

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

Participating countries: AU,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 and CA, LB, RU, US, ZA

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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. The group developed 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 were designed 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 and comprehension. The stories have been designed to be appropriate cross-culturally and include both story grammar components (goal, attempt, outcome) and linguistic features (lexis, morphosyntax, syntax) as well as uniquely bilingual measures (language dominance, codeswitching and code interference). Syntactic and lexical features are 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 designed a range of rapid 'screening'/assessment tools including non-word repetition, word comprehension and naming tasks, and evaluated their potential for identifying SLI in a variety of bilingual populations. Selected properties of target items were manipulated to investigate whether they help to distinguish between second language problems and SLI. WG3 was also gathering data on early productive lexical development of bilingual children under the age of 3 years (using MacArthur-Bates CDIs) in order to assess the gap between the lexicon of bilingual and monolingual populations, 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 tested 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 were tested across languages, cultures and ages. Working memory and inhibition were found to discriminate children with SLI from typically developing bilinguals.

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.

Outcomes:

- Language Impairment Testing in Multilingual Setting (LITMUS) - composed of tests from all four WGs, including a bilingual sensitive sentence repetition, a multilingual narrative protocol and scoring (MAIN), a quasi-universal non-word repetition, a crosslinguistic lexical tasks (CLT), executive function tasks and a Parents Bilingual Questionnaire (PABIQ)
- www.bi-sli.org includes information about both past and future activities as well as separate pages with FAQ for parents and clinicians in many of the Action languages.
- A methods book for researchers and practitioners; "Methods for assessing multilingual children: disentangling bilingualism from Language Impairment." To appear in Multilingual Matters (2014)
- A position paper with a rationale for decisions about whether to educate bilingual children with SLI in a single (home or school) language or bilingually.