

The Cognitive Challenges of Speaking Two Languages

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Speaking seems effortless to most, yet is extremely complex. Even the simplest utterance involves compiling a message to communicate, computing a grammatical structure, selecting the words that best express the message, and retrieving the sounds that make up those words. Bilingual speakers face additional complexities: They have more words to select from (across their two languages), they need more effort to retrieve non-dominant language words, and they need to avoid wrong-language slips of the tongue or else may not be understood. In this talk, I will discuss findings relevant to what help bilingual speakers get in the process: Inhibitory control that helps prioritize non-dominant-language production is applied in a cognitively efficient way, internal monitoring mechanisms help detect wrong-language intrusions, and reusing the words of one's conversational partner (a phenomenon known as alignment) eases the complexity of word choice.