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Authors

Khoe, Yung Han

Kootstra, Gerrit Jan

Kaan, Edith

et al.

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Shared syntax in bilinguals: Does code-switching affect the strength of cross-language structural priming?

Yung Han Khoe

Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands

Gerrit Jan Kootstra

Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands

Edith Kaan

University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, United States

Rob Schoonen

Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands

Stefan Frank

Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands

Abstract

Results from both cross-language priming and code-switching studies suggest that syntax is shared between languages in a bilingual's language system. However, it is not clear how these bilingual language phenomena interact. We tested whether, under an implicit learning account, code-switching in the prime increases syntax sharing, leading to stronger cross-language priming. We conducted four simulated Spanish to English structural priming experiments using the Bilingual Dual-path model. The primes either had an English (code-switched) determiner and noun or noun only, at the beginning or end of the sentence, or were entirely in Spanish. Mixed effects analyses only revealed a significant positive interaction between code-switch condition and priming, indicating stronger priming, with a code-switched English noun phrase at the very beginning of the sentence, but non-significant interactions otherwise. These results provide further support for the idea that code-switching and cross-language structural priming can be interpreted as evidence for shared syntactic representations bilinguals.