

# LANGUAGE ABILITIES OF BILINGUAL CHILDREN FROM OFFICIAL LANGUAGE MINORITY COMMUNITIES: WHY SHOULD WE EVALUATE IN BOTH LANGUAGES?

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# Defining Bilingual

A bilingual can be broadly defined as a person who can communicate in two languages.

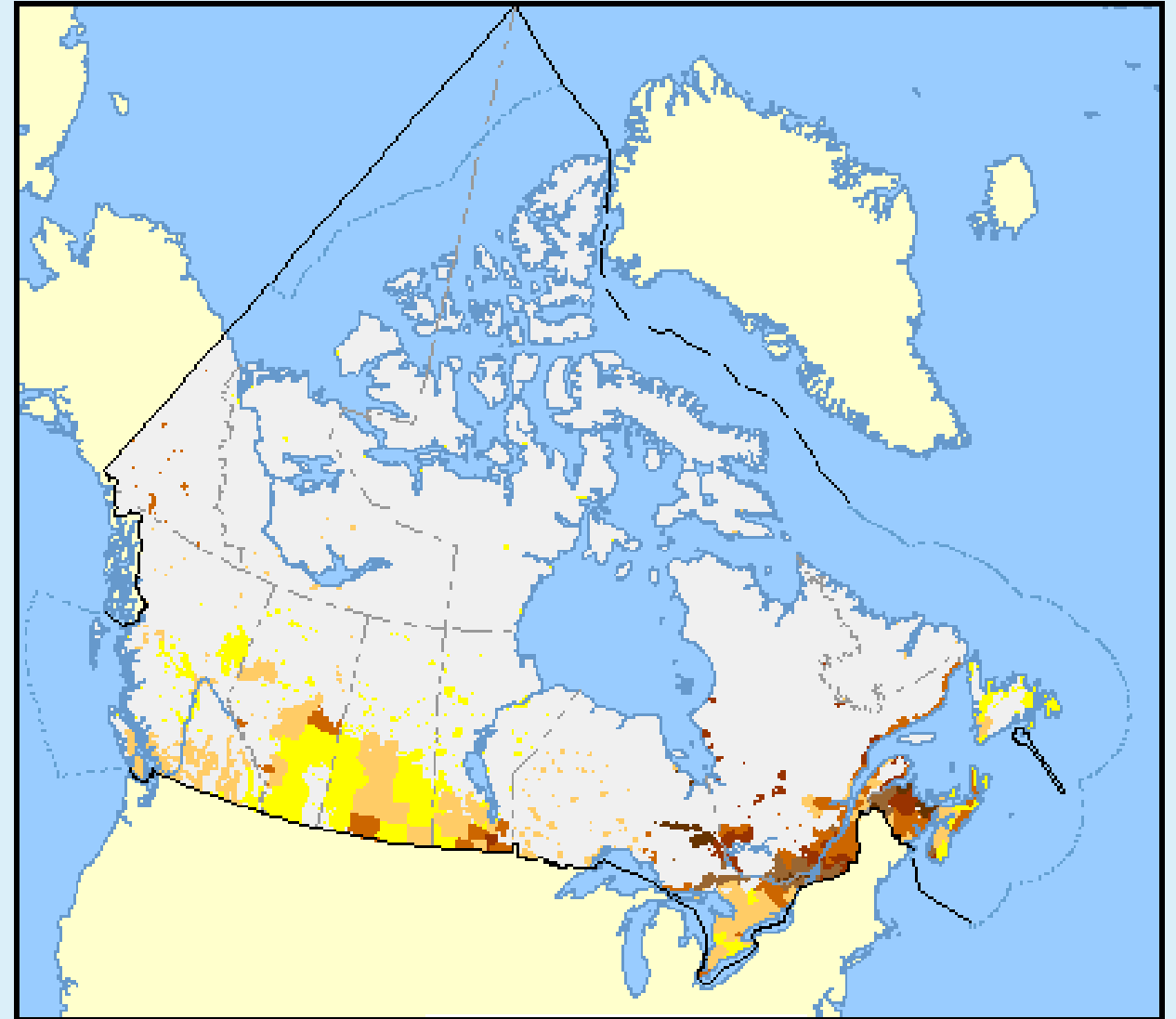
A bilingual

- *has knowledge and performance abilities in both languages*
- *has control of the bilingual system*



# Official Language Minority Communities (OLMC)

Individuals from OLMC report higher rates of bilingualism than majority-language speakers (Lachapelle & Lepage, 2006).



