

Abstract: Language System in German-English Bilinguals. A study on placement verbs.

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The question of how language is stored in the mind has been of interest to linguists for a long time. Since the majority of the world's population is bilingual, answering how language systems are stored in the mind becomes increasingly fascinating. This presentation aims to shed light on the nature of language systems, by analysing placement verbs in German-English bilinguals. The study presented is based on Alferink & Gullberg's (2014) work, who had investigated this matter in French-Dutch bilinguals. French provides its speakers with mostly generic placement verbs such as *mettre* (to put) and *poser* (to place) whereas in Dutch it is obligatory to decide between the semantically specific *leggen* (to lay) and *zetten* (to set/stand), whose usage depend on the positioning of an object. Their study found evidence of a general merged language system. Neither language allows speakers to become more specific or generic, respectively; looking at German-English bilinguals in this respect is highly relevant.

Although the English language uses the generic placement verbs *put* and *place* frequently, it also possesses the low-frequency cognates *lay* and *set/stand*. Conversely, German uses the semantically more specific verbs *legen* (lay) and *stellen* (set/stand) more frequently than generic ones such as *platzieren* (to place) and *geben* (to place). The experiment sets out to investigate how German dominant bilinguals realise *legen* and *stellen* in English. Along the lines with Alferink & Gullberg's (2014) outcome it was predicted that language-specific features would be omitted, primarily resulting in a more general system in German. Following the processing of the data (repeated measures ANOVA), no evidence for a merged system was found within the sample, thus contradicting one of the initial hypotheses. It is concluded that bilinguals' conceptual systems may develop differently, depending on whether a second language is acquired earlier or later in life.