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Authors

Benitez, Viridiana
Smith, Linda B.

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Cross-Situational Word Learning in Bilinguals

Viridiana Benitez

Indiana University

Linda B. Smith

Indiana University

Abstract: Recent research indicates that fluency in more than one language has consequences for fundamental aspects of the cognitive system beyond that of speaking two languages. Specifically, a now growing body of research shows speakers of two languages can allocate their attention more efficiently than speakers of one language in nonlinguistic tasks (e.g., Bialystok, Klein, Craik, & Viswanathan, 2004). In addition, bilingualism has also been shown to promote abilities in the linguistic domain, such as the ability to learn novel words better than monolinguals (Kaushanskaya and Marian, 2009). In the present study, we investigated how the efficiency of attentional allocation and the ability to learn novel words may interact and affect performance in Yu and Smith's (2007) cross-situational word learning paradigm. Monolingual and bilingual adults' learning of 18 novel words using this paradigm were examined, and results help to better understand the effects of bilingualism on cognition.