CHAPTER 1

Bilingualism: Definitions and Distinctions

INTRODUCTION

Since a bicycle has two wheels and binoculars are for two eyes, it would seem that bilingualism is simply about two languages. Multilingualism is then about three or more languages. The aim of this chapter is to show that the ownership of two or more languages is not so simple as having two wheels or two eyes. Is someone bilingual if they are fluent in one language but less than fluent in their other language? Is someone multilingual if they rarely or never use one of their languages? Such questions need addressing before other topics in this book can be discussed.

To understand the answers to these questions, it is valuable to make an initial distinction between bilingualism and multilingualism as an individual characteristic, and bilingualism and multilingualism in a social group, community, region or country. Bilingualism and multilingualism can be examined as the possession of the individual. Various themes in this book start with bilingualism as experienced by individual people. For example, a discussion of whether or not bilingualism affects thinking requires research on individual monolinguals, bilinguals and multilinguals. From sociology, sociolinguistics, politics, geography, education and social psychology comes a different perspective. Bilinguals and multilinguals are usually found in groups. Such groups may be located in a particular region (e.g. Basques in Spain), or may be scattered across communities (e.g. the Chinese in the US). Bilinguals may form a distinct language group as a majority or a minority. For example, linguists study how the vocabulary of bilingual groups change across time. Geographers plot the density of bilinguals in a country. Educationalists examine bilingual educational policy and provision for minority language groups.

The first distinction is therefore between bilingualism (and multilingualism) as an individual possession and as a group possession. This is usually termed individual bilingualism and societal bilingualism. Like most distinctions, there are
important links between the two parts. For example, the attitudes of individuals
towards a particular minority language may affect language maintenance,
language restoration, language shift or language death in society. In order to under-
stand the term 'bilingualism', some important further distinctions at the individual
level are discussed in this chapter. [While bilingualism and multilingualism are
different, where there is similarity, multilingualism is (for the sake of brevity)
combined under bilingualism.] An introduction to bilingualism and
multilingualism as a group possession (societal bilingualism) is provided in chap-
ters 3 and 4.

If a person is asked whether he or she speaks two or more languages, the ques-
tion is ambiguous. A person may be able to speak two languages, but tends to
speak only one language in practice. Alternatively, the individual may regularly
speak two languages, but competence in one language may be limited. Another
person will use one language for conversation and another for writing and
reading. An essential distinction is therefore between language ability and
language use. This is sometimes referred to as the difference between degree and
function.

TERMINOLOGY

Before discussing the nature of language use and abilities, a note about termin-
ology. Entry into the many areas of bilingualism and bilingual education is helped
by understanding often-used terms and distinctions. There exists a range of terms
in this area, for example language ability, language achievement, language compen-
tency, language performance, language proficiency and language skills. Do they all
refer to the same entity, or are there subtle distinctions between the terms? To add to
the problem, different authors and researchers sometimes tend to adopt their own
specific meanings and distinctions.

Some Dimensions of Bilingualism

Bilinguals and multilinguals can be analyzed along the following over-lapping and
interacting dimensions:

(1) Ability: some bilinguals actively speak and write in both languages
(productive competence), others are more passive bilinguals and may have
receptive ability (understanding or reading). For some, their ability in two
or more languages is well developed. Others may be moving through the
early stages of acquiring a second language. Ability is thus on a dimension
or continuum (Valdés et al., 2003) with dominance and development varied
across people.

(2) Use: the domains where each language is acquired and used are varied (e.g.,
home, school, street, phone, TV). An individual's different languages are often
used for different purposes.

(3) Balance of two languages: rarely are bilinguals and multilinguals equal in
their ability or use of their two languages. Often one language is dominant.

(4) Age: when children learn two languages from birth, this is often called simultaneous or infant bilingualism. If a child learns a second language after about three years of age, it is termed consecutive or sequential bilingualism. Chapters five and six consider age issues in detail.

(5) Development: Incipient bilinguals have one well developed language, and the other is in the early stages of development. When a second language is developing, this is ascendant bilingualism, compared with recessive bilingualism when one language is decreasing, resulting in temporary or permanent language attrition.

(6) Culture: Bilinguals become more or less bicultural or multicultural. It is almost possible for someone (e.g. a foreign language graduate) to have high proficiency in two languages but be relatively monocultural. In comparison, some monolinguals move towards biculturalism. A process of acculturation accompanies language learning when immigrants, for example, learn the majority language of the host country. Bicultural competence tends to relate to: knowledge of language cultures, feelings and attitudes towards those two cultures, behaving in culturally appropriate ways, awareness and empathy, and having the confidence to express biculturalism.

