

**Austin, Jennifer, Blume, María, & Sánchez, Liliana (2015). *Bilingualism in the Spanish-speaking world: Linguistic and cognitive perspectives*.  
Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.**

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Book review

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**ABSTRACT**

**EN** The book reviewed here may serve as an excellent resource for advanced undergraduate students of linguistics, as well as graduates and scholars in the field and related disciplines. It comprises five chapters that explore, through three Spanish bilingual communities, the following topics: basic concepts in bilingualism, such as code-switching and language transfer; a brief historical review of Spanish bilingualism; proposed definitions of bilingualism and the different ways in which bilinguals may be classified according to factors such as language competence and age of acquisition; the effect of bilingualism on the brains and minds of bilingual speakers, such as increased cortical activation and enhanced literacy; and, finally, the development and outcomes of bilingualism on the linguistic representations of bilingual speakers. The authors cover a breadth of research, rendering it accessible by succinctly reviewing findings, and further identify areas for future research.

**Key Words:** SPANISH BILINGUALISM, SPANISH-ENGLISH, SPANISH-EUSKARA, SPANISH-QUECHUA, BILINGUAL OUTCOMES, NEUROLINGUISTICS, COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS.

**ES** La obra revisada aquí se presenta como un recurso excelente tanto para estudiantes de últimos cursos del grado de lingüística como para posgraduados y académicos que trabajen en el campo objeto de estudio y áreas afines. Se compone de cinco capítulos que exploran los siguientes temas a través de tres comunidades bilingües donde una de las lenguas es el español: conceptos básicos del bilingüismo, tales como la alternancia de código y la transferencia; una breve reseña histórica del bilingüismo en español; definiciones propuestas en torno al bilingüismo y las diferentes formas en que puede clasificarse a los hablantes bilingües, atendiendo a factores como la competencia lingüística y la edad de adquisición; los efectos del bilingüismo en el cerebro y en las mentes de los hablantes bilingües, entre ellos el aumento de la activación cortical y una alfabetización mejorada, y, por último, el desarrollo del bilingüismo y sus resultados en las representaciones lingüísticas de los hablantes bilingües. Las autoras dan cabida a un extenso ámbito de investigación, y lo hacen accesible a través de un recorrido conciso por los hallazgos, identificando asimismo otras áreas de interés para futuras investigaciones.

**Palabras clave:** BILINGÜISMO EN ESPAÑOL, ESPAÑOL-INGLÉS, ESPAÑOL-EUSKARA, ESPAÑOL-QUECHUA, EFECTOS DEL BILINGÜISMO, NEUROLINGÜÍSTICA, LINGÜÍSTICA COGNITIVA.

**IT** Il libro recensito qui è una risorsa eccellente non solo per studenti universitari di livello avanzato di linguistica, ma anche per dottorandi e studiosi del settore e delle relative discipline. Il volume include cinque capitoli che attraverso l'analisi di tre comunità ispanofone bilingui, esplorano i seguenti argomenti: concetti di base del bilinguismo, come la commutazione di codice e l'interferenza linguistica; un breve ripasso della storia del bilinguismo ispanofono; definizioni proposte di bilinguismo e categorizzazione dei bilingui in base a fattori quali, tra tanti, la competenza linguistica e l'età di acquisizione; gli effetti che il bilinguismo produce sul cervello e sulla mente dei bilingui, come, per esempio, l'aumento dell'attivazione corticale e la maggiore alfabetizzazione; e, infine, lo sviluppo e i risultati del bilinguismo sulle rappresentazioni linguistiche dei bilingui.

**Parole chiave:** BILINGUISMO ISPANOFONO, SPAGNOLO-INGLESE, SPAGNOLO-EUSKARA, SPAGNOLO-QUECHUA, EFFETTI DEL BILINGUISMO BILINGUI, NEUROLINGUISTICA, LINGUISTICA COGNITIVA.

