

WHAT SEMI-SPONTANEOUS SPEECH FROM BILINGUALS, L2 LEARNERS AND MONOLINGUALS CAN TELL US ABOUT BILINGUAL COMPETENCE

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In this paper I hope to give a clearer picture of the nature of and variation in bilingual competence, as it emerges from naturalistic data from French-Dutch bilinguals. Understanding bilingual competence – and in particular the variability in bilingual competence – is important because language proficiency and relative language dominance affect the processes engaged during the planning of spoken utterances (Kroll et al 2006). In a recent paper, Bialystok, Craik and Luk (2007) show that vocabulary size is an important factor that modulates performance in verbal fluency and naming tasks and that bilinguals whose lexical knowledge is matched to that of monolinguals outperform monolinguals on a task of letter fluency and word naming.

In this paper I hope to show that variability in bilingual competence is particularly visible in the lexicon, more than in grammatical variables. As studies of processing generally focus on lexical variables (lexical decision tasks e.g.) it is important to understand how lexical competence varies in bilinguals. More specifically, I hope to show that bilinguals' productive use of vocabulary (as measured with different measures of lexical richness) is significantly different from that of speakers who have grown up with one language only, but that their command of grammar is similar. L2 learners, on the other hand, differ significantly from monolinguals and bilinguals on both lexical and grammatical variables.

The informants in this study are 25 French-Dutch bilinguals, 25 Flemish L2 learners of French and 19 French students from a business school in Paris, who grew up with French only.