# Language of health services and OLMCs

- Access to health services in one's own language is important for improving one's health (ICRSSS, 2015)
- In particular, for speech-language pathology accessing one's language is crucial to assure the quality, accuracy and effectiveness of the services.

# Difficulties accessing SLP services by OLMC

- Assessing the speech and language of children living in OLMCs is challenging due to four main problems:
  - Number of qualified bilingual speech-language pathologists
  - Availability of appropriate tools for assessment
  - Permission to conduct assessment in both official languages
  - **Appropriate normative data on bilingual speech and language development**

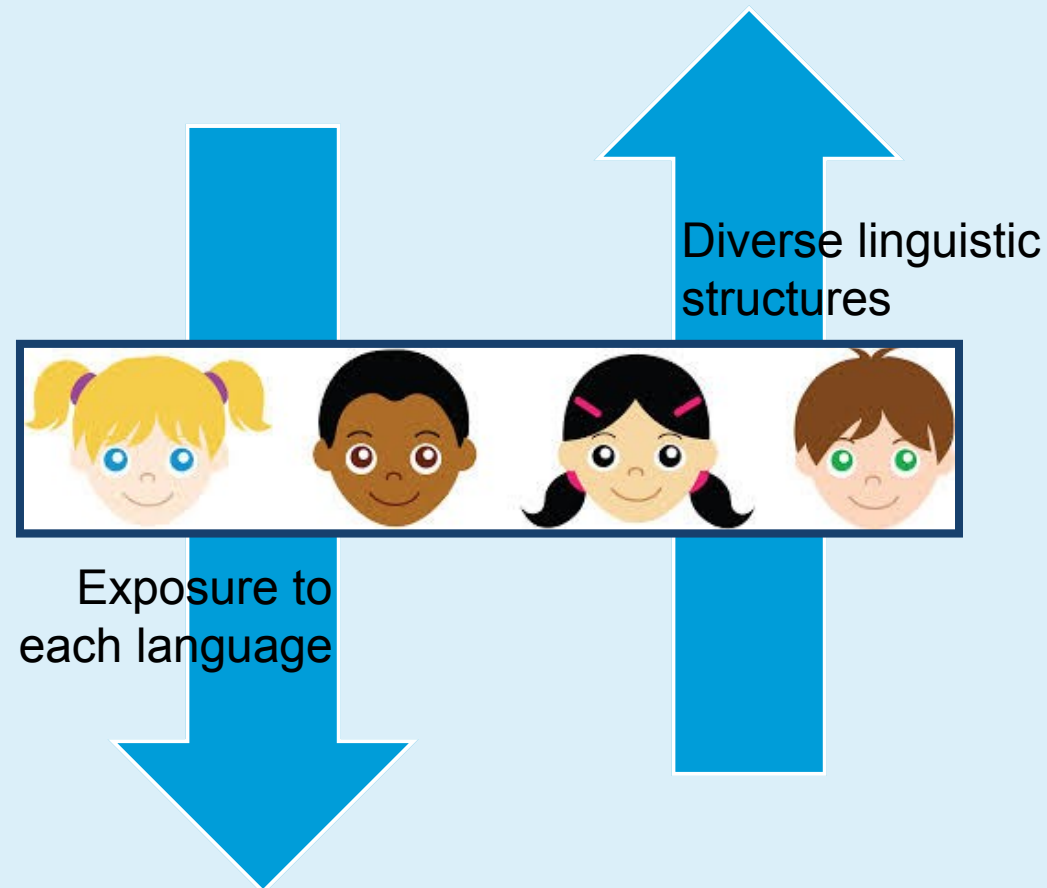
# Bilingual assessment

- Recommendations for best practice in speech and language assessments is to evaluate bilingual children in both of their languages (e.g., in Canada: SAC-OAC, in USA: ASHA)
- Evaluating children in both of their language can provide a unified view of their communication competence, and can confirm the presence of the disorder in both languages
- Comprehensive language profile – need to understand the amount of exposure to, and use of, each language
- Evaluating children in both languages is costly and requires access to professionals and assessment tools in

# Why are bilingual children different?

Compared to monolingual children, bilinguals have

- less time of exposure to each language
- exposed to more diverse linguistic structures



# Current study

- The goal of this study was to document the “typical” range of language abilities of bilingual four-year-old children living in OLMCs
  - Specifically in Winnipeg and in other cities such as Montréal, Québec, Ottawa & Edmonton
- Specifically, we sought to answer three research questions:
  - How do bilingual English-French children living in Winnipeg and other Canadian cities perform on standard vocabulary and language tests?
  - Do children show stronger language abilities in English or French for each task?
  - Do children show profile effects across the tasks?



