

The impact of heritage language proficiency on English as an additional language: Disentangling language and cognition

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Since the earliest studies on multilingual advantages or effects, it has proved difficult to disentangle language development from general cognition. It remains unclear whether language interdependence is an independent variable or whether observable effects are mediated by cognitive ability. Measurable effects of one language on another typically go hand in hand with differences in cognitive ability. We hypothesize that high cognitive ability produces stronger language interdependence effects than low such ability. We approach this problem in the context of heritage bilingualism in Germany comparing a linguistically mixed cohort of bilingual students (n = 557; i.e., Russian-German, n = 237; Turkish-German, n = 320) with a monolingual German control (n = 852) regarding their proficiencies in the foreign language English. We ask whether the bilingual students manifest an English development that is different from their monolingually socialized peers. We place the students in three different groups depending on their performance in a visual-spatial cognitive ability test. We fit structural equation models to test whether heritage language and German proficiency impact English proficiency differently across these groups while additionally controlling for language background and socio-economic status. Results reveal differences between the high cognitive ability groups, here interpreted as a conditioned bilingualism effect.

Bio

Peter Siemund is Professor and Chair of English Linguistics at the University of Hamburg. He is interested in World Englishes, the use of English as an additional language, and multilingual development. His publications include, as author, *Pronominal Gender in English: A Study of English Varieties from a Cross-linguistic Perspective* (2008), *The Amazing World of Englishes: A Practical Introduction* (with Julia Davydova and Georg Maier, 2012), *Varieties of English: A Typological Approach* (2013), and *Speech Acts and Clause Types: English in a Cross-linguistic Context* (2018), and, as editor, *Language Contact and Contact Languages* (with Noemi Kintana, 2008), *Linguistic Universals and Language Variation* (2011), *Foreign Language Education in Multilingual Classrooms* (with Andreas Bonnet, 2018), and *Multilingual Global Cities: Singapore, Hong Kong, Dubai* (with Jakob Leimgruber, 2021). His most recent monograph is *Multilingual Development: English in a Global Context* (2022).