(7) Contexts: Some bilinguals live in bilingual and multilingual endogenous communities that use more than one language on an everyday basis. Other bilinguals live in more monolingual and monocultural regions and network with other bilinguals by vacations, phone and email, for example. Where there is an absence of a second language community, the context is exogenous (e.g. Russian bilinguals in the US). Some contexts may be subtractive, where the politics of a country favors the replacement of the home language by the majority language (e.g. Spanish being replaced by English in the US). This particularly occurs among immigrant bilinguals (e.g. in the US and UK). Other contexts are additive such that a person learns a second language at no cost to their first language as occurs in elite or prestigious bilinguals.

(8) Elective bilingualism is a characteristic of individuals who choose to learn a language, for example in the classroom (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994; Valdés, 2003). Elective bilinguals typically come from majority language groups (e.g. English-speaking Americans who learn French or Arabic). They add a second-language without losing their first language. Circumstantial bilinguals learn another language to function effectively because of their circumstances (e.g. as immigrants). Their first language is insufficient to meet the educational, political and employment demands, and the communicative needs of the society in which they are placed. Circumstantial bilinguals are groups of individuals who must become bilingual to operate in the majority language society that surrounds them. Consequently, their first language is in danger of being replaced by the second language, a subtractive context. The
difference between elective and circumstantial bilingualism is thus valuable because it immediately raises differences of prestige and status, politics and power among bilinguals.

AN INDIVIDUAL'S USE OF BILINGUALISM

Language cannot be divorced from the context in which it is used. Language is not produced in a vacuum; it is enacted in changing dramas. As props and scenery, audience, co-actors and actresses, the play and the role change, so does language. A pure linguistic approach to two language competences is not sufficient. Communication includes not only the structure of language (e.g. grammar, vocabulary) but also who is saying what, to whom, in which circumstances. One person may have limited linguistic skills but, in certain situations, be successful in communication. Another person may have relative linguistic mastery, but through undeveloped social interaction skills or in a strange circumstance, be relatively unsuccessful in communication. The social environment where the two languages function is crucial to understanding bilingual usage. Therefore, this section considers the use and function of an individual's two languages.

An individual’s use of their bilingual ability (functional bilingualism) moves away from the complex arguments about language proficiency that tend to be based around school success and academic performance. Functional bilingualism moves into language production across an encyclopedia of everyday contexts and events. Functional bilingualism concerns when, where, and with whom people use their two languages (Fishman, 1965). The table below provides examples of the different targets (people) and contexts (often called domains) where functional bilingualism is enacted in different role relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Language Targets</th>
<th>Examples of Language Contexts (Domains)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nuclear Family</td>
<td>1. Shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Extended Family</td>
<td>2. Visual and Auditory Media (e.g. TV, Radio, CD, DVD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Work Colleagues</td>
<td>3. Printed Media (e.g. Newspapers, Books)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Neighbors</td>
<td>5. Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teachers</td>
<td>7. Clubs, Societies, Organizations, Sporting Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Presidents, Principals, Other Leaders</td>
<td>8. Leisure &amp; Hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Local Community</td>
<td>10. Information and Communications Technology (e.g. computers, phones)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Language Choice

Not all bilinguals have the opportunity to use both their languages on a regular basis. Where a bilingual lives in a largely monolingual community there may be little choice about language use from day-to-day. However, in communities where two or more languages are widely spoken, bilinguals may use both their languages on a daily or frequent basis. When bilinguals use both their languages, language choice is not haphazard or arbitrary. If the other person is already known to the bilingual, as a family member, friend or colleague, a relationship has usually been established through one language. If both are bilingual they have the option of changing to the other language (e.g. to include others in the conversation), although old habits die hard.

If the other person is not known, a bilingual may quickly pick up clues as to which language to use. Clues such as dress, appearance, age, accent and command of a language may suggest to the bilingual which language it would be appropriate to use. In bilingual areas of Canada and the United States for example, employees dealing with the general public may glance at a person’s name on their records to help them decide which language to use. A person called Pierre Rouleau or Maria García might be addressed first in French or Spanish, rather than English.

An individual’s own attitudes and preferences will influence their choice of language. In a minority/majority language situation, older people may prefer to speak the minority language. Younger folk (e.g. second-generation immigrants) may reject the minority language in favor of the majority language because of its higher status and more fashionable image. Heller (1982, p. 108) shows how in a conversation, perceptions about language and identity affect language choice, as in the following example from Quebec:

I stopped in a garage . . . and struggled to explain . . . that my windshield wipers were congélée and I wanted to make them fonctionner. He listened in mild amusement and then said: ‘You don’t have to speak French to me, madame. I am not a separatist’.

