Code-switching from Dutch to Frisian requires more cognitive control than code-switching from Frisian to Dutch

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Recent research suggests that cognitive control plays a role in code-switching, both in bilingual adults (Verreyt, Woumans, Vandelanotte, Szmalec, & Duyck, 2016) and in bilingual children (Gross & Kaushanskaya, 2015). Code-switching would only require cognitive control, however, when bilinguals maintain some degree of separation between their two languages; it would not require cognitive control when bilingual speakers completely mix their two lexicons and grammars (Green & Wei, 2014).

The Frisian-Dutch bilingual context is interesting in this respect because mixing of Dutch (the majority language) into Frisian (the minority language) is common, but mixing of Frisian into Dutch is not (Breuker, 2001). Therefore, Frisian-Dutch bilingual speakers need to maintain some degree of language separation when they speak Dutch, but not when they speak Frisian. This leads to the prediction that code-switching from Dutch to Frisian practises cognitive control, while code-switching from Frisian to Dutch does not.

To test this hypothesis, we analyzed data from 120 5- and 6-year-old Frisian-Dutch bilingual children. Cognitive control was measured with a Flanker task and information about children’s code-switching behavior was obtained through a parental questionnaire. Age, non-verbal IQ, SES, Frisian and Dutch language scores were included as control variables.

Multiple regression analyses showed that frequency of code-switching from Dutch to Frisian significantly predicted performance on the Flanker task, β = -.24, p = .03, but that frequency of code-switching from Frisian to Dutch did not, β = .08, p = .45. This suggests that switching from a majority to a minority language is related to cognitive control, whereas switching from a minority to a majority language is not.
References


