An Investigation through Different Types of Bilinguals and Bilingualism

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Abstract

Bilingualism can be defined as the use of at least two languages either by a group of speakers or by an individual. The first step of a linguistic research, particularly sociolinguistic and language contact studies is to know and recognize different types of bilinguals and bilingualism along with their main features and to be able to distinguish them with highlighting their main characteristics in order to obtain and apply an appropriate and precise methodology for the research. Therefore, in the present study attempts were made to accurately classify bilinguals by the degree of fluency and competence in the languages spoken, by age, context or manner of acquisition of the languages, (the early/late and simultaneous/successive, formal/informal, acquired/learnt distinctions respectively), as well as by hypothesized processing mechanisms or hypothesized language representation (the additive/subtractive and compound/co-ordinate/subordinate distinctions), and it depicts the main characteristics of the various types of bilingualism and highlights the multi-dimensionality of bilingualism..

Keywords: Bilingualism; individual bilinguals; first language (L1); second language; language acquisition.

1. Bilinguals and Bilingualism: Bilingual is a person who uses at least two languages with some degree of proficiency. Although a bilingual in everyday use is usually considered as an individual who can speak ,interact, read or understand two languages equally well (which in this case it is called a balanced bilingual), but a bilingual person usually has a better knowledge of one language than another.

Bilingualism is defined as the use of at least two languages either by an individual or by a group of speakers. Bilingualism is the norm in the most of the countries of the world. Ambi-bilingualism is a term in bilingualism which is defined as the capability and aptitude to function equally well in two or more languages across a wide range of domains.

There is no single agreed-upon definition of individual bilingualism. Rather, bilingualism is best regarded as occurring on a continuum (Baetens Beardsmore, 1986). At one end of the continuum is the monolingual speaker; at the other, the individual who has acquired both languages in naturalistic contexts in childhood and who is best described as speaking LA and LB with equal and native like fluency. Such ambi or equi- lingualism is considered theoretically ideal (Weinreich, 1968, Lyons, 1981), but to be rare in practice (Lyons, 1981). Along the continuum are those individuals who illustrate greater or lesser degrees of bilingualism, involving the bilinguals who speak both languages fluently and proficiently but are more dominant in one than the other and the adult second language learners with varying degrees of proficiency and mastery of the second language (L2).

Attempts have already been made to classify bilinguals by the degree of fluency and competence in the languages spoken (the bilingual L2 language learner distinction), simply by age, context or manner of acquisition of the languages, (the early/late and simultaneous/successive, formal/informal, acquired/learnt distinctions respectively), and by hypothesized processing mechanisms or hypothesized language representation (the additive/subtractive and compound/co-ordinate/subordinate distinctions). In the subsequent sections the types of bilingualism and their features will be discussed.

3.   Classifications of Individual Bilinguals: It is very important to classify bilinguals into different categories depending on the linguistic, cognitive, developmental and social dimensions. Bilinguals were classified according to the distinction between the degree of fluency and competence in the languages spoken (the bilingual L2 language learner distinction), by age, context, manner of acquisition of the languages, and as w based on the hypothesized processing mechanisms or hypothesized language representation; which include: (a) the early/late, (b) simultaneous/successive, (c) formal/informal, (d) acquired/learnt (e) the additive/subtractive, (f) compound/co-ordinate/subordinate bilinguals. There are various components and aspects associated with the complexity of understanding bilingualism. First thing to keep in mind is that bilingualism has multiple dimensions. Highlighting the multi-dimensionality of bilingualism, researchers have suggested various classifications determined by the different   dimensions of bilingualism they focused on.

3.1 Early and late Bilinguals: Bilinguals can also be categorized into early and   late bilinguals, according to the age of exposure to two (or more) languages. Early bilingualism is defined as the acquisition of more than one language in the pre-adolescent phase of life (Baetens Beardsmore, 1986: 28). Late bilingualism has been defined as the acquisition of one language before and the other language after the age of 8 years.

Early and late bilinguals are distinguished based on their attainment of linguistic competence. Early bilinguals are mainly regarded as attaining native-like linguistic competence in both languages (Baetens Beardsmore, 1986). According to Swain (1972) early bilingualism manifests bilingualism as a native language. In contrast to the early bilinguals, most late bilinguals are regarded as non-native speakers of the L2, who have not attained the complete competence of L2, as evidenced by structural grammatical inadequacies and inability to detect linguistic ambiguity (Baetens Beardsmore, 1986).