In situations where the native language is perceived to be under threat, some bilinguals may avoid speaking the majority or dominant language to assert and reinforce the status of the other language. French-Canadians in Quebec sometimes refuse to speak English in shops and offices to emphasize the status of French.

Li Wei et al. (1992), in a study of a Chinese community in northern England, indicate that the degree of contact with the majority language community is a factor in language choice. Their research shows that Chinese speakers who were employed outside the Chinese community were more likely to choose to speak English with other Chinese speakers. In contrast, those Chinese immigrants who worked in family businesses, mainly catering, and had less daily contact with English speakers, were more likely to use Chinese with other Chinese-English bilinguals.

Some minority languages are mostly confined to a private and domestic role. This happens when a minority language has historically been disparaged and
deprived of status. In Western Brittany in France, for example, many Breton
speakers only use their Breton in the family and with close friends. They can be
offended if addressed by a stranger in Breton, believing that such a stranger is
implying they are uneducated and cannot speak French (C. Baker & S.P. Jones,
1998).

An individual may also switch languages, either deliberately or subconsciously,
to accommodate the perceived preference of the other participant in the conversa-
tion. The perception of which language is regarded as more prestigious or as more
accommodating may depend on the nature of the listener. To gain acceptance or
status, a person may deliberately and consciously use the majority language. Alter-
natively, a person may use a minority language as a form of affiliation or belonging
to a group. (Codeswitching is discussed in chapter 5.)

BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL ABILITY

The Four Language Abilities

If we confine the question ‘Are you bilingual?’ to ability in two (or more) languages,
the issue becomes ‘what ability?’ There are four basic language abilities: listening,
speaking, reading and writing. These four abilities fit into two dimensions: recep-
tive and productive skills; oracy and literacy. The following table illustrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oracy</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receptive skills</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive skills</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table suggests avoiding a simple classification of who is, or is not, bilingual.
Some speak a language, but do not read or write in a language. Some listen with
understanding and read a language (passive bilingualism) but do not speak or
write that language. Some understand a spoken language but do not themselves
speak that language. To classify people as either bilinguals or monolinguals is thus
too simplistic. Or, to return to the opening analogy, the two wheels of bilingualism
exist in different sizes and styles.

The four basic language abilities do not exist in black and white terms. Between
black and white are not only many shades of gray; there also exist a wide variety of
colors. The multi-colored landscape of bilingual abilities suggests that each
language ability can be more or less developed. Reading ability can range from
simple and basic to fluent and accomplished. Someone may listen with under-
standing in one context (e.g. shops) but not in another context (e.g. an academic
lecture). These examples show that the four basic abilities can be further refined into
sub-scales and dimensions. There are skills within skills, traditionally listed as:
punctuation, extent of vocabulary, correctness of grammar, the ability to convey
exact meanings in different situations and variations in style. However, these skills
tend to be viewed from an academic or classroom perspective. Using a language on
the street and in a shop require a greater accent on social competence with language (e.g. the idioms and 'lingo' of the street).

The range and type of sub-skills that can be measured is large and debated. Language abilities such as speaking or reading can be divided into increasingly microscopic parts. What in practice is tested and measured to portray an individual's bilingual performance is considered later in the book. What has emerged so far is that a person's ability in two languages are multidimensional and will tend to evade simple categorization.

**Minimal and Maximal Bilingualism**

So far, it has been suggested that deciding who is or is not bilingual or multilingual is difficult. Simple categorization is arbitrary and requires a value judgment about the minimal competence needed to achieve a label of 'bilingual'. Therefore, a classic definition of bilingualism such as 'the native-like control of two or more languages' (Bloomsfield, 1933) appears too extreme and maximalist ('native like'). The definition is also ambiguous (what is meant by 'control' and who forms the 'native' reference group?). At the other end is a minimalist definition, as in Diebold's (1964) concept of incipient bilingualism. The term incipient bilingualism allows people with minimal competence in a second language to squeeze into the bilingual category. Tourists with a few phrases and business people with a few greetings in a second language could be incipient bilinguals. Almost every adult in the world knows a few words in another language. The danger of being too exclusive is not overcome by being too inclusive. Trawling with too wide a fishing net will catch too much variety and therefore make discussion about bilinguals ambiguous and imprecise. Trawling with narrow criteria may be too insensitive and restrictive.

