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INTRODUCTION

One of the happy consequences of the current boom in cognitive psychology is that topics are addressed which have been largely neglected before. One of these topics is psycholinguistic research of bilingualism. How is it possible that an individual understands and produces two - or more - different languages without dramatic costs or interferences? Do individuals need different language systems to deal with all the languages they know? And if not, what does this tell us about normal (i.e., monolingual) language processing?

Psycholinguistic research on bilingualism has received impetus not only from countries that are usually associated with knowledge of more than one language - such as Canada, Switzerland, and the Netherlands - but also from countries that are not easily perceived as bilingual - such as France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. A major absentee in the contributing nations is Belgium, a country that by its very nature is doomed to bilingualism, that attaches great importance to language education in school, and in which television channels from all over Europe are broadcasted (not to mention the many subtitled programs). Although a small country cannot be at the cutting edge of each and every research topic, in this particular case we are talking about a really missed opportunity. Hence, the idea of a special *Psychologica Belgica* issue on bilingualism, to give the readers an idea of the ongoing research and - perhaps? - a challenge for their own research agenda.

First, I m very glad to present an article by Annemarie Schaerlaekens. Only recently, psycholinguists have discovered that bilingual environment and bilingual education are heterogenous terms, which cover a wide range of situations. This awareness is largely due to the writings of François Grosjean. However, the very same issues have already been put forward by professor Schaerlaekens many years ago. On the basis of her research and clinical experience with children from multilingual environments, she noted how many different bilingual situations exist and how difficult it is to achieve perfectly balanced bilingualism. So, she is the best person to introduce us to bilingual language acquisition in children.

The second article, by Ilse Van Wijnendaele, continues with reading acquisition. What are the theories about learning to read in a language that is not your mother tongue? Are there specific problems, or do people take advantage of their knowledge of other languages? As is often the case, the answers are not simple and depend on the specific circumstances. However, it is clear that the negative views which prevailed in the beginning scientific literature, are not warranted.

My own text deals with word recognition in advanced users. Up to recently, the general idea was that a person has as many word stores as languages. Even nowadays, for many researcher this is the basic assumption. However, an increasing number of findings is published that points to the possibility that one and the same word recognition device might be responsible for the identification of all words known to a person, independent of the language they belong to. This evidence is summarized in the third article.

An increasing number of researchers is - rightly so - feeling uncomfortable about running a proliferation of experiments, without having an idea of how the hypothesized processes might work. So, a very fertile approach in psycholinguistics has been the development of computational models that simulate empirical data and that allow quantitative predictions. In the area of bilingual word processing, the most influential model has been proposed by Ton Dijkstra, Walter Van Heuven, and Jonathan Grainger. Therefore, I m very happy they were willing to contribute to the issue by presenting the model and showing its strengths in explaining and predicting findings that otherwise would be hard to integrate in a coherent framework.

The fact that psycholinguistic research on bilingualism is still a young science becomes clear when one looks for studies beyond individual word recognition. Very few people have looked at the way people process sentences in a non-native language and the tranfers that occur. One of these people is Eva Fernandez, who gives us an excellent review of the literature and her own work on sentence parsing in monolingual and bilingual processing. This article, I am sure, will be the starting point of much more research on the topic.

The two last articles deal with issues that do not primarily belong to language, although they, of course, heavily depend on it. Marie-Pascale Noël and Wim Fias look at the implications of bilingualism for number processing. A popular notion is that counting and calculating are very stubborn to language change. This is taken as evidence for the idea that numerical cognition is based on verbal memories learned during childhood. Noël and Fias review the available research and examine how much truth there is in the popular notion and what the underlying causes are.

Finally, David Green examines the relationship between language and thought in bilinguals. Is it true that bilinguals behave differently depending on the language they speak; and if so, to what extent does this happen? Or are the thoughts generated in the different languages immediately available to the other languages, and can they be accessed equally easily in all tongues spoken by the individual? For the majority of the readers of *Psychologica Belgica*,

these are not unimportant questions, as at the moment they are reading in a language that is not their first language.

This collection of articles can be considered as a modest state of the art of research on bilingualism. However, as written before, I would rather prefer it to be the starting point of more research on the topic in Belgium. We trail behind, but the lost ground is not insurmountable. After all, we owe it to ourselves.

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