TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN INDIA THROUGH BILINGUALISM

Dr. G. Ravi Kumar

Associate Professor, M. L. Engg. College, Singarayakonda

Abstract: Bilingualism can be discussed as a characteristic of an individual. It is a phenomenon in a society. Psychologists and psycholinguists use origin/birth as the criterion to describe bilingualism. According to them a speaker is bilingual when he has learnt two languages in the family from native speakers or when he uses two languages in parallel as a means of communication from the beginning.

Linguists base their definition of bilingualism on linguistic competence. They describe a speaker as bilingual only when he has complete or equal mastery of two languages. They should have native-like control over the two languages and should be able to produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language.

One can say that in India, the need for bilingual education arises out of the need to enable students to learn the language of opportunity, English, as well as to maintain competence in their regional languages. Moreover, since the knowledge of Hindi, as the other official language of the country is also essential, students have to be introduced to three languages at the same time, the regional language, Hindi and English.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Psycholinguists, Social Psychologists, Competence , Functional Approach, Attitude.

Introduction: Bilingualism can be discussed as a characteristic of an individual. It is a phenomenon in a society. Psychologists and psycholinguists use origin/birth as the criterion to describe bilingualism. According to them a speaker is bilingual when he has learnt two languages in the family from native speakers or when he uses two languages in parallel as a means of communication from the beginning.

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Sociologists define bilingualism in terms of function. A speaker is bilingual who uses two languages according to his/her wish or the demands made by the society. Lastly we have the social psychologists who define bilingualism in terms of their attitude. In this case a speaker is a bilingual who defines herself as a bilingual with two languages or two cultures and who is identified by others as bilingual or as a native speaker of two languages.

What is Bilingualism?
A speaker is bilingual who
- Has learnt two languages in the family from native speakers from beginning
- Has used two languages in parallel as means of communication from the beginning
- Complete mastery of two languages
- Native-like control of two languages
- Equal mastery of two languages
- Can produce complete , meaningful utterances in the other language
- Has at least some knowledge and control of the grammatical structure of the other language
- Has come into contact with another language
- Uses (or can use) two languages (in most situations) (in accordance with her own wishes and the demands of community)
- Identifies herself as bilingual with two languages and/or two cultures (or parts of them)
- Is identified by others as bilingual/as a native speaker of two languages

There is a range of definitions available. The choice of the definition is thus wholly dependent upon what it is to be used for. There we will discuss those definitions which reflect basic positions taken in this spectrum.

The classic definition of bilingualism is by Leornard Bloomfield:"native-like control of two or more languages". (Bloomfield, 1933:56) Maximillian Braun's definition is equally rigorous:"active, completely equal mastery of

two or more languages". (Braun, 1973 as cited in Skuttnab Kangas, 1981:82). Oestreicher says that there should be:"complete mastery of two different languages without interference between two linguistic processes." (Oestriecher, 1974) Einar Haugen, who is often called the "grand old man in the research into bilingualism says that "bilingualism begins at the point where the spaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language." (Haugen, 1953) Haugen further defines an ideal bilingual as follows: "The ideal bilingual is of course, two native speakers rolled into one". (Haugen, 1972)

Bloomfield, Braun, Oestreicher and Haugen provide us with an early definition of bilingualism. The assumption here seems to be that if a speaker possesses two language (Language 1 and Language 2) in equal measure, he is an ideal bilingual. Some scholars require no more than "at least some knowledge and control of the grammatical structure of the second language" (Hall,1952 as cited in Skuttnab Kangas, 1981:82). John Macnamara (1969) defined bilingualism by specifying four areas of linguistic skills (viz. understanding, speaking, reading, writing) each of which was further divided into four levels (viz. phonological/graphemic, lexical, syntactic and semantic) and suggesting that a person can be called a bilingual if he is in possession of at least one of these language skills 'even to a minimal degree'. These definitions leave out several related factors like the frequency of alternation, the level of proficiency of the speakers in the two languages, the lexico-syntactic-semantic distance between the two languages and host of others. Moreover these definitions by competence is either too narrow or too broad; sometimes hardly anybody falls within the criteria or practically everybody becomes a bilingual.

Soon as he is able to understand and make himself understood within his limited linguistic and social environment (that is, as is consistent with his age and the situation in which he is expressing himself) (Rivers, 1969:35-36). Thus the functional approach tried to escape the competence performance distinction issue by emphasizing the knowledge of the rules of the language.

The emphasis on communicative competence was based on the realization that language is a social phenomenon. It is not possible to talk about linguistic competence in the abstract or vacuum. Thus, while describing bilingualism, one must involve the performance of a language user in a real sociolinguistic context. There was a change in emphasis from language as a formal code to a functional code. This change is reflected in the following words of Mackey (1970:554) "Bilingualism is not a phenomenon of language; it is a characteristic of its use. It is not a feature of the code but of the message. It does not belong to the domain of langue but of parole."