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## 1. Summary

As its title aptly indicates, *Bilingualism in the Spanish-speaking world: Linguistic and cognitive perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2015, pgs. 225+) has as its scope the exploration of research on the vast topic of bilingualism in communities in which both Spanish and a second language are spoken. The book is made up of five chapters. In the Introduction, Austin, Blume, and Sánchez state the goals of the book, which include reviewing research on the effects of bilingualism on language representation and the minds of speakers of more than one language, examining how theoretical assumptions have affected research on the effects of bilingualism on linguistic and cognitive development, and discussing the concept of degrees of bilingualism within a community based on amount of input and types of communicative interactions. These issues are explored primarily through three main bilingual communities: Spanish-English bilinguals in the USA, Spanish-Quechua bilinguals in Peru, and Spanish-Euskara (Basque) bilinguals in Spain. The chapter also introduces basic concepts that emerge in the field of bilingualism, such as code switching, language transfer and convergence, borrowing, minority and majority languages, diglossia, language shift, language maintenance and death, models of bilingual education, pidgins, and creoles. The chapter ends with a brief grammatical overview of each of the four languages that participate in the bilingualism of the three communities explored, as well as a brief historical synopsis of how Spanish came into contact with each of these languages.

Chapter 1 begins with an exploration of various proposed definitions of bilingualism, including such notions as proficiency, competence, and fluency. The authors look at how the evolution of the definition of bilingualism and the methods of testing language proficiency have impacted, and continue to affect research and education policy. The chapter moves from the early days of Bloomfield's (1933) "native-like control of two languages" to more comprehensive, current-day definitions of bilingualism that include proficiency in the various linguistic subcomponents (phonology, syntax, etc.), as well as in the specific mode of communication and sociolinguistic context. The chapter then proceeds with a discussion of the various criteria used to classify bilinguals, followed by a review of the research on how second languages are acquired, addressing differences from first-language acquisition and the critical period hypothesis. The chapter ends with a brief look at the results of bilingualism, such as language loss and the development of the first and second language in heritage speakers.

Chapter 2 examines bilingualism from the perspectives of mind and brain of speakers of two or more languages. After briefly introducing neurolinguistic and neuroimaging methods, the authors review the research in neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and linguistics, focusing on results that show greater brain gray matter density in bilinguals, as well as increased cortical activation during language processing, which varies according to age of acquisition, proficiency, and continued exposure. The authors also review research that shows how the bilingual brain displays responses to syntactic and grammatical errors during real-time processing and discuss models of bilingual lexical and syntactic processing. The chapter also addresses research that shows that bilingualism may afford benefits in the development of literacy and phonological awareness in children acquiring languages with alphabetic scripts.

Finally, Chapter 3 addresses linguistic development in bilinguals, from a cognitive and linguistic perspective. This chapter deals with key questions such as the nature and organization of the bilingual's lexicon(s) and grammar by considering research on whether the words and associated concepts in each of the bilingual's languages are stored separately or together, and how they are accessed. The authors also address two hypotheses regarding whether bilingual children's syntax for each language is developed in one system or separate systems for each language, and look at more nuanced explanations in the literature that point toward autonomous syntax development with degrees of cross-linguistic influence at the morphological level and at the syntax-discourse interface.

The book ends with two pages of concluding remarks that summarize the entirety of the book, as well as the main topics explored in each chapter.

## 2. Evaluation

*Bilingualism in the Spanish-speaking world: Linguistic and cognitive perspectives* is appropriate for several audiences. Written in a straightforward and comprehensible manner, the book serves as an introductory textbook on bilingualism involving the Spanish language for graduate students as well as advanced undergraduates with prior knowledge of linguistics. Likewise, it may serve as an excellent reference tool for scholars in the field and other related disciplines. Given the large amount of published

research on bilingualism, the authors do an excellent job of achieving their goals of examining theoretical assumptions of bilingualism and their effect on research in the field and looking more in depth at the concept of varying degrees of bilingualism and how these degrees relate to input and different types of communication.

