



CHILDREN'S DAY AT THE CENTRAL PA ARTS FESTIVAL



FEATURED RESEARCH

A message from our Steering Committee

We are very excited to launch this first issue of our Bilingualism Matters at Penn State newsletter! It is our hope that this newsletter will open up new avenues and opportunities for dialogue with you, the folks in our local and national communities, about bilingualism and language science research. But first, let us introduce ourselves...

Who are we?

Penn State's Center for Language Science (CLS) is an interdisciplinary group of linguists, psycholinguists, applied linguists, speech-language pathologists, and cognitive neuroscientists who share an interest in language acquisition and bilingualism. We are the first US chapter of Bilingualism Matters, an international organization based in Edinburgh, Scotland, dedicated to communicating bilingualism research findings to the general public to promote informed decisions about language pedagogy and policy, and raising multilingual children. Our Bilingualism Matters at Penn State Steering Committee consists of CLS faculty and students as well as local community members. This year, we were delighted to welcome new members Kimberly Brown, Assistant Director of The Bennett Family

Center, and Jill Putnam, Assistant Director of The Child Care Center at Hort Woods. Our work has only just begun, so if you are a community member interested in getting involved, please get in touch! (You can find our contact information on the back of this newsletter.)

What will you find in this newsletter?

This newsletter is an opportunity for us to share with you some of the most recent findings in research on bilingualism, to provide language and learning tips, and to update you on our latest news and events. Our newsletters include two research summaries, seasonal tips and suggestions for language learning, and updates on what we've been up to as well as upcoming events. Our featured member section introduces you to a member of the Bilingualism Matters at Penn State community who has been particularly active and engaged in community outreach. We hope you will enjoy getting to know us and our work through our newsletter. We welcome your questions, comments, and feedback, and we hope you'll be in touch!



Thinking Bilingually

This research summary explains how, in some ways, bilinguals and monolinguals think differently, and discusses how these differences also appear in people who speak more than one dialect of the same language.

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Effective Assessment for Emergent Bilinguals

Recent PSU graduate Alaina Eck shares research from her honors thesis on how teachers and speech language pathologists can effectively assess bilingual children.

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Summer language tips

By Frances Blanchette

Summer is a great time for fun activities and trips with the whole family. This often means that parents spend extra special time with their kids. Consider incorporating some of these very simple tips as you interact with the kids in your life:

1. Responsiveness is important. Parents' level of responsiveness to their children is one of the key predictors of children's gains in language abilities and skills. Research suggests that when your children initiate conversation in any way, and you respond promptly and in a manner appropriate to their initiative (like providing an answer to their question), you're actually aiding their language acquisition!

2. Talk about the things that interest them. Children learn new words and phrases best when they're talking about things they're interested in. When first learning a language, it can be difficult for kids to connect words with objects. Research shows that being interested in an object actually helps kids remember its name the next time they come across it. What a quick, simple, and fun way to learn new words!



3. Talk in the language you speak the best.

When parents talk at length about past experiences, children become excellent narrators. The quality of your speech is one of the most important predictors of your child's language abilities and skills. For this reason, it is important to speak to your child in the language you speak best (even if you speak a second language).

These tips were adapted from the Society for Research and Development's Social Policy Report (27): Multilingual Children: Beyond Myths and Toward Best Practices, prepared by Dr. Alyssa McCabe and colleagues. The full report, endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, is available online. Just Google the title and you'll find it!

DID YOU KNOW?

Many local libraries have a section for bilingual and multilingual children's books. Here in State College, PA, The Schlow Library features books in Spanish, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, and many more. Consider taking a trip to the multilingual section in your local library this summer, and be sure to tell the librarian which languages interest you the most.



Dr. Matthew Carlson, Professor in the Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese Department and faculty member in the Center for Language Science at Penn State

Bilingualism Matters Featured Partner: Professor Matt Carlson

This newsletter's featured member is Dr. Matt Carlson, Assistant Professor of Spanish and Linguistics and faculty member of the Center for Language Science at Penn State. This year Matt undertook the major project of coordinating our participation in three Exploration U: Community Science Night events, which were a wonderful opportunity for us to connect with the public and have great conversations about language science and bilingualism. Here's what Matt had to say about his outreach work:

I do outreach work to encourage people to stop and think about the wonder of the world, which so often goes unnoticed right under our noses. I love watching people's curiosity awaken when they see something they never thought about before. At the Exploration-U events we've

participated in recently, this goes for the parents as well as the children, and for young and old anywhere! But it's about more than just the enjoyment of curiosity and discovery. When we open our eyes and ears to learning things we didn't know before, it changes how we think about the world and how we act in it by reminding us how wonderful and valuable the world, and the others we meet in it, are. In my own research and teaching, outreach keeps me from getting too set on my own point of view, and it reminds me to keep waking up that sense of curiosity and wonder every day, in myself and in my students, so that every day we can look back at having learned something we didn't know before.

Look for us at Exploration U again next year!

Thinking bilingually

By Frances Blanchette

Do bilinguals and monolinguals think differently from one another?

This question has been the focus of a lot of recent research in language science, and as it turns out, in certain domains the answer is a resounding yes. But of course, as with most interesting questions, there's a lot more to the answer than just a simple yes or no. In this piece, we've summarized some interesting recent findings for you.

