

Cognitive Features of Bilingualism at Higher Education

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Article Information

Received: December 25, 2022

Accepted: January 26, 2023

Published: February 27, 2023

Keywords: *bilingualism, language learning, cognition, multitasking, concentration, monolingualism*

ABSTRACT

The current article is to focus on the relationship of cognition, education and proficiency between first and second language in bilingual students in Uzbekistan. All data and theoretical information in this study also support the notion that learning a second language in childhood is associated with positive cognitive gains. Bilingualism in children and adults are positively related to concept formation, classification, creativity and analogical reasoning. We conducted our own study with Uzbek students studying English in UzSWLU showing survey results in methodology part.

Introduction. There is no difference in cognitive ability in the sense of general intelligence – so bilinguals are not smarter than monolinguals. But the difference between monolingual and bilingual cognition is in specific processes concerned with attention and selection. It is the ability to selectively attend to relevant information when there is distraction that is better in bilinguals. And that is not trivial, because that is at the basis of a lot of higher order thinking and performing. So, if one is driving on a highway at high speed – there are a lot of things on your mind: there is a route, an exit you're watching for, the signs – there is a need to keep a lot of things in mind and watch the signs. You need to be able to focus your attention in very careful ways. That is the kind of thing that bilinguals are doing better. These processes of holding information in mind while you're performing a task and selecting which information to pay attention to is part of the executive function system. Even on memory tasks, there is no difference in simple memory, but if a memory task includes the need for executive function – selectively attending to what the participant has to remember, then bilinguals perform better.

Literature review. The explanation given by Ellen Bialystok is that if a person is bilingual, if he or she has two languages that are used regularly, both of these languages are always active in mind, and that means that there is always conflict that requires a mechanism to select the correct language. So, the interpretation is that the executive function system is used to selectively attend to the language that currently needs to be used, and this is exactly the process that is at the bottom of all the cognitive tasks on which bilinguals are performing better. Some of the studies do not put people into groups, but instead give each participant a bilingualism score [2]. Typically, people who are more bilingual show better results than people who are less bilingual. In this case, people who have been bilingual for a longer time would show larger effects than people who have been bilingual for a shorter time. And perhaps, that is because that is all caused

by this ongoing experience – these are dose-related effects. It is hardly that simple, because there are many things involved, but in general – the more – the better [1].

A prevailing research question in past decades concerns to the cognitive consequences of bilingualism. The critical question is the extent to which the consequences of bilingual exposure are confined to language-related stimuli (something expected a priori) or do the consequences extend to other domains. Several studies have reported that bilingual individuals outperform monolingual individuals in tasks related to these functions all throughout life. In children and adults, such an advantage would originate in bilingual individuals' need to navigate two active language systems when using language [5].

Researchers on bilingualism have repeated over the years that half of the world's population, if not more, is bilingual. Unfortunately, there are no clear data for the whole world but it is clear that bilingualism is found in all age groups, in all levels of society, and in most countries. For example, a European Commission report (2006) showed that some 56% of the inhabitants of 25 European countries speak a second language well enough to have a conversation in it. They may not all lead their lives with two or more languages but the percentage gives an idea of how extensive bilingualism can be. In North America, some 35% of the population of

Canada is bilingual. The percentage is smaller in the United States (around 18–20%) but this still amounts to some 55 million inhabitants. The proportion of bilinguals is much higher in other parts of the world such as Asia and Africa where it is normal to know and use several languages in one's everyday life [4].

Materials and methodology. In the study 60 students of UzSWLU participated, who were assigned to three different groups (monolingual Uzbek, bilingual Uzbek-Russian, multilingual Uzbek- Russian-English), 20 with students in each group. All participants were either 20-22 years old at time of testing. In addition to age, a number of selection criteria were used. Children with a non-verbal intelligence below 70 were excluded, as were students for whom full datasets were not available. Furthermore, within the bilingual groups, students were only included if at least one of their parents spoke the non-Russian language with the speaker, to ensure that all these participants could be considered bilingual. Each of them given concrete question covering the study. Details of the questions are given in Table 1.

No	Questions:	Yes	No	Answer (own option)
1	Can people become bilingual easily?			
2	Do bilingualism or multilingualism have advantages?			
3	Do bilinguals mentally translate when they speak?			
4	Does it affect the fact of speaking in different languages to the way you feel and think?			

Table 2. Results of questions

Questions	Yes	No	Given options
1	50	50	10
2	90	10	45
3	60	40	15
4	70	30	25

The table above shows that most of the participants consider that bilingualism is necessary for all

sort of learners. Coming to question 1 half of the participants think it is easy to obtain 2nd language easily, while the rest of them cannot consider like this. 2nd question results show that almost all students ponder bilingualism is benefit whereas only 10 % cannot believe this option. 3rd question results show 60 % students thinks it is demanded to approach mental translation and 40% students claim it is not. The last percentages demonstrate that 70 % of participants feel and speak differently while gaining bilingualism, as far as 30 % of them consider that is nor relevant to feeling manner. Coming to giving answers as own option. Few students are active in this field showing on average 35% of all participants of experiment.

To conclude, the phenomenon is far more frequent than one imagines at first and it is only natural, therefore, that the language sciences have given bilingual studies much more room in recent years. Being bilingual may give advantages to individuals because of greater mental flexibility, concept superiority, information diversity, and higher verbal IQ ability. It is believed that bilinguals have an advantage in mental skill sets and flexibility.

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