Valdés (2003) pictures bilinguals is existing on a continuum, where A and B are the two languages. The first letter is the dominant language, and font sizes and case suggest different proficiencies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Ab Ab Ab Ab AB aB aB Ba Ba Ba Ba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aB</td>
<td>Ab Ab Ab Ab AB aB aB Ba Ba Ba Ba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who is or is not categorized as a bilingual will depend on the purpose of the categorization. At different times, governments, for example, may wish to include or exclude language minorities. Where a single indigenous language exists (e.g. Irish in Ireland), a government may wish to maximize its count of bilinguals. A high count may indicate government success in language planning. In comparison, in a suppressive, assimilationist approach, immigrant minority languages and bilinguals may be minimized (e.g. Asian languages in the UK in the Census – see chapter 2).

Is there a middle ground in-between maximal and minimal definitions? The
danger is in making arbitrary cut-off points about who is bilingual or not along the competence dimensions. Differences in classification will continue to exist. One alternative is to move away from the multi-colored canvas of proficiency levels to a portrait of the everyday use of the two languages by individuals (see earlier).

**Balanced Bilinguals**

The literature on bilingualism frequently spotlights one particular group of bilinguals whose competences in both languages are well developed. Someone who is approximately equally fluent in two languages across various contexts may be termed an equilingual or ambilingual or, more commonly, a *balanced bilingual*. As will be considered in chapter 7, balanced bilinguals are important when discussing the possible thinking advantages of bilingualism.

Balanced bilingualism is sometimes used as an idealized concept. Fishman (1971) argued that rarely will anyone be equally competent across all situations. Most bilinguals will use their two languages for different purposes and with different people. For example, a person may use one language at work; the other language at home and in the local community.

Balanced bilingualism is also a problematic concept for other reasons. The balance may exist at a low level of competence in the two languages. Someone may have two relatively undeveloped languages that are nevertheless approximately equal in proficiency. While this is within the literal interpretation of ‘balanced’ bilingual, it is not the sense employed by many researchers on bilingualism. The implicit idea of balanced bilingualism has often been of ‘appropriate’ competence in both languages. A child who can understand the delivery of the curriculum in school in either language, and operate in classroom activity in either language would be an example of a balanced bilingual.

Is ‘balanced bilingualism’ of use as a term? While it has limitations of definition and measurement, it has proved to be of value in research and theory (see chapter 7). However, categorizing individuals into such groups raises the issue of comparisons. Who is judged normal, proficient, skilled, fluent or competent? Who judges? The danger is in using monolinguals as the point of reference, as will now be considered.

An argument advanced by Cook (1992, 2002a) and Grosjean (1985, 1994, 2001) is that there are two contrasting views of individual bilinguals. First, there is a monolingual or **fractional** view of bilinguals, which evaluates the bilingual as ‘two monolinguals in one person’. There is a second, **holistic** view which argues that the bilingual is not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals, but that he or she has a unique linguistic profile. The monolingual view is that normal or ‘pure’ to have own language, and therefore bilinguals are studied from that perspective. The multi-competence view is that bilingualism and multilingualism are normal with different consequences for how language is studied (e.g. acquisition, use, storage, thinking, integration / interconnection / separation, (Cook, 2002a)).
THE MONOLINGUAL VIEW OF BILINGUALISM

Many teachers, administrators, politicians and researchers look at the bilingual as two monolinguals in one person. For example, if English is a bilingual’s second language, scores on an English reading or English attainment test will often be compared against monolingual scores and averages. A bilingual’s English language competence is often measured against that of a native monolingual English speaker (e.g. in the US and the UK). This is unfair because it derives from a monolingual view of people. It is also unfair because bilinguals will typically use their two languages in different situations and with different people. Thus bilinguals may be stronger in each language in different domains.

One expectation from this fractional viewpoint will be for bilinguals to show a proficiency comparable to that of a monolingual in both their two languages. If that proficiency does not exist in both languages, especially in the majority language, then bilinguals may be denigrated and classified as inferior. In the United States, for example, children of immigrant families, or of other language minority families, are often officially federally categorized as LEP (Limited English Proficient). In northern Europe, bilinguals who appear to exhibit a lack of proficiency in both languages may be described as ‘semilingual’.

While areas such as Africa, India, Scandinavia and parts of Asia often see bilingualism as the norm, in countries such as the United States and England, the dominant view of the world is monolingual (Brutt-Griffler & Varghese, 2004). Although between a half and two-thirds of the world’s population is bilingual to some degree, the monolingual is often seen as normal in these two countries, and the bilingual as an oddity or as inferior. This ‘inferior’ viewpoint, for example that bilinguals have two half developed languages, is encapsulated in the debate about ‘semilingualism’.

