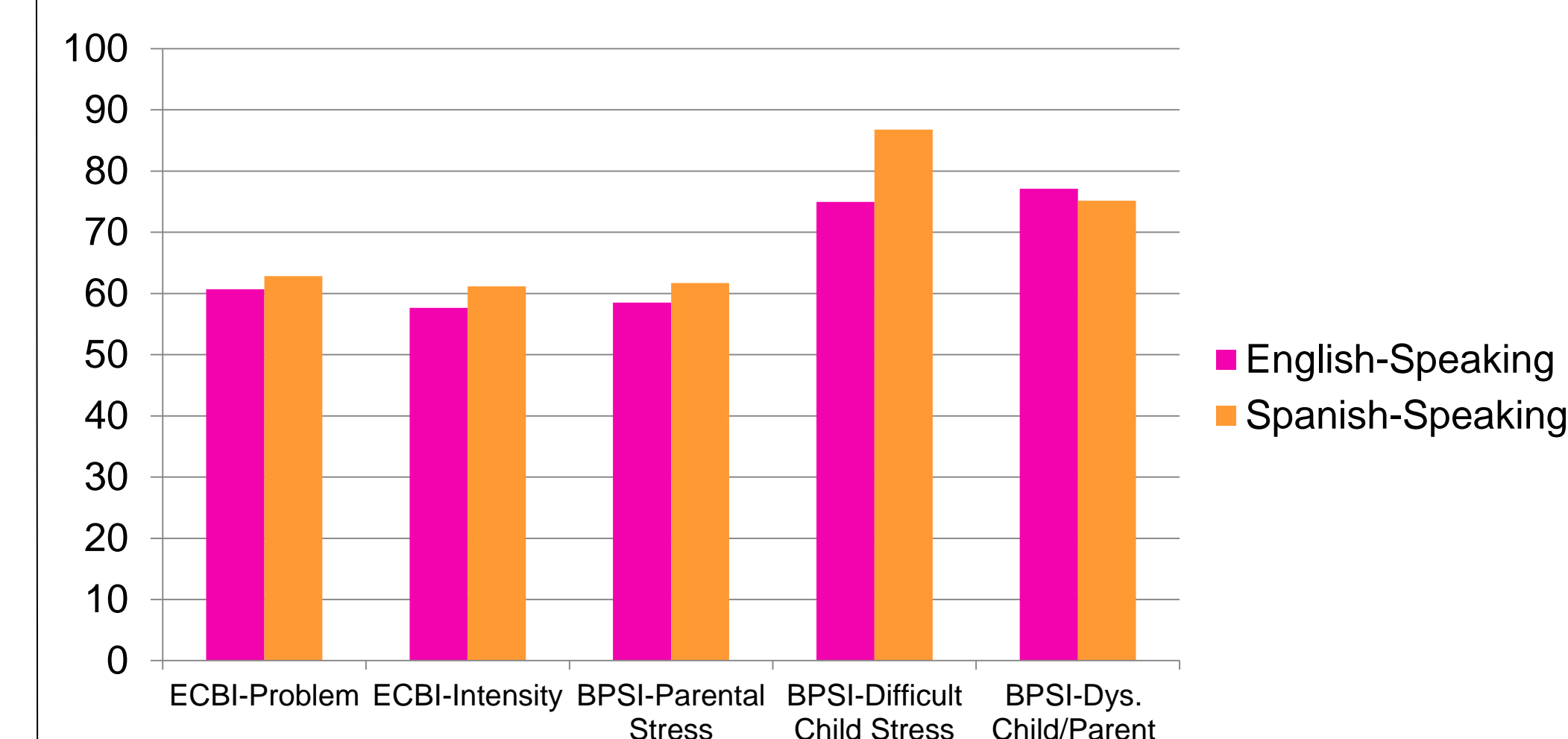


- ❖ This graph shows that for Spanish-speaking mothers, more depressive symptoms was associated with less total talk; while for English-speaking mothers those with more depressive symptoms talked more. This represents a significant language by depressive symptom interaction when predicting total parent verbalizations  $F(1, 62) = 10.28$ ,  $p = .002$ .

## RESULTS CONTINUED

### Group Differences in Measures

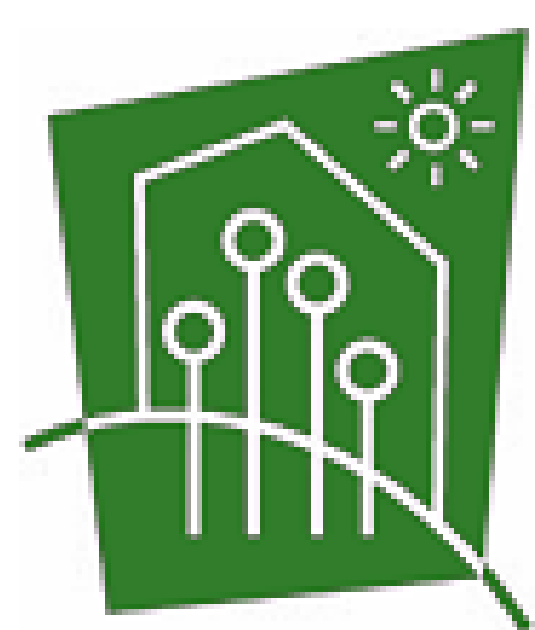
- ❖ Multivariate analyses of covariance testing the influence of mothers' acculturation and depressive symptoms on parental stress and child behavior problems showed no significant effects for acculturation. All other things being equal, English- and Spanish-speaking mothers reported similar levels of stress and child behavior problems.



- ❖ However, when examining potential predictors for reported behavior problems, both child risk elements and depressive symptoms were significant, and did not vary by acculturation.
- ❖ Child risk significantly influenced both behavior scores, ECBI-Intensity,  $F(1, 89) = 4.69$ ,  $p = .033$ , and ECBI-Problems,  $F(1, 89) = 4.54$ ,  $p = .036$ .
- ❖ Depression also significantly influenced both behavior scores, ECBI-Intensity,  $F(1, 89) = 16.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , and ECBI-Problems,  $F(1, 89) = 4.13$ ,  $p = .045$ .

## DISCUSSION

- ❖ The purpose of this study was to examine the differences between English- and Spanish-speaking Latino mother-child dyads, and to explore the influence that maternal depression has on the parent-child relationship and reported child behavior problems.
- ❖ Analyses of the demographic and risk characteristics showed substantial differences in the population of clinic-referred Latino children. English-speaking children showed a significant history of exposure to drugs and alcohol, neglect, foster care, and greater socio-economic risk. However, mothers in both groups reported similar levels of depressive symptoms and child behavior problems.
- ❖ Parents' verbalization patterns were similar for English- and Spanish-speaking mothers, but Spanish-speaking mothers were not as talkative on the whole. Furthermore, greater numbers of depressive symptoms predicted different interaction styles, with more depressive English-speaking mothers speaking more and more depressive Spanish-speaking mothers speaking less.
- ❖ In spite of the different manifestation of depressive symptoms in their interactions with their children, greater depression and child risk predicted more child behavior problems and parenting stress in both groups of mothers. This suggests that although the way depression affects parent-child relationships may differ by cultural groups, its effects on parenting stress and children's behavior problems is invariant.



# UC DAVIS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL