

# **On Language and Thought: How Bilingualism Affects Conceptual Associations**

**Siqi Ning**

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, United States

**James Bartolotti**

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, United States

**Viorica Marian**

Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, United States

## **Abstract**

Language experience influences cognition. Using behavioral and ERP measures, the present study examines whether experience with multiple languages can change how we form associations between concepts. Four experiments comparing bilingual and monolingual groups on semantic relatedness judgments indicate that highly proficient bilinguals perceive concepts as more related to one another than monolinguals. Results suggest that bilinguals denser lexical and phonological connections across their two languages may shorten semantic distances between concepts. This finding is consistent with connectionist models of language and suggests that the structure of the lexical and phonological systems may influence conceptual level associations. We conclude that bilingualism has consequences for the structure of the language system at the level of lexical-semantic connections.