

Learning and Using Two Languages May Change Your Mind

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Abstract: In the last two decades there has been an upsurge of research on the bilingual mind and brain. Although the world is multilingual, only recently have cognitive and language scientists come to see that the use of two or more languages provides a unique lens to examine the neural plasticity engaged by language experience. But how? Bilinguals proficient in two languages appear to speak with ease in each language and often switch between the two languages, sometimes in the middle of a sentence. In this last period of research, we have learned that the two languages are always active, creating a context in which there is mutual influence and the potential for interference. Yet proficient bilinguals rarely make errors of language, suggesting that they have developed exquisite mechanisms of cognitive control. Contrary to the view that bilingualism adds complication to the language system, the new research demonstrates that all languages that are known and used become part of the same language system. A critical insight is that bilingualism provides a tool for examining aspects of the cognitive and neural architecture that are otherwise obscured by the skill associated with native language performance in monolingual speakers. In this talk I illustrate this approach and consider the consequences that bilingualism holds more generally for cognition and learning.



Bio: Judith Kroll is a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Language Science at the University of California, Irvine. Her research focuses on the unique way bilinguals juggle the presence of two languages in one mind and brain. Her work, supported by grants from National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health, shows that bilingualism provides a tool for revealing the interplay between language and cognition that is otherwise obscure in speakers of one language alone. Kroll is currently the principal investigator on a Partnerships for International Research and Education (PIRE) grant from NSF to develop an international research network and program of training to enable language scientists at all levels (undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral) to pursue research abroad on the science of bilingualism. She is the author of more than 100 studies on the science of language which have appeared in publications including the *Journal of Experimental Psychology, Cognition, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, and Brain & Language*, to name a few. She is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Psychological Association, the Association for Psychological Science, the Psychonomic Society, and the Society of Experimental Psychologists. Kroll was one of the founding editors of the journal *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* (Cambridge University Press), and one of the founding organizers of Women in Cognitive Science, a group developed to promote the advancement of women in the cognitive sciences and supported by NSF.