

Beyond Replicating Linguistic Elements: Novel Concept Combinations in Multilingual Children

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Abstract : The Novel Concept Combination (NCC) refers to the unique ability of multilingual children to creatively merge and integrate different linguistic and cultural elements to form innovative and original concepts. Children raised with more than one language often exhibit this skill in their daily communication, such as creating innovative metaphors that enrich their communication, showcasing their creativity in conveying the essence of their messages. This paper explores NCC abilities in multilingual children by focusing on two male trilingual siblings exposed to Chinese, French, and English from birth. The siblings were observed for 19 years in their daily context. Seventy-six hours of video-recorded data were used for this study (38 hours for each participant). A coding scheme developed by Wang et al. was employed to code the recorded data. The results suggest that these multilingual siblings proportionally increased their NCC skills over the years, emerging at age 3 and peaking at age 15. The characteristic of their NCC lies in their capacity to not merely replicate linguistic elements of different languages but to recreate, reshape, and reconstruct novel ideas in communication, enriching their interactions. The paper also addresses the educational implications for educators and parents, emphasizing the importance of valuing these novel ideas in everyday environments to encourage NCC development. This, in turn, contributes to cognitive and social development.

Keywords : multilingual children, novel concept combination, multilingual creativity, linguistic richness

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