

Leveraging cognitive profiles of DLD in a linguistically diverse society

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Author Bio: Dr. Kerry Danahy Ebert began her career with a B.S. in Symbolic Systems from Stanford University. She then transitioned to the field of speech-language pathology, completing an M.A. from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, practicing as a clinician for several years, and then returning to the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities to complete her PhD. In 2011, Dr. Ebert joined the faculty at Rush University in Chicago, IL. There she taught coursework on children's speech-language disorders and on cultural and linguistic diversity, and built a research line focused on cognitive-linguistic profiles of bilingual and monolingual children with developmental language disorder (DLD). Dr. Ebert returned to the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities in 2019. She currently leads two grants from the United States National Institutes of Health, focused on innovative approaches to the identification of DLD in diverse bilingual children.

Abstract: The relationship between cognitive and linguistic skills in children with developmental language disorder (DLD) has long garnered research interest. After decades of study – which has spanned skills from lower-level processing speed to higher level executive functions and encompassed both nonverbal and verbal domains -- weaknesses in cognitive skills are well-established features of DLD. However, the impact of this body of literature has historically been limited by its reliance on cross-sectional designs, inclusion of predominantly monolingual English-speaking populations, and focus on population-level (versus individual-level) deficits in children with DLD. In recent years, several research initiatives have begun to address these weaknesses. This presentation will discuss recent investigations of cognitive skills in bilingual children with DLD and their theoretical and clinical implications. It will focus on efforts to move beyond cross-sectional, group comparisons of linguistically homogeneous children with and without DLD. These recent studies address questions such as whether cognitive weaknesses are consistent across bi- and mono-lingual children with DLD; whether cognitive skills predict language acquisition in children with DLD, or vice versa; and whether specific cognitive skills or combinations of skills can contribute to the identification of DLD, especially among groups of children with heterogeneous language-learning experiences. These lines of inquiry have the potential to transform DLD identification within a linguistically diverse society and contribute significantly to our understanding of the underpinnings of DLD.