My favorite speaker from class on October 16th was Dr. Lisa Hsin, professor of Educational Psychology from the department of education. The broad area of interest that Dr. Hsin performs research within is the academic outcomes and experiences of bilingual children. She states that she has two broad questions: 1) What cognitive factors shape the development of language and literacy skills from childhood to adolescence and 2) What kinds of experiences support children in forming their own intellectual standpoint and the ability to articulate and defend their positions? Both of these questions are asked within the context of the effects of speaking two languages. For all of her research questions, Dr. Hsin approaches them with both qualitative and quantitative methods. A few of the more specific inquiries that Dr. Hsin has that she mentioned in class were the effect of cognitive abilities in bilingual children versus monolingual ones and the effect being bilingual has on argumentative essay writing. What I found most fascinating about Dr. Hsin’s work is a topic she didn’t mention in class, but one on her personal website. This topic was Mathematics within the Multilingual mind and interested me because of the way they relate understanding the mathematical language with understanding a distinct spoken language. I have never heard of mathematical proficiency being related to bilingualism so I am curious to her findings and its implications. If I were to meet with Dr. Lisa Hsin one on one, that is the primary question that I would ask her – that is, what exactly are her findings from her research on mathematics and multilingualism. Additionally, I would ask her precisely which benefits and in what context she concluded from her work with bilingual children. I know that speaking another language, especially as a child, has incredibly positive outcomes, but I am curious as to which and how far reaching they are.

Citation of one of Dr. Lisa Hsin’s recent publications:

Hsin, L. & Snow, C. Read Writ (2017) 30: 1193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-016-9718-9>

This publication concerns the benefits of bilingualism in academic writing. The article starts off with discussing what exactly makes academic writing different from other forms of writing and how students at increasingly younger ages are being asked to write in such manners. While the publication holds the idea that bilingualism has benefits for academic writing, it acknowledges how those with minority-spoken languages may struggle writing in English if they didn’t have great exposure to English growing up, despite speaking a second language. The study was done by having two groups of students – Limited Minority (LM) and English Only (EO) students write academic essays to be analyzed for sophistication by a computerized program. These were then broken up into three categories Acknowledgement, Articulation, and Positioning and then each groups proficiency in that segment. What the study found was that on the average students with bilingual experience performed better than those with English only given that they understood the prompt and groups had relatively similar exposure to the topic. I believe that this study is what Dr. Hsin was referencing when she mentioned bilingual children and argumentative essay writing. I found this study easy to understand, a bit lengthy, but gave a clear overview of the methods that were employed and was sure to consider many potential outside factors.