‘Semilingualism’/‘Double Semilingualism’

Bilinguals tend to be dominant in one of their languages in all or some of their language abilities. This may vary with context and may change over time with geographical or social mobility. For others, the dominance may be relatively stable across time and place. The topic of dominance will be considered in chapter 2 when tests are discussed. For the present, a group has been proposed, one that is distinct from balanced and dominant bilinguals. Sometimes termed pejoratively as semilinguals or double semilinguals, the group is regarded as not having sufficient competence in either language. This section will suggest that such a label is more politically motivated than accurate or commonplace.

Hansegård (1975; see Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) described semilingualism in terms of deficiencies in bilinguals when compared with monolinguals on the following: display a small vocabulary and incorrect grammar, consciously think about language production, stilted and uncreative with each language, and finds it difficult to think and express emotions in either language.

The notion of semilingualism, or double semilingualism, has received much
criticism (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Wiley, 1996a, 2005c; MacSwan, 2000). There are major problems with the term. First, the term took on disparaging and belittling overtones, particularly in Scandinavia and with immigrant groups in the US. Semilingualism may be used as a negative label that invokes expectations of underachievement and a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is most frequently applied to immigrant groups and ‘blames the victim’.

Second, if languages are relatively undeveloped, the origins may not be in bilingualism per se, but in the economic, political and social conditions that evoke under-development. This is a theme considered in detail in later chapters. The danger of the term semilingualism is that it locates the origins of underdevelopment in the internal, individual possession of bilingualism, rather than in external, societal factors that co-exist with bilingualism. Thus the term may be used as a political rather than a linguistic concept.

Third, most bilinguals use their two languages for different purposes and events. Language may be specific to a context. A person may be competent in some contexts but not in others. Some children are competent in the school context, but are less competent in the vernacular of the street. Some are competent in a language for religious purposes, but less so in the home.

Fourth, the educational tests that are most often used to measure language proficiencies and differentiate between people may be insensitive to the qualitative aspects of languages and to the great range of language competences. Language tests may measure a small, unrepresentative sample of a person’s daily language behavior (see chapter 2). Thus ‘deficiencies’ are often an artifact of narrow academic tests. Standardized tests of language proficiency fail to measure the discourse patterns that children from different cultures use with considerable competence.

Test scores [are] based on specific language and literacy tests of the school. These tests, in turn, reflect particular literacy practices and social expectations favoring groups that control institutions. Also, because school tests are based on ‘standard’ academic language, there is an implicit bias against language variation within L1 (i.e., there is a bias against speakers of non-standard and creolized varieties of L1. In interpreting results based on standardized tests, practitioners sometimes claim that students have ‘no language’, meaning that they have no standard academic language. (Wiley, 1996a, pp. 167–168)

Fifth, the comparison with monolinguals may not be fair. It is important to distinguish whether bilinguals are ‘naturally’ qualitatively and quantitatively different from monolinguals in their use of their two languages (as a function of being bilingual). An apparent deficiency may be due to unfair comparisons with monolinguals.

The criticisms raise serious doubts about the value of the term ‘semilingualism’. However, this does not detract from the fact that there are language abilities on which people do differ, with some people being at the earlier stages of development, others where there is rapid language loss (Davies, 2003). Being at an early stage or undergoing language loss may not be the result of being bilingual. Economic and social factors or educational provision may, for example, be the cause.
Rather than highlight the apparent ‘deficit’ in language development, the more equitable and positive approach is to emphasize that, when suitable conditions are provided, competence in language is capable of development to high levels. When a ‘language deficit’ is perceived, a more proper approach is to locate the causes in, for example, the type of tests used, material deprivation, in the quality of treatment in schooling and not in language itself (see chapters 9, 15 and 17).

THE HOLISTIC VIEW OF BILINGUALISM

Cook (1992, 2002a, 2002b) and Grosjean (1985, 1994, 2001) present a more positive alternative view of bilinguals, as those with multi-competences. Grosjean uses an analogy from the world of athletics, and asks whether we can fairly judge a sprinter or a high jumper against a hurdler. The sprinter and high jumper concentrate on one event and may excel in it. The hurdler concentrates on two different skills, trying to combine a high standard in both. With only a few exceptions, the hurdler will be unable to sprint as fast as the sprinter or jump as high as the high jumper. This is not to say that the hurdler is a worse athlete than the other two. Any comparison of who is the best athlete makes little sense. This analogy suggests that comparing the language proficiency of a monolingual with a bilingual’s dual language or multilingual proficiency is similarly unjust.

