



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Contact between people speaking different languages has been a common phenomenon since ancient times. As globalization has increased awareness of the extent of language contact and linguistic diversity, questions concerning bilingualism have taken on an increasing importance from both practical and scholarly points of view (Wei & Moyer, 2008). Psycholinguistics has greatly enriched the field of bilingualism research by providing insights into the bilingual mind, in order to better understand the cognitive basis of bilingualism and the logic of experimental and formal approaches to language science. Psycholinguistic research in the field of bilingual lexical processing has suggested that information from the non-target language is spontaneously accessed when bilinguals read, listen, or speak in a given language. Although there has been extensive research in this area, the available evidence is not always consistent and the answers to some of the questions are still subject to controversy. Grosjean (1998a) suggested that variation in experimental manipulations may influence the pattern of results and be responsible for differences in outcomes.

The present study, therefore, intended to bridge this gap by examining the nature of bilingual lexical representation and processing in a previously unexamined different-script language pair

(Bodo–Assamese). We examined two major areas of research activity in experimental psycholinguistics—comprehension and production. The overall goal of the study was to investigate how Bodo–Assamese bilinguals represent and process their two languages during word recognition as well as production, as a function of their second language age of acquisition and proficiency. More specifically, it focused on the empirical investigations of the storage and retrieval of cognates and non-cognates in a bilingual mind. In order to look at proficiency separately from age of acquisition, we tested three groups of bilinguals who differed on their second language age of acquisition and proficiency—Early High Proficient, Late High Proficient and Late Low Proficient. The study further investigated whether language-specific differences, such as script can modulate cross-language activation, the locus of language selection, and the manner of language/lexical selection during bilingual word recognition as well as production.

To address these issues, several behavioural experiments were designed which include twenty word recognition experiments from three different tasks (visual lexical decision, semantic categorization, and translation recognition) and twelve production experiments from five different tasks (word naming, word translation, simple picture naming, picture-word interference, and primed picture naming). The overall results of the experiments suggest that Bodo–Assamese bilinguals activate both the first language and the second language in parallel, even when direct linguistic input is presented in one language only. The results are interpreted within the context of current models of bilingual language representation and processing.