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Language and Cognition in Bilinguals and Multilinguals

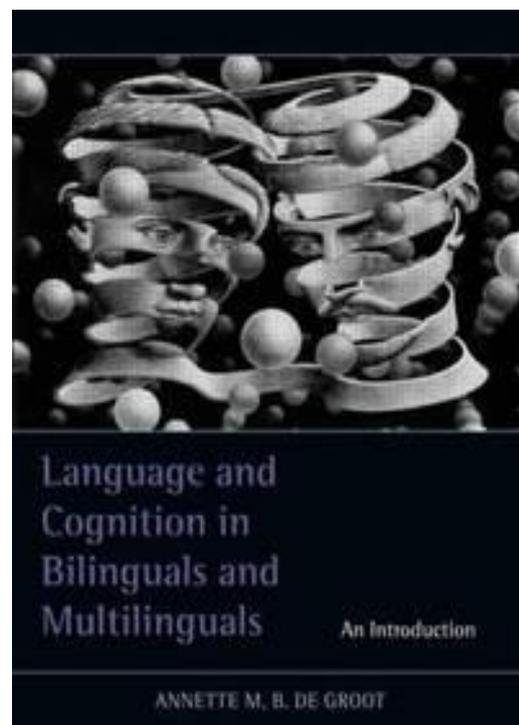
Authored by Annette M.B. de Groot

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Reviewed by Natalia Kucirkova

The Open University, UK

The Open University, FELS/CREET, Walton Hall, Milton
Keynes, MK7 6BJ; e-mail: n.kucirkova@open.ac.uk



Within the current global and multicultural context, a monolingual orientation is no longer tenable in a comprehensive study of psycholinguistics. However, since its foundation in the 1950s, the majority of psycholinguistic research has been carried out in a monolingual framework. It is only in the last 15 years that studies in bilingualism have shown that many psycho-neurobiological factors shaping the acquisition and use of language may be altered and affected by bi- and multilingualism.

In her newly published book, Annette M.B.de Groot challenges the view of monolingual psycholinguistics. Professor of Experimental Psychology at the University of Amsterdam, De Groot provides a comprehensive discussion of the psychology of language from both the bilingual and multilingual perspective.

Despite the book's title *Language and Cognition in Bilinguals and Multilinguals*, the book is unable to give equal weighting for material on both phenomena. This is due to the unbalanced volume of studies on bilingual and multilingual psycholinguistics, with the former significantly outweighing the latter. De Groot attempts to redress this imbalance by suggesting that multilingualism can be in many respects seen as 'noisier' bilingualism (De Groot, p.2). Therefore, many of the theories and processes described are seen as applicable to both bilingualism and multilingualism and the two terms are used interchangeably throughout the book, as well as in this short review.

Research on bilingualism parallels that of psycholinguistic research, and this orientation is reflected in the book. Three main areas of study are covered: language acquisition, language processing and language production. Although information for language comprehension and language production appears in two modalities -speech and writing- the study of bilingualism is generally oriented towards spoken rather than written skills of bilinguals.

As De Groot notes, differences with mainstream psycholinguistics arise from varying classification concepts of bilingualism. There are the so-called balanced bilinguals (those who possess similar degrees of proficiency in both languages but may not have yet reached full competence in both) as opposed to 'proficient bilinguals' who have attained a near-native level of proficiency. The age of acquisition further divides bilinguals into 'early' or 'late' acquirers. The context of acquisition also sub-classifies the early bilingual acquirers into simultaneous, consecutive or sequential bilingualism. Alternative sub-divisions of bilingualism such as 'additive' and 'subtractive' bilinguals can be applied according to the status of the two languages in a society, and recent literature proposes still further branches of bilingualism.

Prior to this publication, a few edited journal volumes had addressed specific aspects of bilingualism (e.g. foreign language vocabulary acquisition), but a need was felt for a comprehensive publication which would clearly identify the diverse models of bilingualism, surfacing at an incredibly rapid rate. De Groot's book is excellent in unifying a wide variety of aspects of bilingualism under appropriate umbrella terms and offering an almost encyclopaedic guide through the important but complex maze of bilingualism research.

In each chapter, the reader is provided with a lot of information on the theory, methods and evidence generated by both seminal and the most recent research on individual bilingualism topics. Although written at an introductory level, important methodological issues for both mainstream and brain-based approaches to linguistics are included, with links being made to theory as well as suggestions for possible future research. This guided integration of methodology and theory means that little previous knowledge of the field is required. The author skilfully weaves various studies and concepts together, organising the book into eight concise chapters.

Chapter 1 begins by providing an overview of the subsequent seven chapters and introduces core terminology and various definitions of bilingualism. Chapter 2 considers language development in monolingual and bilingual infants. It focuses on phonological and lexical development and touches on the issue of higher

proficiency present in bilinguals who start to learn their second language early on. The concluding discussion on the importance of critical or sensitive period for second language proficiency echoes the ongoing debate in language studies of whether language is innate or learned—an argument which is reflected throughout the entire book. Chapter 3 explores in detail late foreign vocabulary learning and compares it to first language words acquisition. Here the facilitative role of word meanings is stressed, which, with the help of a range of perspectives on the structure of bilingual lexical representations, explains the different learning rates of various word types. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the issue of simultaneous activation of memory and language systems for spoken and written input: word production and word recognition. Chapter 6 is concerned with the way in which language control operates, and investigates the skill to maintain or switch between languages. The executive language control system offers most explanatory power and it is pleasing to see the chapter concludes by discussing simultaneous interpreting, bringing the topic to life. The reader is reminded in chapter 7 of the losses that can occur in both first and second language and focuses on effects of bilingualism on mental processes such as cognition, in particular cognitive control and its relationship with general intelligence. The last chapter provides an insight into the bilingual brain. Central to this chapter are the questions: which brain structures are called for in bilingual language processing? Is language laterised in bilinguals in a distinct manner to monolinguals? A rather fragmented structure of the chapter reflects the so-far relatively modest knowledge on specific language areas in the bilingual brain, and leaves the reader with a range questions about further research.

With the exception of the first and last chapters, each chapter follows a similar format: introduction to the topic, methods and task section, evidence and summary of main findings. This structure gives the book a strong coherent feel. The material is presented at an introductory level which makes the book attractive and useful for anyone who wishes to learn more about the ability to speak two or more languages. The book's clear information and thorough orientation will appeal especially to language learners, simultaneous or native bilinguals, interpreters or translators. More importantly, the inclusion of a glossary, number of figures and full references means the book fills the long-awaited need for a textbook on bi- and multilingualism for graduate students, researchers and practitioners in Cognitive Psychology and Linguistics.

Overall, *Language and Cognition in Bilinguals and Multilinguals* will undoubtedly stimulate creative future research directions in bilingualism. For the many bilinguals among us, it is a valuable resource on both biological and cognitive basis of multi/bilingualism.