

Education, not age, predicts variable plural production in Yucatec Maya

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Abstract: We examine the effects of age and education on the production of variable grammatical morphology among speakers of Yucatec Maya. Our investigation focuses on the use of optional plural morphology when describing pictures of one, two and seven entities performing an action in Yucatec Maya. Our sample (N=69) compares children and adults ranging in age from 5 to 48 years old (mean=19.6, SD=12.1) with levels of education (Spanish-based) ranging from no formal education to some college. Since the use of plural morphology is not optional in Spanish, this is a particularly interesting test of the effects of education in Spanish on sentence production in Yucatec Maya. Mixed effects logit models reveal that set size is a significant predictor of the use of plural morphology and numeral mention. Education, but not age, predicts the use of plural morphology, though only on nouns. We propose a language-internal and language contact-based explanation.