

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSIAN-ENGLISH BILINGUAL PRESCHOOLERS

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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.
- Input of a child's heritage language influences development of that language (Hammer et al., 2012; Hammer et al., 2009; Pearson et al., 1997).
- Use also plays a role in language development because it "forces the learner to process the language in a way that only hearing it 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.

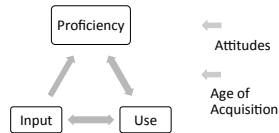


Figure 1. Pearson's (2007) Model of Factors Influencing Language Proficiency

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) subtest of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – Preschool Edition (CELF-P), and
 - Sentence Structure (SS) subtest of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – Preschool Edition.
- 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

Figure 2. English Composite Scores

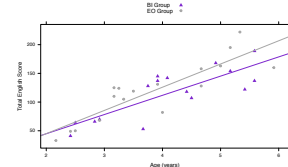
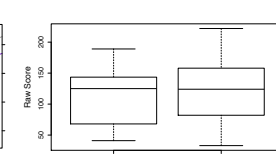


Figure 3. Median of English Composite Scores



Analyses: BI Group Input

Figure 4. Composite Scores by Percentage Persian Spoken by Parents (Input)

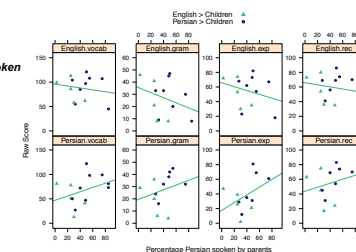
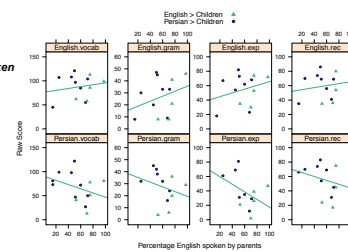


Figure 5. Composite Scores by Percentage English Spoken by Parents (Input)



Analyses: BI Group Use

Figure 6. Raw Scores by Percentage Persian Spoken by Children (Use)

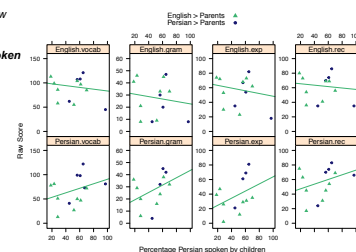
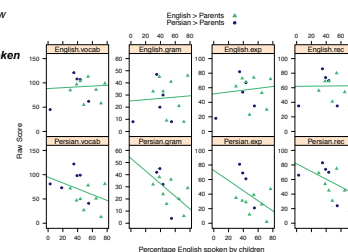


Figure 7. Raw Scores by Percentage English Spoken by Children (Use)



Results: BI Group

- 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

	Persian Scores	English Scores
Persian Input From Parents		
Expressive Language	0.42	0.27
Receptive Language	0.28	-0.17
Vocabulary	0.35	0.17
Grammar	0.27	0.30
English Input From Parents		
Expressive Tasks	-0.42	0.27
Receptive Tasks	-0.28	0.17
Vocabulary Tasks	-0.35	0.17
Grammar Tasks	-0.27	0.30

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

	Persian Scores	English Scores
Persian Use By Children		
Expressive Tasks	0.38	-0.17
Receptive Tasks	0.31	-0.10
Vocabulary Tasks	0.33	-0.13
Grammar Tasks	0.40	-0.14
English Use By Children		
Expressive Tasks	-0.45	0.10
Receptive Tasks	-0.45	0.01
Vocabulary Tasks	-0.39	0.05
Grammar Tasks	-0.58	0.06

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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