

Processes and Mechanisms of Bilingual Control: Insights from Monolingual Task Performance Extended to Simultaneous Interpretation

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Abstract

A topical question in the study of bilingualism from a psycholinguistic perspective is how bilinguals manage to produce relatively pure monolingual language output when the communicative setting requires them to do so. Models that account for this behaviour assume subtle control processes that differentially activate and/or inhibit each of the two underlying language sub-systems and that inhibit — prior to articulation — output of the non-target language sub-system that might otherwise seep through. The control operations in simultaneous interpreting are likely to be even more complex due to the fact that this form of language behaviour demands that both of the interpreter's language sub-systems are activated, but possibly to a different extent. In this paper we will discuss a number of views on bilingual language control in "monolingual" tasks and, especially, in simultaneous interpreting, which presumably is the cognitively most demanding "bilingual" task. A monolingual task (as we define it) is one where, in theory, the (bilingual) participants only have to address one of their language sub-systems and where, ideally, pure output is produced. A bilingual task is one where task performance requires that both language sub-systems are implicated. A number of studies suggest that the control exerted by bilinguals in monolingual and bilingual language tasks is effectuated by a more general cognitive system that takes care of the control of action in

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general. An attempt will be made to relate simultaneous interpreting to this more general theory of control.