The Effect of Multilingualism on Morphological Awareness and Vocabulary Development in Children

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In the United States 21% of people over the age of 5 speak a language other than English at home (Shin & Ortman, 2011). Many of these individuals are the victims of discrimination and in the past educators and parents feared that bilingual children would learn fewer words than their monolingual peers leading many bilingual parents to never teach their child a second language (Soto, 2016). Past research is conflicted on whether or not multi-linguals vocabularies are smaller than monolinguals (Pearson & Fernandez, 1994). One measure of vocabulary knowledge is morphological awareness, or the recognition and understanding of the smallest units of meaning in a word is a key predictor of reading comprehension and thus academic achievement. The purpose of my study is to further investigate possible differences between how monolinguals’ and multilinguals’ vocabularies develop to document the possibility of a multi-lingual advantage.

In this project the manner in which vocabulary development and morphological awareness differs between people who speak multiple languages and people whose only language is English was investigated. Several researchers have found evidence that morphological awareness transfers from one language to another (Hayashi & Murphy, 2013). Additionally, Campbell and Sais, (1995) previously found evidence that bilingual children performed better at a task of spoken morpheme deletion (Rainbow⇒Bow). As a result, I hypothesize that children who know multiple languages will have more advanced morphological awareness when compared to monolingual children who have been matched for grade level. Measures of expressive vocabulary, receptive vocabulary, morphological awareness, and other metalinguistic knowledge were used in order to identify these possible differences.


