Research Perspectives on Bilingualism and Bilingual Education

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Abstract

This chapter outlines key research perspectives on bilingualism and bilingual education. Three broad perspectives are identified: linguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic. The chapter focuses on theoretical questions and methodological approaches within each of the three broad perspectives and highlights the differences and links across each. Recent and current work on bilingual education and future directions are discussed.

Keywords

Methods • Bilingual education • Psycholinguistics • Sociolinguistics • Linguistics • Translanguaging

Contents

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Introduction

This chapter outlines various research perspectives on bilingualism and bilingual education. Three broad perspectives within this interdisciplinary area are identified: linguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic. The chapter focuses on theoretical questions and methodological approaches within each of the three broad perspectives, highlighting the differences and links across each.

Early Developments

Bilingualism and bilingual education became a major focus of scientific research only in the last century, especially since the 1970s. Two disciplines that have influenced much of the research on bilingualism and bilingual education are linguistics and psychology. The research agenda of much of modern linguistics was defined by Chomsky (1986) as consisting of three basic questions:

1. What constitutes knowledge of language?
2. How is knowledge of language acquired?
3. How is knowledge of language put to use?

For bilingualism research, these questions can be rephrased to take into account knowledge of more than one language:

1. What is the nature of language or grammar in a bilingual person's mind, and how do two systems of language knowledge coexist and interact?
2. How is more than one grammatical system acquired, either simultaneously or sequentially? In what respects does bilingual acquisition differ from monolingual acquisition?
3. How is the knowledge of two or more languages used by the same speaker in bilingual interaction?

Linguists and psychologists working on bilingualism have addressed these questions with a variety of methods and types of data.

Concerning bilingual knowledge, for example, Weinreich (1953) proposed three types of bilinguals (see Fig. 1) representing three types of relationships between the linguistic sign (or signifier) and the semantic content (signified). In Type A, the individual combines a signifier from each language with a separate unit of signified. Weinreich called such individuals "coordinative" (later often called "coordinate") bilinguals. In Type B, the individual identifies two signifiers, but regards them as a single compound, or composite, unit of signified, hence "compound" bilinguals. Type C refers to people who learn a new language with the help of a previously acquired one. They are called "subordinative" (or "subordinate") bilinguals. His examples for each type were from English and Russian.

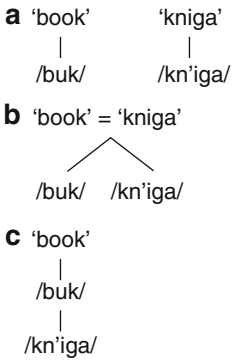

Fig. 1 Three types of bilinguals

Weinreich's typology is often misinterpreted in the literature as referring to differences in proficiency in each language. But in fact the relationship between language proficiency and cognitive organization of the bilingual individual is far from clear in Weinreich's model. Weinreich argued that some "subordinate" bilinguals demonstrated a very high level of proficiency in processing both languages, as evidenced in grammaticality and fluency of speech, while some "coordinative" bilinguals showed difficulties in processing two languages simultaneously (i.e., in code-switching or in "foreign" words identification tasks). Using Weinreich's distinctions, bilinguals are distributed along a continuum from a subordinate or compound end to a coordinate end and can at the same time be more subordinate or compound for certain concepts and more coordinate for others, depending on, for instance, the age and context of acquisition.

On the acquisition of bilingual knowledge, both linguists and psychologists have intensively studied language development of bilingual children. For instance, in an early study, Volterra and Taeschner (1978) suggested three key stages of lexical and syntactic development among children exposed to two languages:

- Stage I: The child has one lexical system comprising words from both languages.
- Stage II: The child distinguishes two different lexicons, but applies the same syntactic rules to both languages.
- Stage III: The child speaks two languages differentiated both in lexicon and syntax, but each language is associated with the person who uses that language.

Although there is some research support for Volterra and Taeschner's (1978) model, it has also been heavily critiqued, especially with respect to the first two stages (e.g., De Houwer 2009; Genesee 2002; Meisel 2011). This is generally known as the "one-system-or-two" debate, that is, do bilingual children begin with a fused linguistic system and gradually differentiate the two languages or do they start with a differentiated system? Part of that debate centers around the question: what counts as evidence for differentiation or fusion? Volterra and Taeschner, for instance, based

their decision on whether the child made appropriate sociolinguistic choices, that is, whether the child spoke the "right" language to the "right" person. They argued that awareness of the two languages as distinct plays a crucial role in deciding the issue of differentiation, and a child's ability to make appropriate language choices reflects that awareness. However, this is a circular argument unless some criterion is provided for assessing what is meant by awareness other than that children separate the languages. A child's apparent (in)ability to choose the right language for the right addressee is a rather different issue from whether the child has one or two linguistic systems. There now exists a large body of literature rebutting the "fused" system hypothesis, suggesting instead that bilinguals have two distinct but interdependent systems from the very start (e.g., Genesee 2002; Paradis and Genesee 1996).

