

Abstract

Recent studies suggest that bilingualism can have a positive effect on social cognition. The aim of this study was to test these findings and to determine whether acquiring two or more languages has an effect on social cognition, more specifically on prosocial tendencies such as empathy and compassion. The study involved 64 participants (34 monolingual and 30 bilingual) aged 11 to 15 years who completed self-assessment questionnaires, the Dispositional Positive Emotion Scale (DPES) and the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), which assessed participants' compassion and multidimensional empathy. Participants also took part in a 3D simulation assessing prosocial tendencies, which was projected via a holographic display. Participants' reaction time was measured during the 3D simulation. Results showed that there was no significant difference between monolingual and bilingual participants in compassion or the multidimensional empathy. In contrast, there was a significant difference between the groups in reaction time where the bilingual participants' reaction to the scene in 3D simulation was faster. This study suggests that although there was no difference between groups in the questionnaire survey, bilingual adolescents may exhibit prosocial tendencies when prosocial behavior is observed in real time. Results are discussed in the light of existing studies in this area and suggestions for future research are made.

Key words: bilingualism, social cognition, prosocial behaviour, bilingual advantage, adolescence