

The perception of affective and neutral words by Polish-English bilinguals

Recent psycholinguistic research has indicated that bilingual speakers are less sensitive to the affective value of words or sentences in the second (L2) relative to the first language (L1; e.g., Chen et al., 2015; Hsu et al., 2015; Jankowiak & Korpala, 2018). This finding has been particularly observed for negative stimuli, possibly a result of psychological distance to arousing stimuli in L2 (Pavlenko 2012, Jonczyk, 2016). Little is known, however, whether such an effect might be also reflected in questionnaire research, where participants make conscious and explicit decisions regarding how they perceive the presented stimuli. To this end, we used questionnaires to examine how bilingual speakers perceive positive, negative, and neutral words in their respective languages. 120 highly proficient Polish-English bilinguals (AgeRange= 20–27) volunteered to take part in the study; participants' level of proficiency in English was assessed using the LexTALE test (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012). Within each questionnaire, participants were randomly presented with 35 positive (e.g., kindness, wiosna), 35 taboo (e.g., handjob, skurwiel), and 50 neutral (e.g., funnel, łokieć) words in either L1 or L2 and rated the words on two 7-point Likert scales of valence (from very negative to very positive) and arousal (from no arousal to very strong arousal). The questionnaires were built and conducted using SurveyMonkey (Momentive, Inc.). All words were matched on concreteness (Brysbaert et al., 2014) and lexical frequency across the two languages (SUBTLEX-PL for Polish stimuli, Manderla et al., 2014, and SUBTLEX-UK for English stimuli, van Heuven et al., 2014). Data collection is soon to be completed. The results of the study will be reported and discussed with reference to the L2 psychological distance previously observed in bilingualism research. We will also provide insights and recommendations on stimuli selection procedures in bilingual studies on affective language processing.

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