

Testing for Reversed Language Dominance Effect in Bulgarian-English Bilinguals: Evidence from Read-Aloud Task

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Abstract:

Bilinguals are typically more proficient in one language that is regarded as their dominant language (L1). Speech in the dominant language is characterized with frequent usage, faster retrieval of lexical items, and fewer errors relative to the non-dominant language (L2). But when bilinguals are cued to switch back and forth between languages, dominance sometimes reverses—in this context bilinguals demonstrate better performance in their non-dominant compared to their dominant language, a phenomenon known as reversed language dominance effect. This unusual pattern has been replicated in bilinguals of many different language combinations and in a number of tasks. The results, however, are not consistent across studies and there is a limitation of language variety. The current study turns to the Bulgarian-English language pair, which represents linguistically and typologically distant families: Slavic and Germanic. Speech production was elicited by asking 48 Bulgarian dominant Bulgarian-English bilinguals to read aloud mixed-language paragraphs with high frequency switching. The switch words were separated by target language (Bulgarian vs English), switch type (switch back to the default language vs switch out of the default language), and part of speech of the switch word (content vs function). Switching difficulty was measured by production of cross-language intrusion errors on the switch words (e.g., mistakenly saying *door* instead of *врата* when reading: *На входната door се почука*). All participants were Bulgarian dominant, but they produced more intrusion errors when switch words were written in their dominant language than in their non-dominant language (i.e., they exhibited reversed language dominance effect).

Keywords:

Bilingualism, inhibition, reading aloud, intrusion errors, reversed language dominance effect.