

D. DIGLOSSIA

1. Definition

In many speech communities, two or more varieties of the same language are used by some speakers under different conditions. Often, a case of the standard language and the local dialect.

But sometimes there are two varieties in the same speech community. Ferguson (in Wei) gives the example of Bagdad, the Christian and Muslim communities. The Christian arabs speak a 'Christian Arabic' dialect when talking among themselves, but speak a general 'Muslim Arabic' when speaking in a mixed group.

For convenience we can talk about High and Low varieties.

2. Characteristic features

a. specialisation of function and role

In one set of circumstances, only H is appropriate, and in another only L is appropriate, with overlap.

Good example: Someone once sent the same SMS to her mother and to her sister. She used classical for the message to her mother and dialect for the message to her sister. It is important for learners of Arabic to know classical and one variety of dialect if they are to be fully functional in the Arab world.

b. Prestige

H is regarded as superior. Literacy is associated with it. Sometimes the feeling is so strong that H alone is regarded as real, and the L is reported 'not to exist', eg 'He doesn't know Arabic'. It is close to self-deception. Even when the feelings of reality and superiority of H is not so strong, there is usually a belief that somehow H is more beautiful, more logical, better able to express important thoughts, etc. And, this belief is often held by those who do not have a good command of H. Even if not understood, H is held in high prestige. Many speakers prefer to hear a lecture or speech etc in H even though it may be less intelligible to them than in L.

To Americans, accustomed to evaluating speeches in terms of effectiveness of communication, there is a clash of values. Americans have a different set of priorities.

c. Literary heritage

Most literature is in H, and held in high esteem. It is even sometimes said to be good style to use old phrases and constructions which may not be readily understood. This results in praise for the author for really knowing his Arabic!

d. Acquisition

L is learned by the normal route, of listening to children and adults speaking L. Grammatical concepts are rarely explained. In contrast H is learned chiefly through formal education, and grammar is learned formally in terms of rules, like L2.

e. Standardisation

H has a lot of formal study, dictionaries, codifying grammars etc. The formal studies of L have often been done by scholars outside the speech community and may be written in other languages. There is no standardised spelling, and wide variation on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. L is rarely written. It is to the credit of IBLV that dialect is offered as a course. NB it is ONE High and many Low.

f. Stability

Diglossia persists over the centuries and there is interaction between High and Low. (The communicative tensions may in part be resolved by the use of a relatively uncodified, unstable, intermediate form. eg Arabic, using L grammar but H vocabulary.) But, Egyptian colloquial is widely understood. Cartoons use Classical.

g. Grammar

L is usually simplified, and this is true for Arabic, and Greek.

h. Lexicon

H has its own distinctive lexicon, for technical terms, and learned expressions. L has its lexicon for homely objects, popular expressions etc. But there exists a large area of overlap where there are equivalents, and both can be used in the dialect. The use of one or the other immediately stamps the utterance as tending to the H or L.

i. Phonology Depends on the languages.

NB it is usually ONE High and MANY Low varieties.

3. How is diglossia to be distinguished from, {standard language with regional dialects} ?

This is a big question with no easy answers.

No part of the speech community in diglossia regularly uses H as a medium of ordinary conversation, and any attempt to do so is felt to be either pedantic and artificial (Arabic, Greek), or even (Swiss German) disloyal to the community.

Diglossia is one of degree rather than kind. The standard dialect in English is Educated Southern English. UK has one language and many dialects, and one of these dialects has been chosen to be the standard.

4. How widespread/common is diglossia?

Not limited to any geographical region or language family.

5. How does diglossia originate? See p 76/7 Wei.

a. Three conditions

- 1) A sizable body of literature in a language variety emerges. This variety is related to a vernacular, and this literature embodies and reinforces some of the fundamental values of the community. ie one of the dialects needs to establish itself and become fixed through literature, as largely happened to English.
- 2) Literacy in the community is limited to a small elite. When literacy rates are high, this works against diglossia.
- 3) Over several centuries, a gap evolves between High and Low. Dialects change more rapidly than the High form. Question: is English going the same way?

(b. Diglossia is accepted, and not regarded as a 'problem' until certain trends occur.

- 1) More widespread literacy. Why? Not everyone learns both well, which leads to tension, and a felt gap.
- 2) Broader communication among different regional and social levels of the community
- 3) Desire for a full fledged standard 'national' language as an attribute of autonomy or sovereignty.

6. => trend to unify H and L. Speak more like you write. Write more like you speak.

7. Supporters of High argue that:

- a. H must be adopted because it connects the community with its 'glorious past', or with the world community
- b. H is a natural unifying factor, it is not divisive like dialects.
- c. Status. Often based on the beliefs of the community in the superiority of H: it is more beautiful, expressive, logical; it has divine sanction etc. Whatever the objective truth of such beliefs, the fact is that they are held, and are therefore important.

8. Supporters of L argue that:

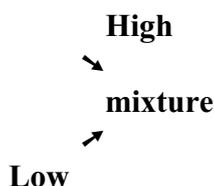
- a. L is better, because it is closer to the real thinking and feeling of the people, the heart.
- b. Education in L is easier at the beginning because children have a basic knowledge of it.
- c. It is more effective as a vehicle for communication, and is widely understood locally.
- d. Lesser arguments might include, that it is more vivid in its metaphors, and the fact that many modern nations write as they speak.

9. Notes

- a. Diglossia may remain stable over a long period of time
- NB b. If there is a single communication center in the whole speech community, or several centers in the one dialect area, then these centers will set the standard. Eg in UK, the Universities control the examination boards, and these boards set standards which text books must comply with.

10. Bilingualism and diglossia

1. Diglossia + Bilingualism	3. Bilingualism only
2. Diglossia only	4. Neither Diglossia nor Bilingualism



1. D + B

- eg Some Swiss cantons, where French is also spoken
- eg Arabic plus French or English, at least for the educated and middle class.

Note, in all cases, the speech community have available to them both a range of compartmentalised roles as well as ready access to these roles. **Each role typically uses a different language variety.**

More roles, means more varieties of language. If the role repertoires of these speech communities were of a lesser range, then so too their linguistic repertoires would be restricted.

When there are distinct roles, there tend to be distinct varieties of language. When the roles merge, the varieties merge. If the roles were not compartmentalised, (ie kept distinct and separate), because of association with quite separate (though complementary) values domains of activity everyday situations, then one language or variety would displace the other.

The bilingual population will be a small privileged group unless large sectors of the population take part in all these /languages/varieties.

2. Diglossia only

eg Pre WW1 European elites. Since the elites rarely interacted with common people, they (the elites vs common people) did not form a single speech community. Their roles were separate. Baker 2011 says it is hard to find a good example.

3. Bilingualism only

eg Tunisians growing up in France, speaking dialect and French. There is widespread illiteracy in Arabic, and they are not exposed to H.

Neither Bilingualism nor Diglossia

Rare, isolated, undifferentiated speech communities