However, this raises the question, should bilinguals only be measured and compared by reference to other bilinguals? When for example, someone learns English as a second language, should that competency in English only be measured against other bilinguals? In countries like Wales for instance, where first-language Welsh-speaking children compete in a largely English-language job market against monolingual English speakers, the dominant view is that they should be given the same English assessments at school.

Any assessment of a bilingual’s language proficiency should ideally move away from the traditional language tests (with their emphasis on form and correctness), to an evaluation of the bilingual’s general communicative competence. This appraisal would be based on a totality of the bilingual’s language usage in all domains, whether this involves the choice of one language in a particular domain, or a mixing of the two languages.

There is sometimes a political reality that deters the blossoming of a holistic view of the bilingual. In Australia, much of Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, the dominant English-speaking monolingual politicians and administrators will not accept a different approach or standard of assessment (one for monolinguals, another for bilinguals).

Yet the bilingual is a complete linguistic entity, an integrated whole. Bilinguals use their two languages with different people, in different contexts and for different purposes. Levels of proficiency in a language may depend on which contexts (e.g. street and home) and how often that language is used. Communicative competence in one of a bilingual’s two languages may be stronger in some domains than in others. This is natural and to be expected. Any assessment of a bilingual’s compe-
tence in two languages needs to be sensitive to such differences of when, where and with whom bilinguals use either of their languages. Such an assessment should reveal the multi-competences of bilinguals (Cook, 1992, 2002a).

CONVERSATIONAL FLUENCY AND ACADEMIC LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

So far, the chapter has centered on the variety of language abilities and the danger of categorization using a small or biased selection of language sub-skills. One issue has been whether the variety of sub-skills can be reduced to a small number of important dimensions. Hernández-Chávez et al. (1978), for example, suggested there are 64 separate components to language proficiency. In comparison, many reading tests tacitly assume that reading can be reduced to one dimension. Oller’s (1982) claimed that there was one overall, global language dimension. An overlap between different academic language tests was sufficient for Oller and Perkins (1980) to suggest that there exists a single factor of global language proficiency.

The idea of a single language factor is contentious as the evidence indicates that there are both global and specific aspects of language proficiencies. Oller’s (1982) idea of a global language factor is based on quantitative testing. As will be considered later in the book, such tests leave qualitative differences between people unexplored. There is also an emphasis on language in an academic context. This leaves the out-of-school communicative profile of people relatively ignored.

Oller’s (1982) much disputed claim for one global language factor provides a starting point for a distinction between two different language abilities. Oller’s (1982) language proficiency factor has been allied to the language abilities needed to cope in the classroom. Most (but not all) language tests are closely linked to the cognitive, academic language skills of the classroom. Reading and writing tests are obvious examples. The notion of a curriculum based language competence led various authors to make an important distinction. Apart from academically related language competence, it has been proposed that there is a conceptually distinct category of conversational competence (Cummins, 2000b). Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976) proposed a difference between surface fluency and academically related aspects of language competence. Surface fluency would include the ability to hold a simple conversation in the shop or street and may be acquired fairly quickly (e.g. in two or three years) by second language learning. To cope in the curriculum, conversational language competence may not be enough. Academically related language competence in a second language may take from five to eight years or longer to acquire. This theme is considered in detail later in the book when a contentious distinction is made between basic interpersonal communicative skills and cognitive/academic language proficiency (BICS and CALP – see chapter 8). Such a distinction between two levels of language competence is important as it involves disputing Oller’s (1982) ‘single factor’ language skill.
If language abilities are multicolored, and if bilinguals have a range of colors in both languages, then positive terms are needed to portray the variety. Calling bilinguals LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students in the US seems negative and pejorative. For example, in the US, Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as reauthorized by the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ of 2001 is entitled ‘Language Instruction of Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students’. Such a label can accentuate children’s perceived deficiency rather than their proficiencies, children’s perceived ‘deprivation’ rather than their accomplishments, their lower, marginalized, minority status through majority eyes rather than their bilingual potentiality. Such a label highlights past and present performance rather than potentialities and the possibility of functioning well in two or more languages.

The chapter now continues by considering various language structure theories. Theories about the structure of language competence provide an integrating consideration of the themes of the definition of bilingualism.