# Participants

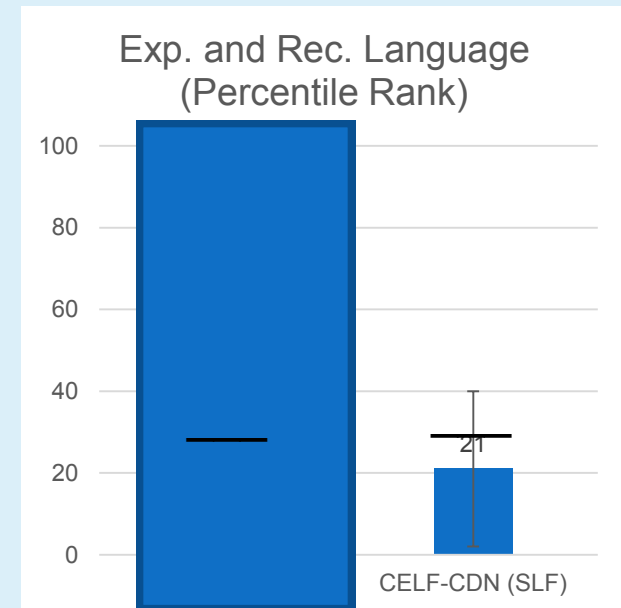
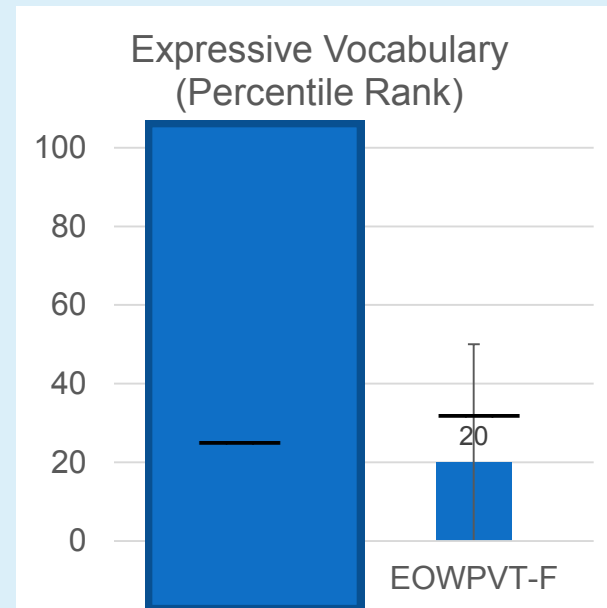
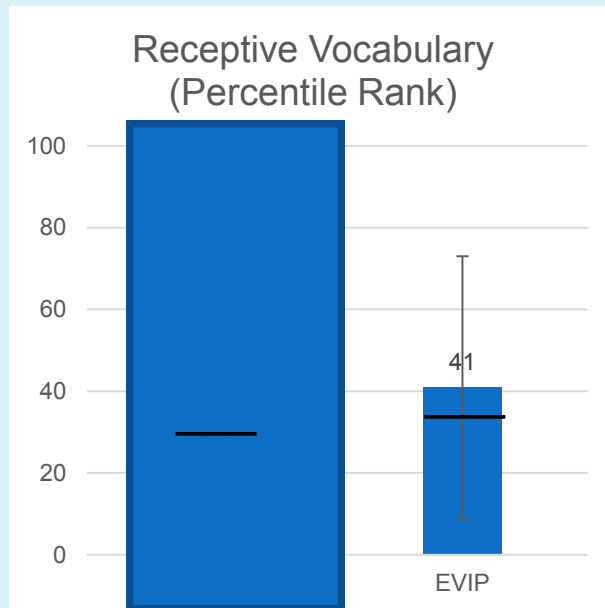
- 9 children in Winnipeg and 43 children in other cities participated
  - 9 from Montreal
  - 16 from Québec
  - 6 from Ottawa
  - 13 from Edmonton
- Children had acquired the minority language from birth, and all had learned their L2 before 24 months (all but 2 in other cities)
- 7/9 children in Winnipeg used English and French within the home (33/43 participants in other cities used both languages at home)

