

## Is bilingualism really an advantage? What about individuals with autism?

### İki dilli olmak gerçekten bir avantaj mı? Peki ya otizmli bireyler?

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#### ABSTRACT

The prevalence of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is rising globally, making the identification of at-risk groups increasingly important. The proportion of bilingual families has also increased in recent years. There are very few studies examining the relationship between ASD and bilingualism. Although bilingualism is considered an advantage in terms of child development, its consequences in the presence of ASD are unclear. Therefore, there is no consensus among professionals in this field on the subject of bilingualism. Being bilingual is a factor that should not be overlooked during interventions for children with ASD. More research is needed to examine the relationship between being bilingual and ASD longitudinally.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder; Bilingualism; Children; Language

#### ÖZ

Otizm spektrum bozukluğu (OSB) tanısının yaygınlığı küresel olarak artmakta olup, riskli grupları belirlemek daha önemli hale gelmektedir. İki dile sahip ailelerin oranları da son yıllarda artmaktadır. OSB ile iki dillilik arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyen çok az çalışma vardır. İki dillilik çocuk gelişimi açısından bir avantaj olarak görülse de, OSB varlığındaki sonuçları net değildir. Bu nedenle, bu alandaki profesyoneller arasında iki dillilik konusunda bir fikir birliği yoktur. İki dilli olmak, OSB'li çocuklarda müdahale sırasında göz ardı edilmemesi gereken bir faktördür. İki dilli olmak ve OSB arasındaki ilişkiyi uzunlamasına inceleyecek daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç vardır.

Anahıtar kelimeler: Otizm spektrum bozukluğu; iki dillilik; Çocuklar; lisan

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#### Is bilingualism really an advantage? What about individuals with autism?

Regular use of more than one language has become increasingly common in today's societies. It is estimated that more than half of the world's population today is bilingual or multilingual. However, bilingualism is difficult to define. There are many different definitions of bilingualism in the literature. Researchers have proposed different definitions of bilingualism, such as simultaneous bilingualism and consecutive

bilingualism, based on factors such as length of exposure to two languages or parents' language preferences [1]. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by deficits in social interaction, communication difficulties, and repetitive behaviors [2]. Studies focusing on the relationship between ASD and bilingualism are few and have important definitional limitations. It is not clear from many studies to what extent these current definitions were taken into account in previous studies examining the relationship between bilingualism and ASD.

Although bilingualism was previously shown as an advantage for cognitive processes, this view has been questioned over the years. A study has shown that the literature challenging the bilingualism advantage (BA) hypothesis has increased after 2014 [3]. However, it is thought that publication bias may be an obstacle to discourses opposing the BA hypothesis in the literature [4]. Studies with results that fully support the BA hypothesis are most likely to be published. However, it has been observed that studies questioning the BA hypothesis have a lower chance of being published [4]. Studies were found to be published relatively frequently (68%) if the data showed a bilingual advantage. In contrast, only 29% of studies showing no effect of bilingualism or even disadvantages of being bilingual have been published [4]. Based on this, it is useful to question the relationship between Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and bilingualism. Although some clinicians thought there was no disadvantage, families had ongoing concerns. Unlike parents of monolingual children, parents of children with ASD have been found to express concerns that a bilingual environment will cause confusion and increase language delays in their children [5]. Perhaps these concerns of families may actually show us that there is something that researchers have overlooked. In summary, although the literature often indicates that bilingualism is an advantage, including ASD, it seems that concerns about this issue have not been resolved. In addition, many variables, such as definitions of bilingualism, environments of exposure to two languages, and times of exposure to two languages, seem to be ignored in these studies. It will also be important to change the focus of studies in groups with defined clinical characteristics (especially ASD). Existing research generally agrees on the assertion that bilingualism does not create additional difficulties in language development in ASD [6]. In future studies, it may be more appropriate to focus on core symptoms in neurodevelopmental disorders such as ASD. If we look at ASD symptoms rather than language acquisition in bilingual children diagnosed with ASD, results that we have not encountered before will await us. It is clear that larger-scale longitudinal studies on bilingualism and ASD are needed.

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