**THE STRUCTURE OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCE**

The language theories of the 1960s (e.g. Lado, 1961; Carroll, 1968) tended to center on language skills and components. The skills comprise listening, speaking, reading and writing and the components of knowledge comprise grammar, vocabulary, phonology and graphology. These earlier models did not indicate how skills and knowledge were integrated. For example, how does listening differ from speaking? How does reading differ from writing? Earlier models fail to probe the competence of ‘other’ people in a conversation. In a conversation, there is negotiation of meaning between two or more people. Real communication involves anticipating a listener’s response, understandings and misunderstandings, sometimes clarifying one’s own language to ensure joint understanding and relationships of similar and different status and power.

It has also been suggested that such skill and knowledge models tend to ignore the sociocultural and sociolinguistic context of language. Earlier models tended to be linguistic and ignore the settings and social contexts where language is used. A more sociolinguistic approach will examine actual content and context of communication called ‘speech acts’ or the ‘ethnography of communication’. This approach includes looking at the rules of dual language usage among bilinguals, their shared knowledge in conversation, and the culturally, socially and politically determined language norms and values of bilingual speech events.

Various holistic models of language competence have been developed. One example will be briefly outlined.
Bachman’s Model of Language Competence

A major model of language competence was proposed by Bachman (1990), refined by Bachman and Palmer (1996) and with a critique by McNamara (2003). Bachman’s model is valuable in that it considers both language competence and language performance. The model includes not only grammatical knowledge but also knowledge of how to use language in a particular communicative context. To fully define, refine and enable the testing of communicative competence, Bachman (1990) proposed a model that is summarized in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Competence</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Organizational Competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>(i) Grammatical (e.g. Syntax, Vocabulary)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ii) Textual (e.g. Written and oral cohesion)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Pragmatic Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Illocutionary Competence (e.g. speech strategies, language functions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Sociolinguistic Competence (e.g. sensitivity to register, dialect, cultural figures of speech)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To explain the table: for Bachman (1990), communicative competence is composed of two major components: organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence is broken down into two parts, grammatical competence and textual competence. Grammatical competence comprises knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, morphology and phonology/graphology. For example, a person needs to arrange words in a correct order in a sentence with appropriate endings (e.g. high, higher, highest). Textual competence involves ‘the knowledge of the conventions for joining utterances together to form a text, which is essentially a unit of language – spoken or written – consisting of two or more utterances or sentences’ (Bachman, 1990, p. 88).

Pragmatic competence is composed of two sub-parts: illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. Following Halliday (1973), Bachman (1990) lists four language functions as part of Illocutionary competence: ideational (the way we convey meanings and experiences), manipulative (using language in an instrumental way to achieve ends), heuristic (the use of language to discover new things about our world and solving problems), and the imaginative function (using language beyond the ‘here and now’ (e.g. for humor or fantasy).

The second part of pragmatic competence is sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence is sensitivity to the context where language is used, ensuring that language is appropriate to the person or the situation. This may entail sensitivity to differences in local geographical dialect, sensitivity to differences in register (e.g. the register of boardroom, baseball, bar and bedroom). Sociolinguistic competence also refers to sensitivity to speaking in a native-like or natural way. This
will include cultural variations in grammar and vocabulary (e.g. Black English). Another part of sociolinguistic competence is the ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech. Sometimes, to understand a particular conversation, one needs inner cultural understanding of a specific language. A Welsh figure of speech such as ‘to go round the Orme’ (meaning ‘to be long-winded’) is only fully understandable within local northern Welsh cultural idioms.

In order to represent language as a dynamic process, the listed components given in the table must be regarded as interactive with each other. Therefore the notion of strategic competence is important, where individuals constantly plan, execute and assess their communication strategies and delivery. Bachman and Palmer (1996) see such strategic competence as cognitive executive processes that govern language behavior. In a revision of the model, Bachman and Palmer (1996) added the personal characteristics of the individual language user to the model (topical knowledge and affective schema). Critiques of this model are provided by McNamara (1996) and Skehan (1998).

Since competence in a language is viewed as an integral part of language performance and not abstracted from it, measuring language competence cannot just use pencil and paper tests, but also need to investigate the language of genuine communication. Instead of tests that are artificial and stilted (e.g. language dictation tests), communicative performance testing involves creative, unpredictable, contextualized conversation. However, predicting ‘real world’ performance from such tests, and the ‘one sidedness’ that ignores the reality that conversations are jointly constructed and negotiated, remain problematic. This suggests that it will be difficult to measure communicative proficiency in an unbiased, comprehensive, valid and reliable way. Simple classroom tests are likely to be but a partial measure of the bilingual’s everyday performance.

