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Whole is Greater than the Sum of its Parts : Bilingualism Shapes Tolerance for Simultaneous Identities

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Abstract

In a set of three cross-cultural studies, we investigated how culture, linguistic background, and way of acquiring a bilingual status could affect tolerance for simultaneous identity (the belief that people can be simultaneously part of two social groups). Adults (N =1412), and 5-7-year-old children (N = 166) read stories about three bilingual children who each acquired a second language by different means (through learning, immigration, or parents) and measured participant's tolerance towards the simultaneous identity. In study 1 and 2 we found that US and Indian bilinguals were more likely to tolerate simultaneous linguistic identity than monolingual groups. In study 3 we find that bilingual 5-7-year-old children from the US and India exhibit a pattern similar to what was previously found in adults. Results suggest that both culture and the experience of bilingualism serve as important mechanisms in shaping our social group cognition.

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