

Conditions of Competent Bilingualism of Primary School Children in Germany

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Introduction

In Germany, a high share of children from families who have migrated from the former Soviet Union or Turkey grow up bilingually with **German** as the **majority language (MaL)** and **Russian** or **Turkish** as the **minority language (MiL)**; Olczyk et al., 2016). These children use their two languages in different contexts and to different degrees, which can result in varying competence levels in both languages (Peña et al., 2022).

Method

The analyses are based on **NEPS data of Starting Cohort 2 (SC2)** from 1st to 2nd grade of Wave 3 and 4 (W3/4). The focus is on children who completed the MiL test in Russian or Turkish and the MaL test in German in 2nd grade (Blossfeld & Roßbach, 2019).

Research questions (RQ)

- 1) How many distinct **bilingual profiles** can be identified among bilingual primary school children in Germany?
- 2) Which conditions of the **individual, family, and institutional level** characterize the identified bilingual profiles and to what extent do the respective conditions differ across profiles?

A particular focus is on identifying the conditions under which children growing up bilingually become **competent bilinguals**, i.e., achieve high levels of competence in MaL and MiL.

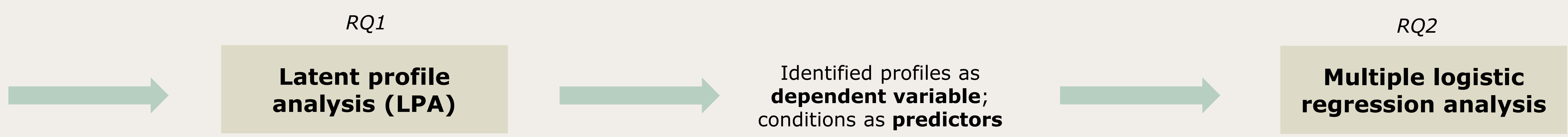
Variable	Russian-German group (n = 200)		Turkish-German group (n = 135)	
	M	SD	M	SD
MaL competence (early reading comprehension; WLE)	0.07	2.09	-0.73	2.10
MiL competence (listening comprehension; WLE)	0.02	0.92	0.00	0.67
Female (%)	105 (52.5)		68 (50.4)	
Age (in years)	7.29	1.38	7.37	0.57

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; WLE = Weighted Likelihood Estimate (mean value = 0).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the Russian-German and the Turkish-German group

Data analysis

MaL + MiL competence scores (Weighted Likelihood Estimates, WLE; Warm, 1989)



Results RQ1

Two profiles were identified in the *Russian-German group*:

- **Average Balanced Bilingual profile** ($M_{MaL} = -0.15$; $M_{MiL} = -0.24$) and
- **Competent Bilingual profile** ($M_{MaL} = 1.38$; $M_{MiL} = 1.49$)

One profile was identified in the *Turkish-German group*:

- **Emergent Bilingual profile** ($M_{MaL} = -0.73$; $M_{MiL} = 0.00$)

