

Dual-Dimension Naming Speed and Language-Dominance Ratings by Bilingual Hispanic Adults

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Bilingual Research Journal, Summer 2005 by Langdon, Henriette W, Wiig, Elisabeth H, Nielsen, Niels Peter
Abstract

This study compared the efficacy of measures of naming speed, verbal fluency and self-ratings for establishing language dominance in 25 bilingual English-Spanish adults with college degrees. Naming speed was measured by total naming times (in seconds) for five Alzheimer's Quick Test tasks (Wiig, Nielsen, Minthon & Warkentin, 2002) and verbal fluency with the Word Listing by Domain (Lambert, Havelka, & Crosby, 1958; Fishman & Cooper, 1969). Self-ratings of English-Spanish competence (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and frequency of use of each spoken language served as standards for comparisons. For the aggregate sample, color-form, color-animal, and color-object naming times were significantly shorter for English than Spanish.

Introduction

Many factors influence language dominance in multilingual speakers. Among them are the timing of learning each language (simultaneous or sequential), the duration and frequency with which each language is being used, the language used in the home and/or professional setting, and the facility with which a given speaker acquires a new language (Baker, 2001; Cummins, 1984; Romaine, 1995). Therefore, it is not a simple task to establish which of two or more languages available to a speaker maintains the dominant position. The objectives of this study were to compare the efficacy of naming speed for repeated visual stimuli, verbal fluency, and self-ratings of language dominance for English or Spanish by bilingual and biliterate adults. We used test results and self-ratings to evaluate which measures would best identify the dominant language. We were especially interested in exploring relationships between measures of (a) naming and cognitive speed (attention, working memory, verbal automaticity), validated to be mediated by temporal-parietal lobe activation (Wiig, Nielsen, Minthon, & Warkentin, 2002), (b) verbal fluency and language-dominance ratios (Fishman & Cooper, 1969; Lambert, Havelka, & Crosby, 1958), and (c) self-ratings of competence and frequency of use of English and Spanish.