



PICTURE NAMING OF COGNATE AND NON-COGNATE NOUNS IN BILINGUAL APHASIA

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Previous research has found differences in the speed and accuracy of responses involving concrete cognate nouns and non-cognate nouns in a range of written and "on-line" tasks using neurologically unimpaired, bilingual adults. The present study investigated whether cognateness affects verbal confrontation naming performance in balanced French/English bilinguals ($N = 15$ aphasic and 15 non-aphasic subjects). Subjects met selection criteria for equal proficiency, regular use, and early acquisition of both languages. Results of a picture naming test show that cognate pictures were more often correctly named in both languages than were non-cognates. Some error types and self-correction behaviors also varied with cognate status. There were similarities between the results of this study and those of previous studies of monolingual naming. Some error types and self-correction strategies appear to be unique to bilingual speakers. Theoretical questions and treatment applications arising from these findings are outlined. © 1999 by Elsevier Science Inc.

Educational Objectives: After reading the following article, the reader will be able to (1) define the words "cognate" and "balanced bilingualism," (2) list the types of errors and self-correction behaviors of bilingual aphasic patients in a picture-naming task and compare these to the error types of unilingual patients, and (3) list the treatment strategies that may be appropriate for bilingual but not for unilingual aphasic patients.

KEY WORDS: Aphasia; Anomia; Bilingualism

INTRODUCTION

As the demographics of many areas of the world change, speech-language pathologists are seeing increasing numbers of bilingual aphasic adults. Bilingualism is no longer an occasional feature in neurogenic language disorders,

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but is “a phenomenon every clinic must be prepared to cope with” (Paradis, 1995, p. 219). Bilingual aphasia is, therefore, a topic of increasing clinical interest.

Much of the pioneering psycholinguistic research on bilingualism asked, “Do bilinguals have one lexicon or two?” Although it was a useful starting point for a new field of study, this question is now seen as too broad to be meaningful (Altenberg, 1989; Diller, 1974; Durgunoglu & Roediger, 1987; Snodgrass, 1993). Just as the question “Is aphasia therapy efficacious?” has been replaced by “What type of therapy is efficacious for whom?” (to paraphrase Wertz, 1987), the question of “one lexicon or two” has been replaced by “What kinds of lexical stores or processes exist for what kinds of bilinguals for what types of words and for which language tasks?”

This study asks whether cognate status (cognates are word pairs with similar form and the same meaning in two languages) influences naming accuracy and error types on a confrontation naming task. How words are represented or retrieved in the bilingual lexical system(s) is not addressed for two main reasons. First, the inferences drawn from lexical processing studies are controversial. Differences across a bilingual’s two languages or differences between bilingual and unilingual performance are often interpreted as revealing the organization of the bilingual lexicon. This practice is called into question by studies by Kolers and Roediger (1984) and by Durgunoglu and Roediger (1987) showing that the same subjects produce results consistent with both a combined store (items from both languages in a single lexicon) and a dual store (separate, language-specific lexicons) depending upon the experimental task. Diller (1974) and Altenberg (1989) have both raised theoretical objections to the single/dual store debate. It seems prudent, therefore, to follow Snodgrass’s (1993) advice:

What can we conclude from this review about the organization of the bilingual lexicon? The major conclusion I reached is that investigators were concluding too much about the process underlying each of the tasks on the basis of too few data. I would urge researchers of the bilingual lexicon to spend more time collecting data so that we can be sure that a particular pattern really exists before making sweeping theoretical statements about the meaning of this pattern. (p.110)

Second, while we await the resolution of the broad questions of how bilingual language is organized, bilingual aphasic patients require assessment and treatment. Knowing the influence of cognate status on confrontation naming in bilingual adults with aphasia can be of immediate practical benefit. If cognates are easier to produce than non-cognates, treatment might focus more on the latter, for instance.

Although there is little clinically oriented literature on how to assess and treat bilingual aphasia (Roberts, 1998), the studies of lexical performance in

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