Comparing bilingual and monolingual adults in their dominant language: Executive control and lexical knowledge measures

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Previous research on bilingualism has documented that early bilinguals, in particular, benefit from various executive functions such as attentional control, inhibiting distractions, and task switching, compared to their monolingual peers. To this end, bilingual experience has long been associated with various executive control advantages in linguistic and non-linguistic tasks. However, a series of studies have raised the question of whether or not bilingual experience leads to lexical access difficulties in each language of bilinguals. The aim of this study is to examine the question of whether or not bilinguals with different levels of bilingual experience differ in performance on a distraction inhibition (stroop) task and a lexical production task (synonym/antonym/analogy). The data come from three different groups of adult learners: (i) 5 early bilinguals who were exposed to Kurdish/Arabic and Turkish in early childhood; (ii) 13 late bilinguals who were native speakers of Turkish and learned English as L2 after the age of 10; (iii) five monolinguals who spoke only Turkish. While similar studies have been reported in regard to the cognitive and linguistic consequences of bilingualism with other language pairs, to our knowledge, no previous work has investigated this issue with Kurdish/Arabic – Turkish bilinguals and Turkish – English bilinguals. Preliminary findings of this on-going study revealed that early bilinguals had cognitive control advantages over both the monolingual and the late bilingual participants. However, there was not a significant difference between the monolingual and the late bilingual group on the distraction inhibition task. Moreover, the three groups did not differ in their performance on the vocabulary measure in Turkish. These results might have implications for the importance of age of acquisition and amount of exposure in determining the extent of advantages and disadvantages of bilingual experience.

Keywords: lexical knowledge, bilingualism, age of acquisition, executive control.