

Abstract

While research on the consequences of bilingualism on cognition (e.g., executive control) has been flourishing, studies on the impact that bilingualism can have on social cognition are scarce and inconclusive. This dissertation investigates the relationship between bilingualism and social cognition, focusing primarily on social biases. Across five investigations (two published papers, three manuscripts), I elaborated and tested a complex framework which grasps how bilingualism and social biases relate.

Paper 1 addressed the reality of the monolingual language experience, a crucial step for understanding bilingualism. The findings illustrated the heterogeneity of monolingualism, proposing new approaches to its operationalization. This is a key issue for studies comparing bilinguals and monolinguals. Manuscripts 2 and 3 investigated whether bilingualism is associated with the expression of fewer biases in adults and whether this relationship is mediated by executive control and moderated by motivation. Manuscript 4 extended the framework to the flexibility of social categorization, a process closely related to the expression of social biases. Manuscripts 2-4 depicted a complex relationship between bilingualism and social cognition that depends on language-related, cognitive, and motivational factors. Thus, they draw attention to the need for interdisciplinary approaches when investigating the consequences of bilingualism in social cognition. Lastly, Paper 5 assessed whether experimentally induced goals also modulate the flexibility of social categorization. The results added another level of analysis to the topic by revealing how processing goals can influence the flexibility of social categorization. Taken together, the work presented in this dissertation advances our understanding of the relevance of bilingualism for social cognition from an integrative perspective.