Research report

Involvement of the middle frontal gyrus in language switching as revealed by electrical stimulation mapping and functional magnetic resonance imaging in bilingual brain tumor patients

Joanna Sierpowska a,b,1, Alejandro Fernandez-Coello c,d,1, Alba Gomez-Andres a,b, Angels Camins e, Sara Castañer e, Montserrat Juncadella f, Andreu Gabarrós c,** and Antoni Rodriguez-Fornells a,b,g,*

a Cognition and Brain Plasticity Group [Bellvitge Biomedical Research Institute – IDIBELL], L'Hospital de de Llobregat, Barcelona, Spain
b Dept. of Cognition, Development and Education Psychology, Campus Bellvitge, University of Barcelona, L'Hospital de de Llobregat, Barcelona, Spain
c Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge (HUB), Neurosurgery Section, Campus Bellvitge, University of Barcelona – IDIBELL, L'Hospital de de Llobregat, Barcelona, Spain
d CIBER de Bioingenierı ´a, Biomateriales y Nanomedicina (CIBER-BBN), Barcelona, Spain
e Institut de Diagnı ´stic per la Imatge, Centre Bellvitge, Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge, L'Hospital de de Llobregat, Barcelona, Spain
f Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge (HUB), Neurology Section, Campus Bellvitge, University of Barcelona – IDIBELL, L'Hospital de de Llobregat, Barcelona, Spain
g ICREA, Pg. Lluı ´s Companys 23, Barcelona, Spain

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Abstract

Neural basis of language switching and the cognitive models of bilingualism remain controversial. We explored the functional neuroanatomy of language switching implementing a new multimodal protocol assessing neuropsychological, functional magnetic resonance and intraoperative electrical stimulation mapping results.

A prospective series of 9 Spanish–Catalan bilingual candidates for awake brain surgery underwent a specific language switching paradigm implemented both before and after surgery, throughout the electrical stimulation procedure and during functional magnetic resonance imaging.

Abbreviations: LS, Language switching; ESM, electrical stimulation mapping; IFG, inferior frontal gyrus; MFG, middle frontal gyrus; SFG, superior frontal gyrus.

* Corresponding author. Cognition and Brain Plasticity Unit, IDIBELL, University of Barcelona, Campus Bellvitge, L' Hospital de de Llobregat, Barcelona, 08097, Spain.

** Corresponding author.
E-mail address: antoni.rodriguez@icrea.cat (A. Rodriguez-Fornells).

1 Both authors declare equal contribution.
1. Introduction

It is an intriguing topic how bilinguals are able to switch, seemingly effortlessly, between the languages they speak (Crinion et al., 2006; Rodriguez-Fornells, Rotte, Heinze, Nösselt, & Münte, 2002). Language switching (LS) allows effective communication in bilingual communities by enabling individuals to appropriately select the target language as a function of external cues such as linguistic knowledge of their interlocutor, face-related cues or contextual effects (Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012; Gollan & Ferreira, 2009; Rodriguez-Fornells et al., 2011; Soverij, Rodriguez-Fornells, & Laine, 2011). When bilingual language control is impaired, LS can be considered pathological (Fabbro et al., 2000). Pathological switching is defined as the phenomena of passing from one utterance/sentence to another without appropriately adapting the language in use to the given situation (Fabbro et al., 2000). As every cognitive function, LS may be impaired if the intrinsic brain organization is impacted by a brain lesion (i.e., brain tumor).

Intraoperative electrical stimulation mapping (ESM) has been the gold standard technique for identifying essential sensory and motor cortex as well as cortical language areas in patients undergoing tumor resection (Duffau, 2008; Ojemann, 1983; Penfield & Roberts, 1959). Although single-language naming tasks are the most extended tool to map language function during awake brain surgery (Corina et al., 2010; Havas et al., 2015; Lubrano, Prod’homme, Demontet, & Köppe, 2012), there is an increasing need to adapt intraoperative neuropsychological tasks to map specific brain functions such as LS in order to preserve an optimal quality of life according to the patient’s specific life characteristics (Fernandez-Coello et al., 2013). However, the literature concerning the intraoperative monitoring of LS in multilingual brain tumor patients is rather scarce.

Even if the intraoperative evidences on LS are yet to be explored, evidence from other studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) (Abutalebi et al., 2008; Chee, Soon, & Lee, 2003; Hernandez, 2009; Hernandez, Dapretto, & Mazzotti, 2001; Hernandez, Martinez, & Kohnert, 2000; Rodriguez-Fornells et al., 2002), electroencephalography (EEG) (Khateb et al., 2007; Kuipers & Thierry, 2010; Moreno, Fedemerителей, & Kutas, 2002; Proverbio, Leoni, & Zani, 2004) and transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) (Holtzheimer, Fawaz, Wilson, & Avery, 2005; Nardone et al., 2011) support the idea that LS, similarly as task switching, is sustained (at least partially) by a more general executive control system (Fabbro, 2001; Guo, Liu, Misra, & Kroll, 2011; Hernandez et al., 2001; Hervais-Adelman, Moser-Mercer, & Gol estani, 2011; Rodriguez-Fornells, De Diego Balaguer, Kohnert, & Münte, 2006). However, there is no agreement concerning the brain regions specifically recruited during LS. On the one hand, Fabbro (2001) stated that voluntary language switching is based on a more general control mechanism independently of language processing suggesting that pathological LS results from pragmatic disorders of communication (not benefiting from contextual/social cues that support effective communication). Following this perspective, LS would be sustained by non-domain specific cognitive control systems. In contrast, other studies directly comparing task switching to LS suggest some differences in control mechanisms across linguistic and non-linguistic domains (Calabria et al., 2016; Crinion et al., 2006; Prior and Gollan, 2011; Weissberger et al., 2012), proposing the implication of language domain specific areas in LS compared to cognitive switching occurring when speaking only one language.
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