

BILINGUALISM 2016-7

Main References

Wei Intro & ch1, ch12/13.

Harding & Riley ch3/4

Baker 2011 ch1 & 2.

Clark chapter 14

Hardtalk interview with Amanda Galsworthy. Interpreter to French Presidents.

<http://www.scientificlanguage.com/esp/authentic.pdf> This is paper 17 in the ESP folder of this website.

A. How can we define a bilingual?

NB for convenience, bilingualism usually refers to two or more languages.

A bilingual uses different languages for different purposes, and does not typically possess the same level or type of proficiency in each language. Gaps are typical and normal.

People brought up in a monolingual environment often think that bilingualism is exceptional (unusual, not normal). In fact one in three people worldwide use two or more languages routinely. Even more make irregular use. See Wei p6-7 for a list of terms.

It is unrealistic to expect most bilinguals to be perfect in both languages.

There is the additional question of diglossia, which is often ignored by monolinguals, and even ignored by some linguists. Many monolinguals have very little experience or knowledge about diglossia. Even bilinguals, depending on the languages they know, may not be acquainted with diglossia. In diglossia the community will often value the high form, but this is not a linguistic judgement.

How can the word 'bilingualism' also include the idea of diglossia? The point is, gaps are normal, even in L1. This is acknowledged in the CEFR sense of 'plurilingualism'.

1. How is it defined/measured?

- a) fluency? (flows, not hesitant, natural)
- b) equal competence in both? [eg a French and Arabic speaking European may find it hard to order meals in French even though French is usually the easier language]
- c) accuracy
- d) is it speech only? (This is the popular idea) What about the following:
 - 1) someone who can understand L2 perfectly, but not speak?
 - 2) speakers who are not literate in it?
 - 3) someone who cannot speak or understand speech, but can read and write?
- e) Are there different degrees of bilingualism that can vary over time and with circumstances? Note how a valid TOEFL test has to be recent.

2. Families can be trilingual when each parent speaks a different language and there is another in the community.

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3. **A plurilingual uses different languages for different purposes, and does not typically (usually) possess the same level or type of proficiency in each language.** It is L1 + L2 with gaps in both. There will be gaps in each language. Eg, baby language including nursery rhymes is usually known only in one language.
4. For a bilingual, language choice is not just a matter of communication, but also **identity**. eg Welsh, road signs. [In Wales, the road signs are in both Welsh and English, even though ALL Welsh speakers are perfectly fluent in English. The Welsh is not necessary, and some would say it was dangerous. But Welsh is there to reinforce Welshness. This is all sociolinguistics, and we will leave that. [good exam Q!!] For instance, I was born near Manchester, and my roots are in Lancashire, even though I have not lived there, and speak educated Southern English. But if you listen carefully, there are some sounds which I keep from my roots. eg 'grass' I say as /græs/ instead of /grɑ:s/.

Arabisation can be motivated more by identity than by communication needs.

5. **Summary.**

Bilingualism is obviously a relative concept. It involves a question of

- a) **Degree** ie extent of knowledge of each language
- b) **Function.** What are they used for? Role? Use of Classical Arabic, sometimes as a matter of identity, and this can be more important than clear speech, and even more important than accurate speech for the speaker may not be good in classical but must be seen to be trying hard to use classical.
- c) **Alternation**, how much takes place?
- d) **Interference** ie undesirable language

These points are explained in detail below.

6. **Degree**

speaking, listening, reading, writing vs phonology/spelling, grammar, lexis, semantics, stylistics. For each language, over 20 items per language.

7. **Internal and external functions**

Bilinguals usually prefer one language for internal functions such as counting, dreaming, cursing, or praying silently. Other activities, perhaps best described by 'can-do' statements are more objective and concern what people can do in a language, such as read a newspaper, carry on a conversation, etc. These external functions are commonly known as 'the functions in English' and are the sort of thing taught in conversation classes.

8. External factors

The external functions are determined by the number of areas of contact and by the variation of each in **duration, frequency, and pressure**. The areas of contact include all media (means) through which languages were learnt and used, including the language of the home, community, school, mass media, printed word.