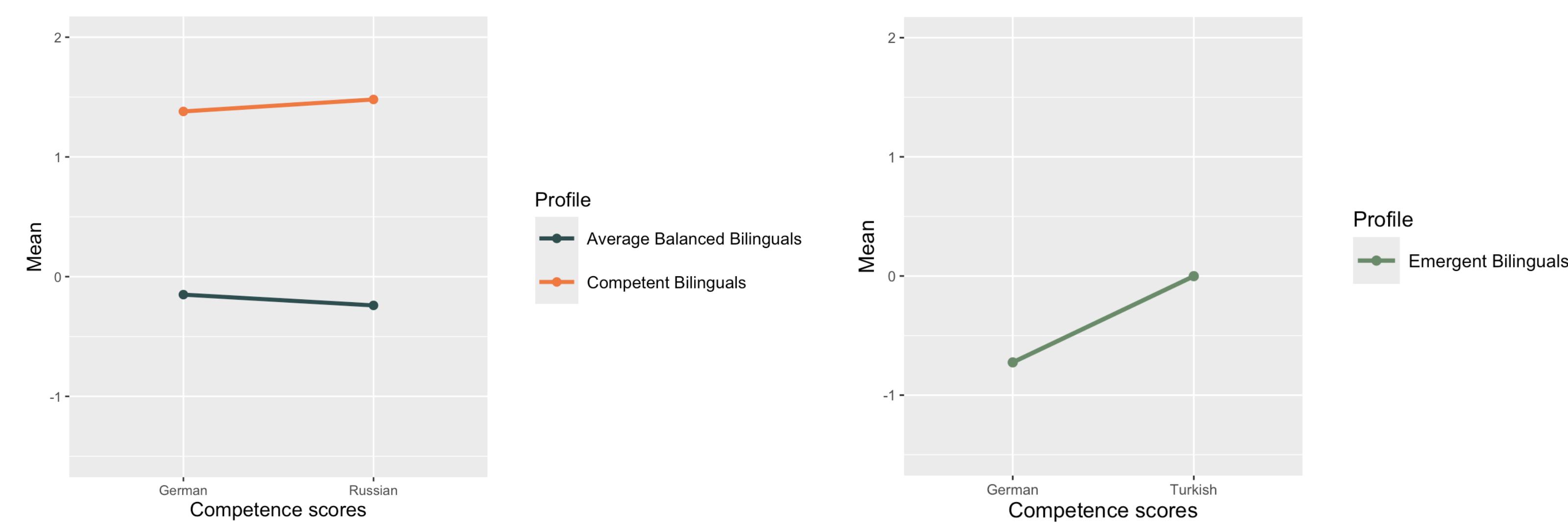


Figure 1. LPA results of the Russian-German group (left) and the Turkish-German group (right)

Results RQ2

We examined several conditions from three levels:



Variable	Competent Bilinguals vs. Average Balanced Bilinguals (Ref.) (Russian-German group; n = 200; 27 vs. 173)			
	b	SE	OR	p-value
Individual level (person icons)				
Age	-0.115	0.638	0.892	0.858
General cognitive abilities				
Perceptual speed	0.018	0.034	1.018	0.598
Reasoning	0.395	0.140	1.484	0.005
Family level (house icon)				
Parental language competence				
MaL Parent A	-0.373	0.601	0.689	0.535
MiL Parent A	0.553	0.690	1.738	0.423
Resources				
SES (HISEI)	0.011	0.016	1.011	0.508
Cultural capital (Number of books at home)	0.675	0.252	1.963	0.007
Parental media use	0.035	0.524	1.036	0.946
Language use				
MiL at home	0.665	0.337	1.944	0.049
Home learning environment	0.246	0.238	1.280	0.300
Institutional level (school icon)				
Duration kindergarten	-0.561	0.580	0.570	0.333
Composition of class				
SES	-0.024	0.026	0.976	0.367
Migration background	0.008	0.015	1.008	0.599
Language use				
With peers	0.344	0.355	1.411	0.332
MiL language support	-2.384	1.239	0.092	0.054

Note. Bold values = significant ($p < .5$); b = regression coefficient; SE = standard error; OR = Odds Ratio

Table 2. Results of logistic regression analysis for the Russian-German group

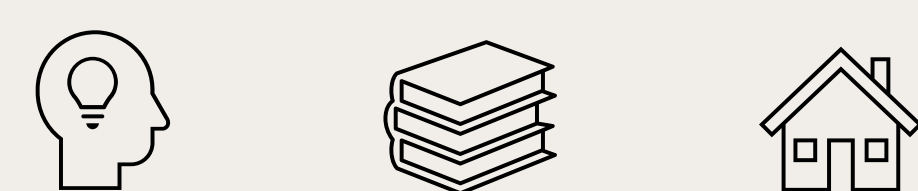
Summary

The LPA results demonstrate **varying language competence levels within bilingual profiles**, both among bilinguals and across both languages.

The **Competent Bilingual profile** was identified exclusively in the Russian-German group, characterized by above average competences in both languages, along with an **Average Bilingual profile**. An **Emergent Bilingual profile** was found in the Turkish-German group.

Results of the logistic regression indicate that **individual and family level conditions predict competent bilingualism**.

Specifically, children with **higher general cognitive abilities** ($OR = 1.484$; $p = .005$), **more books at home** ($OR = 1.963$; $p = .007$), and who use more frequently the **MiL at home** ($OR = 1.944$; $p = .049$) are more likely to be assigned to the **Competent Bilingual profile**.



Discussion

The results indicate a **wide range of language competences** among bilinguals. **Individual and family resources** can enhance competent bilingualism, particularly when only the MaL receives institutional support. The identified profiles may **guide language learning interventions** both at home and in educational settings, thereby improving the alignment between individual needs and language support. Engaging with both languages in more contexts benefits children and is an increasingly important **cultural value** in diverse and multicultural societies.