# Methodology

- Children's language abilities were measured using parallel clinical assessments in English and French:
  - Vocabulary knowledge (PPVT/EVIP)
  - Expressive vocabulary (EOWPVT)
  - Morphology and syntax (CELF-PRE/CELF-CDN)
- In addition, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire about language use and exposure (MacLeod, in preparation; Alberta Language Development Questionnaire, Paradis et al. 2010)

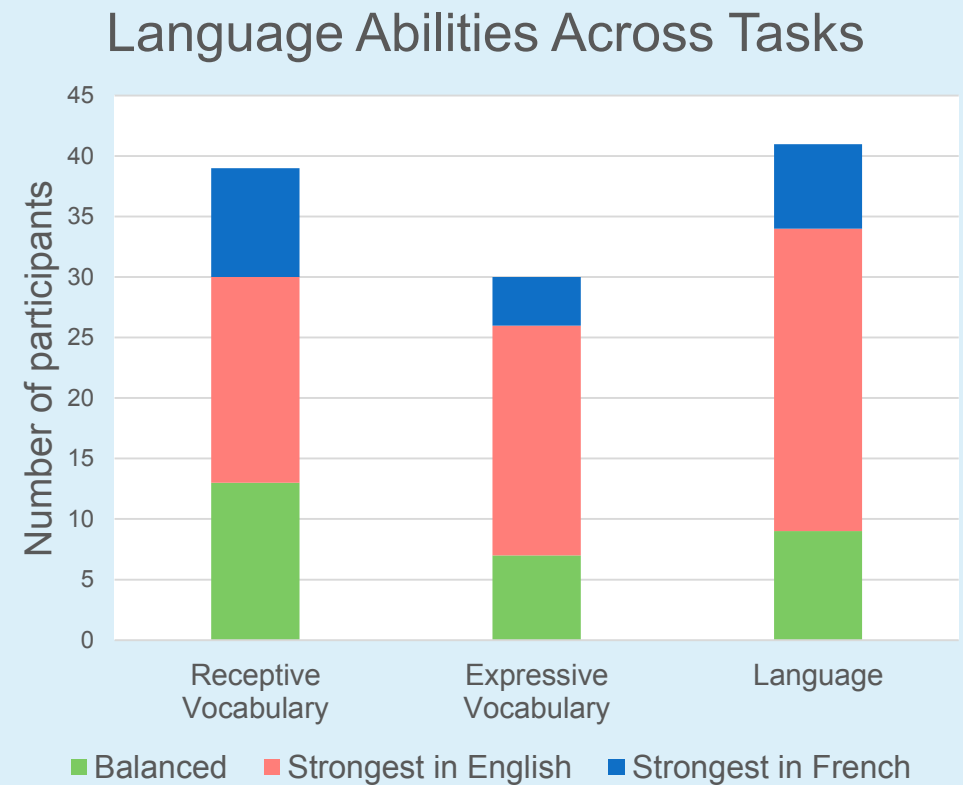
# Research question 1: How do bilingual English-French children living in OLMCs perform on standard vocabulary and language tests?

- Overall, children were within normal range for one of their two languages
  - Winnipeg: equivalent language abilities in vocabulary knowledge, expressive vocabulary, and overall expressive/receptive language skills
  - Other cities: stronger language abilities in English
  - **But** this could be missed if only one language was assessed
- The next step is to explore individual patterns to better understand the variability observed



