

# “The linguistic evaluation of bilingual children: Data from an Italian school in Greece.”

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## Objective

Over the years, a number of international researchers, have focused on the language development of bilingual children. However, the findings concerning the importance of non-word (pseudo-word) tasks as an indicator of bilingual language development have been mixed {1} Furthermore, few studies have investigated the bilingual language development of young Italian-Greek speakers specifically.

The aim of this study was to identify the communication-language skills of school-aged children growing up in bilingual Italian-Greek families and/or in a bilingual educational environment. Our goal was to evaluate the non-word repetition in both languages, and to compare the results with their academic and language abilities, according to teachers' evaluations. The research questions that arise are:

- ❖ What are the academic and language skills of bilingual children according to their teachers?
- ❖ What is the performance of bilingual children in the non-word repetition task in Italian and in Greek respectively?
- ❖ Do their academic and language skills correlate with their performance on the non-word repetition task?

## Methods:

### 1. Participants

Grade	Age (years)	Students
1 <sup>st</sup>	6;4-7;4	13
2 <sup>nd</sup>	7;6-8;4	8
3 <sup>rd</sup>	7;5-8;11	15
4 <sup>th</sup>	8;5-10;3	14
5 <sup>th</sup>	10;4-11;4	10

The sample consisted of 60 elementary students who were selected from the “Italian School of Athens”. The participants were aged between 6 and 12 years ( $M=8;9$ ,  $SD=2,5$ ) and there were no exclusion criteria.

The sample included families of different nationalities. More specifically, 19 children had Greek parents, 6 children had Albanian parents, 25 children had Italian-Greek parents and 10 children of other nationalities.

### 2. Materials and procedure

In order to conduct this study, approval was acquired from the Italian embassy and written permission from the students' guardians.

The process included two phases: During the first phase, a questionnaire was completed by the teachers based on their observations of the child's language-communication and academic abilities. Afterwards, the children were assessed individually using specialized tools that examine non-word repetition in both languages.

Statistical analysis of the data was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

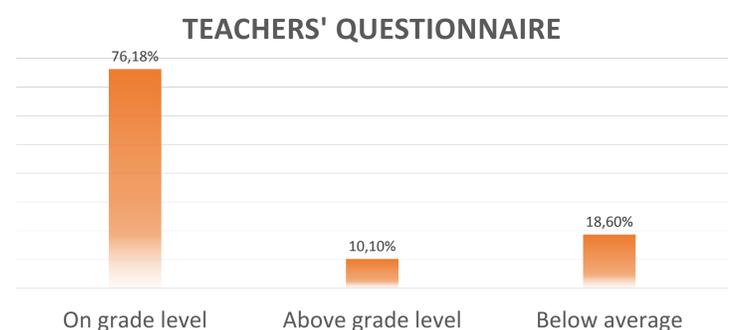
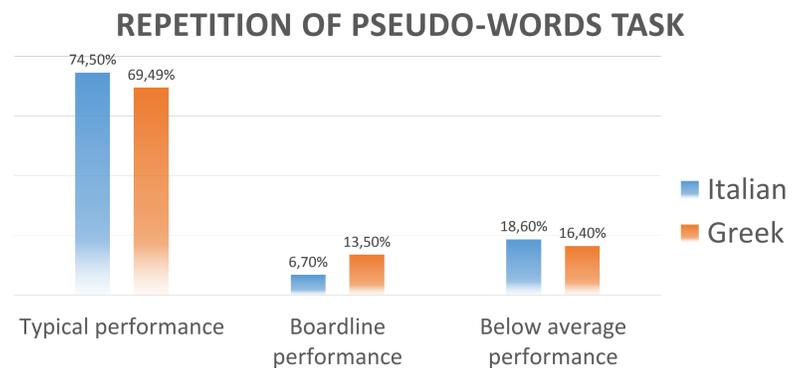
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The test materials consisted of:

- ❖ The test used to examine the students' academic abilities in reading, writing and mathematics, and also to detect any language-communication deficits was the “Detection of oral speech difficulties: A teachers' questionnaire”, which is part of the «Educational assessment for speech-language evaluation» (VDOE, 2011).
- ❖ The students' non-word repetition abilities were assessed with the «Ripetizione di non parole» subtest of «Batteria per la Valutazione del Linguaggio in Bambini dai 4 ai 12 anni (BVL\_4-12)» (Marini, Marotta, Bulgheroni, & Fabbro, 2015)
- ❖ The students' non-word repetition abilities in Greek were assessed with the “Short-term phonological memory: Repetition of pseudo-words” subtest of the «Diagnostic Verbal IQ Test for Greek preschool and school age children». {2}

## Results:



According to the results, the students' low performance in the non-word repetition task correlates with their academic skills. ( $p<0.05$ )

## Conclusions

In the present study, students' performance in the non-word repetition tasks appears to establish a correlation with their language skills, since the percentage of students with the lowest performance coincides with the percentage of children with the lowest academic skills.

The performance on non-word repetition tasks has proved to be a valid assessment tool for language skills, as it is associated with phonological awareness {3}. However, according to previous findings, in the case of bilingualism, non-word repetition tasks are not sufficient for the assessment of language skills {4}. Earlier research has shown a bilingual advantage when it comes to non-lexical tasks. Overall, greater attention is needed when evaluating language skills in bilingualism-multilingualism, due to numerous factors, such as the age of language acquisition, the language environment influence and the varying other conditions under which bilingualism-multilingualism has arisen {3}.

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