Does Bilingualism Mean Biculturalism?

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Abstract

One may easily associate bilingualism with biculturalism. Is bilingualism the same as biculturalism? Definitions of culture show that language is an essential component, but not the only one. If a person is proficient in two languages, he/she is a bilingual. However, he/she may not be a bicultural. Positive attitudes towards another culture are indispensable for a person who does not come from a bicultural family background to appreciate values and practices of a second culture. Factors that facilitate biculturalism are more complex than those governing in learning two languages. This article attempts to identify these factors through a few cases. Parents' and educators' attitudes, in a heterogeneous or a homogenous society are discussed, in how they guide pupils to learn a second language and to appreciate a second culture.
Needs -- The Core Motivator

"The need to communicate across speech communities" (Edwards, 1994), inter- or intra-ethnicity, is one of the most pertinent answers for questions such as "Why does a person learn more than one language?", and "Why should a society acknowledge the existence of various languages?". Does the same reason apply to questions such as "Why does a person acquire competency in a second culture?" or "Why should a society promote bi- or multiculturalism?" Proficiency in a foreign language is also considered necessary for cultural transmission (Lin, 1990; Beardsmore, 1994), economic development, national development (Khoo, Kreher & Wong, 1993), knowledge acquisition, and religious beliefs (Zhang Wei, 1991). Needs change across situations, over time, and in respect to target groups. A shift of interests in foreign language emphasis, from European to Asian (see Mackerras, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1995), has been observed in Australia because of its intention to be closer to Asian neighbors (Baldauf, 1993). With the change of demographic composition in the US, bilingual programs which were once perceived negatively have gradually gained their recognition as a means to enhance multicultural understanding (Lyons, 1995).

If a person is able to define his/her linguistic needs, he/she is more innovative in learning a foreign language (see Karita, 1996). Similarly, if a person realizes the need to acquire a second cultural competency, he/she will appreciate and internalize values of another ethnicity. Since the 1950s a group of social scientists have endorsed the importance of testing existing theories and models across cultures and the necessity of discovering behaviors and thinking patterns of other cultural groups (see Triandis et al., 1980; Berry et al., 1992). Teaching culture is indispensable for understanding behaviors (Meier, 1996). With the influx of immigrants and world-wide electronic
access, a person’s understanding of a language is as essential as his/her understanding of a culture. Educators are aware that bilingual education and language diversity are indispensable themes for multicultural education (Hernandez, 1989; Tiedt & Tiedt, 1995; Grant & Gomez, 1996) and intercultural communication (Jandt, 1995a & b).

**Language and Culture: Where are the Intersections?**

Language in an active sense is a form of *joint action* between the speaker and the addressee (Clark, 1996). Interactions with speakers of the target language increase the effectiveness of language learning (Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Tentative progress in listening and speaking Japanese was observed in Australian pupils who participated in an exchange program to Japan (Marriot & Enomoto, 1996; Atsuzawa-Windley & Noguchi, 1995). Pupils of Brussels’ European schools performed at a high level of French language proficiency than those of a French Canadian immersion program because the former interacted actively with native speakers. The latter consisted of pupils of English language speaking families (Genesse, 1995) who seldom used French after school.

Bilingualism does not instantly lead to biculturalism (see Figure 1). A bilingual is a person who has a complete or nearly complete mastery of two languages. He/she learns two languages from the childhood either from his/her family members or in school. A bilingual is able to use two languages in most situations at his/her command and the demands of the community (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984). He/she identifies himself/herself with two languages and/or two cultures, as well as is identified by others as a native speaker of two languages. Besides retaining bilingual competency, a bicultural person maintains high contact with, loyalty to, and activity in two cultures
(LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). He/she is able to acquire knowledge of, develop effective support systems in two cultures and, at the same time, enhance his/her personal and cultural identities. He/she is accepted by members of both cultures, has positive attitude in regard to both groups, possesses knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, and knows role repertoires of both cultures.

Insert Figure 1 here!

Culture and the individual are inseparable. Culture is the way we think, feel, and behave. It is also the way we perceive our environment. Culture comprises cultural products, collective adaptation, shared experience, shared meaning, shared style of representation, and creative potential (Kim & Yamaguchi, 1994). Due to the high rate of interaction, people who live next to each other, speak the same dialect, and engage in similar activities (e.g., have similar occupations) are likely to share the same (subjective) culture (Triandis, 1972). Similarities in race (physical type), sex, age, religion, home and occupation increase such interactions, and lead to the formation of a similar (subjective) culture.

Ethnic language is perceived as one of the essential components of ethnic or cultural identity (Sodowsky et al., 1991; Suinn et al., 1992, 1995). Cultural identity embraces other components such as language preference, language opportunities, cultural preference, ethnic interaction, social interaction, affinity for ethnic identity and pride, generational identity, and preference of cultural activities (e.g. food, movie) (Suinn et al., 1992, 1995; Horvath, Marsella, and Yamada, 1996). The process of ethnic or cultural identity is a nonlinear trend (Sodowsky, Kwan, & Panna, 1995). If a person
lives in diverse social and cultural contexts, his/her ethnic identity orientation can move to another over time and/or across situations, and move back and forth among various orientations: a bi- or multicultural, strongly ethnic, marginal, or strongly dominant cultural identity. A person is more likely to identify himself/herself with his/her culture with the presence of another ethnic or cultural group (Gudykunst, 1995).