Bilinguals and executive control

In recent decades, there has been a great deal of research showing that bilingual children and some bilingual adults demonstrate higher levels of "executive control" than monolinguals. So what is executive control, and why does it matter? When people select and monitor their own behavior to achieve a specific goal, they are using a kind of thinking called executive control. Researchers have demonstrated that bilinguals tend to be better at this kind of thinking. To illustrate, let's play a little game. Below you see a list of words written in different colors. Try naming the color each word is written in. (For a little extra fun, try timing yourself.)

Red
Blue
Purple
Green
Brown
Orange

As you may have noticed, it's pretty challenging to accomplish the goal of naming the colors in the face of conflicting information coming from the text. This task, called The Stroop Task, is therefore a good diagnostic of executive control.

We know from research that each time bilinguals speak, both of their languages are activated in the brain. This means that when bilinguals are getting ready to name something in one language, they have to inhibit information from the other language in order to say what they want to say. Researchers believe that this means bilinguals are exercising their executive control each time they speak, and that this is precisely what makes them so good at performing tasks like the Stroop Task, in which they have

to ignore conflicting information to accomplish a goal.

What about people who speak more than one dialect?

Some people grow up speaking more than one version or dialect of the same language. For example, right here at Penn State there are people who in their home community speak a dialect of English called Appalachian, and who use a different dialect in the University setting. Recently, a group of researchers in Greece asked whether the executive control advantage we've seen in bilingual children can also be found in children who speak more than one dialect of the same language.

To answer this question, the researchers studied children who speak two dialects of Greek: Cypriot (spoken in Cyprus), and the "Standard Modern" version of Greek. They found that although the differences are not as pronounced as when we compare bilinguals with monolinguals, children who speak two dialects of Greek are better at performing tasks that measure executive control (like the Stroop Task) than monolinguals. What this means is that, in the domain of executive control, people who speak more than one dialect may think more like bilinguals than monolinguals.

Research on the relationship between billectalism (speaking two dialects) and bilingualism is still very new, and many exciting questions are yet to be explored. We hope this summary serves as a good introduction, and inspires you to ask your own questions!

Dr. Kyriakos Antoniou and colleagues authored the Greek study, published in 2016 in the journal Cognition.

NEWS AND EVENTS



Global Connections International Children's Festival

On April 9th, 2016 we participated in the International Children's Festival held by Penn State's Global Connections at Calvary, Harvest Fields in Boalsburg. We met many wonderful families, and had great discussions about bilingualism and linguistic diversity. We hope to be invited back next year!



Bennett Family Center International Picnic

On May 11th, 2016 we took part in The Bennett Family Center's annual International Picnic. This wonderful event invites families to celebrate their cultural heritage, and we enjoyed playing games and talking to families about bilingualism, and linguistic heritage and diversity. We look forward to more collaborations with our partners at The Bennett Family Center.



Central PA Arts Fest

Come find us on July 13th during Children's Day at this summer's Central PA Arts Fest. We'll have crafts and games for kids, and we'll be there to talk with you and answer your questions about bilingualism. We hope to see you there!

Effective assessment for emergent bilinguals

By Alaina Eck

Bilingual children acquiring English in school often make mistakes that sound like those of monolingual children struggling with Specific Language Impairment or other language disorders. These mistakes, which are part of the typical language development for bilingual children, may include leaving out or adding sounds or words, or using word orders that are incorrect in English. In addition, cultural differences may influence the language use of bilingual children (e.g. not speaking directly to adults). Many teachers and speech-language pathologists are not trained to expect these errors or patterns from bilingual children, which can lead to unnecessary referrals to the speech-language pathologist (Crago, Genessee, & Paradis, 2011). This creates a strain on schools and districts with already limited resources, and can keep the child away from crucial classroom time.

When speech-language pathologists receive these referrals, they must carefully distinguish between language differences and language disorders. As a future speech-language pathologist potentially receiving these referrals, I began researching the

current guidelines to properly assess bilingual children. I found many of the guidelines and standards vague, and it seemed as though speech-language pathologists were left to determine for themselves whether they were qualified to make the proper determination for the child.

In my research, I distributed a survey to school-based speech-language pathologists across the country to gauge their self-perceived competency in tackling the important issue of assessment. As it turns out, speech-language pathologists who reported having specialized coursework and training, as well as those with experience working with bilinguals, reported being much more competent with the assessment of bilinguals. The results of my research thus points to the importance of increased development and training for speech-language pathologists in this area.

My research has led me to advocate for a standardized education and training program for speech-language pathologists, to prepare them to more effectively assess bilinguals. On a local level, the research supports a 'staff specialist' model, where a designated speech-

language pathologist would assess and serve any bilingual student referred within the district or geographic area. These 'specialists' would be speech-language pathologists with extensive training and experience working with bilingual students. In addition, speech-language pathologists can educate teachers about the typical language development patterns of bilingual children learning English to limit the confusion between language differences and language disorders.

Parents are also vital in the assessment process, as they are important resources regarding the language development of students in their home languages, the language patterns they observe outside of school, and any cultural practices that may be contributing to the observed differences. With increased education, collaboration, and mindfulness, all bilingual children can benefit from the effective assessments they deserve and receive all the resources they require to meet their full potential.

Alaina Eck recently graduated with Honors from PSU's Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. Contact her at aeck94@gmail.com.

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