

Autistic polyglots: An analysis of the language experiences, motivations, and atypical learning profiles of autistic multilinguals

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INTRODUCTION

Autism

- can be associated with language / communication difficulties

Bilingualism

- 50% of the population
- profiles shaped by many features of exposure / use
- impacts social and cognitive processes

Autism + Bilingualism

- families: concern bilingualism will overload autistic child
- autistic multilinguals: only case studies available
- lived experience accounts of autistic multilinguals are lacking

OBJECTIVES

1) Identify the different language profiles of autistic multilingual adults.

2) Describe factors contributing to the learning of multiple languages in autistic people, and describe the interplay between autism and bilingualism as perceived by autistic multilingual people.

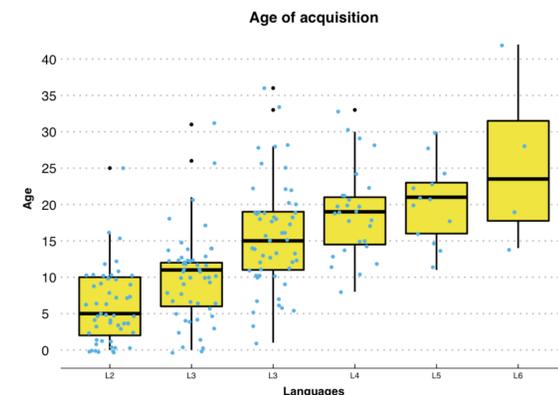
METHODS

- Autism & Bilingualism Census:
 - online survey circulated from 22nd February 2017 to 31st March 2017
 - part 1 - language history, proficiency and use
 - part 2 - self-rating of social life quality and social life habits
 - part 3 - free responses: bilingualism x autism experience
- 297 respondents, including 54 respondents reporting 4 languages or more. The following analysis was performed on this sub-sample.
 - 47 clinically diagnosed, 7 self-identified
 - 55.6% female
 - mean age: 32.7 (SD = 9.8; range = 18–64)
 - 26 respondents reported 4 languages
 - 14 respondents reported 5 languages
 - 14 respondents reported 6 languages or more

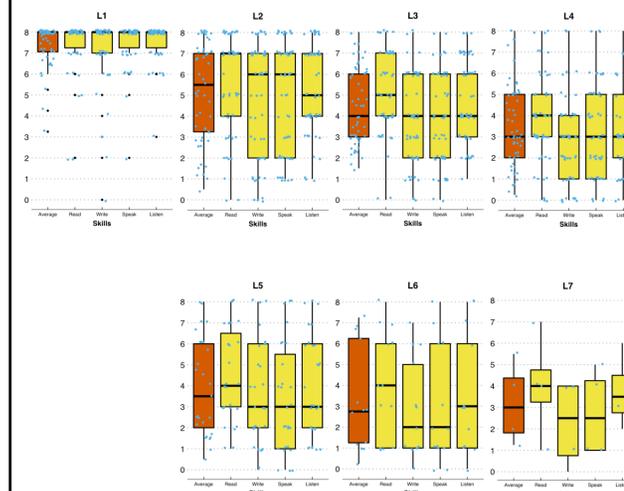
RESULTS

1) Identify the different language profiles of autistic multilingual adults.

