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ASPECTS OF COGNITIVE AND LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT
OF BILINGUAL CHILDREN : A STUDY OF ENGLISH-
LATVIAN BILINGUAL SCHOOLCHILDREN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES | (iv) |
| SUMMARY | (vi) |
| STATEMENT | (ix) |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | (x) |
| CHAPTER 1. BILINGUALISM AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT | 1 |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 2. The relationships between bilingualism and intelligence ... | 1 |
| 3. The effect of bilingualism on cognitive development ... | 14 |
| 4. Naturalistic observations of childhood bilingualism ... | 21 |
| 5. Theories of bilingualism | 23 |
| 6. Some aspects of bilingual functioning ... | 34 |
| 7. The effects of temporal and contextual factors on bilingual proficiency ... | 37 |
| 8. Statement of aims | 61 |
| CHAPTER 2. METHOD | 63 |
| 1. Subjects | 63 |
| 2. Selection of bilingual subjects | 64 |
| 3. Selection of monolingual subjects ... | 66 |
| 4. Selection of concurrent and consecutive bilingual subjects ... | 70 |
| 5. Test materials and procedures | 72 |
| 6. Order of presentation of tests | 85 |

| | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| CHAPTER 3. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS | ... | ... | ... | 86 |
| 1. Comparison of results of monolinguals and bilinguals | ... | ... | ... | 86 |
| 2. Comparison of results of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals | ... | ... | ... | 90 |
| 3. Summary of conclusions | ... | ... | ... | 102 |
| CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION | ... | ... | ... | 105 |
| 1. Monolingual-bilingual comparison | ... | ... | ... | 105 |
| 2. Concurrent-consecutive bilingual comparison | | | | 111 |
| 3. Implications of the results | ... | ... | ... | 118 |
| APPENDIX A. Sample letter sent to parents | ... | | | 121 |
| APPENDIX B. Background data of monolingual and bilingual samples | ... | | | 124 |
| APPENDIX C. Test materials | ... | ... | ... | 126 |
| APPENDIX D. Raw scores of monolingual and bilingual subjects on linguistic tasks | ... | | | 142 |
| APPENDIX E. Raw scores and difference scores of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals on linguistic tasks | ... | | | 143 |
| APPENDIX F. Mean scores of high and low intelligence concurrent and consecutive bilinguals | ... | ... | ... | 147 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | ... | ... | ... | 150 |

LIST OF TABLES

| TABLE | PAGE |
|---|------|
| 1. Comparison of monolingual and bilingual subjects on five background variables. | 69 |
| 2. Comparison of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals on five background variables. | 71 |
| 3. Mean scores of monolinguals and bilinguals on three linguistic skills measures. | 87 |
| 4. Analysis by t-test of scores of monolinguals and bilinguals on three linguistic skills measures. | 87 |
| 5. Percent correct responses of monolinguals and bilinguals on Concrete Reasoning Scale. | 88 |
| 6. Analysis by Chi-square and t-test of Concrete Reasoning Scale data of monolingual and bilingual subjects. | 89 |
| 7. Analysis of differences between concurrent and consecutive bilingual samples on four background variables. | 90 |
| 8. Data from Language Background Questionnaire for concurrent and consecutive bilinguals. | 92 |
| 9. (i) Mean scores on three English linguistic skill measures of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals. | 93 |
| (ii) Mean scores on three Latvian linguistic skills measures of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals. | 94 |
| 10. (i) Analysis of results of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals on three English linguistic tasks. | 95 |
| (ii) Analysis of results of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals on three Latvian linguistic tasks. | 95 |
| (iii) Analysis of difference score results on linguistic tasks for concurrent and consecutive bilinguals. | 97. |

| TABLE | PAGE |
|--|------|
| 11. Partial correlational analysis. | 98 |
| 12. Parallel line assay analysis. | 100 |
| 13. Percentage correct responses of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals on Concrete Reasoning Scale. | 101 |
| 14. Analysis by Chi-square and t-test of Concrete Reasoning Scale data of concurrent and consecutive bilinguals. | 102 |
| 15. Difference scores for linguistic skills of high intelligence concurrent and consecutive bilinguals. | 114 |
| 16. Difference scores for linguistic skills of low intelligence concurrent and consecutive bilinguals. | 114 |
| B(i) Raw score data from bilingual sample on five criteria used in matching procedure. | 124 |
| B(ii) Raw score data from monolingual sample on five criteria used in matching procedure. | 124 |
| D(i) Bilingual samples raw score data on linguistic tests. | 142 |
| D(ii) Monolingual samples raw score data on linguistic tests. | 142 |
| E(i) Raw score data from concurrent bilingual sample | 143 |
| E(ii) Raw score data from consecutive bilingual sample | 145 |
| F(i) Mean scores of high and low intelligence concurrent and consecutive bilinguals on linguistic measures | 147 |
| F(ii) Comparison of Concrete Reasoning Scale data of high and low intelligence concurrent and consecutive bilinguals | 148 |
| F(iii) Linguistic skills of high and low intelligence concurrent and consecutive bilinguals compared with monolingual matched sample scores. | 149 |

SUMMARY

Twenty three English-speaking monolingual children between the ages of 6 and 11 years, were matched for age, sex, school grade, intelligence as measured by Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices, and the occupational status of the father, with 23 Latvian-English speaking bilingual children. The performance of both groups on three linguistic tasks, i.e. word naming, speed of reading and sentence construction, was compared. The cognitive development stage reached by the two groups was assessed using Siegelman and Block's (1969) form A of Smedslund's (1964) Concrete Reasoning Scale. The four items on this scale measure understanding of concepts of conservation of discontinuous quantity, reversal of spatial order, conservation of length and transitivity of length.

There were no significant differences between the monolingual and bilingual subjects on any of the three linguistic measures. The scores of the bilingual subjects exceeded those of the monolingual subjects on every item of the Concrete Reasoning Scale, but the differences were not statistically significant.

The bilingual sample was divided into concurrent and consecutive subgroups on the basis of the age at which the second language had been introduced. The concurrent group's mean age at the time of introduction of the second language was 27 months, and the consecutive group's mean age at the time of introduction of the second language was 47 months. There were 11 subjects in the concurrent group, 10 boys and 1 girl, while the consecutive group had 12 subjects, 7 boys and 5 girls. Although it was not possible to match the groups on critical variables, statistical analysis showed no significant differences, between the concurrent and consecutive bilingual samples, in age, Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices scores, grade attended at school or the occupational status of the father.

The concurrent and consecutive bilingual groups were compared on the same three linguistic skills tasks as the monolinguals, but in both Latvian and English. Difference scores between their performance on these tasks in both languages gave measures of bilingual balance or proficiency. Form A of Smedslund's (1964) Concrete Reasoning Scale was used to assess cognitive skills.

Although the consecutive bilinguals performed better than the concurrent bilinguals on almost all the linguistic

tasks, in both languages, there were no significant differences between the groups on these measures. Similarly, the bilingual balance measures, i.e. the difference scores between performance in Latvian and in English, showed no significant differences between the two groups.

The results from the Concrete Reasoning Scale present the same picture. On all but the first item, where both groups scored to criterion, the consecutive bilinguals gave more correct answers, and more adequate reasons for those answers than did the concurrent bilinguals, but none of the differences reached significance.

The possible reasons for these findings, and their implications for theoretical models of bilingualism, are discussed.

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University. Nor, to the best of my knowledge and belief, does it contain any material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Inara Proske

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