A Review of a Final Thesis

submitted to the Department of English and ELT Methodology,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Name and titles of the reviewer: Eva Maria Luef
Reviewed as: ☐ a supervisor ☒ an opponent

Author of the thesis: Tatiana Lebedeva

Title of the thesis: Nonword Repetition Task for Detecting Developmental Language Disorder in English-Russian Bilingual Children

Year of submission: 2024
Submitted as: ☐ a bachelor's thesis ☒ a master's thesis

Level of expertise:
☐ excellent ☒ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Factual errors:
☒ almost none ☐ appropriate to the scope of the thesis ☐ frequent less serious ☐ serious

Chosen methodology:
☒ original and appropriate ☐ appropriate ☐ barely adequate ☐ inadequate

Results:
☒ original ☐ original and derivative ☐ non-trivial compilation ☐ cited from sources ☐ copied

Scope of the thesis:
☐ too large ☒ appropriate to the topic ☐ adequate ☐ inadequate

Bibliography (number and selection of titles):
☐ above average (scope or rigor) ☒ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Typographical and formal level:
☐ excellent ☐ very good ☒ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Language:
☒ excellent ☐ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Typos:
☒ almost none ☐ appropriate to the scope of the thesis ☐ numerous

Brief description of the thesis (by the supervisor, ca. 100-200 words):

Review, comments and notes (ca. 100-200 words)
Strong points of the thesis:
The thesis is an interesting investigation of a non-word repetition task in an English-Russian bilingual child growing up in the UK. Ms Lebedeva has proved her ability to work on complex psycholinguistic tasks. She designed a new testing tool for delayed language development and conducted a comparative study of her tool to existing tools. I was impressed by her work, especially coming up with novel calculations (or proxy variables) for Russian phonotactic probabilities and neighborhood densities, for instance. I think the thesis is of high scientific quality.

Weak points of the thesis:
The formal organization confused me at times. Main headings and sub-chapter had the same font and font size. Most citation styles show variation in this regard (for good reason). It is also not a good idea to use non-introduced abbreviations as chapter headings or add a, b, c…. to chapter headings.
In addition, some paragraphs/ chapter could be moved (for instance, 2.3.3. starts out a bit redundant and could be moved to an earlier part of the thesis). Why was ToM discussed when it had no relevance for the thesis?

Questions to answer during the Defence and suggested points of discussion:

1. Please explain what your findings can potentially add to the question of the integration of the bilingual lexicon.
2. What would be alternative (even if laborious) ways to obtain Russian phonological neighborhood statistics (density, frequency, phonotactic probabilities?
3. What effects would you expect if you had chosen shorter, phonologically denser target words in both languages?

Other comments:

Section 2.3.2. could be enhanced – there is quite a lot of literature on bilingual lexical activation in word recognition and pertaining to the phono-lexicon, e.g.
- Blumenfeld & Marian, 2007;
- Canseco-Gonzalez et al., 2010;
- Ju & Luce, 2004;
- Marian & Spivey, 2003a, 2003b;
- Shook & Marian, 2012;
- Weber & Cutler, 2004
Shook & Marian's model of bilingual activation (BLINCS) may also be relevant (from 2013)

p. 19: it could be mentioned that the so-called "late bilinguals" are what is often referred to as "second language learners" or "adult language learners". It is generally not used in the context of asymmetric/ lopsided bilingualism.

Concerning the "last observation" on page 70, I agree that the findings seem to show that the languages are separate but also linked to some degree, but I would argue that this could be explained by language experience, rather than a separate storage. For instance, Shook and Marian in their 2013 bilingual activation model (as other bilingual activation models, such as BIMOLA) take into account the experience with a language to make predictions concerning co-activation. In this sense, your findings may reflect more fully developed English in combination with less developed Russian, rather than say anything pertaining to mental storage of languages.

<u>Minor comments:</u>

p. 21: why are there initials in some citations? For instance, A. Baddeley et al., 1988, or p. 24 etc. Sometimes you have two initials (e.g., p. 27)

2.3.2. better to name the chapter "lexical activation"

There are quite a few abbreviations, not all of which are necessary. For instance, phonotactic probability doesn't need an abbreviation.

Table 1 provides the pronunciation guides to the English words, but Table 2 doesn't provide them for the Russian words (where it would have been more important for your readers)

Proposed grade:
☒ excellent   ☒ very good   ☐ good   ☐ fail

Place, date and signature of the reviewer:
Prague, May 19, 2024