Bilingual Assessment Project: Annual Report for 2010-2011
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This project involves the development of the Bilingual Language Profile questionnaire (BLP), an easy-to-use instrument that allows for assessment of language proficiency and language use patterns in the two languages of bilinguals. The measures can be used to develop a profile of speakers’ relative dominance in their two languages. The instrument can be adapted to specific needs of researchers, administrators and teachers by emphasis on appropriate subtests within the instrument.

Several goals for Year One were set and achieved. These included researching and producing an annotated bibliography, drafting and trouble-shooting the instrument, and piloting the instrument. Versions were developed and extensively pilot tested in French, Spanish, Catalan, and English. Over the summer, the French and English versions were used in the field by Libby M. Gertken as part of her doctoral research, and versions in Catalan and Spanish were similarly used by Mark Amengual.

Critical to the pilot testing and refinement of the instrument was the involvement of Birdsong’s graduate Topics in Second Language Acquisition class during Spring 2011. As part of their course requirements, students in the class recruited pilot subjects. The subjects were run during a 3-hour class session. Each pilot participant was asked to provide feedback to the class about individual items on the test. A brainstorming session followed, and several improvements to the instrument were effected. We also discussed the practical and theoretical relevance of the instrument to the study of bilingualism. As an additional part of the class session, the instrument was informally adapted for a pilot subject who was an English-ASL bilingual and for another who was an Arabic-English bilingual.

In Summer 2011, the BLP was validated in the field as part of Gertken’s doctoral dissertation project. Twenty-two English-French bilinguals living in or near Paris, France completed the BLP, along with a standardized proficiency test in French (Oxford Placement Test, OPT) and a psycholinguistic naming task (A Quick Test of Cognitive Speed, AQT; Wiig, Nielsen, Minthon, & Warkentin, 2002). Self-reported proficiency in the BLP was found to correlate strongly with proficiency scores on the OPT ($R = .795$, $p < .001, N=17$), suggesting that self-reports in the BLP are reliable measures of proficiency. To establish criterion-based validity of the BLP, global dominance scores on the BLP were compared scores to on the AQT, which reflect working memory capacity, executive attention, and cognitive speed. The AQT had been used in an earlier study to categorize Spanish-English bilinguals into language dominance groups (Langdon, Wiig, & Nielsen, 2005). Analyses revealed a positive correlation between BLP dominance and AQT dominance ($R = .606, p < .001, N=21$), suggesting that bilingual language dominance, as determined by self-reported language history, use, proficiency, and attitudes, explains a substantial amount of the variance in naming time differences in French vs. English.
Also in Summer 2011, the BLP was also used by Amengual as part of his doctoral dissertation research. Amengual’s dissertation explores phonetic transfer between the L1 and L2 vowel systems of Spanish-Catalan bilinguals, and the literature suggests that language dominance is the strongest predictor of linguistic performance in both production and perception studies. The classification of participants into experimental groups (Spanish-dominant or Catalan-dominant) was determined by global scores of dominance. The BLP will also be used by Amengual to provide a fine-grained continuous variable which permits placing bilinguals on a continuum of bilingualism. (Similar uses of BLP scores in subject classification are envisioned by Gertken in her study of parsing in French by French-English bilinguals.)

Along with these developments, the team produced an annotated bibliography on language dominance. The document is divided into two sections. The first looks at materials that have been developed for assessing dominance. The second section is a survey of linguistic and psycholinguistic studies where dominance is a subject variable; in these studies, ad hoc assessments of dominance are employed. For ease of access to these materials, URL’s are provided for each entry in the bibliography.

The instrument, the project, and COERLL were featured in two talks Birdsong presented in Spring 2011. The first was a guest lecture at Indiana University sponsored by the Mary-Margaret Barr Koon Fund and the Gertrude F. Weathers Fund before an audience of linguists, psychologists, foreign language teachers, and graduate students. The second talk was an invited presentation at a conference in Rolduc, Holland, entitled: “Frontiers in Linguistics, Acquisition, and Multilingualism Studies: Dynamic Paradigms” http://www.mpi.nl/repos/html/FrontiersWorkshop.html The audience consisted of researchers and students from across Europe and the U.S., many of whom were associated at some point in their careers with the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, NL.

REFERENCES