Discussions of language competence often move to questions about measurement (e.g. of students). To what extent can we measure someone’s performance in their two languages? How can we portray where and with whom people use their two languages? What are the problems and dangers in measuring bilinguals? These questions provide the themes for the next chapter.

CONCLUSION

Defining exactly who is or is not bilingual is essentially elusive and ultimately impossible. Some categorization, however, is often necessary and helpful to make sense of the world. Therefore categorizations and approximations may be required. Definitions in a phrase (e.g. Bloomfield’s (1933) ‘native-like control of two languages’) offer little help. Intrinsically arbitrary and ambiguous in nature, they can be easily criticized and are difficult to defend.

A more helpful approach may be to locate important distinctions and dimensions surrounding the term ‘bilingualism’ that refine thinking about bilingualism (Baetens Beardsmore, 1986). The fundamental distinction is between bilingual ability and bilingual usage. Some bilinguals may be fluent in two languages but
requently use both. Others may be much less fluent but use their two languages regularly in different contexts. Many other patterns are possible.

A person's use of their two languages asks questions about when, where and with whom? This highlights the importance of considering domain or context. As a bilingual moves from one situation to another, so may the language being used in terms of type (e.g. Spanish or English), content (e.g. vocabulary) and style. Over time and place, an individual's two languages are never static but ever changing and evolving.

In terms of ability in two languages, the four basic dimensions are listening, speaking, reading and writing. With each of these proficiency dimensions, it is possible to fragment into more and more microscopic and detailed dimensions (e.g. pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, meaning and style). Those sub-dimensions can subsequently be further dissected and divided.

Creating a multidimensional, elaborate structure of bilingual proficiency may make for sensitivity and precision. However, ease of conceptualization and parsimony require simplicity rather than complexity. Therefore simple categorization is the paradoxical partner of complex amplification. This chapter has focused on the categories of balanced bilingualism, semilingualism, and one-factor ideas of language ability. These categories have received some depth of discussion and critical response in the research literature. As will be revealed in later chapters, these categories also relate to central research on bilingualism and bilingual education.

The chapter considered theories of the structure of language competence. In particular, the focus has been on linking a linguistic view of language competence with a communicative view. Language can be decomposed into its linguistic constituents (e.g. grammar, vocabulary). It is also important to consider language as a means of making relationships and communicating information. This important dualism will follow us through the book: ability and use; the linguistic and the social; competence and communication.

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**KEY POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER**

- There is a difference between bilingualism as an individual possession and two or more languages operating within a group, community, region or country.
- At an individual level, there is a distinction between a person's ability in two languages and their use of those languages.
- Bilinguals typically use their two languages with different people, in different contexts and for different purposes.
- Language abilities are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thinking in a language is sometimes seen as a fifth language ability.
- Balanced bilinguals with equal and strong competence in their two languages are rare.
- There is a difference between a monolingual or fractional view of bilinguals
and a holistic view. The fractional view sees bilinguals as two monolinguals inside one person. The holistic view sees bilinguals as a complete linguistic entity, an integrated whole.

- The term ‘semilingual’ or ‘double semilingualism’ has been used to describe those whose languages are both under-developed. However, the label has tended to take on negative, political and personally pejorative connotations.
- A distinction is made between the kind of language required for conversational fluency and the type of language required for academic, classroom operations.
- Language competence includes not only linguistic competence (e.g. vocabulary, grammar) but also competence in different social and cultural situations with different people.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING


See also the Special Issue of the International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 2004, volume 7, 2&3, for a recent conceptualization of bilinguals and bilingualism.

A valuable WWW site for general searching on bilingualism is maintained by the School of Education at the University of Birmingham (UK): http://www.edu.bham.ac.uk/bilingualism/database/biweb.htm

STUDY ACTIVITIES

(1) Do you consider yourself and/or people known to you as bilingual or multilingual? Would you describe yourself, or someone known to you, as ‘balanced’ in ability and use of two or more languages? Which language or languages do you think in? Does this change in different contexts? In which language or languages do you dream, count numbers, pray and think aloud?

(2) This activity can be based on self-reflection or you may wish to interview someone who is bilingual or multilingual. Make a table or diagram to illustrate how one person’s dual or multilingual ability and language usage has changed and developed since birth. Write down how different contexts have affected that change and development. The diagram or table should illustrate the life history of someone’s languages indicating changes over time and over different contexts.

(3) In a school with which you are most familiar, find out how students are labeled and categorized in terms of their languages. Who applies what labels? Which students are seen positively and negatively? Are there consequences of labels?