This project involves the development of the Bilingual Language Profile questionnaire (BLP), an easy-to-use instrument that allows for assessment of language history, proficiency, attitudes, 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.

Following the creation of the BLP in Year One, our goals in Year Two included continued pilot testing and refinement of the BLP and dissemination of the instrument through Web content, outreach, and publications. Each of these goals was met in Year Two.

By Fall 2011, we had collected responses to the online BLP questionnaire from 68 English-French bilinguals recruited in central Texas and in Paris, France. As part of our testing of the instrument’s reliability and interval validity, we performed a factor analysis on BLP items addressing French language status. Factor analysis is one way of checking relationships between the hypothesized dimensions of dominance and their underlying latent constructs. The clusters that emerged corresponded to the dimensions of dominance that we had hypothesized, with the exception that Language History and Language Use patterned together: History/Language Use (factor 1), Language Proficiency (factor 2), Language Attitudes (factor 3). We chose to treat these as distinct modules within the BLP, however, as language history and use variables may elicit distinct responses for certain bilingual groups (e.g., heritage speakers) which are potentially valuable for audiences of the BLP. As the factor analysis groupings accounted for the majority of the variance in the English-French bilinguals’ BLP scores, we concluded that our questionnaire items were sufficiently broad to capture variability within the bilinguals sampled for this analysis.

To determine consistency within our modules, we further analyzed the data from our sample of English-French bilinguals using a Cronbach’s alpha test for reliability (e.g., Dewaele, 2004). Cronbach’s coefficient measures how closely related a set of items are as a group. Cronbach’s alpha for each module of the BLP was found to be moderately to highly reliable, indicating that the items within each module measure the same variable while still contributing unique information.

The effects of language dominance as measured by the BLP are being investigated in the dissertations of Libby M. Gertken and Mark Amengual. Gertken’s dissertation concerns the real-time processing of syntactic ambiguities by adult learners of French (native English speakers) and the influence of language dominance on ambiguity resolution and syntactic priming. Amengual’s dissertation explores phonetic transfer between the L1 and L2 vowel systems of Spanish-Catalan bilinguals. As the literature suggests that language dominance is the strongest predictor of linguistic performance in both production and perception studies. The BLP will be used by Amengual to provide a fine-grained continuous variable which permits placing bilinguals on a continuum of bilingualism.
Development of a website for the BLP questionnaire in Fall 2011 was critical to our dissemination efforts (http://sites.la.utexas.edu/bilingual/). The website provides information about the BLP questionnaire, including an instructional video, in order to promote the instrument and its use by different audiences. Another important feature of the website is the “Give us Feedback” link, which encourages researchers using the BLP to share their experiences with the instrument and provide the BLP team with feedback. The website is continuously updated with news, refined content, and additional materials.

The BLP instrument, the informational website, and data analyses were presented at several conferences in 2011 and 2012. In October 2011, Libby M. Gertken and Mark Amengual presented “The Bilingual Language Profile: A Tool for Assessing Bilingual Language Dominance” at the Linguistic Association of the Southwest (LASSO) conference in South Padre Island, Texas. Around thirty researchers and educators from the U.S., mainly interested in Spanish-English bilingual issues, were in attendance. In February 2012, Libby M. Gertken travelled to Montpellier, France where she spoke about the BLP at the L2 Proficiency Assessment Workshop, Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3. Her talk, “Assessing Language Dominance through Self-Reports on the Bilingual Language Profile,” was attended by approximately forty international researchers and teachers interested in bilingualism and second language acquisition. In March 2012, David Birdsong presented a paper at an invited symposium on age and second language acquisition at the annual AAAL meeting in Boston. The title of the presentation was “Beyond critical periods and deficits: A capacities approach to second language acquisition and bilingualism.” There were approximately 75 people in attendance. Several people, including attendees from Japan and Sweden, expressed interest in the BLB and said they would visit the web site.

A draft of a book chapter “Assessing Language Dominance with the Bilingual Language Profile” (working title) has been prepared by the team and is due in its final version on September 30th, 2012. The chapter will be included in an edited volume published by Multilingual Matters entitled “Assessing L2 Proficiency: from the Laboratory to the Classroom” (working title) and edited by P. Leclercq, H. Hilton, and A. Edmonds. The chapter aims to delineate the construct of language dominance (as distinct from proficiency) and to introduce the BLP to researchers and language teachers interested in pedagogy and second language acquisition. The intended readership of the volume, as stated in the proposal includes “final-year undergraduates working on second language acquisition projects, postgraduate students involved in second language acquisition research, and researchers and teachers in general whose interests include a second language acquisition component.”

One indication of the success of our outreach efforts thus far is the creation of Arabic and Russian versions of the BLP in Year Two by volunteer researchers Lama Nassif at the University of Texas-Austin and Kate Lindsey at Stanford. These additions expand the BLP corpus to include 7 languages, including English, French, Spanish, Catalan, ASL, Russian, and Arabic.

REFERENCES

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