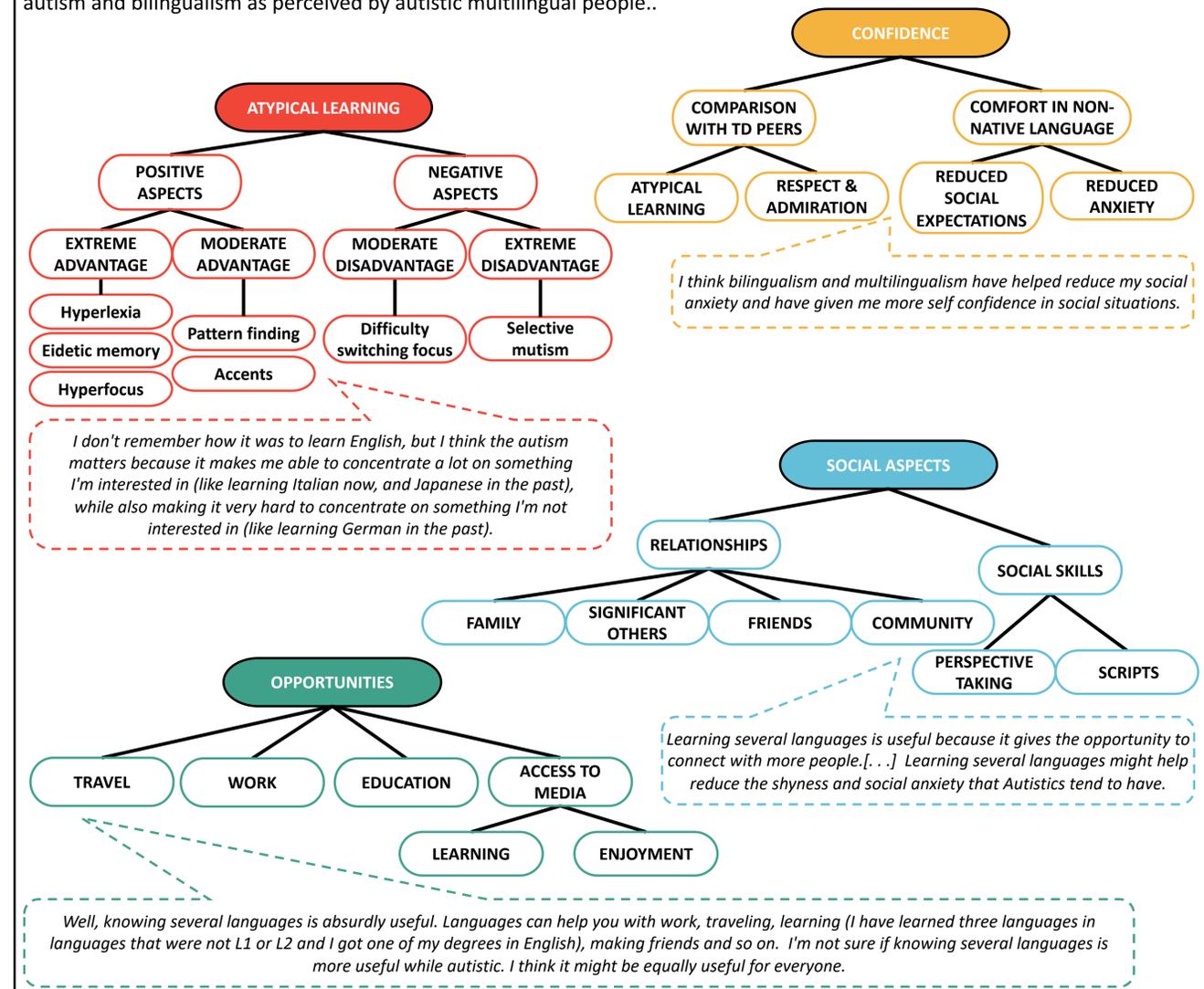
a. Many languages learned after age 10 – not raised polyglots



b. High levels of proficiency even in a 4th language



2) Describe factors contributing to the learning of multiple languages in autistic people, and describe the interplay between autism and bilingualism as perceived by autistic multilingual people..



DISCUSSION

1) Wide range of language learning profiles (age of acquisition, proficiency).

2) Autistic polyglots' motivations: social aspects and a predisposition for language acquisition. Benefits: better social skills, increased opportunities, and confidence.

1st study reporting insights from autistic multilinguals on the relationship between autism and their language experiences, their motivations, and their perceived benefits of being multilingual.

This study highlights diversity in the language profiles of autistic multilinguals, and offers multiple leads to better support language learning opportunities for autistic people.

CONTACT

Thank you to all the participants and services that contributed to this research!

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