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Processing of Emotional Expressions in Hindi L1-English L2 Bilinguals

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Abstract

The first language (L1) of multilingual speakers has been regarded as more emotionally resonant due to its early acquisition and, consequently, closer link to personal experiences. However, recent research indicates that the second language (L2) may also evoke meaningful emotional responses, especially among immigrants and individuals immersed in the L2 culture. In India, English-as-an-L2 is used predominantly in academia, whereas native languages like Hindi are primarily used in personal contexts. Building on this natural contextual divide, our study focused on Indian Hindi(L1)–English(L2) bilinguals, examining their emotional reactivity to emotionally charged stimuli in (i) Hindi and English and (ii) personal and professional contexts, using skin conductance responses (SCRs) extracted from electrodermal activity (EDA) data. Our results indicate that Hindi-L1 induces high reactivity regardless of context, whereas English-L2 does it selectively in the professional context. This contrast implies a dynamic relationship between bilingual processing and the domain of discourse.