The Influence of bilingualism on linguistic and cognitive processes: Evidence from Kurdish-Turkish bilingual children

Ecehan Sönmez, Belma Haznedar
Bogazici University, Turkey

Research on bilingualism has witnessed a paradigm shift from an early deficit view which attributes some disadvantages such as confusion or linguistic delay to a bilingual child towards an account which focuses on the possible benefits of the ability to operate in two different linguistic systems. Recent findings provide robust evidence for higher levels of cognitive flexibility in bilingual children, which is manifested by superior performance in executive functioning tasks (e.g. Bialystok, 2007). Despite these cognitive advantages, however, bilingual children are reported to have lower levels of vocabulary knowledge even in their dominant language (Bialystok & Craik, 2010). The primary aim of the present study is to investigate whether or not the well-documented “benefits and costs” of bilingualism apply to the case of bilingual speakers of Kurdish and Turkish, a language pair which has not been examined in the previous literature. We would like to see whether there are any differences between Turkish-speaking monolingual children and Kurdish-Turkish speaking bilingual children in terms of their vocabulary knowledge and attentional control skills. 16 participants (8 monolingual, 8 bilingual) took part in an expressive vocabulary test and a Stroop Task. Preliminary results were in line with the literature in that bilingual children outperformed their monolingual peers in inhibiting irrelevant information and directing their attention to the target stimuli. However, they scored lower in the expressive vocabulary test, which is a natural outcome of bilingualism rather than an indication of linguistic deficiency.

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