

The impact of language experience on sentence repetition task performance in bilingual children

Variation in language performance across bilinguals is often attributed to factors such as age and input. This variability contributes to the challenge of distinguishing between typically developing bilinguals (Bi-TD) and bilinguals with SLI (Bi-SLI). As part of the LITMUS tools developed within Cost Action IS0804, sentence repetition (SR) tasks were designed to elicit different performance patterns from Bi-TD and Bi-SLI. This study examines the performance of a group of Bi-TD children with little French input on the French SR task (LITMUS-SR-French, Prévost et al., 2012).

Prior work on monolinguals with SLI has demonstrated that SR is an effective assessment tool (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2001). Moreover, clausal embedding (e.g., Tuller et al., 2012) and certain types of wh-movement (e.g., Friedmann & Novogrodsky, 2011) have been shown to create difficulties for these children. The Litmus-SR tasks therefore varied in terms of embedding and wh-movement and were controlled for length and word frequency (Marinis & Armon-Lotem, 2015). Previous work on the LITMUS-SR-French revealed that identical repetition scores distinguished the Bi-TD from the Bi-SLI (Fleckstein et al., 2013). However, most of these children had at least 24 months of exposure to French. It is unclear how bilinguals with less exposure would perform on such a task.

Therefore, the LITMUS-SR-French performance of 18 Bi-TD acquiring L2 French via immersion education in English-speaking Canada (Bi-IMRS) was examined. The Bi-IMRS (mean age: 6;11) were tested approximately 18 months after L2 exposure began. Their mean identical repetition rate was 33%, which was drastically lower than the Bi-TD (81%, Fleckstein et al., 2013). However, target repetition scores revealed that the Bi-IMRS had less difficulty with relative clauses ($M = 79\%$) compared to complement clauses (54%) and monoclausal past tense (64%), suggesting that the target repetition of relative clauses may be useful for reducing the effect of input on SR.

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