

CRAM PRESENTS

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What does "being bilingual" mean?
Towards a psycholinguistic definition



The psycholinguistics of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and/or bilingualism is a difficult undertaking for many reasons, not least due to the fact that bilinguals and second language (L2) learners are not homogenous groups. In short, the individuals that make up these groups differ with respect to how, when, and how well they have acquired their two languages. Research has shown that such factors impact how bilinguals and L2 learners process and represent their languages in their mind. As a consequence, the results of psycholinguistic studies investigating bilingualism may differ drastically because the "bilinguals" of one study might not ultimately be comparable to the "bilinguals" of another study. It is thus crucial to tease apart the complex variables at play. In order to do so, not only does the field of psycholinguistics

need a comprehensive, inclusive and objective language assessment tool that can be used to adequately categorize participants, but we need to carefully determine how experimental data is affected by our categorizations. In the present talk I will present data from a number of different experimental paradigms conducted in our lab that integrate proficiency, age of acquisition, age of immersion, manner of acquisition, and language environment data in order to highlight the insights that can emerge when the multi-facted nature of "bilingualism" is more fully considered.

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