

Poster Session

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Are bilinguals full-time translators? The evidence of implicit automatic translation in Indonesian-English bilinguals

This study investigated whether bilinguals implicitly and automatically translate their less dominant language into more dominant language during language processing. Fifty-two Indonesian-English bilinguals and 35 English-dominant bilinguals (English-Chinese and English-Tamil bilinguals) completed a gender-decision task, which involved deciding gender of English words. The critical manipulation lay in the words employed in the gender-decision task: gender-ambiguous and gender-unambiguous. Gender-ambiguous words were English words which Indonesian translation equivalents were ambiguous (e.g., nephew and niece are both commonly translated as keponakan in Indonesian). In contrast, gender-unambiguous words were English words which Indonesian translations indicated gender directly (e.g., aunt is bibi, both female). We predicted that if Indonesian-English bilinguals automatically translate English words into Indonesian, the gender-decision latencies for gender-ambiguous words would be longer than gender-unambiguous words. The hypothesized difference in response latencies would indicate activation of the Indonesian translations, as ambiguity in the Indonesian translations would require extra processing time prior responding in the gender-decision task. In contrast, we expected no significant response latencies differences between gender-ambiguous and gender-unambiguous words in the control group that was consisted of English-dominant bilinguals. The novelty of the current study is that the participants were not prompted to think or use Indonesian throughout the experiment, and no prime was involved, therefore, overcoming the limitations of previous experimental designs (e.g., Thierry & Wu, 2007). The results supported the prediction that bilinguals implicitly and automatically translate their less dominant language to more dominant language during language processing. Moreover, the automatic translations were modulated by second language proficiency.