In the first chapter, for example, after thoroughly reviewing the many forms of bilingualism according to factors such as language competence, use and age of acquisition, the authors rightfully address some of the crucial and difficult questions in the field, such as the lack of consensus in defining what it means to be bilingual, along with related concepts such as “native-like” and “near-native” and the implications of this lack of clarity for research. In addressing these concerns, the authors note that researchers must be cautious about overgeneralizing the classification of the participants in their studies, and should look closely at the differences between bilinguals as seen in the aforementioned factors, and others like type and place of exposure to each of the languages for reporting of bilinguals with respect to all (extra)linguistic variables. In the same chapter, the authors also do a great service to all bilinguals by calling forth the issue of viewing native language (L1) influence as a deficiency. While this viewpoint has largely been abandoned by scholars in linguistics, researchers in related fields, such as education, will benefit greatly from this call to a more scientific view of the phenomenon.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is the large amount of information it provides in just 234 pages and the ease with which the reader is taken through the material. The authors do an outstanding job of distilling the essence of what has been found in the huge body of research in the different subfields of bilingualism while also calling attention to what questions must still be investigated. For example, the second chapter provides a concise overview of the diverse methods of investigation used in psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic research, and reviews studies on the differences found in the brains of bilingual speakers when compared to their monolingual counterparts. These results are presented along with the theoretical models of language representation and processing that accompany such research, and the cognitive benefits of being bilingual. For scholars interested in making significant advances in the field, the chapter notes, for example, the lack of studies that examine adult second-language (L2) attrition. For the more unseasoned reader, the authors provide necessary explanations of linguistic phenomena, such as a clear yet succinct explanation of ergativity in the first chapter.

While there is no doubt that the book will serve scholars and students alike, it does have some slight shortcomings. In the third paragraph of Chapter 3, the authors state that they “espouse a view of language that assumes the existence of different language components: a lexicon, a phonological component, a syntactic component, and an interpretive component” (p. 127). In short, the authors adopt a generative grammar perspective. While choosing a particular theoretical perspective is certainly not a shortcoming, this claim comes, perhaps, a little too late. In fact, an informed linguist is able to discern the authors' theoretical position from the very beginning of the book, in such sentences as “As in other Indo-European languages, movement is overt, with, for example, *wh*-words (*qué, quién, cuándo*, etc.) being moved to the beginning of sentences for question formation” (p. 17). The notion of movement is, of course, associated with transformational theories of syntax. Although the majority of studies in bilingualism involving Spanish are indeed conducted from a generative grammar approach, the authors do draw on many studies of bilingualism involving other languages in their examinations of various phenomena. Thus, the book would be enriched if it also reviewed studies that took a usage-based perspective of (second) language acquisition, such as Gries and Wulff (2005), Paradis, Nicoladis, Crago and Genesee (2011), and Ulbrich and Ordin (2014). A broader view on bilingualism would add value particularly to Chapter 3, in which issues such as bilingual syntactic development and cross-linguistic influence are addressed. The reader would thus benefit from added information and insight on theoretical approaches adopted in the study of bilingualism.

Nonetheless, this relatively small oversight does not diminish the quality of the product. In a book whose scope might seem quite large at first, the authors have succeeded in reviewing and examining research in a great deal of subfields, bringing together the many angles from which research in bilingualism in the Spanish-speaking world has been approached and offering insights on the current state of the subfields in question. The reader will find that *Bilingualism in the Spanish-speaking world: Linguistic and cognitive perspectives* provides information for both the seasoned scholar as well as the more inexperienced learner.

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- EN** **Maria I. Fionda** earned her doctoral degree in Spanish linguistics at the University of Florida, where she researched individual differences in second language processing among low-proficiency adult native English learners of Spanish. Her areas of interest include cognitive linguistics, specifically the effect of general cognitive abilities such as working memory on second-language processing and individual differences in morphosyntactic processing at various levels of proficiency.
- ES** **Maria I. Fionda** es doctora en Lingüística Española por la Universidad de Florida, donde ha investigado las diferencias individuales en el proceso de adquisición de una segunda lengua por parte de aprendientes adultos de español básico cuya lengua materna es el inglés. La lingüística cognitiva es una de sus áreas de interés, concretamente el efecto de las capacidades cognitivas generales tales como la memoria de trabajo en el procesamiento de una segunda lengua, así como las diferencias individuales en el procesamiento morfosintáctico a distintos niveles de dominio lingüístico.
- IT** **Maria I. Fionda** ha conseguito il dottorato in Linguistica spagnola all'Università della Florida, dove ha svolto una ricerca sulle differenze nell'elaborazione della seconda lingua tra apprendenti anglofoni adulti di spagnolo con un basso livello di competenza. I suoi interessi di ricerca includono la linguistica cognitiva, in particolare l'effetto di abilità cognitive generali come la memoria di lavoro sull'elaborazione della seconda lingua, e le differenze individuali nell'elaborazione morfosintattica a vari livelli di competenza.