The interaction between bilingualism and autism from social, cognitive and perceptual perspectives

May J Wang
China

Abstract

The presentation takes a novel psycholinguistic approach looking into autism, focusing on the interaction between bilingualism and autism research. It provides a combination of different dimensions, from social to cognitive and perceptual, to explain this relationship. In light of the complexity and variety of symptoms characterized in individuals with autism, this presentation aims to broadly categories them into three areas - namely social interaction deficits, cognitive deficits, and perceptual irregularities – in order to pinpoint the specific explanations for the abnormalities. In particular, theoretical underpinnings of theory of mind, executive functions, and central coherence will be compared and discussed in a heterogenous fashion. Multilingualism and additional language development have also attracted attention on the three areas mentioned above. Cognitively, multilingualism was argued to bring upon advantages on domain-general cognitive functions ranging from working memory to inhibition and task-switching. Theory of mind and central coherence were also associated to how language switches interact with metacognitive awareness and semantics/pragmatics in linguistics. This presentation therefore, argues that the theoretical overlap in autism and bilingualism on the executive functions domain could be critical in advancing the understanding of both populations in the cognitive perspective. More importantly, this argument posits that the adverse effect from apparent executive dysfunction along with other neurodevelopmental symptoms could potentially be reversed by the acquisition of new languages. Additional language learning could serve as effective practice strategies to compensate for the developmental deficits on social, cognitive and perceptual aspects. The focus of this presentation therefore critically evaluates research that relates the two psychological concepts, aiming to unleash the potential of a rather new area for autism treatment. Further, in light of the lack of research that links the two areas in the academia, this presentation also targets to encourage researchers to explore this multi-beneficial, multidimensional technique to autism intervention.

Biography

May J Wang as a very fluent bilingual herself, she is an Emerging High School Student based in Beijing, China. She has specific interests on the interaction of language development and autism. Particularly, she has read widely on how multilingualism and autism develop in a psychological perspective. As a future research interest, she is motivated to support those with autism through introducing the potential advantage of learning additional languages. As an active volunteer in her school's campaigns for mental health education, she has constantly taken action to raise awareness of and provide solutions for adolescent mental health issues within and outside her school.

miffyjiajia@163.com