

International Linguistic Association

Monthly Lecture Series

Saturday, April 9, 2022. 11 AM - 12 PM (EST)

Dr. Laura Spinu
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Toward an Integrated Framework for Studying the Relationship between Bilingual Language Experience and Cognitive Reserve

Abstract:

Numerous articles in popular media exalt the benefits of bilingualism, among which its positive effects on cognitive reserve, the mind's resistance to damage of the brain (Bialystok et al. 2012, 2014). From a scientific perspective, however, this is not nearly a certainty. On the one hand, we have not teased apart the effects of linguistic and non-linguistic ways of enhancing cognitive reserve, the latter including playing musical instruments or advanced math skills (Calvo et al. 2016). On the other hand, while the connection between language experience and higher-level cognitive functions, also known as executive functions, has been under close scrutiny for decades, the effects of language on lower-level, sensorimotor functions, which are also connected to cognitive reserve, remain understudied (Spinu et al. 2018, 2020).

Furthermore, we have not implemented ways of objectively quantifying bilingual knowledge, which researchers claim has led to a massive replication crisis in the field, particularly in areas concerning the posited - yet highly controversial - existence of a bilingual cognitive advantage (Marzecova 2015, DeLuca et al. 2019). It is not unusual to find words such as “need”, “plea”, “appeal”, “call”, or “quest” among recent titles (de Bruin 2019, de Bruin et al. 2021, Marian & Hayakawa 2021, Poarch & Krott 2019). All of these articles, among others, recognize the critical need for innovative approaches. A complete picture of how language affects cognitive reserve cannot be obtained unless these issues are addressed.

In this talk, I propose an integrated framework for studying the relationship between bilingual language experience and cognitive reserve by addressing the methodological and theoretical gaps outlined above, and I present the results of experimental work I have conducted recently in this direction.

Date & Time: April 9, 2022. 11:00 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

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Dr. Laura Spinu

Associate Professor, Kingsborough Community College



Born and raised in Romania, Laura moved to the US in 2001 to pursue her Master's and doctoral studies. Her research interests lie in the fields of phonetics (more specifically, the acoustic characteristics of fricative sounds) and psycholinguistics (in particular, bilingual cognition). She has lived in various places in the Northeast, including Princeton, NJ, Stony Brook, NY, Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC. Before joining CUNY, she also spent several years in Canada working for Concordia University (Montreal, QC) as well as York University, Brock University, the University of Toronto, and the University of Western Ontario. At KCC, she has advised the Speech Club and Debate Club and mentored students as part of the CUNY Research Scholars Program. Two of her mentees won first place at the CUNY-wide student speech competition hosted by the CUNY League of Active Speech professors (CLASP). Interacting with students has been incredibly inspiring and stimulating for Laura – so much so that she felt compelled to kickstart a separate research program called K-CORE (**K**ingsborough **C**ollaborative **R**esearch & Conference Bootcamp), with tremendous success already: in less than 2 years, her student mentees delivered 21 presentations on original research in psycholinguistics at professional conferences, online, in person, and even abroad (International Symposium on Monolingual and Bilingual Speech, the Northwest Linguistics Conference, three meetings of the Acoustical Society of America, the annual conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association, to name a few).

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<https://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/facultyprofiles/lauraspinu.html>