

Linguistic and cognitive profile of children raised in intentional bilingualism: insights from cross-group comparison

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Bilingual children often score lower than monolingual peers on single-language vocabulary measures, but most evidence comes from bilingualism in migrant or heritage-language contexts. Much less is known about intentional bilingualism, where caregivers deliberately introduce a non-native additional language (L2) at home. For example, Polish-speaking families living in Poland address their children at least partially in English. While this practice is gaining popularity among parents in Eastern Europe and Asia, it remains unclear how regular L2 contact affects the child's development in the first language – the societal language of the community and the first language of the child's parents.

We report preliminary results from an ongoing project comparing preschoolers raised in intentional Polish–English bilingualism with monolingual Polish-speaking peers, tested in Polish (L1). Across tasks the bilingual group included 27–34 children and the monolingual group 12–18 (aged ~3–6 years; bilingual $M = 4.5$, monolingual $M = 4.7$). Bilingual children reportedly hear a non-Polish language, mostly English, for about 36% of their day (range 10–80%) and mainly from parents.

We explored the developmental profile of children raised in non-native bilingualism in terms of language and cognitive skills. The linguistic dimension included receptive and expressive vocabulary (LITMUS CLTs), comprehension of metacognitive verbs (MetVoc), morphosyntactic skills (short version of LITMUS SRep), whereas the cognitive dimension explored nonverbal reasoning (Binet), working memory (Digit Span), card sorting (SKD), theory-of-mind reasoning (TRM), and emotion understanding and naming (SkaRE).

Age-controlled analyses showed no disadvantage for bilingual children in CLT receptive or expressive vocabulary. However, bilingual children scored lower in metacognitive verb comprehension (10.5 vs. 12.3, $p < .001$) and sentence repetition (11.5 vs. 17.2, $p < .001$). Bilinguals are not disadvantaged in nonverbal reasoning, card sorting, or theory of mind. In contrast, their scores were significantly lower on the socio-emotional scale (9.0 vs. 10.4, $p = .003$), especially emotion naming and naming emotions in social contexts.

These preliminary findings suggest intentional bilingualism is not linked to a general L1 disadvantage, but rather to selective differences in tasks requiring complex verbal processing and explicit naming of internal or emotional states, domains sensitive to L1 input quantity and quality. Notably, sentence repetition, a sensitive index of morphosyntactic ability, showed one of the clearest gaps; this nuances earlier reports of relatively spared morphosyntax in intentionally bilingual children (Banasik-Jemielanik et al., 2025) and suggests the picture may depend on the demands of the task used. Planned analyses will test between-group differences while controlling for age, English exposure, and parental English proficiency, moving beyond simple group-mean comparisons.

References

Banasik-Jemielniak, N., Obarska, M., Misiak, M., Wajs, S., Kochańska, M., Rowicka, M., Kałowski, P., Walczak, D. & Biedrzyńska, A. (2025). Intentional bilingualism does not hinder morphosyntactic development in L1: A study with children speaking Polish. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 13670069251398735.