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Chinese Dialect Proficiency and Executive Function: Evidence from the Simon Task

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Abstract

A considerable number of studies have investigated whether speaking two languages improves executive function. Results, while controversial, have highlighted the influence of second language proficiency on the emergence of these cognitive advantages. To date, few studies have investigated whether other related linguistic experiences, such as dialect use, confer similar advantages. The diverse range of dialects found across the People's Republic of China provide ideal conditions under which to explore this question. Using a heterogeneous sample of Mandarin-English bilingual, bidialectal young adults ($n = 73$), the present study investigated whether differences in self-reported dialect proficiency impacted on Simon Task performance. While results showed reduced Simon effects associated with higher reported dialect proficiency, it was a consequence of slower performance on congruent trials, not improved performance on incongruent trials. The observed reduction in facilitation from congruent trials associated with higher reported dialect proficiency suggests a cognitive disadvantage, but merits further investigation.