

# The Multilingual Mind: lecture series on multilingualism across disciplines

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Tuesdays, 17.00 - 18.30 CET  
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**Cross-language phonological overlap in bilingual toddlers**

### Abstract

Adult and young bilinguals co-activate their languages in different degrees, even in entirely monolingual tasks/contexts (Spivey & Marian, 1999; Von Holzen, Fennell, & Mani, 2018). Previous research has used cognate words as stimuli. Cognates are translations overlapping in their phonological form (e.g., English “chocolate” /tʃɒklət/ and the Spanish “chocolate” /tʃokolate/). Previously reported cross-language phonological effects cannot be attributed only to phonological overlap between labels because they also overlap at the conceptual level. Here, we analyse how phonological representations across languages influence word recognition of non-cognate words in three-year-old Catalan-Spanish bilinguals. We adapted the visual word paradigm by Chow, Aimola-Davies, & Plunkett (2017). Children saw four pictures after 4100ms of the start of the trial an absent target was named in Catalan, while children saw four pictures: A) a Catalan to Spanish phonological competitor (B) a Spanish to Catalan one, and C) two phonologically unrelated competitors to the absent target named. A logistic growth curve analysis of fixations up to 3000ms after word onset showed that children looked more at the phonologically related competitors through translation than unrelated competitors across the trial. These results support that young bilinguals activate phonologically related competitors (Catalan to Spanish and Spanish to Catalan) in their familiar languages even when no overt phonological overlap is presented.