Title
The Effects of Bilingualism on Context Sensitivity

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0wj4w4kp

Journal

ISSN
1069-7977

Authors
Benitez, Viridiana
Smith, Linda B.

Publication Date
2009

Peer reviewed
The Effects of Bilingualism on Context Sensitivity

Viridiana Benitez  
Indiana University

Linda Smith  
Indiana University

Abstract: Bilinguals must be sensitive to context cues in order to access the right language system for that moment. Consistent with this idea, a growing body of research suggests that bilinguals more effectively switch attention, following changing cues, in executive control tasks. The present study used a context-cued pattern perception task to more directly assess whether adult bilinguals are more sensitive to context than monolinguals, even in non-verbal contexts. If bilinguals attend to contextual information more efficiently than monolinguals, then they should recognize patterns faster when presented in the same context (attention to relevant cues facilitates recognition) and also when presented in different contexts (inhibition of irrelevant cues facilitates recognition). The results show that this is the case, suggesting that bilingualism enhances a context awareness that results in refined inhibition skills, a finding consistent with current research, and enhanced attention to relevant cues, a result not previously discussed in bilingualism research.