According to the definition of bilingualism by attitude, the focus is on the speaker's own view of what is her native context and other people's assessment of the speaker. As Bertil Malmberg (idem 135) put it, "The speaker must not stand out from his environment when using the other language i.e. he must be accepted as the native speaker".

Malmberg further modifies his position saying that the speaker must also be able to: "act in both language groups without any disturbing deviance being noticed. (as cited in Skutnabb Kangas 1981:88).

Indian Bilingualism and the Teaching of English: India like the other countries in South Asia, has a multiethnic and multilingual background. It is known to be a land of myriad tongue, a unique mosaic of linguistic heterogeneity with over 1,652 mother tongue spread throughout the country. Analyzing the phenomenon of bilingualism in India R.N.Ghosh (1979) says, "The basic structure of Indian languages is made up of the Aryans, Dravidians, Tibeto-Burman and Austric families, who entered the sub continent and made it their home."

Ghosh further says that the Indo-Aryans account for 74 percent of the entire Indian population. The important languages for this group are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Kashmiri, Sindhi and Urdu. The important languages of the Dravidian family which account for 24 percent of the total Indian population are Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. Bhotia,Ladaki and the languages spoken along the Himalayan foothills are Tibeto-Burman Languages. Santali, Khasi and Nilobrarese are the languages spoken in the Austric group. These languages are spoken by one percent of the population. This multiplicity of languages in the country is a product of the movement of people and conquest and it has given rise to a complex bilingual situation. The identity of various language and culture groups is considered inviolable and their preservation is guaranteed by the constitution.

In India the official language of the country was never a lingua franca. Ghosh (1979) says that, "The language used in the ancient period was Sanskrit, in the medieval period it was Persian and in the modern period it was English". This is why for the educated class, bilingualism has always been inevitable and prestigious. Merchants and soldiers, owing to their mobility have been bilingual. The illiterate poor living in the districts bordering two states show oral bilingualism. Thus in India, bilingualism and diglossia of various types have been tolerated.

The bilingual phenomena with English as one of the languages is a recent phenomenon which emerged in 19th century India. The major influences shaping it according to Mackeyare (1967) colonization, education and economic forces. The missionaries were the first to introduce English schools and English education caught the fancy of Indian intellectuals and social reformers. The linguistic change over from Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and the regional languages to English was astonishingly rapid. Indian leaders saw in English the key to Europen science and literature. English replaced Persian in 1837 as the official language and in 1844 the administration announced that those educated in English would be preferred in all government appointments.

A knowledge of English opened to the Indians the prospect of office, wealth and influence. By the time the modern education system took shape in 1854-57, English had already become a dominant language in education and administration.

In the following decades, the medium of instruction was normally the regional language at the primary and middle stages, but English at high school and universities. Yet, among the leaders of public opinion , a measure of ambivalence was always present in respect to English being used as the medium of instruction. Meanwhile the Culcutta University Commission in 1917, found that the teaching of regional languages had been totally neglected. English was used as a medium of instruction even at the lower secondary stage and the teaching of English was far from satisfactory.

 Michel West (1926) who studied the position of English teaching and bilingualism in Bengal found that "the attempt to teach English was vague and imprecise. It is therefore necessary to examine the pupils' need with the greatest exactness". (as cited in Ghosh 1979:40) He felt that to read English efficiently was more important to students in India than the acquisition of a pure accent. Thus West favored single skill bilingualism and not balanced bilingualism. He also created materials specifically to promote reading skills. But multi-skill teaching and learning of English prevailed at that time and his recommendations were unheeded.

The noteworthy development of the fifties, affecting language reaching was the formulation of the three language formula. This formula safeguards the Psychological and culture needs of the individual by giving the regional language due importance. Apart from this, it attempts to promote national integration and national identity through a national link language. It makes sure that the country is not cut off from the mainstream of current international knowledge. The link is established through an international link language to serve as 'a window on the world.' The international link language could be French, Russian, German or any other international language. But in India, English was the obvious choice for historical reasons. In a nutshell, the formula stipulates the study of mother tongue or regional languages at the secondary stage, Hindi or a modern Indian language in Hindi speaking area and English.

As discussed earlier The Central School run by the Union Government in New Delhi for children of transferable Union Government employees, use two languages as the medium of instruction, i.e. English and Hindi. The only drawback is that children in the non-Hindi region don't get to study their mother tongue formally. Again there are English medium schools, which also have bilingual instruction. The second language here is the learner mother tongue or the state language. Another situation is where English is used as an auxiliary medium in some of the regional medium schools.

Conclusion: One can say that in India, the need for bilingual education arises out of the need to enable students to learn the language of opportunity, English, as well as to maintain competence in their regional languages. Moreover, since the knowledge of Hindi, as the other official language of the country is also essential, students have to be introduced to three languages at the same time, the regional language, Hindi and English.

This brings us to the end of the discussion on bilingualism and bilingual education. An examination of the bilingual/multilingual education programmes in the world was essential to put into perspective the peculiar problems that India faces and the differences and similarities between bilingual/multilingual education programme in India and in other countries.

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