Research on bilingual language use began with broad descriptions of language choice patterns. Fishman's (1965) domain analysis, for example, outlined the ways in which speakers make their language choices according to topic, setting, and participant. Gumperz (1982) identified a range of discourse functions of bilingual code-switching, which he defined as alternation of language within an interactional episode. Such functions include, for instance, quotation, addressee specification, interjections, and reiteration. In the meantime, linguists proposed various grammatical constraints on code-switching (e.g., Myers-Scotton 1993; Poplack 1980). Such descriptive accounts laid the foundation for subsequent research on bilingual interaction.

The earliest work on bilingual education in turn was heavily influenced by the widespread view in the field of psychology that bilingualism had a detrimental effect on a human being's intellectual and spiritual growth. The following is a quote from a professor at Cambridge University, which illustrates the dominant belief of the time, even among academics and intellectuals:

> If it were possible for a child to live in two languages at once equally well, so much the worse. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby be doubled, but halved. Unity of mind and character would have great difficulty in asserting itself in such circumstances. (Laurie 1890, p. 15)

Laurie's quote represents a commonly held belief through the twentieth century that bilingualism disadvantages rather than advantages one's intellectual development. The early research on bilingualism and cognition tended to confirm this negative viewpoint, finding that monolinguals were superior to bilinguals on intelligence tests. One of the most widely cited studies was done by Saer (1923), who studied 1,400 Welsh-English bilingual children between the ages of 7 and 14 in five rural and two urban areas of Wales. A ten-point difference in IQ was found between the bilinguals and the monolingual English speakers from rural backgrounds. Saer concluded that bilinguals were mentally confused and at an intellectual disadvantage compared with monolinguals. It was further suggested, via a follow-up study of university students, that "the difference in mental ability as revealed by intelligence tests is of a permanent nature since it persists in students throughout their university career" (Saer 1924, p. 53).

A later version of this deficient view of bilingual children manifested in the term "semilingual." Semilinguals were believed to have linguistic deficits in six areas of language (see Hansegard 1975):

1. Size of vocabulary
2. Correctness of language
3. Unconscious processing of language
4. Language creation
5. Mastery of the functions of language
6. Meanings and imagery

It is significant that the term "semilingualism" emerged in connection with the study of language skills of people belonging to immigrant and ethnic minority groups. Supporting research was conducted in Scandinavia and North America and was concerned with accounting for the educational outcomes of submersion programs, where minority children were taught through the medium of the majority language. However, these studies, like the ones conducted by Saer, had at least four methodological flaws. First, the tests that were used to measure language proficiencies were insensitive to the qualitative aspects of language use. Language is often specific to a context; a person might be competent in some contexts but not in others. Second, as bilingual children are still in the process of developing their languages, it is not valid to compare them to some idealized adults. Third, the comparison with monolinguals is also unfair. It is important to recognize that bilinguals are "naturally" qualitatively and quantitatively different from monolinguals in their use of the two languages, that is, as a function of being bilingual. Fourth, if participants' languages are relatively underdeveloped, the origins may not be in bilingualism per se, but in the economic, political, and social conditions that evoke underdevelopment. Monolingual and bilinguals in these studies were not comparable in other respects (e.g., socioeconomic status), so results were confounded.

Major Contributions

Psycholinguistic Approaches to Bilingualism

Many of the questions first raised in these earlier studies were challenged by subsequent research, using better methodologies and technologies. For example, current psycholinguistic models of the bilingual lexicon, such as the concept mediation model and the word association model (e.g., Potter et al. 1984) and the revised hierarchical model (Kroll and Stewart 1994), take into consideration proficiency level, age, and context of acquisition and have much great explanatory power.