Early bilingualism can also be classified into two types, include:
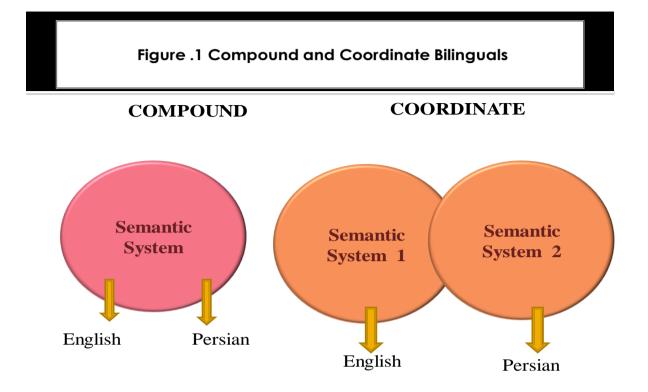
- Simultaneous early bilingualism and successive early bilingualism. Simultaneous early bilingualism occurs in situations when a child learns two languages at the same time, from birth. This often produces a strong bilingualism.

- Successive early bilingualism occurs in situations when a child who has already partially acquired a L1 (first language) and then learns a L2 (second language) early in childhood; an example can be when a child moves to another place where the dominant language is not his native language. This usually results in the production of a strong bilingualism, but the child needs time to learn the L2.

Late bilingualism refers to the bilinguals who have learned their second language (L2) after the critical period, especially when L2 is learned in adulthood or adolescence. Late bilingualism in fact is a successive bilingualism which occurs after the acquisition of L1. In the late bilingualism, since the bilinguals have already acquired the L1, uses the experience of the individuals to learn the L2.

3.2 Balanced and Dominant Bilinguals: The distinction between balanced and dominant (or unbalanced) bilinguals (Peal and Lambert, 1962) is based on the relationship between the fluency and proficiencies of the respective languages which   bilinguals master. Those who acquire similar degrees of proficiency and mastery in both languages are defined as balanced bilinguals, while on the contrary, dominant (or unbalanced) bilinguals are those individuals whom their proficiency in one language is higher than that in the other language(s). In other words, in dominant bilingualism, the individual is more proficient and competent in one of the two languages, while a balance bilingual is more or less equally competent and proficient in both languages.

3.3 Compound, Coordinate, and Subordinate Bilinguals: According to Weinreich (1953), compound, coordinate, and subordinate distinctions deal with the properties of how two or more linguistic codes are   organized and stored by individuals. In compound bilinguals, two sets of linguistic codes (e.g. 'Dog' and 'Sag') are stored in one meaning unit; in other words, have one system of meaning for words which is used for both L1 and L2, while on the contrary, in coordinate bilinguals, each linguistic code is stored and organized separately in two meaning units and the bilinguals have two systems of meanings for words; i.e. one system of meaning is for words that the individuals know in the L1 and the other is for words they know in L2. The following figure (1) clarifies the point:

Figure .1 Compound and Coordinate Bilinguals

COMPOUND   **COORDINATE**

Semantic System

English   Persian

Semantic System 1   Semantic System 2

English   Persian

Furthermore, in subordinate bilinguals, linguistic codes of Bilinguals' second language (L2) are assumed to be understood and interpreted through their first language (L1). specifically, they are considered to possess two sets of linguistic codes, however, only one meaning unit, which is accessible merely through their L1.

3.4 Folk and Elite Bilinguals: There are still several other classifications of bilinguals which are dependent on variables such as cultural identity and language usage. Besides these types of individual variables, bilinguals can be classified depending on various social variables. Concentrating on the social status of language, Fishman (1977) states that depending on the social status of language, bilinguals can be classified into 'folk' and 'elite' bilinguals. Where folk bilinguals are often language minority community whose own language does not have a high status in the predominant language society in which they dwell. In contrast to folk bilinguals, elite bilinguals are those who speak a dominant language in a given   society   and also those who can speak another language which provides them additional value and benefit within the society. Based on the dimensions similar to Fishman (1997), Valdés and Figueroa's (1994) differentiate between circumstantial and elective bilinguals.

