

Effects of Bilingualism on Cognitive Control across the Lifespan

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It is difficult to study the cognitive implications of bilingualism because of the diversity of experiences and political contexts with which it is intertwined. The present paper attempts to disentangle some of these issues by reporting controlled experiments that have held constant variations in language proficiency, context of bilingualism, and social factors that affect performance. The studies examine aspects of language proficiency, executive control, and memory across the lifespan by reporting research from children, adults, and older adults. The overall pattern of results for all these ages is that some types of language proficiency are weaker in bilinguals than in monolinguals, executive processing in terms of cognitive control is much greater in bilinguals than monolinguals, and memory ability depends on the type of material and the type of task but frequently demonstrates reliable differences between monolinguals and bilinguals. These results are discussed in terms of an explanation of how bilingualism affects cognitive performance.