

Action IS0804

2009- 2013

Language Impairment in a Multilingual Society: Linguistic Patterns and the Road to Assessment

Participating countries: CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, HU, IC, IE, IT, IL, LU, LT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SK, TR, UK (COST countries) and CA, LB, RU, US, ZA (non-COST countries)
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Objectives:

- The **main objective** of this Action is to profile bilingual Specific Language Impairment (SLI) by establishing a network to coordinate research on the linguistic and cognitive abilities of bilingual children with SLI across different migrant communities.
- **Derived objectives**
 - Disentangle bilingualism and SLI by establishing the relative contribution of each.
 - Show how SLI can be identified in both of a child's languages.
 - Explore the extent to which the manifestations of SLI are similar or different across languages in the same child.
 - Establish whether the nature and severity of SLI is affected by the child's acquisition of more than one language.
- **Secondary objectives**
 - Mentor young researchers from countries with significant immigrant populations and language combinations.
 - Identify critical sociolinguistic information which will set standards for increasing comparability of research in bilingual SLI.
 - Develop guidelines for assessment.

Working Group 1 - Syntax and interfaces with morphology and semantics

Group Leaders: Theo Marinis, UK & Petra Schulz, DE

WG1 focuses on the most established linguistic indicators of SLI in the domains of syntax, morphology, and semantics. We are currently designing and piloting a battery of tasks to identify structures that are vulnerable in monolingual and bilingual children with SLI, but not in typically developing bilingual children. The tasks include comprehension, elicitation, and sentence repetition of relative clauses, wh-questions, passives, clitic pronouns, subject-verb agreement, and case. On-line reaction time experiments are being developed to help elucidating the underlying cause of language breakdown in bilingual language impairment

Working Group 2 - Narrative and discourse

Group Leaders: Natalia Gagarina, DE & Joel Walters, IL

Telling a story is difficult for children with SLI, even when they are assisted by picture stimuli. WG2 has developed story-telling and retelling tasks involving narrative production as well as comprehension. The stories have been designed to be appropriate cross-culturally and include both story grammar components (goal, attempt, outcome) and linguistic features (lexis, morphology, syntax) as well as uniquely bilingual measures (language dominance, code-switching, code interference). Morphosyntactic and lexical features will be comparable with the data collected by WG1 and WG3.

Working Group 3 - Lexical and phonological processing

Group Leaders: Shula Chiat, UK & Ewa Haman, PL

For phonological and lexical processing, WG3 is designing a range of 'rapid screening'/ assessment tools including non-word repetition, word comprehension, and naming tasks, and will evaluate their potential for identifying SLI in a variety of bilingual populations. Selected properties of target items will be manipulated to investigate whether they help to distinguish between second language problems and SLI. WG3 is also gathering data on early productive lexical development of bilingual children under the age of 3 years (using MacArthur-Bates CDIs) to assess the gap between the lexicon of bilingual and monolingual populations as well as to measure/determine language dominance and diversity.

Working Group 4 - Executive functions

Group Leaders: Anne Baker, NL & Kristine Jensen de López, DK

Executive functions (EF) involve high-level cognitive processes that control and regulate thought and action. WG4 has been piloting a range of different EF tasks with monolingual and bilingual children. A set of EF tasks consisting of paper-and-pencil game-like tasks which can be used in the clinic and across different cultures as well as a set of computerized task with the advantage of controlling for reaction time are tested across languages, cultures, and ages and will be recommended for further piloting with bilingual children with SLI.

Expected Outcomes:

- Development of tasks which tap both unique bilingual phenomena and unique SLI phenomena in order to distinguish both.
- Better understanding of the relative contribution of representation and processing capacity in typically developing bilinguals, in bilingual children with SLI, and in monolingual children with SLI.
- Creation of guidelines for diagnosis and of instruments to distinguish typically developing from SLI bilinguals.
- A rationale, based on a strong research base, for decisions about whether to educate bilingual children with SLI in a single (home or school) language or bilingually, by showing whether bilingualism adversely affects children with SLI or not.