Psycholinguists also have used the latest functional neuroimaging technologies to investigate the cognitive organization of languages in the bilingual brain (e.g.,

Abutalebi et al. 2005). The key research question here is the relationship between the neurobiological substrate for multiple languages and environmental influences such as age of acquisition, exposure, and proficiency. While the patterns of brain activation associated with tasks that engage specific aspects of linguistic processing are remarkably consistent across different languages and different speakers, factors such as proficiency seem to have a major modulating effect on brain activity: more extensive cerebral activations associated with production in the less-proficient language and smaller activations with comprehending the less-proficient language.

In terms of acquisition of bilingual knowledge, a more interesting question than the one-or-two-systems debate has emerged. Specifically, is bilingual acquisition the same as monolingual acquisition? Theoretically, separate development is possible without there being any similarity with monolingual acquisition. Most researchers argue that bilingual children's language development is by and large the same as that of monolingual children (Meisel 2011). In general terms, both bilingual and monolingual children go through an initial babbling stage, followed by the one-word stage, the two-word stage, the multiword stage, and the multi-clause stage. At the morphosyntactic level, a number of studies have reported similarities rather than differences between bilingual and monolingual acquisition. Nevertheless, one needs to be careful in the kinds of conclusions one draws from such evidence. Similarities between bilingual and monolingual acquisition do not mean that (1) the two languages a bilingual child is acquiring develop in the same way or at the same speed and (2) the two languages a bilingual child is acquiring do not influence and interact with each other.

There is one area in which bilingual children clearly differ from monolingual children, namely, code-mixing. Studies show that bilingual children mix elements from both languages in the same utterance as soon as they can produce two-word utterances (e.g., De Houwer 2009; Deuchar and Quay 2000; Lanza 1997). As with adult code-switching, bilingual children's language mixing is highly structured. The operation of constraints based on surface features of grammar, such as word order, is evident from the two-word/morpheme stage onward, and the operation of constraints based on abstract notions of grammatical knowledge is most evident in bilingual children once they demonstrate such knowledge overtly (e.g., verb tense and agreement markings), usually around 2.6 years of age and older (Koppe and Meisel 1995). As Genesee (2002) pointed out, these findings suggest that, in addition to the linguistic competence to formulate correct monolingual strings, bilingual children have the added capacity to coordinate their two languages online in accordance with the grammatical constraints of both languages during mixing. While these studies have provided further evidence for the separate development, or two systems, argument, they have also suggested that there are both quantitative and qualitative differences between bilingual acquisition and monolingual acquisition.

Psycholinguistic approaches to bilingualism have offered insights into how multiple languages are simultaneously acquired and represented by the bilingual individuals. The typical methods psycholinguists use tend to be laboratory based, using carefully designed experiments or standard assessments. These methods, together with the theoretical models that psycholinguists have developed, have

enhanced the status of bilingualism research in the scientific community. Nevertheless, the transfer of the scientific knowledge of bilingualism to real-world issues, such as the education of bilingual and multilingual children in schools and communities, remains a challenge.

Sociolinguistic Approaches to Bilingualism

In contrast to linguistic and psycholinguistic researchers, sociolinguists see bilingualism and multilingualism as socially constructed phenomena and the bilingual and multilingual person as a social actor. For the multilingual speaker, language choice is not only an effective means of communication but also an act of identity (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). Every time we say something in one language instead of another, we are reconnecting with people, situations, and power configurations from our history of past interactions and imprinting on that history our attitudes toward the people and languages concerned. Through language choice, we maintain and change ethnic group boundaries and personal relationships and construct and define "self" and "other" within a broader political economy and historical context. Issues of identity and identification are paramount for the sociolinguist.

In early variationist sociolinguistic work (e.g., Labov 1972), identity was taken to mean the speaker's social economic class, gender, age, or place of origin. It was assumed that speakers expressed identities through their language use. Scholars such as Rampton (1999) have criticized such assumption, arguing that identities are negotiated locally through social interaction. Further, linguistic forms and strategies have multiple functions and cannot be directly linked to particular identities outside of interactional contexts. More recent work by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), using critical discourse analysis, emphasizes the negotiation of identities.

The idea that identity is negotiable can be traced back to the work of social psychologists who were interested in group processes and intergroup relations (e.g., Tajfel 1981). Identity, from this particular perspective, is reflective self-image, constructed, experienced, and communicated by the individual within a group. Negotiation is seen as a transactional process, in which individuals attempt to evoke, assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others' desired self-images. Identity domains such as ethnic, gender, relational, face work are seen as crucial for everyday interaction. Speakers feel a sense of identity security in a culturally familiar environment, but insecurity in a culturally unfamiliar environment. Satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes would include the feelings of being understood, valued, supported, and respected.

