

Raphael Berthele (Universität Fribourg)

On Predispositions for Language Learning. Multi-Variable Explorations of Children and Adults.

Although there is no doubt that anybody can learn more than one language, research on language aptitude (LA) shows that individuals differ considerably in their ease to learn first, foreign, second, and third/additional languages. In this talk, I present a very brief overview of language aptitude (LA) research and discuss two recent studies. The first study examines LA in Swiss primary school children learning English and French. Results reveal the internal dimensions of LA and their respective predictive values for language skills. Furthermore, I discuss social predispositions and how they relate to the other constructs in the analyses.

The second study sheds light on LA in adults, drawing both on behavioral and neuroscientific metrics. I will focus on the behavioral tests capturing a wide range of metrics, from music to motor skills to specifically linguistic and general cognitive abilities. Taking into account differing views on language acquisition/learning, I discuss the relationship between general cognitive and specifically linguistic abilities and language experience/multilingualism, as well as other associations within the set of metrics available. To end my talk, I address problems of causality and discuss the results of both projects in the light of current research on the heritability of abilities.