Bilingualism: Language and Cognition

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BLC mini-series: Tools to document bilingual experiences

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Editorial

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Bilingual experiences are complex and dynamic (Grosjean, 2013). The complexity reflects the rich language experiences an individual accumulates over a lifetime, and the dynamicity represents how the complexity changes across different language interaction contexts. Essential to understanding the cognitive and linguistic consequences of bilingual experience, the experience of bilingualism ought to be documented. Currently, we know that bilingualism can be captured in multiple dimensions, such as onset age of second language (L2) exposure (see Birdsong, 2018 for a recent review), language dominance (Unsworth, Chondrogianni & Skarabela, 2018), first and second language proficiency (Pérez, Hansen & Bajo, 2019), or the learning context in which L2 acquisition occurs (Montrul, 2019). Researchers in the field use different tools to document language experiences, providing quantity and quality of language acquisition history, daily usage, or home exposure through multiple languages for children and adults. Given the interdisciplinary nature of bilingualism research, if these tools are published at all, they are dispersed across different journals and as appendices of articles. The main purpose of this mini-series is to collect these tools for researchers to choose and adapt.

In this mini-series, we have collected five contributions from researchers from the U.S. and Canada who have invested in developing tools for research purposes. These contributions present tools that document bilingual experience from infancy to senior adulthood. We see the mini-series as an opportunity to collectively report tools researchers use to document participants' bilingual experience. These tools will be a systematic collection for students and emerging researchers interested in pursuing research in bilingualism.

Recognizing the diverse social contexts where bilingualism occurs is important. Bilingualism, like other experiences, does not happen in a vacuum. The mini-series has included five contributions from research teams in North America. Their tools are designed and grounded in an environment where there is a societal dominant language – namely, English – except for Byers-Heinlein et al. (Byers-Heinlein, Schott, Gonzalez-Barrero, Brouillard, Dubé, Jardak, Laoun-Rubenstein, Mastroberardino, Morin-Lessard, Pour Iliaei, Salama-Siroishka & Tamay, 2020): her work is situated in Montreal, Canada, where English and French are present in the community. In addition to documenting individual participants' language, describing the societal language use and contact will enrich the interpretation of participant characteristics captured by these tools. Currently, in research adopting a monolingual-bilingual comparison, the information about societal language context is not often documented (Surrain & Luk, 2019). Furthermore, new dimensions, such as language entropy and capturing the social interactions of bilinguals, should be considered to supplement the conventional qualifiers of bilingualism (Gullifer & Titone, 2020; Gullifer, Kousaie, Gilbert, Grant, Giroud, Coulter, Klein, Baum, Phillips & Titone, accepted).

The first contribution, by Byers-Heinlein et al. (2020), has shared a structured interview designed to document infants' language experience, the Multilingual Approach to Parent Language Estimates (MAPLE). In the contribution, Byers-Heinlein et al. (2020) address the key descriptors to document in the interview, as well as interview practices that are engaging, but respectful. Finally, the contribution ends with possible effects that may influence the interpretation of parental reports of children's language environment.

Since young children spend a significant amount of time at school, characterizing children's school environment can supplement information captured from home language environment. Castro, Scheffner Hammer, Franco, Cycyk, Scarpino, and Burchinal (2020) share the Center for Early Care and Education Research – Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL) Child and Family, and Teacher Questionnaires. In this questionnaire, parents and teachers are proxies for capturing young children's home and school language environment. The tool was designed with Spanish–English bilingual families in the U.S. in mind. Castro et al. (2020) supplement this tool with a validation study using child assessments as correlates.

The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) was first published in 2007 (Marian, Blumenfeld & Kaushanskaya, 2007). Since its publication, LEAP-Q has been used extensively in research involving bilinguals. This tool has been translated to 22 different languages, adapting to different dialects and cultural contexts. This tool reflects the collective effort in the field to improve the necessary linguistic sensitivity when conducting research with

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bilinguals. Kaushanskaya, Blumenfeld, and Marian (2019) share how researchers have used this tool in the last decade, and the appropriate modifications that can be made.

Bilingualism is an experience that changes with time. Similarly, researchers are adapting and evolving with how bilingualism is captured. The fourth contribution by Li et al. (Li, Zhang, Yu & Zhao, 2019) reports another popular tool for bilingual researchers. The Language History Questionnaire (LHQ) 3.0 has evolved from the earliest version LHQ (Li, Sepanski & Zhao, 2006), to LHQ 2.0 (Li, Zhang, Tsai & Puls, 2014), to this updated version that features the web-based adaptation. LHQ 3.0 provides a comprehensive web-based interface to capture language proficiency, language dominance, and language immersion. Li et al. (2019) have also provided a step-by-step guide for researchers to utilize LHQ 3.0.

The final contribution from Anderson, Hawrylewicz, and Bialystok (2018a) reports the utility of the Language and Social Background Questionnaire (LSBQ) for children and older adults. LSBQ is also appropriate for use in young adults, as reported in the teams' earlier work (Anderson, Mak, Keyvani Chahi & Bialystok, 2018b) and in factor analyses across these three age groups in the lifespan. In this contribution, Anderson et al. (2018a) highlights the different factors important to be used as qualifiers for bilingualism across the lifespan.

Characterizing bilingualism as an experience is both a goal and a challenge for researchers working with the increasingly linguistically diverse population around the world. The tools included in this mini-series provide a starting point to understand the complexity and dynamicity of bilingualism as an experience. As language contact and globalization increase, language experiences will become more complicated. To this end, the research community needs to adapt and evolve with bilingualism.

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