

Workshop 14-15th of September – University of Reading

Title: Effect of bilingualism on the performance of emotional identification and inference tasks in young children: an exploratory study

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Abstract: Bilingualism is a complex subject, mainly due to its dynamism and multiple facets. It has been the subject of numerous studies in both children and adults, healthy and pathological, with the aim of investigate various linguistic and non-linguistic domains. We know that a series of variables moderate the results obtained by these studies. These variables can be inherent to bilingualism, such as the degree of exposure and use of languages (Crespo et al., 2019) and their level of proficiency (Khedder & Kaan, 2021), or related to the characteristics of the experimental design (Grosjean, 1998; López-Rojas et al., 2023).

However, there is still a relatively unexplored area in studies on bilingualism, that of the developmental trajectory of emotions. The present study is an exploratory study that aims to investigate emotional competence in young French-speaking monolinguals (4-6 years old) compared to their bilingual peers. To control the variables mentioned above and inherent to bilingualism, we decided to use the Q-BEx questionnaire (De Cat et al., 2022) as it accurately documents the language profile of young bilinguals. Two tasks are proposed to participants: an emotional identification task and an emotional inference task (according to the protocol of Thommen et al., 2021). We also control the degree of intelligibility of the participants using the Intelligibility Context Scale (ICS) (McLeod, 2020) and the behavior of the children using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 2000).

In monolinguals, we know that the recognition of emotions varies according to age (Aguert et al., 2013; Grosbras et al., 2018), mother tongue (Filipe et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2022; Morton & Trehub, 2011), presented emotion (Amorim et al., 2021) or privileged channel (Nelson & Russel, 2011). We hypothesize that bilinguals, since they are confronted with two linguistic systems, experience a singular development of their emotional competence. This development could be influenced by the context of bilingualism (e.g., school vs. family) or the social and cultural status (Haft et al., 2021) for each of the bilingual's languages. There would thus be additional variables, compared to monolinguals, that need to be documented and controlled to interpret our results correctly. We will present, in this workshop, the results of this first exploratory study, which is part of a larger project aimed at investigating the developmental trajectory of emotional prosody in bilinguals through an emotional recognition task based on acoustic and prosodic cues.

The field of emotions particularly interests us insofar as the adequate mastery of emotional skills is a factor of social integration and academic success (Votmer & Salisch, 2017), while the opposite can generate behavioral problems (Chronaki et al., 2015). We hope to contribute to the scientific literature on bilingualism by emphasizing the singular development of this type of population compared to their monolingual peers and the need to nuance the classical dichotomous view of bilingual (dis)advantage (Antoniou, 2019; Poarch et al., 2019; Luk, 2022).

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