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ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BILINGUALISM BY URIEL WEINREICH AND EINAR HAUGEN

Juan José Varela Tembra (PhD) [1], Arburim Iseni (MSc) [2]

[1]Instituto Universitario de Estudios Irlandeses "Amergin" **-** Universidade da Coruña

Edificio dos Servizos Centrais de Investigación, 15071 A Coruña, Spain

Tel.- 981 167000 ext. 2685, Cell Phone.- 696 363514

juan.varela@udc.es

[2]Faculty of Philology, Department of English Language and Literature, State University of Tetova

Rr. Ilindenit pn., 1200 Tetova, Macedonia

Tel.-356 500 ext +38944, Cell Phone.-072608000

arburim.iseni@unite.edu.mk

Abstract

The main aim of the present study is to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism inspired by the pioneering work of Uriel Weinreich and Einar Haugen and provide a synthesis of the main ideas, classifications and views on bilingualism. Language as a means of expression and communication is more complex in its spoken than in its written form. Spoken language is never existent without paralinguistic features, which influence the message differently in different cultures. The study of bilingualism is essentially the study of the consequences of second language learning. Weinreich states that the ideal bilingual switches from one language to the other according to the appropriate changes in the speech situation. Being a bilingual means you have a developed cognitive skills and skills to switch constantly between the two languages. As for the advantages of being a good bilingual one should have the ability to learn new words easily, categorize these words, having good listening skills, find solutions to the problems and have improved skills in communication. Regarding disadvantages, a bilingual person while using two languages constantly might cause the verbal skills be generally weaker because their vocabularies seem to be weaker than those of a monolingual speakers. As Albanians we have the capacity to know and use two or more languages fluently. Bilingualism is common phenomena that occur in all the countries of the world in which people overwhelmingly attempt to learn another language other than their mother language. Both languages of a bilingual person are always switched on in their brains, notwithstanding which language they choose to speak at the moment. Through learning a second language, the third and fourth languages come more easily. A bilingual person not only is able to speak both languages but s(he) is indirectly studies the culture of the place of that language s(he) speaks and is more open-minded and respectful towards the culture diversity. Therefore, it is very beneficial to learn the second language because it will help and facilitate people in many things.

Keywords: bilinguals, bilingualism, advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism, second language acquisition, language interference, etc.

1. Introduction

Systematic investigations of bilingualism began approximately one hundred years ago with the careful study by Ronjat (1913), culminating, during the early history of this type of research, in the monumental work by Leopold (1939-1949). This study reports on the findings of bilingual language development among Albanian pupils that aims at examining their acquisition of phonology, vocabulary, and grammar, in this case English, which then needs to be conceptualized.

Penfield and Roberts (1959) proposed that in order to switch between languages the bilingual needs to make use of a corresponding mental switch mechanism.

Bialystok & Senman, 2004; Goetz, 2003; Kovács, 2009 argue that "several studies have suggested that bilinguals show certain advantages when it comes to social understanding. In some ways, this is not surprising, as bilinguals must navigate a complex social world where different people have different language knowledge. For example, bilingual preschoolers seem to have somewhat better skills than monolinguals in understanding others' perspectives, thoughts, desires, and intentions."

Hakuta (1990) states that native language proficiency is a powerful predictor of the rapidity of second language development.

Further, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), "Children who grow up learning to speak two languages are better at switching between tasks than are children who learn to speak only one language."

However, the study also found that "bilinguals are slower to acquire vocabulary than are monolinguals, because bilinguals must divide their time between two languages while monolinguals focus on only one."

For these reasons, if you grow up as a bilingual you are often also bicultural. In his article 'Advantages of Being Bicultural' François Grosjean lists the benefits as "having a greater number of social networks, being aware of cultural differences, taking part in the life of two or more cultures, being an intermediary between cultures" as well as having "greater creativity and professional success".

According to Tej K. Bhatia (2013) 'bilingualism and multilingualism phenomena are devoted to the study of production, processing, and comprehension of two (and more than two) languages, respectively. However, in colloquial usage the term "bilingualism" is used as a cover term to embody both bilingualism and multilingualism.'

Diebold (1961) has suggested that 'bilingualism has commenced when a person begins to understand utterances in a second language, but is unable to produce utterances.'

