

Bilingualism, Characteristics in Second Generation Latin Americans: Preliminary Results

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Introduction

- Different categories of bilingualism can be distinguished (Ardila, 2007). However, one of most prominent type, specifically refers to the bilingualism of the second generation of immigrants. As a matter of fact, this is the most frequent type of bilingualism found in South Florida
- Rosselli et al (2000) examined the impact of bilingualism on verbal fluency and repetition tests in older Spanish/English bilinguals. Bilinguals who learned English before age 12 performed significantly better on the English repetition test and produced a higher number of words in the description of a picture than the bilinguals who learned English after age 12. The authors suggested that variables such as task demands, language interference, linguistic mode, and level of bilingualism might impact fluency and repetition skills in bilinguals.
- Ardila et al. (2000) analyzed the interfering effect of the second language (L2) on the first language (L1) in native Spanish speakers living in the United States. They examined 3 linguistic aspects: (a) syntactic comprehension, (b) verbal memory, and (c) calculation abilities. They observed that the closer to the English syntax the sentences were, the easier it was for the participants to understand them. Participants who had been exposed to English between the ages of 5 and 12 outperformed participants exposed to English before 5 years of age.

Objectives

- Explore the lexicon knowledge in L1 and L2
- Test whether grammatical similarities and differences between L1 and L2 affect the grammatical understanding and use in each language.
- Examine the interference in reading L1 and L2 due to the orthographic differences between English and Spanish.

Method

Participants

- A sample of male and female Spanish-English bilinguals (ages 18-40)
- Either born in a Latin American country or the United States (Immigration to the US has to occur prior to the age of 12)
- Completely, or mostly attended school in English.
 - 19 Spanish-English Bilinguals with a mean age of 21.7 (SD 1.79)
 - 8 of the participants were born in a Latin American country and emigrated to US prior to age 12. Mean age 10.37 (SD 1.50)
 - 11 Bilingual participants are US nationals.
- A control group of English monolinguals with a mean age of 24.33 (SD 6.59) was tested as well.

Procedure

Participants will come in for one session (about 60-90 minutes) where a total of 14 oral and written language knowledge tasks in both Spanish and English will be directed. Prior to the language testing a short questionnaire directed to pinpoint the bilingualism history will be administered.

Such tasks include items from both versions of the Bilingual Aphasia test (English and Spanish), which will be used to assess spontaneous speech, verbal fluency, semantic and grammatical judgment, reading out loud, silent reading understanding, spontaneous writing, dictation and syntactic comprehension. Additionally the Vocabulary subtest from the WAIS-III (English and Spanish versions) will be given in order to analyze the lengthiness of idiolect. Identifying data for this study will be coded and only codes will be entered on SPSS to identify each participant

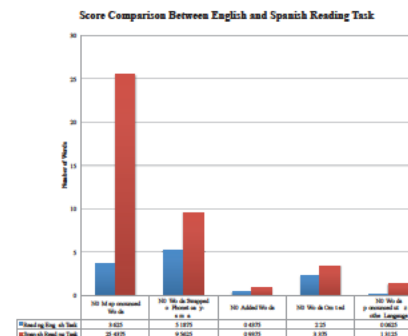
The control group of English monolinguals will be assessed using only the English section within the battery of tests. This control group will serve as a comparison criterion for the bilinguals' linguistic capabilities in English.

Preliminary Results

Statistical evaluations were performed using SPSS software. It was observed that bilinguals performed significantly better in English (L2) than in (L1). Mean analyses showed that:

- There was a greater amount of English words produced in the fluency task (L1 M=45.29 SD= 24.005 and L2 M= 60.176, SD24.44)
- Participants were graded higher in the English Reading out loud scale in regard to fluency, precision and pronunciation (L1 M=7.12 SD=3.935 and L2 M=9.647 SD=4.07) A strong negative correlation was found between spontaneous speech fluency and number of words that were phonetically swapped during the reading task ($r=-.649^*$, $p=.000$)
- Writing skills also showed to be significantly different. When graded on fluency, grammar, vocabulary, descriptiveness and semantic acceptability (L1 M=13.47 SD=5.99 and L2 M=15.52 SD=6.29) as well as dictation (L1 M=7.65 SD= 3.23 and L2 M=8.353 SD=3.23)

Furthermore testing will be performed in order to get a more representative sample of both groups and obtain more comprehensive results.



Discussion

It was observed that L2 significantly overwrote L1, becoming the dominant language. Grammatical judgment as well as reading and writing became more accurate, vocabulary was larger, and fluency was greater in English than in Spanish. Interference from English to Spanish in reading, writing and vocabulary was significant, whereas interference in the opposite direction was minimal.

Unfortunately, no studies comparing reading and writing abilities in each of the languages are readily available for US Spanish/English bilinguals. In order to further understand language representation in bilinguals, it is crucial to pinpoint the specific characteristics second generation immigrants have in each one of the languages with regard to lexicon, grammar and written language. This study will advance the comprehension of South Florida's Spanish/English bilingualism by furthermore examining the differences between writing and reading in both languages.

References

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