Social Perceptions of Bilingualism and Early Language Development

Sarah Surrain, Gladys Aguilar, Alexandra Chen, Dasha Maghooli, So Yeon Shin & Gigi Luk
Harvard Graduate School of Education

BACKGROUND

• Home language environments influence oral language development in both monolingual and bilingual families. (Hurt & Biley, 1992; Rowe, 2012; Hoff, et al., 2012; De Houwer, 2014)

• Hamers and Blanc (1982) proposed that for bilingual children, social perceptions of the value of each language would also mediate language acquisition, but this has not been tested empirically.

• We know that parent beliefs about literacy influence reading socialization at home and early language development. (DeBaryshe, 1995)

• For parents who use a non-English language at home, how do they perceive the value of bilingualism in society and for their children? And what is the relationship between beliefs, usage and children’s vocabulary acquisition in two languages?

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

• 210 adults (19-79 yrs old, m=42 yrs), representative of U.S. population in geographic region, education, and race

• Recruited through Qualtrics Panels

• Language Background:
  - 23% never learned an add’l language
  - 31% used to speak or tried to learn an add’l language
  - 46% spoke at least two languages
  - 17 Non-Eng. languages spoken, Inc. Spanish (70%) & French (8%)
  - 109 were parents of children under 18
  - 48 were parents of toddlers exposed to English and Spanish

MEASURES

• 20-minute online survey

• Demographic background, language usage, & home literacy activities in most used Non-English language (Hurt & Biley, 2015; Velasquez, 2014)

• MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories (CDI) short form in English and Spanish (Fenson, et al., 2000; Jackson-Maldonado, Marchen & Ferrall, 2013)

• Perception of Bilingualism (POB) attitude scales (1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree)

• Parent education & home literacy (controlling for age and Span. usage)

• Expected positive effect of parent education and home literacy for age and Span. usage.

RESULTS

CONCLUSIONS

• Both Perception of Bilingualism (POB) scales had strong internal reliability, suggesting that items may tap into two related constructs and reflect consistency across the items in the current survey.

• Adults who used more of a non-English language reported more positive perceptions of the value of bilingualism, both for society and for their children.

• Consistent with prior research, parent education and home literacy were key predictors of toddlers’ vocabulary, but the influence of Spanish usage and perceptions of bilingualism warrants further examination.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

• U.S. context; parallel versions will be developed for international comparisons

• Small sample; we will continue to collect online data

• Bias towards adults who seek out surveys online; data collection in school districts and lab-based studies will diversify our sample and provide more enriched sociolinguistic information for data interpretation

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Jeanne Chall Reading Lab Travel Grant for supporting this presentation and all of our participants who spent their time and energy on our survey.

Contact: sarahsurrain@harvard.edu, scholar.harvard.edu/sarahsurrain