The amount of influence of each of these on the language habits of the bilingual depends on the duration, frequency, and pressure of the contact. In addition, these may apply to either comprehension alone, or also expression.

a. Language contact/exposure

- 1) **Home languages.** Variable. Different reasons! The home family can be bilingual or monolingual
- 2) **Community languages,**
 - a) **neighbourhood.** This can be more important than the home. [Story of Tunisian friends living in Italy].
 - b) **ethnic group,** very important in a community with no other possible contact with the language.
 - c) **religious group,** which may not be the language of his ethnic community
 - d) **occupational group** eg Moroccans in Italy are mainly market traders. eg Airspeak.
 - e) **recreation group.** eg foreign children in a school, taking their breaks together and using their language.
- 3) **Education languages**
 - a) *Single language schools,* eg in bilingual areas.
 - b) *Dual language schools.*
 - i. *divergent media schools.* The use of the two languages for different purposes. NB in describing the bilingual person, it is important to determine which subjects were taught in which language. If one of them was used for religion, history, and literature, the influence will be different to that for maths, geography etc
 - ii. *parallel media schools.* Both languages are equal, and used for the same purposes and under similar circumstances. The syllabus will be taught in both languages. eg some parts of Belgium. This may be for instance by using a language one week, and the whole school uses another language the next week. Some military and technical schools in Canada do this.
 - c) *Private tuition.* This may be in a language not spoken in the community.
 - d) *Self study,* through another language.
- 4) **Mass media and its influence on language**

Eg Tunisians learning Italian to watch TV. Mass media can include reading. eg A father insisting that his children read 30 minutes per day in Italian, age 11-16, in order to keep up the Italian they already knew.
- 5) **Correspondence**

Regular correspondence is a way a bilingual may maintain L2 skills.

b. Variables (ie other outside factors and pressures)

Contacts with each of the above may vary in duration, frequency, and pressure. They may also vary in the use of each language for comprehension only, or for both comprehension and expression.

- 1) **Duration** (amount of time in a foreign language)
- 2) **Frequency.** eg contact hours per month, words written/read per month. Eg some children grow up with only a few hours a week of interaction with their parents in that language.
- 3) **Pressure**
 - a) Economic. eg minorities need the majority language. (Reverse exists, the minority language may have economic aspects. Eg North Africans in Italy.)
 - b) Administrative. Civil servants are sometimes required to know another language. Welsh
 - c) Cultural. Not considered educated unless using L2. Prestige
 - d) Political eg Arabisation
 - e) Military. Eg occupation, means the locals learn the language of the invader. I used to still meet people who learnt some German or Italian in 1940-43!
 - f) Historical. Eg English in India
 - g) Religious. A bilingual may become fluent in L2 for purely religious reasons.
 - h) Demographic. ie the number of persons with whom the bilingual comes into contact.
 - i) Tourism
 - j) Legal - refugees

9. Internal functions (personal)

- a. **Internal uses** eg counting, adding-up, praying, cursing, dreaming. **Linked with circumstances.** Eg the language of bus numbers.
- b. **Aptitude**
 - 1) *Sex* Women are usually better at languages than men.
 - 2) *Age.* Persons who become bilingual in childhood may have differences (cf proficiency and usage) from those who become bilingual as adults. A child can transfer from one native language to another in a matter of months. Up till the age of nine the brain seems well suited to language learning. Others argue differently. Child bilinguals are different to adult bilinguals. Whenever there are immigrants, the authorities often organise language lessons, and they usually separate the children from the adults, partly because children/teenagers have different interests to the adults, and partly because there are differences in the language learning process.
 - 3) *Intelligence.* It is a factor, but what is hard to say.
 - 4) *Memory.* Memory is clearly a factor in imitation. It is a factor in Bilingualism. The **auditory memory span** for sounds immediately after hearing them is related to the ability to learn languages. As L2 ability increases, more words are held in the memory before interpreting them.
 - 5) *Attitude.* Crucial. It will also influence the hearer's attitude to them.
 - 6) *Motivation.* This is vital too. In a child, it can influence progress. eg a child can reject the language of one parent. Another sibling may not!

