

Speakers' linguistic identity modulates the comprehension of codeswitched sentences

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According to the Adaptive Control hypothesis (Green & Abutalebi, 2013), bilinguals can modulate the use of inhibitory-control mechanisms to regulate language activation depending on the communicative context. Recent studies at the lexical level have shown that the linguistic-identity of an interlocutor, may also modulate the activation and selection of languages (Blanco-Elorrieta & Pykkänen, 2016, 2017; Hartsuiker, 2015; Martin et al., 2016; Molnar et al., 2015). Yet, less is known about sentence processing. In the present self-paced-reading experiment, 46 Italian-English bilinguals were familiarized through videos with 3 types of interlocutors (Italian vs. English vs. Italian-English bilinguals) and then read 2 types of sentences (Italian-only vs. Italian-English code-switched ones) presented beneath each speaker's face, supposedly "produced" by them. The interaction that was yielded in the code-switched word position reflected an interlocutor identity effect, with slower reading times in Italian-English code-switched sentences than in Italian-only sentences when they were "produced" by Italian speakers ($p=.057$) than by English or Italian-English bilinguals ($ps<.001$). In the next region, there were equal sentence-type effects for all speakers. Thus, when reading sentences in L1-Italian, unexpected code-switches to L2-English produced by Italian speakers delayed the detection of the code-switch, whereas code-switching costs were immediately demonstrated when code-switched sentences were produced by English and Italian-English speakers. These findings suggest that during sentence comprehension (i) bilinguals modulate the activation of their languages by taking into account the interlocutor's identity, and (ii) such information is a critical cue in bilingual communication and code-switching cannot be dissociated from the producer of a message.