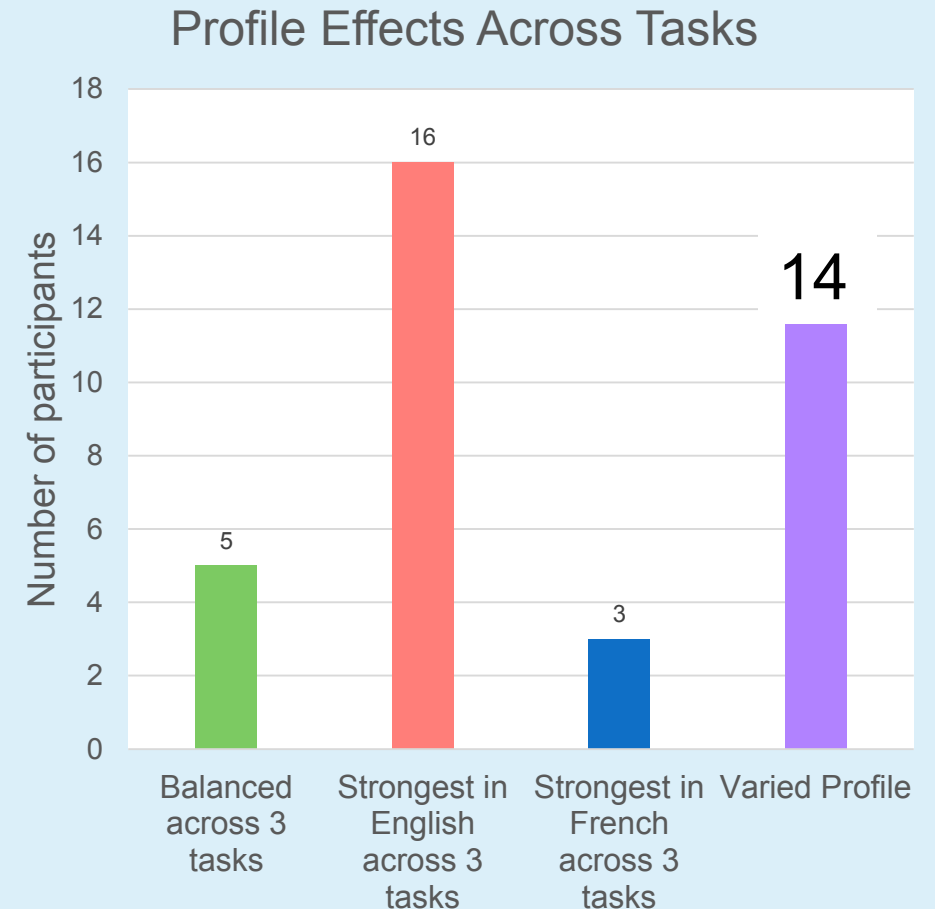
# Research question #2: Do children show stronger language abilities in English or French for each task?

- It was possible to observe a stronger language
  - Winnipeg: 50% of children were balanced (but slightly stronger in French)
  - Other cities: Majority of children were stronger in English in at least one task
  - Despite early exposure to both English and French for most children, and use of both languages within the home
- Balanced abilities were more likely for vocabulary knowledge



# Research question #3: Do children show profile effects across the tasks?

- 2/3 of children showed consistent abilities across tasks but 1/3 showed profile effects (similar effects in WPG)
- “Profiles” were quite variable: 5/14 children had balanced receptive vocabulary and stronger English expressive vocabulary and language; 9/14 children had unique profiles
- Highlights the importance of assessing children in both languages to get a complete picture of their language abilities



# Exploring profile effects

14 children showed profile effects, in other words they were not consistently balanced or stronger in a single language across tasks

## 5 children

- Balanced receptive vocabulary
- Stronger in English for language and expressive vocabulary

## 1 child

- Stronger in French for receptive vocabulary
- Balanced in expressive vocabulary
- Stronger in English for language

## 1 child

- Stronger in French for receptive vocabulary
- Balanced in expressive vocabulary
- Stronger in English for language

## 1 child

- Stronger in English for receptive vocabulary and language
- Stronger in French expressive vocabulary

## 1 child

- Stronger in English expressive and receptive vocabulary
- Balanced for language

## 3 children (2 in WPG)

- Stronger in French for receptive vocabulary
- Stronger in English for expressive vocabulary
- Balanced for language

## 1 child

- Stronger in French for receptive vocabulary
- Balanced expressive vocabulary and language

## 1 child

- Stronger in French for receptive vocabulary and language
- Stronger in English for expressive vocabulary

# NEXT STEPS

- Develop guidelines for clinicians when assessing bilingual children that accounts for (a) age of second language acquisition, (b) amount of exposure, and (c) the sociolinguistic context (e.g. language preference, who interacts with the child and in what language, the setting)
- Continue to explore “typical” language development
- Once we understand what can be expected of “typical” bilingual development, we can more confidently identify delayed and disordered bilingual language development



# MERCI! THANKS!

Questions?

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