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Translanguaging and the Bilingual Brain

Globalisation and the widespread use of the internet have caused bilingualism to be on the rise, with more than half of the world's population being bilingual (Grosjean 2010). The social attitudes towards bilingualism have somewhat shifted. The assumption used to be that bilinguals were at a cognitive disadvantage in comparison with their monolingual peers who have similar socio-cultural backgrounds due to the cognitive system being overloaded resulting in slower information processing, but this claim has been disputed (Kovacs 2007). In fact, numerous scholars such as Bialystok (2001) claim that there are actually cognitive benefits to being bilingual such as divergent thinking and creativity (Kharkhurin 2007), metalinguistic awareness (Friesen and Bialystok 2012), improved memory skills (Pavlenko 1999), multitasking ability (Poarch and Bialystok 2015) and arithmetic skills (Rusconi et al. 2007).

In the bilingual language processing system the two language channels interact with one another which can lead to cases of one or the other language becoming more dominant, switching between two languages and modifications of linguistic forms (Kecskes and Papp 2000). The umbrella term I shall use to describe this mixing of two separate languages is *translanguaging* which Canagarajah defines as "the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system" (2011: 401). The difference between translanguaging and code-switching is that code-switching assumes that the bilingual has two separate monolingual codes corresponding to each of their two languages that can be used without reference to each other. Translanguaging, on the other hand, indicates that bilinguals have a single linguistic system from which they select lexical, syntactic and pragmatic features in order to communicate more effectively (Celice and Seltzer 2011). Likewise, there is evidence that supports how translanguaging is beneficial for language acquisition and ease of communication because individuals are able to express themselves more freely in an environment such as the classroom (Garcia 2009).

The main research question I wish to address is as follows: if competency in two languages enables the bilingual to process information more efficiently whilst filtering out what is unnecessary and outperforming monolinguals in tasks that measure attention span control when using L1 or L2 in monolingual communication, how would this compare to when the bilinguals are faced with translingual communication? In other words, I wish to find out whether language comprehension would be even more enhanced and the aforementioned cognitive abilities such as working memory even more maximized when reading a translingual text than reading a monolingual text. I focus on two lines of argumentation:

1. Does translanguaging lead to faster and more efficient language comprehension and does it enhance the attention span in comparison with the reading comprehension of monolingual texts?
2. Does translanguaging augment working (short-term) memory in situation-specific tasks?

The impetus for my research question were the results obtained from my Master Thesis questionnaire where the majority of participants claimed they mix languages due to ease of communication, and this dissertation may provide the explanation as to why people seemingly find it easier to engage in translanguaging. Regarding my methodology, I will be using an experimental approach to test whether bilinguals who presumably all have to some extent the cognitive advantage of enhanced working memory are able to remember more information when reading a translingual text as opposed to a monolingual text. The data shall be obtained using an eye-tracking tool at the Heidelberg University Language and Cognition Lab to measure the reading performance of bilinguals in comprehending monolingual and translingual texts.

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