

## ABSTRACT

Divergent hypotheses exist concerning the types of knowledge underlying early bilingualism, with some portraying a troubled course marred by language delays and confusion, and others portraying one that is largely unremarkable. Three French & English young bilinguals were compared to an extraordinary group of bilinguals: three hearing children acquiring a signed and a spoken language, Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) & French. The Results showed that both groups (1) achieved the classic milestones in each language at approx the same time, and followed the same course as monolinguals, (2) exhibited comparable rates of lexical development in each language over time, (3) differentiated between their two lexicons from their earliest use of words (signs) in each of their languages ("translation equivalents"), (4) altered their language choice depending upon interlocutor's language ("interlocutor sensitivity"), and (5) produced language mixing rates that reflected parental mixing rates. (6) LSQ-French children produced signs & words simultaneously, but they were highly patterned. We conclude that the young bilingual's capacity to differentiate between its two languages is in place prior to first words, and we hypothesize that this capacity may derive from mechanisms that enable the establishment of early phonological representations!

## BACKGROUND

Divergent Perceptions: "The Bilingual Paradox"  
Bilingualism is good...is bad

Divergent Hypotheses: Types of Knowledge

a. One-System Hypothesis<sup>2</sup>

Young bilinguals begin with a single, fused linguistic representation of two languages that differentiates over time

Evidence: Different developmental rates of two languages; language mixing

b. Two-System Hypothesis<sup>3</sup>

Young bilinguals possess two representations of their two languages, although precisely when this occurs is not known because subjects are typically in the two-word stage (after 18 months)

Evidence: Patterned nature of language mixes; interlocutor sensitivity

## OBJECTIVES

What is the Knowledge Underlying Early Bilingual Language Acquisition?

A. Is infant bilingual acquisition fundamentally similar to monolingual acquisition or is it "delayed?"

Examined: Timing Milestones; Lexical Rate & Growth

B. Do young bilinguals differentiate their two lexicons? When does this begin?

Examined: Translation Equivalents

C. Is language mixing an index of language "confusion?"

Examined: Relationship between Child Mixing & Parental Mixing; Interlocutor Sensitivity; Sequential & Simultaneous Language Mixing

## INNOVATIONS

First-Time Empirical Study Of Bilingual Infants from ages 10 months, in addition to comparative analyses with older bilingual children

Unique Population

TYPICAL BILINGUALS

2 Spoken Languages

Exclusively Sequential Production of Words

UNIQUE BILINGUALS

1 Signed & 1 Spoken Language

Potentially Possible Simultaneous Sign & Speech

Will children exploit this possibility?

Principled or Confused?

## PREDICTIONS

Fresh Insights From Signing-Speaking Bilinguals

Once the physical constraint of the mouth is removed, these children should exploit the dual modality possibilities in ways that provide fresh insights into the knowledge underlying all bilingual acquisition

One-System Hypothesis

Delay: Should exhibit differential rates across sign & speech due to maturational differences between hands & tongue

Confusion

Interlocutor Sensitivity: Should randomly flip from one language to the other  
Language Mixing: Should exhibit no internal systematic patterns

Two-System Hypothesis

Delay: Should show no delay

Confusion

Interlocutor Sensitivity: Should exhibit a patterned relationship between language choice & adult language

Language Mixing: Simultaneous language mixing may exist, but it should exhibit internal systematic patterns

## SUBJECTS

6 Hearing Children: 3 LSQ & French, 3 French & English

Studied over 1 year: 6 months approx reported here

	Language	Sex	Ages studied From - To Approximate
Cell 1	LSQ & Fr Fr & Eng	M F	10 mths- 2;0 yrs
Cell 2	LSQ & Fr Fr & Eng	F F	2;5 yrs- 3;5 yrs
Cell 3	LSQ & Fr Fr & Eng	F M	3;5 yrs- 4;5 yrs