10. Balanced bilinguals

Full bilingualism, sometimes termed 'balanced' is rare, though, see the fascinating interview with Amanda Galsworthy in which she confesses to being totally bilingual, and in fact being fluent also in Spanish.

11. An individual's use of bilingualism

Language use involves context, in particular the different interactions. These are constantly changing. Communication involves not only the form, but also who is saying what to whom, under what circumstances. So, someone with limited form may communicate well, and vice versa. This leads to functional bilingualism ie when, where, how, with whom etc people use their languages.

The contexts are often called domains. Cp diglossia.

12. What does the bilingual do with the foreign elements?

He may use it exactly as he would in the foreign language, for instance by using temporary code switching.

Or he may modify it, in terms of structure, or level, eg cultural, semantic, lexical, grammatical, or phonological. eg the English way of saying *cul de sac* /kydsak/ [where y is the vowel as in 'tu'] as /kʌl di: sæk/.

Much interference comes from equating one feature of a language with that of another. eg French /e/ with English /ei/ as in *cours d'été* /ku:R dete/ becomes /ku:R deiteɪ/. But, a Bilingual will not necessarily modify the pronunciation of the foreign word. eg <stage> which I have heard on the BBC pronounced the English way /steɪdʒ/, and the French way /stɑ:ʒ/

NB. 13. Receptive bilingualism

The individual understands the language, but cannot or will not speak it. It is very common, and outsiders to bilingualism often regard this 'refusal to speak' as proof that bilingualism does not work.

It is especially common in times of language shift, where a group is changing from using one language to using another. eg Immigrant groups. The children acquire only partial competence. Writing (if this existed) fails first, then reading. The effort needed to impose these skills becomes too great for the parents. Then the children succeed in limiting the spheres where their maternal language is spoken eg speaking it only to the grandparents. If their position is extremely strong, they avoid speaking it entirely, even to their parents. So the children speak the local language to their parents, and the parents reply with the maternal language. Eventually the parents give up, and speak the local language with their children. (See Bilingual family first edition p34).

Also exists where parents use one language with each other and another with the children. In such circumstances children learn to understand the language of their parents but never speak it. But should the family move to the environment where speaking is needed, the children can quickly change.

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Another example is where the parents speak different languages to the children, and one parent only understands the other, but does not speak it. But there does seem to be a general rule: where one of the parents does not understand one of the languages, attempts to maintain bilingualism in the family will fail. Riley p36.

15. **Asymmetrical** bilingualism also exists, where you speak a language better than you understand it. This is usually a short-lived period.

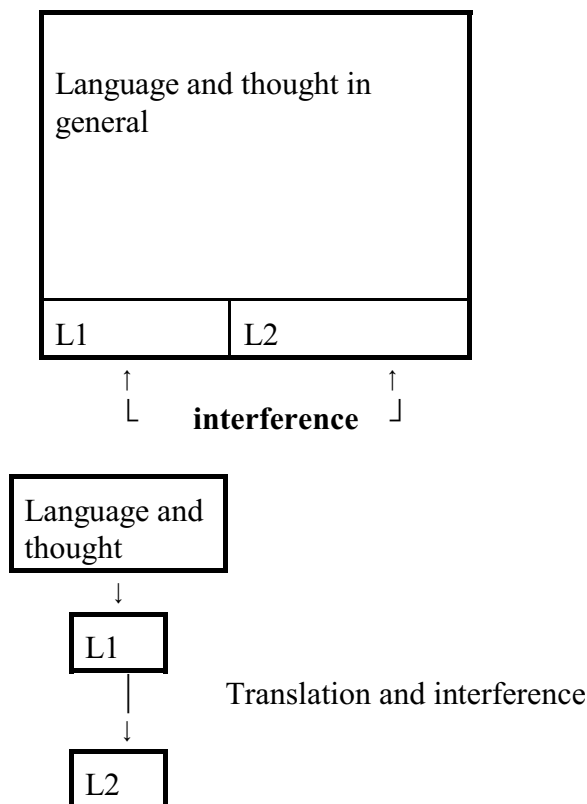
B. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A BILINGUAL?

