Introduction

- Iranian-Americans are one prominent minority in the U.S. with unofficial estimates close to 1 million. Despite this and the known importance of heritage languages, little is known about Persian-English language development.
- Funding for this research was provided by the University of Minnesota’s College of Liberal Arts and the Department of Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences.
- Use also plays a role in language development because it “forces the learner to process the language in a way that only hearing does not” (Bohman et al., 2010, p. 10; Hammer et al., 2012).
- The growing Persian-speaking population, the lack of research involving Persian-English bilingual children, and the importance of heritage languages makes this study necessary.

Research Questions

- The purpose of the study was to:
  - To compare the vocabulary and morphosyntactic language skills of Persian-English bilingual preschoolers and to the language skills of monolingual-English preschoolers; and
  - To examine the relationships between parent language input, child language use, and child Persian and English language skills.

Participants

- **Bilingual (BI) Participant Characteristics**
  - 15 preschoolers
  - 2 through 5 years of age
  - Attended a Persian immersion preschool (100% Persian instruction) in northern California
  - Bicultural and bilingual
  - Wide range of exposure to Persian and English
- **English-only (EO) Speaking Participants Characteristics**
  - 17 preschoolers
  - 2 through 5 years of age
  - Attended English-only schools in suburban Minnesota
  - Monocultural and monolingual

Method

- Children completed a language assessment battery in Persian and English (BI Group) or English (EO Group), including:
  - Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOW),
  - Receptive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (ROW),
  - Recalling Sentences (RS) subset of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – Preschool Edition (CELF-P), and
- Each measure was interpreted into Persian to allow assessment in both languages.
- Assessment raw scores were combined to create the following composites: vocabulary tasks (EOW + ROW), grammar tasks (RS + SS), expressive language tasks (EOW + RS), and receptive language tasks (ROW + SS).
- Parents completed a questionnaire regarding their child’s development and language environment. Questions used to derive study key variables included:
  - Question 17 for which parents listed their child’s communication partners and reported the percentage of time the partners spoke to the children in Persian and English, and
  - Question 18 for which parents reported the percentage of time their child spoke Persian and English in various settings (e.g., with friends, siblings, watching TV).

Analyses: BI Group & EO Group Comparison

- Wilcoxon Signed Rank test indicated that the BI Group’s English Scores were significantly greater than their Persian scores (Z = 6, p < .001).
- Correlations:
  - Table 2. Correlations of Parental Language Input and Child Raw Scores for BI Group. Not Significant

Analyses: BI Group Persian vs. English

- Table 3. Correlational Analyses of Child Language Use and Child Raw Scores for BI Group. Not Significant

Discussion

- BI Group & EO Group comparisons revealed no significant differences in English skills.
- As a group, BI participants performed better on English tasks than Persian tasks.
- BI participants with greater Persian input tended to score higher on Persian tasks, while greater English led to lower Persian scores.
- BI participants’ English use influenced Persian skills more than increased English input and had the smallest effect on English skills.
- It appears that increased English input and use may be at the cost of improving heritage language skills.

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