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

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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.