

## Bilingual advantages in L3 learning: The role of informal L3 exposure

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Folk wisdom has it that it is easier to learn foreign languages if you have been raised bilingually, but research evidence is controversial. Factors that have been proposed to explain the conflicting findings include typological proximity, home language status and bilingual proficiency/literacy. We argue that prior research has overlooked one crucial variable: differences in out-of-school exposure to L3. Bilinguals may receive less out-of-school exposure to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because their time is already divided between two languages. Alternatively, bilinguals may receive more informal EFL exposure if parents in mixed marriages communicate in English. In this talk we report two studies comparing monolinguals and bilinguals learning EFL in the Netherlands.

**Study 1** compared EFL skills of typically-developing monolingual Dutch (N=31) and bilingual Turkish-Dutch children (N=30) in the first two years of secondary education (age 12–14). The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 2007) and the Litmus Sentence Repetition Task (Marinis & Armon-Lotem, 2015) were administered to measure EFL proficiency. A language exposure questionnaire adapted from PABIQ (Tuller, 2015) was filled in by the parents. On both measures we found a significant Group\*Exposure interaction ( $\beta_{PPVT} = -2.79$ ,  $SE = 0.72$ ,  $t = -3.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta_{SRT} = -0.59$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ,  $t = -2.70$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Bilinguals with little informal exposure to English performed worse than monolinguals, but bilinguals with more EFL exposure outperformed their monolingual peers.

**Study 2** focussed on EFL learning by monolingual (N=49) and bilingual (N=22) children with developmental language disorder in the last three years of special primary education (age 9–12). The bilingual participants spoke a variety of home languages. The English tests included a Receptive Vocabulary Task and a Grammar Test. An exposure questionnaire designed for the purposes of this study was also administered to the children. Bilinguals outperformed monolinguals on the Grammar Test, even if differences in out-of-school exposure were taken into account ( $\beta = -0.52$ ,  $SE = 0.21$ ,  $z = -2.44$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Bilinguals also outperformed monolinguals on the Receptive Vocabulary Task, but the differences disappeared once informal exposure to English was controlled for ( $\beta = 2.22$ ,  $SE = 1.44$ ,  $z = 1.55$ ,  $p = .12$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant Group\*Exposure interaction ( $\beta = -0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $z = -2.06$ ,  $p = .04$ ) revealing that a greater amount of informal EFL exposure benefitted bilinguals more than monolinguals.

Taken together the findings demonstrate that (i) not taking the amount of informal EFL exposure into account may lead to either false positives or false negatives as far as bilingual advantage in L3 learning is concerned; and (ii) bilingualism may be associated with enhanced input processing capacities (bilinguals benefit more from higher EFL exposure than monolinguals).

### References

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