According to Grosjean (1982), The bilingual, however, should not be considered as the sum total of two complete or incomplete monolinguals. The presence of two languages and their interaction in the bilingual produces a different but complete language system which responds to the individual's needs to communicate using one or other language or, in some settings, a mixture of both languages.

Researcher Lambert (1977:19) states that the level of bilingualism achieved will 'reflect some stage in the subtraction of the ethnic language and the associated culture, and their replacement with another'. Subtractive bilingualism results, for example, when a child is educated in the more prestigious language without appropriate support for his/her home language in the education programme.

Weinreich (1953:83-110) demonstrated that the linguistic outcomes of language contact, or "interference", are also conditioned by the social-cultural setting, e.g.extent and degree of bilingualism;length of contact;geographical and demographic distribution;social factors (e.g. religion, race, gender, age);use in different social functions (e.g. education, government, media,literature); orpolitical and ideological factors (e.g. prestige or "language loyalty").

2. Literature Review

Second-language acquisition and first-language acquisition are apparently guided by common principles across languages and are part of the human cognitive system (McLaughlin, 1987).

Furthermore, the rate of acquisition of a second language is highly related to the proficiency level in the native language, which suggests that the two capacities share and build upon a common underlying base rather than competing for limited resources (Cummius, 1984).

Uriel Weinreich (1974) the term bilingualism and bilingual describes it as follows: 'The practice of alternately using two languages will be called bilingualism, and the persons involved, bilingual'

Another definition of Bilingualism given by François Grosjean (1985, 1994) is that there are two contrasting views of individual bilinguals. First, there is a 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.

Moreover, Grosjean uses an analogy for bilingual 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.

Hoffman (1991, p.17) Hoffman (1991) states that one difficulty in defining bilingualism is its interdisciplinary nature, with researchers from distinct but related fields within linguistics "bringing different methods, criteria and assumptions to bear upon studies of bilingual situations".

Convincingly, Danesi (1990, p.65) has shown that proficiency in both the mother tongue and the school language are interdependent and that literacy development in the mother tongue contributes the primary condition for the development of global language proficiency and the formation of the appropriate cognitive schemas needed to classify and organise experience.

According to Kaushanskaya, M., & Marian, V. (2007) they state that 'Theoretically, there are two mechanisms through which earlier acquisition age can amplify bilingual advantage on cognitive tasks. The

first is based on acritical-period-based phenomenon, where early acquisition of two languages modulates the development of the cognitive system in a particularly advantageous way. The second is based on the proficiency and exposure-based outcomes of early L2 acquisition, where longer usage of two languages, and not the age of acquisition itself, drives the development of bilingual advantage."

As far as the bilinguals are concerned, Fishman (1972) argues that bilinguals are rarely equally fluent in both languages in all topics. He argued that sociolinguistic forces demand that bilinguals organize their languages in functionally complementary spheres. Moreover, he emphasized that it is this complementary nature of language functions that assures the continued existence of bilingualism, because any society which produces bilinguals who use both languages with equal competence in all contexts will stop being bilingual, as no society needs two languages to perform the same set of functions.

Although bilinguals share the common experience of using more than one language in their lives, the ways in which they acquire their languages varies.
Monica Heller (2007) in her book Bilingualism: A Social Approach statets that "Weinreich was among the first to examine bilingualism in terms of a related set of linguistic forms and social functions, in an attempt to describe structurally-different linguistic manifestations of bilingualism as they might relate to different functional distributions of linguistic varieties in a community."

Whereas Einar Haugen (1950, p.88) in his book Problems of Bilingualism states that 'Our goal is full understanding of the speaker's informal analyses which guide his bilingual behavior. It is clear that his activity is shaped in obedience to analogies with previously established habits. But the rules according to which he selects one analogy and not another are still undermined."

Moreover, Einar Haugen (1974, p.43) claims that "Bilinguals do have problems of their own in keeping their languages apart."

