

Language and communication impairment in bilingual older adults: impact on individuals and families.

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Bilingualism defined



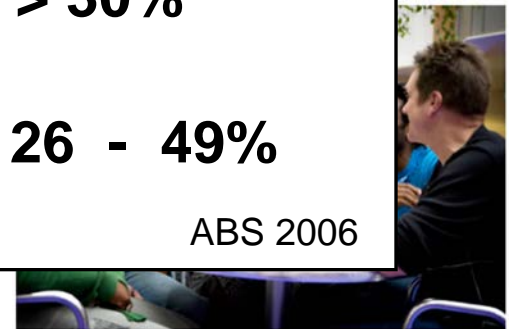
- speak two or more languages – currently or in the past equally proficient or more proficient in one language
- may not speak first language regularly
- specific contexts for each language: home / work / school / community => “hidden” bilingualism
- bilingualism is both prevalent and increasing

Prevalence of Bilingualism



- Australians born overseas: **26.1 %**
- Speak language other than English at home: **21.5 %**
- Aged over 65 speaking LOTE at home: **> 30%**
- Estimated overall bilingualism: **at least 26 - 49%**

ABS 2006



Prevalence of Bilingualism

- NSW: 20% (1.2 million people) have a disability
27.9% with a disability are from CALD backgrounds
(ABS 2006)
- SESLHD: 21% born overseas in non-English speaking country
24% speak language other than English at home
(ABS 2006)
- POWH Community Health - Speech Pathology caseload:
60% bilingual / multilingual
10% monolingual non-English language

Research Focus

- **To investigate the impact of impaired language and communication (aphasia) in bilingual adults and their carers**
- Little research on impact of aphasia on bilinguals
- Older individuals are at higher risk of language and communication impairment due to strokes and dementia
- Bilingualism is extensive in the older population
- In single-language speakers impaired language and communication due to aphasia impacts on functional independence, social participation and wellbeing

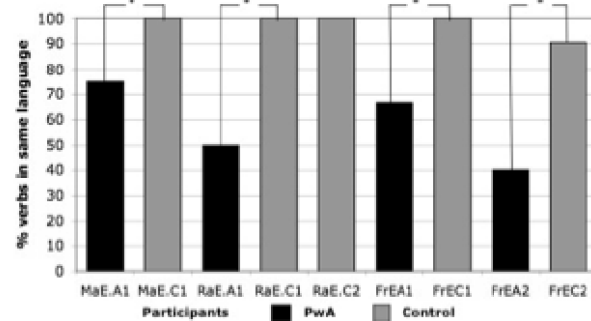
Bilingual participants & method

- 5 bilingual adults with aphasia and 5 matched controls from same language communities
- Proficient bilinguals, literate, switch languages in conversation
- Languages: Rarotongan (Cook Islands Maori), Maltese, French & English
- Tested first and second language (English) and ability to use both languages in conversation
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with bilingual participants with aphasia & carers to investigate impact of impaired language and communication

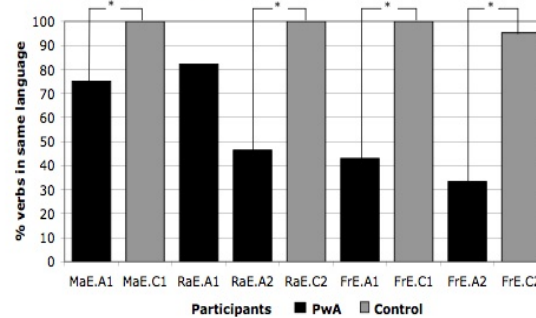
Quantitative Results

- Parallel impairment of language and communication in each language (L1 and L2) for bilinguals with aphasia
- Impaired grammar of language switching – unable to use both languages correctly in conversation
- Able to select the appropriate language to speak

Dual language production: Pronoun subject



Dual language selection: Pronoun subject



Qualitative Results: Consequences

Themes from interviews with participants and carers:

- limited social participation & community activities:
avoid/reduced conversations, phone, social contact
hard to participate in groups
- reduced independent functioning:
more housebound, changed living arrangements, need
others to talk to services, make appointments
- loss of identity: changed work, family, social roles, self
identity
- decreased quality of life and wellbeing, increased stress:
for bilingual individuals with aphasia & carers

Implications for everyday practice

- Assessment in both languages for bilingual individuals is essential: impairment may not be equivalent
- Always check if bilingual (past or present spoken languages): if Australian born & fluent English will not be indicated on medical record
- Discussion of complex information and testing may need to be in first language for accurate results
- Education and training for families - effective use of both languages together to facilitate communication
- Education of health team on impact of bilingualism
- Need for increased services to improve outcomes and address impact of communication impairment

Contact details

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Related Publications:

- Miller Amberber, A. (2011). Adapting the Bilingual Aphasia Test to Rarotongan (Cook Islands Maori): linguistic and clinical implications. *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics*, 25, 601-618.
- Miller Amberber, A. (2011). Language intervention in French-English bilingual aphasia: evidence of limited therapy transfer. *Journal of Neurolinguistics*, doi:10.1016/j.jneuroling.2011.10.002
- Miller Amberber, A. (2011). Bilingualism in the ageing population: consequences of language change and language loss in bilingual dementia and aphasia. *Proceedings of the 10th National Emerging Researchers in Ageing Conference*, Sydney, p. 211-218.
- Miller Amberber, A., Nickels, L., Crain, S. & Coltheart, M. (2011). Switching languages in bilingual aphasia: evidence of grammatical impairment from Rarotongan, Maltese, French and English. *Proceedings of the 12th International Science of Aphasia Conference*, Barcelona, p. 104-107.