

Lexical access in bilingual speech production: evidence from language switching in highly-proficient bilinguals and L2 learners

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One of the most challenging questions for models of bilingual language production refers to how bilingual speakers manage to select the words in the intended language and prevent massive interference from the other language.

I will discuss two theoretical proposals about how lexical access in bilingual speakers proceed and I will bring new experimental evidence suggesting that the mechanisms in charge of lexical selection may differ depending on the proficiency level of the bilingual speakers in their two languages.

The experimental evidence that I will discuss comes from a language switching paradigm. In this paradigm participants have to name pictures in their two languages in an unpredictable manner (the language in which a given picture has to be named is signaled by its color). The pattern of switching performance for different populations of bilingual speakers differ in

interesting ways, revealing that the switching performance of highly- proficient bilinguals does not seem to be subject to the same mechanisms as that of the L2 learners.

I interpret these results as revealing that the lexical access mechanism of highly proficient and L2 learners are governed by different principles.

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