

On the New Dynamics of Bilingualism: Variation in Language Experience Shapes the Bilingual Mind and Brain



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Dr. Judith F. Kroll is Distinguished Professor at the University of California, Irvine and former director of the Center for Language Science at Pennsylvania State University. Her research uses the tools of cognitive neuroscience to examine the way that bilinguals juggle the presence of two languages in one mind and brain. Her work shows that bilingualism provides a tool for revealing the interplay between language and cognition that is otherwise obscure in speakers of one language alone. She 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 (<http://womenincogsci.org/>).

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ABSTRACT

In the last three decades there has been an upsurge of research on the bilingual mind and brain. In this period we have learned that humans are far more plastic across the lifespan than previously understood. It is now uncontroversial to claim that the bilingual's two languages are continually active, creating a dynamic interplay across them. But there continues to be controversy about the consequences of that cross-language exchange for how cognitive and neural resources are recruited when a second language (L2) is learned and used actively and whether native speakers of a language retain privilege in their first acquired language (L1). The new research reveals that the bilingual's two languages are far more open to each other than was initially understood. The two languages are continually active and interacting, producing dynamic changes to the L1 itself, creating openness to the L2, and reflecting the influence of the L2 on the L1, with the L1 potentially losing its status as the dominant language under some circumstances. By examining variation in the trajectory of learning and in the contexts of language use, we see the regulatory mechanisms that engage cognitive and neural resources and that become shaped by experience. In this talk, I illustrate the ways that recent studies have shown that the minds and brains of bilinguals are inherently complex and social, taking into account the variation in the environments in which the two languages are embedded, and shaping the dynamics of cross-language exchange across the lifespan.