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Language Brokering Experience Affects Phrase Interpretation and Sound Segmentation: Evidence from Spanish-English Bilinguals

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Abstract: Psycholinguistic repercussions of early experience in informal translation (language brokering) were examined in two tasks administered to proficient Spanish-English bilingual adults who had extensive brokering experience during childhood and proficient bilinguals without prior brokering experience. It was hypothesized that experience in language brokering leads to a greater sensitivity to non-literal meanings of expressions and a more analytic orientation to speech sounds in each language. The results supported these hypotheses. Experiment 1 showed that in making plausibility judgments for phrases that had a literal meaning, a non-literal meaning, or an absurd meaning, bilinguals with brokering experience performed significantly faster than non-brokers in accessing non-literal meanings. Experiment 2 showed that on a task requiring participants to delete "the first sound" of cross-language homophones, brokers' performance was sensitive to differences in properties of the sounds in each language, whereas non-brokers' performance did not differ across languages.