

Individual Paper Session 5
Bilingualism
Tuesday, July 4
2:45-3:15pm

L1 transfer effects in native-like L2 speakers

Nguyen-Hoan, Minh
University of New South Wales
mnguyen@psy.unsw.edu.au

Bilinguals who have lived in their L2 environment from birth are generally assumed to be as proficient in their L2 as native speakers of that language. The present study investigated this assumption by testing people who were born in Australia, but whose parents are from a non-English speaking background. This group of bilinguals are exposed to two languages from an early age but, because of their schooling and L2-rich environment, actually develop language dominance in L2.

The present study compared bilinguals who had Cantonese L1 (logographic, morphosyllabic), Vietnamese L1 (alphabetic, morphosyllabic) or some Other language L1 (alphabetic, non-morphosyllabic) to English monolinguals on various English (L2) tasks.

The results showed that all bilingual groups demonstrated deficits in phonemic awareness and processing of spoken English monosyllabic nonwords, but that some of these deficits were stronger for the morphosyllabic groups. That is, these bilingual groups showed poor sublexical processing ability relative to monolinguals. For the tasks that explicitly required lexical processing, however, Cantonese bilinguals actually outperformed monolinguals.

Such findings indicate that despite developing language dominance in L2 from an early age, bilinguals do not exhibit monolingual-like performance on L2 processing tasks and, furthermore, that their processing of L2 may be affected by specific characteristics of L1.