

Bilingualism and Cognition in Autism: What Interaction Teaches Us — and What Comes Next

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Research on bilingualism in autism has reached an important point of convergence: exposure to more than one language is not harmful and may be associated with advantages in some domains. In this talk, I present findings from our cross-sectional and longitudinal studies on interactional bilingualism in autistic children, examining cognitive outcomes across development using both experimental measures and caregiver-based assessments. Together, these studies help clarify not only whether differences emerge, but also when they are most visible developmentally.

I then turn to recent work from the ABCCD research program that shifts the focus from outcomes alone to properties of bilingual experience itself, including second-language proficiency and richness of exposure. This provides a more fine-grained view of how bilingual profiles relate to cognitive variation in autism.

I use this empirical base to open a broader question that motivates this workshop: whether similar patterns might arise under non-interactive forms of bilingual exposure, where language learning occurs with limited direct social interaction. The aim is to set the stage for the perspectives and evidence presented in the subsequent talks.