

bilingualism

- **who is a bilingual?**

- bilinguals should have native like competence in both the languages
- someone who has a minimal competence of a second language
- competence in all the four language dimensions.

- **levels of bilingualism**

- individual: a psychological state of an individual who has access to two language codes to serve communicative purposes
- societal : two languages are used in a community and a number of speakers can use two languages.

dimensions

- **organization of the two languages**
 - compound: one semantic system for 2 language codes , often refers to a speaker who learns both the languages at the same time, in the same context.
 - coordinate: two semantic systems for two language codes, refers to one who learns the languages in different contexts.
 - subordinate: weaker language is interpreted through the stronger language.

- **sequence of acquisition:**

- successive: when one language is learnt after another--- generally the adult learners
- simultaneous: learning two languages at the same time---infant learners

- **language proficiency/competence:**

- balanced: proficiency in both the languages are similar
- dominant: proficiency in language is higher than the other

- **Two views of bilingualism**

- fractional : this view takes the position that a bilingual is equivalent to two monolinguals put together and entails parallel linguistics competence---hence parallel linguistics processing.
- holistic: this view understands that bilinguals integrate the knowledge of and from both the languages and create something that is greater than each of the languages—sort of a meta-language system.

detailed look at the major socio-psychological backdrop relevant to societal bilingualism.

Social psychology of bilingualism

- Multilingualism is seen in negative light through scriptures in the western world. The story of Babel shows multilingualism as a result of God's curse on Noah's descendants. So, linguistic diversity is seen as a punishment.
- This sentiment has been perpetuated through various stages of colonialism and invasion, including that of taking over the entire Northern America by Europeans/Christianity.
- The world dynamics started changing in the last couple of centuries and the global trade and commerce demanded a new world order in terms of languages. Rising economies also played their part.
- Coupled with that was the rise in research that proved that ability to speak in more than one language is an advantage rather than a problem.
- Studies in the domain of cognitive science of languages showed language as a tool as many other higher mental functions and the inter-relationship between them makes this ability a unique one.

A. Influence of social context on bilingualism

- The social context impacts the process of becoming and remaining a bilingual.
- For example, a person speaking Spanish and English is considered a bilingual, but similar adjective is not always used for someone who speaks English and American Sign Language Or, Standard English and Ebonics, an African-American variety of English with low prestige.
- So, a lot depends on social consensus
- Another point in this regard is that bilingualism is not ability to use language as speech, in its input-output system. It has to be socially situated. Extra linguistic cues like gestures, intonations, gazes etc imbue meaning into the context of speech.

B. Bilingualism and social identity

- Language often is a marker of social identity. By this token, if bilingualism is part of in-group identity it will be accepted and embraced, but if it part of out-group identity, it will be discriminated against. Thus, stereotypes about groups impact how bilingualism is viewed.
- A society where the minority (out-group) speaks a language different from the majority (in-group) bilingualism is necessitated. As a result for a long time, bilingualism was considered a deficit, thought to hinder character formation etc.
- Like Mexicans in US are viewed as a low status group and consequently their language (Spanish) and also their bilingualism.
- However, the reverse is seen in cases where an out-group is seen as superior in socio-cultural aspects, their bilingualism may be looked up to. Case in point French-English bilinguals.

C. Assimilation and acculturation forces

- Depending on the language policy of a nation, the pressure to acculturate and assimilate differs.
- For example, the US uses the melting pot metaphor to merge all racial and ethnic differences to merge into a single culture, supporting only one language English. Immigrants are expected to abandon their culture and language in exchange for the American dream.
 - *Our new immigrants must be part of our One America...We have a responsibility to make them welcome here; and they have a responsibility to enter the mainstream of American life. That means learning English...(42nd President of USA William Clinton, 19th January, 1999)*
- this worked fine for most of European migrants, who became, through successive generations, part of the in-group, thus negates any need for bilingualism.
- However, other immigrants like Mexicans and Chinese or Asians in general, could not assimilate as smoothly because of their phenotype, the outer appearance. Their difference makes them open to discrimination and in turn makes them continue to identify with their culture to prevent isolation as well as to garner social support. This results in the maintenance of bilingualism in these groups.

D. Attitudes about bilingualism

- Attitudes are evaluations that can be positive or negative, which affect the behavioral levels of bilingualism.
- In Scandinavia, proficiency in two or more languages is encouraged and expected . But in Canada, even though French and English have equal status legally, tension often erupts that show that English is still accorded more prestige.
- In US, a person with French accent is seen a sophisticated one, even exotic , but not someone with Asian accent.
- This is true for even how the group itself sees its own bilingualism.

- Each of these factors need detailed understanding.

Social motivation

- Choice: bilinguals can exercise a choice of languages, to identify with the socio-psychological values attached with that language.