See Baker 2011 ch8.

1. Brain

- a. Does a bilingual brain function differently? Is the organisation of a bilingual brain different? We will not go into that in this course.
- b. Are the mental representations of the two languages different? There is evidence both for separate storage, and shared storage. Maybe this is two stores for language, and a common general conceptual store.
- c. Obviously, speakers with different proficiency levels vary in the strength and directness of the interconnections between the separate language stores. Some can go direct from concept to language in either language, others have to go via L1. Advanced people are more likely to have it use both and not to keep them separate. Beginners are more likely to keep it all separate.

This is the “**Common underlying proficiency model of bilingualism**”.



Thresholds theories

‘Under what conditions does bilingualism have positive, neutral and negative effects on cognition?’

NB, see the material on ESP for other threshold theories pertaining to adults. The important difference is that adults at least have one strong language/s.

THE thresholds theory

1. One theory that partially summarizes the relationship between cognition and degree of bilingualism is called the Thresholds Theory. This was first postulated by Cummins (1976) and Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977). They suggested that the research on cognition and bilingualism is best explained by the idea of two thresholds. Each threshold is a level of language competence that has consequences for a child.
 - The first threshold is a level for a child to reach to avoid the negative consequences of bilingualism.
 - The second threshold is a level required to experience the possible positive benefits of bilingualism.
 - Such a theory therefore limits which children will be likely to obtain cognitive benefits from bilingualism.
 - It also suggests that there are children who may derive detrimental consequences from their bilingualism.

2. Three storey house

There is a three storey house, with two ladders, indicating progression upwards.

Lower floor: both languages weak

Middle floor. One normal language, one weak language

Upper floor. Both languages strong.

3. The problem is that it is only a rough picture. It does not precisely define the level and nature of the language proficiency a child must obtain in order to:
 - avoid the negative effects of bilingualism
 - obtain the positive effects of bilingualism

NB. Developmental interdependence hypothesis. Cummins. 2000

1. A child's second language competence is partly dependent on the level of competence already achieved in the first language. **Therefore, higher L1 means easier to learn L2.**
2. Cummins found that everyday conversational language could be acquired in two years. Academic language required 5-7 years.
3. **Teaching maths**
This requires special care. Maths problems are often word problems, and not just about numbers and symbols.
Note, Baker 2011 misses out the evidence that maths is inherently a subject with heavy use of logic, and logic words. If the words form a problem, and the general language context forms a problem, then you have a megaproblem.
4. **The distinction between BICS and CALP.**
 - (Basic) Interpersonal Communication Skills **eg playground**
 - Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency **eg formal lesson**

This distinction has been influential, though much criticised. Sometimes unfairly, because it was only ever presented as a limited shorthand.

5. Main caveats are:

- a. There are many more language dimensions
- b. Can easily become slogans, used to label and stereotype students.
- c. Tendency to view BICS as basic and CALP as advanced.

6. Explanatory power

- a. Explains why in the USA when immigrants are transferred to normal classrooms, they tend to fail.
 - 1) Their cognitive/academic ie thinking proficiency is not well enough developed
 - 2) Their 'common underlying proficiency' may be weak, since this has not been stretched in the home language.
- b. Think. Tunisia. Could it explain the huge jump from collège to Lycée and the change to science and maths in French. The cognitive demands are higher and the language is a problem.

Comparisons with ESP

Case in point:

Doctors, watching surgery videos, with B1 English, and using the information the next day.

1. Visuals help
2. Clear narration helps
3. Need/desire to know
4. High subject knowledge
5. Some similarities of technical words with English, and the higher the knowledge of French, the more likely there will be grasp of an English word.
6. High language skills.

The only weak point is B1.

In comparison, a Humanities teacher neither knows the subject, nor the technical language in any language, and probably does not have high general language skills such as reading and guessing.