

Bilingualism in children

[Family](#), [Children](#)



Bilingualism is the production and/or comprehension of two languages by the same individual (Cummins, 1981). Many children of varying nationality, acquire this ability of learning two languages through cultural maintenance and educational enrichment. Furthermore, the media continuously bombards children of stimulation of the other language (Cummins, 1981). Cummins (1981) stated that there is a strong tendency among children of replacing the first language with the other. A series of tests were made by Feldman and Shen (1969) about some language-related cognitive advantages of bilingual five year olds.

Three tasks for children were made accordingly to gather information. These tasks of increasing difficulty were (1) object constancy, (2) naming and (3) using labels in sentences, respectively . In object constancy, children were primarily shown with objects such as cups, plates, sponge, match and suction cup soap holder. These objects were later physically transformed in front of them. Crushing the cups, burning the match and painting the plates were some examples of transformation. Transformed objects are placed beside an identical pre-transformed objects.

Afterwards, the children were asked to identify which among the two was primarily shown. Naming, on the other hand, purposely tests the child's ability to use verbal labels to name familiar objects. The experimenter tried to confuse the children by switching the names of the familiar object and designating nonsensical names to objects. For example, calling an airplane as " car" and relabeling the cup as " wug". The children were asked which among the objects was really an airplane. They were also asked which one was called a " wug" and then they were asked what it really was.

In the third experiment, the child was requested to show his ability of using three sorts of labels in simple relational sentences such as " The cup is on the plate. " These labels, as discussed in naming, were common names, switched common names and nonsense names. The principle for using simple relational sentences was that referential word meaning is the simplest sort of meaning. Words like " cup", " plate" and even the part of the predicate " on" can all be thought of as referring to things. Results showed that bilinguals perform significantly better in the said three tasks than monolinguals do (Feldman & Shen, 1969).

Moreover, bilinguals' advantage over monolinguals was more apparent in comprehension than production measures. These means they execute better where nonverbal pointing responses were required. In addition, functions related to labeling would be more advanced by having two languages. Research by Bialystok (2004), on the other hand, has shown that bilingual children develop control processes more readily than monolinguals do. They respond more rapidly to conditions that placed greater demands on working memory and carry out controlled processes more effectively (Bialystok, 2004).

On the other hand, Macnamara (1966) argued some studies have reported negative effects of bilingualism (as cited in Bialystok, 2004). In Feldman & Shen's (1969) experiment, it was found out that monolinguals do better in the use of either common names alone or nonsense names alone. Furthermore, Fishman (1967) added that disadvantages commonly associated with bilingualism would not appear in bilinguals whose languages were situation specific (as cited in Feldman & Shen, 1969). It was an

accepted notion that bilinguals had deficits compared with monolingual peers.

Nonetheless, studies show significant cognitive advantages of children with bilingual capacities. These advantages were dominant in comprehending rather than performing verbal actions. Other research pointed out bilingual advantages in the areas of creativity, problem solving and perceptual disembedding (Bialystok, 2004). These advantages of bilinguals can be uniquely attributed to an early development in association and labeling skills (Feldman & Shen, 1969). Bibliography: Bialystok, E. , Craik, F. I. M. , Klein, R. & Viswanathan, M. (2004) Bilingualism, Aging, and Cognitive Control: Evidence From the Simon Task.

Psychology and Aging, 19 (2), 290-303. Feldman, C. & Shen, M. Some Language-Related Cognitive Advantages of Bilingual Five Year Olds. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp_nfpb=true&&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED031307&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED031307 Cummins, J. Bilingualism and Minority-Language Children. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp_nfpb=true&&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED215557&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED215557