

Assessing the reliability of the Bilingual Language Profile: A tool for measuring language dominance

What this study was about and why it is important

Language dominance is a measure of the relative strength of each of a bilingual's two languages. Considering language dominance as a continuum, some bilinguals are more dominant in one language, while other bilinguals have more balanced dominance between the two. Language dominance has been shown to impact a wide range of different language and cognitive behaviors. While there are many ways of measuring a bilingual's language dominance, one of the most common tools in recent research has been the Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong et al., 2012). The Bilingual Language Profile is a self-reported questionnaire that asks participants to evaluate each of their languages with respect to language history, language use, language proficiency, and language attitudes. While some studies have begun to examine the validity of this measure and how researchers interpret the Bilingual Language Profile scores, this questionnaire has yet to be examined for test-retest reliability. Test-retest reliability is a measure of stability of a given test over time. That is, whether the same participant would get similar results when taking the survey at different times.

What the researchers did

- A total of 454 Spanish-English bilinguals completed the Bilingual Language Profile.
- Of those initially recruited, 248 completed the survey a second time approximately one month later.
- Overall dominance scores were compared between the first and second surveys.
- The Bilingual Language Profile also provides global language scores for each language and scores for each of the four subcomponents: language history, language use, language proficiency, and language attitudes. These were also compared between the first and second surveys.

What the researchers found

- This study showed that, for this group of Spanish-English bilinguals, the reliability of the overall language dominance score was excellent.
- The reliability of each of the global language scores were also good to excellent, although the weaker (i.e., non-dominant) language was somewhat more reliable than the stronger (i.e., dominant) language.
- The reliability of each of the subcomponents was also good to excellent, although language history and language use were more reliable than language proficiency and language attitudes.

Things to consider

- This study contributes to the overall evaluation of the Bilingual Language Profile and shows that it may be a reasonable, reliable tool for measuring language dominance.
- Future research should consider a wide variety of different language pairings and bilingual populations to continue to evaluate the utility of the Bilingual Language Profile.

Materials, data, open access article:

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