3.5 Additive Bilinguals and Subtractive Bilinguals: Lambert (1974) depicts that depending on how one's L2 influences the retention of one's L1, bilinguals can be classified into additive bilinguals and subtractive bilinguals. Bilinguals who can improve their L2 without losing their L1 proficiency are called   additive bilinguals, on the contrary, those   whose L2 is acquired or learned at the cost of losing   their   L1can be called as subtractive bilinguals. For being additive bilinguals, both of the languages learned by individuals should be valued in the society in which they live. In other words, when learning a L2 does not interfere with the L1 learning, both languages develop, which is considered as an additive bilingualism. While subtractive bilingualism occurs when learning a L2 interferes the L1 learning and consequently the L1 is replaced by L1. In other words, subtractive bilingualism occurs when an individual learns the L2 to the determinant of L1. In this case the competent and mastery of L1 diminishes, while the proficiency and mastery of the L2 (usually the dominant language) augments.

Some of the significant types of bilingualism which   usually appear in the bilingual literature are summarized in table (2.2).

Table 2.2 Typology of Bilingualism:

Typology	Point of Focus (Dimension)	Characteristics of SLA	Possible Outcomes	Related Issue and Educational Implications
Balanced Dominant (Peal & Lambert, 1962)	Relationship between proficiencies in two languages	Functional differences; Related to age factor (?)	Differences in proficiencies in L1 and L2: achieving equal level of proficiency in L2 with L1 (balanced); L2 proficiency varies but not the same as L1 (dominant	Conceptualizing and assessing one's language proficiency; Cummins's threshold hypothesis and interdependent hypothesis; semilingualism
Compound Coordinate Subordinate (Weinreich, 1953)	Organization of linguistic codes and meaning unit(s)	Functional differences; differences in form–meaning mapping	Differences in semantic representation and information processing for L1 and L2	Difficulties with operationalizing distinctions and testing differences
Early Simultaneous Sequential Late (Genesee et al., 1978)	Age of acquisition	Maturational differences; schooling differences	Attainment of L2 proficiency varies by age of acquisition; L1 proficiency is not addressed	Neurolinguistic differences (?); critical period hypothesis
Incipient Receptive Productive	Functional ability	Functional and motivational differences	Different proficiencies in L1 and L2 in different domains	

Additive Subtractive (Lambert, 1974; 75)	Effect of L2 learning on the retention of L1	L2 as enrichment with or without loss of L1; status of a language in a given context	L2 as enrichment without loss of L1 (additive); L1 is replaced by L2 (subtractive)	Social status of individual groups and the social value of their L1 greatly influences the retention of L1; support for literacy in L1 and L2 literacy development
Elite Folk (Fishman, 1977); Circumstantial Elective (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994)	Language status & learning environment; literacy support of first Language	Differences in language status & value of bilinguals	No or little additive value of first language as a language minority status (folk); additive value of second language (elite)	Support for literacy in L1 and L2 literacy development
Bicultural L1 Monocultural L2 Accultural Deculturated (HAmers & Blance, 2000)	Cultural identity	Differences in acculturation process	Cultural identity shaped by two cultures (bicultural); identity in one culture; loss of first language culture	High bilingual competence does not necessarily coincide with dual identity

Bhatia, T. K., & Ritchie, W. C. (2012)

4. Conclusion: To sum up, in this research provides a clear and precise description of the types and the characteristics of various types of bilingualism. The bilinguals were classified according to the distinction between the degree of fluency and competence in the languages spoken, by the context and manner of acquisition of the languages, by age, and as based on the hypothesized processing mechanisms.

It is very important to remember that most of these dimensions are usually interrelated. It can be argued that one who is exposed to two languages from birth (simultaneous bilingual) can have a better opportunity to be a balanced bilingual . Bilinguals can be classified based on the various dimensions and facets; both at the individual and as well as at the social levels. Therefore depending on the dimensions of their bilingual characteristics, they can be classified into different types of bilinguals. It should be clearly mentioned that a second element of complexity comes from the fact that these dimensions of bilingualism are continuous and not simply categorical constructs. One cannot draw clear boundaries between different types of bilinguals within a given dimension.

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