

Deconstructing the monolingual norm in research on multilingualism

Antonella Sorace

University of Edinburgh and *Bilingualism Matters*

Linguistics research has traditionally been shaped by the idea of a native monolingual speaker. Research on bilingualism and language learning has also defined attainment levels (e.g. "near-native speakers") and differences ('advantages' or 'disadvantages') with respect to native monolingual norms. However, interdisciplinary research on language learning and language change across the lifespan is deconstructing the notion of the native monolingual speaker as a default point of reference. Experimental research has shown not only that a speaker's first language (L1) changes in natural and selective ways upon exposure to a second language (L2) but also – and crucially – that the aspects of L1 grammar affected by change are the same that remain variable even in highly proficient L2 speakers of the same language (Sorace 2011, 2016). This selective convergence between L1 change and L2 acquisition may be a marker of flexibility and 'communicative efficiency' which is functional to successful L2 learning. I will show how the deconstruction of the native monolingual norm opens up new perspectives not only on multilingualism but, more generally, on language, with wider and important societal implications.