Culture, to a large extent, influences a person's verbal and implicitly communicative style, perception, affective style, behavioral style, cognitive style, motivational style, and activities. Internalized culture is "the cultural influences operating within the individual that shape (not determine) personality formation and various aspects of psychological functioning." (Ho, 1995, p.5) It is formed during enculturation when a child socializes with his/her parents, care-takers, siblings, relatives, and other adults of the same ethnicity or culture. Internalized cultural beliefs influence individual cognition. Bienculturaltion or multienculturation is "enculturation in more than one culture (e.g. as in the case of parents from diverse cultural backgrounds)." (Ho, 1995, p. 13) Bi-socialization is socialization in more than one culture (e.g. as in the case of a society of diverse cultural groups). Different cultural systems are internalized and coexist in the mind. No one culture is regarded as the host or dominant. One should take enculturation (ethnic socialization) and acculturation (socialization into another ethnic group) into consideration, when one investigates the development of a person's ethnic identity (Cansas & Pytluk, 1995).

**One or More Languages and One or More Cultures**

The language policy of a society influences a family's and an individual's language choice. This policy, in turn, is influenced by the demographic composition as well as the sociopolitical, cultural and economic needs of a society (see Figure 2).
Case 1: Multilingualism in a Heterogeneous Society

A society’s language and cultural policy is formulated on the score of internal stability and international credibility. Malaysia, a multiethnic society, for example, selected Malay for its national unity and national development, but English for its personal and economic development (Ozog, 1993). Singapore, another multiethnic society, elected English as a language of commerce and trade, as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges, and as a means of intraethnic and interethnic communication (see Kuo & Jernudd, 1994; Gopinathan, 1994). Singapore bilingual policy, i.e. the use of English and a mother tongue, exercises a great impact on language choice of a family. There is an increase in the use of English by the Chinese (Gupta & Siew, 1995), Indian (Saravanan, 1994), and Malay (Bibi Jan Mohd Ayyud, 1994) communities in Singapore (see also Tham, 1990). In preschools teachers converse merely English during English lessons. In second language classes the mother tongue is the only language of communication. Some families impose a bilingual policy when one parent insists on using one language and the other employs another (see Wung, 1983). The heterogeneous features of Singapore society provide an individual an opportunity to use two languages according to Singapore social and cultural contexts.

Case 2: Multilingualism in a Homogenous Society

From the perspectives of demographic composition and language policy, Japan is not a homogenous society in the strictest sense. The American occupation after the Second World War brought forth a substantial change in language education. In 1947, the English language was introduced into all high schools as a compulsory subject. Being
bilingual in Japan is a matter of individual choice and not one of necessity (Yamanoto, 1995). With Japanese as the sole language of communication, Japanese students possess rare opportunities to use English or other foreign languages actively. Learning foreign language through *Katagana* and accepting foreign terminology in the form of *Katagana* do not help pupils accomplish a high proficiency in foreign languages (see Honna, 1995). For economic and cultural purposes, Japan possesses a great aspiration to promote multilingualism (see Maher & Yashiro, 1995). This aspiration can only be attained, if minorities such as the returnees (Yashiro, 1995), the Koreans (Maher & Kawanishi, 1995), the Chinese (Maher, 1995), as well as those living in the North (Dechicchis, 1995) and in various islands (see Matsumori, 1995) are given substantial support to promote their languages and cultures.

**Case 3: Multilingualism in Intermarriage Families**

Intermarriage families can be a conducive environment for biculturalism and bilingualism, if parents take part in bienculturation (at home) and bisocialization (in the society). I cite two examples. Elisabeth who lived in Britain was a daughter of an English father and a German mother (Littlewood, 1996). Since birth Elisabeth has received intensive bilingual input, but employed English in her daily communication. When Elisabeth was 4 years and 3 months old, she visited her grandparents in Germany. During her first week, Elisabeth used German as a tool of communication. After experiencing a transitional stage of code-switching with English equivalence words, a few weeks later, Elisabeth internalized German vocabulary into her cognitive skills and employed German language with ease. Elisabeth’s experience alerts us that an early input of two languages is essential, and interactions with target language speakers in a natural environment help cultivate an internalized linguistic and cultural
competency. Stephen (American English-speaking) and Suzanne (French-speaking) met while they were monolinguals (Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 1992). To attain competency in their partner’s language, Stephen and Suzanne involved themselves actively and consciously in French language and English language speaking communities. Living in a monocultural English language speaking environment in Louisiana US, Stephen and Suzanne decided to speak French with their son and twin daughters. They visited Quebec frequently mainly to ensure that their children had ample exposure to the French language and culture in a natural setting. Stephen’s and Suzanne’s experience convinces us that persistence and determination are indispensable for promoting bilingualism and biculturalism, especially in a monocultural society.

Positive Attitudes: The Key Factor

Language acquisition may accelerate cultural understanding. Language competency is a part of cultural competency. Parents’ and teachers’ positive attitudes are necessary for teaching languages and cultures (see Baker, 1995). Whether it is in a homogenous or in a heterogeneous society, bienculturation and bisocialization should begin at home and continue in school. Parents’ persistence and teachers’ promotion of in two or more languages and a diverse cultural policy are indispensable for multiculturalism and multilingualism.

Literature


Karita, M. (1996). Enabling students to recognize themselves to be prospective members of the international community will be a hint to create innovative English teaching approach. The Journal of Foreign Languages, 9, 202-203.


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Figure 1: Bilingual Identity and Bicultural Identity
Figure 2. Interactions Between Needs and Language Choices