

“Lifelong Bilingualism: Effect on Executive Control”

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For fluent bilinguals who regularly use both languages, both languages are active when either one is being used. To avoid intrusions and produce fluent speech, a mechanism is needed to control attention to the target language. This selective attention appears to be achieved through domain general executive functions, and the constant exercise of these executive processes accelerates their development in children, enhances their efficiency in adulthood, and mitigates their decline in aging. These consequences of bilingualism will be illustrated by describing research that has been conducted on bilinguals who speak a large variety of languages and who have been selected from across the lifespan. The results will be interpreted within a framework that invokes general cognitive processes to manage attention to two competing linguistic representational systems.