

Referential Choice in Two Languages: The Roles of Language Dominance, Input, Cross-Linguistic Influence, and Cognitive Factors

Appropriate references are essential for successful communication. For instance, understanding the sentence “Mike likes ice cream” would not be possible if the speaker and the listener could not correctly refer to the entity Mike. Psycholinguistic research has shown that successful reference involves choosing a form from among a set of available referring expressions. Monolingual speakers are usually very fast and efficient at making these decisions in conversation.

In a series of studies, I will show that bilingual speakers may choose referring expressions differently from monolingual speakers. I will analyze some of the possible underlying causes of this pattern, including: (i) the use of cognitive resources during language production, (ii) language dominance, (iii) a potential lack of input related to the types of sentences where pronouns typically appear, and (iv) cross-linguistic influence.

I propose that the bilinguals’ production patterns are suggestive of L1 interference and are not primarily influenced by different uses of cognitive resources compared to monolingual speakers. I will also present some pilot data suggesting that limited input regarding discourse-pragmatic properties may contribute to the patterns observed.