

Bilingual Development and Language Assessment

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The situation of children growing up in multilingual settings is becoming more and more frequent. For many of these children, the acquisition of the national language begins with organized (pre-) school, which makes them early second language (L2) learners. This means that these children very often perform significantly below monolingual children on standardized language measures. This poor performance combined with the fact that areas of difficulty are often identical in bilingual children and children with Specific Language Impairment has been shown to lead to both over-diagnosis and under-diagnosis of SLI, with damaging consequences on the individual and social level. This talk explores similarities and differences in bilingual and impaired language development pointing out consequences for the search for clinical markers but also for theories of language development and impairment. I will also report on projects developing within and from COST 0804 which are addressing the problem in various ways, trying to further our understanding of what constitutes normal language development in bilingual/second language children and to develop cross linguistic tools for language assessment. Especially the second goal calls for new measures and assessment procedures concentrating on tasks involving non-word or sentence repetition, executive function and linguistically complex constructions such as question formation and subordination.