Eleni Peristeri (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki): Measuring the impact of bilingualism in the language and cognitive skills of autistic children

A considerable number of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) grow up in homes where more than one language is spoken. Understanding the effect of this 'bilingual exposure' on autistic children's abilities is challenging, but research so far largely shows that learning more than one language does not hinder autistic children's development, and can be beneficial. However, many practitioners and parents have reported that they are concerned that difficulties linked to ASD, especially in communication, may be made worse if a child uses or hears more than one language. In addition, it is often assumed that speaking two languages is too taxing for a child who has an intellectual disability – which applies to about half of all children with ASD. In this talk, I will present findings from bilingual and monolingual autistic children on a series of tasks tapping into language and cognitive skills, and also relate bilingualism effects to the autistic children's cognitive and sociodemographic profiles. The overall findings reveal that the benefit of bilingualism in language and cognition in autism is not a "all-or-nothing" process, but rather relies on the type of the skill being tested, or/and the autistic child's profile.