John Macnamara (1969, p.82) describes bilingualism as "possession of at least one of the four language skills, even to a minimal degree"

Wheras William Mackey (1970, p.555) about bilingualism states that it is "the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual"

Furthermore, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1981, p.90) states that "A bilingual speaker is someone who is able to function in two (or more) languages, either in monolingual or bilingual communities, in accordance with the sociocultural demands made of an individual's communicative and cognitive competence by these communities or by the individual herself, at the same level as native speakers, and who is able positively to identify with both (or all) language groups (and cultures), or parts of them."

Similarly to this, Sapir (1929) wrote "…the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group...We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.

Haugen (1956) gave the definition of the term bilingual stating that "'Bilingual is a cover term for people with a number of different language skills, having in common only that they are not monolingual... A bilingual is one who knows two languages, but will here be used to include also the one who knows more than two, variously known as a plurilingual, a multilingual, or a polyglot'

Cummins (1979) posited that the proficiency of bilinguals in two languages was not stored separately in the brain, and that each proficiency did not behave independently of the other.

According to Lisa Cheng, bilinguals possess a better attentional control because they are trained all the time to ignore other languages and irrelevant information and select precisely which lexicon they want to use.

Additionally, language is simply defined by Richards et. al. (1992, p. 196) as the system of human communication which consists of the structures arrangements of sounds (or their written presentation) into larger units, e.g. morphemes, words, sentences, utterances.

The process of perceiving language in an individual is by the processes of learning and acquisition. Learning is a conscious process, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. Whereas acquisition is a process by which children unconsciously acquire their native/first language(s). In language acquisition, the focus is on communication or reception of a message as opposed to syntax and grammar as is the case in language learning (Rice, Bruehler & Specker, 2004)

3. Objectives

The primary concern of this study is to explore advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism and provide a synthesis of the main ideas, classifications and views on bilingualism. More specifically, the study seeks answers to the following question: How does one learn a foreign language? How should one learn the language in order to be able to speak really fluently? When does real fluency begin? Is it possible to achieve fluency if one starts learning foreign languages at the age of 17 or 18? When is the best time to start learning a second language?

4. Methodology

Descriptive method was used for this research. Besides collecting the data, observations were also conducted to analyze their bilingualism development.

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the research methodology used in this study and gives information about the population and the sample. It also describes the data collection instruments and procedures. It finally describes the validity and reliability of the instruments and gives information about the data analysis.

4.2 The Study Population and Sample

Burns and Grove (1993, p, 779) states that a population is defined as all elements (individuals, objects and events) that meet the sample criteria for inclusion in a study. Our study population consisted of both male and female high school students. To select the participants of the present study, a simple random sampling method was used because it is regarded as one of the most reliable methods to obtain a representative sample. The participants, selected for the purpose of this study, are between 17 and 18 years of age. All of them were native speakers of Albanian, who also learned English as a Second Language since their primary and the secondary education system. All the participants are homogeneous in terms of their linguistic, educational, and socioeconomic background.

4.3 Data Collection
4.3.1 Data Collection Instrument

The major source of data used to find answers to the research questions are the questionnaires. The topics given in these questionnaires were general but argumentative in nature.

4.3.2 Data Collection Procedure

All of our participants will be required to answer different types of questionnaires on different topics that will relate to the acquisition of the use of both L1 & L2. They will be given a Rensis Likert type scale questionnaires to answer. From the data obtained, estimation of exposures of the two languages they use will be calculated and measured.

4.4 Reliability and Validity
4.4.1 Reliability

We will be using a test-retest device to measure the reliability of our instrument. Accordingly, we will expect our students' results to show consistency in the answers.

4.4.2 Validity

In order to ensure the content of our study instrument, we will employ the method of trustee's validity. We will ensure ourselves that questions asked will be appropriate to our students' standard and will suit their ages, and that the rubric set will be very clear.

4.5 Data Analysis

The analysis will be derived from Uriel Weinreich and Einar Haugen views on bilingualism and also on the issue of their language competence and from the our own experience of dealing with bilinguals.

5. Results and Discussion

In this section, it will be presented and discussed the findings of the study in light of its objectives with illustrative examples; and finally, other developments related to bilingualism will be revealed as this study focuses on.

6. Conclusion

The researcher will use a simple random sampling method to select the participants of the present study. This section will also describe the research methodology that will be used in this study, including the population, sample, data collection instruments as well as strategies used to ensure the reliability and validity of the study.

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