There are two major problems with such an approach. First, the categories used in the analysis are often rigid and ill-defined and have a monolingual and unicultural bias. The world is often seen as consisting of "them" and "us," "in-group" and "outgroup," or "we code" and "they code." The so-called negotiation, in this particular perspective, is unidirectional – the native speaker abandoning (or at least modifying) his or her first language and culture in order to learn the language of the host culture. This process is often known as "convergence" or "acculturation" (Gudykunst and

Kim 2003). The second major problem concerns the approach's static and homogeneous view of culture and society. It does not take into account the historical, ideological, economic processes that led to the present social grouping or stratification (Zhu 2013).

Adopting a post-structuralist approach to the notion of identity, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) argued that the relationship between language and identity is mutually constitutive and that identities are multiple, dynamic, and subject to change. For them, negotiation of identities is the interplay between reflective positioning, that is, self-representation and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to reposition particular individuals or groups. Their analyses of multilingualism and identities in a variety of social contexts demonstrate that languages are appropriated to legitimize, challenge, and negotiate particular identities and to open new identity options. Identity options as constructed, validated, and performed through discourses available to individuals at particular times and places, that is, certain linguistic resources may be available to certain groups of speakers, while others may not.

Parallel to the work on multilingualism and negotiation of identities, sociolinguists critically examine some of the concepts and notions commonly used by other researchers in the field of bilingualism and multilingualism. For example, the very idea of code-switching raises questions as to what a language is. Instead of thinking of languages as discrete systems, sociolinguists tend to see multilingual speakers as actors of social life who draw on complex sets of communicative resources which are unevenly distributed and unevenly valued (Heller 2003). The linguistic systematicity therefore appears to be at least as much a function of historically rooted ideologies (of nation and ethnicity) and of the ordering practices of social life as of language per se. This perspective goes beyond a focus on mental representation of linguistic knowledge and opens up the possibility of looking at bilingualism and multilingualism as a matter of ideology, communicative practice, and social process.

This particular sociolinguistic perspective has important implications for the way researchers collect, analyze, and interpret data. Informed by developments in anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies, sociolinguists have examined communicative practices within and across sites that can be ethnographically demonstrated to be linked. Working with the ideas of *trajectories* (of speakers, linguistic resources, discourses, institutions) across time and space and of *discursive spaces* which allow for, and also constrain, the production and circulation of discourses, Heller (2003) has examined multilingual practices in a number of communities and argued that multilingual practices contribute to the construction of social boundaries and of the resources those boundaries regulate. They therefore also raise the question of the social and historical conditions which allow for the development of particular regimes of language and for their reproduction, their contestation, and eventually, their modification or transformation.

A further, closely related area in which sociolinguists have extended the work by linguists and psycholinguists on bilingualism is that of the acquisition of linguistic knowledge. Building on earlier research on language socialization, which focused on

young children acquiring their first language in culturally specific ways, scholars such as Bayley and Schecter (2003) examined bilingual and multilingual children's developing competence in various speech and literacy events. Particular attention is given to the range of linguistic resources available, or not, in bilingual and multilingual communities and the ways in which children, as well as adolescents and adults, learn to choose among these resources for their symbolic value. The researchers emphasized language socialization as an interactive process, in which those being socialized also act as agents rather than as mere passive initiates. This line of inquiry also demonstrates how domains of knowledge are constructed through language and cultural practices and how the individual's positioning affects the process of knowledge acquisition and construction.

Current Work on Bilingual Education

While traditional research questions (e.g., cognitive advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism for children, bilingual assessment, bilingual classroom interaction, and language-in-education policy) continue to influence research on bilingual education, an important strand in the current bilingual education research examines how new minority communities respond to the lack of status accorded to them and their languages. Mainstream education in many contexts neglects the real-life social experiences of cultural and linguistic diversity (e.g., Hornberger and King 1996). As a result, new minority communities often set up schools themselves in order to promote their cultures and languages. Indeed, in the UK, the government has put the issue of language and cultural maintenance in the hands of the new minorities themselves, and such educational provision has been set up in addition to the education provided by the state (Blackledge and Creese 2010).

This form of community language education has provided a "safe" but largely hidden space in which specific communities can learn about their own cultures and languages. Although there has been a large amount of work in Britain, North America, and Australia which points to crucial connections between minority communities and their languages, cultures, religions, literacy practices, and identities, there is a dearth of studies which focus specifically on community language education initiatives. Much of the work that is available demonstrates how ethnic minority children benefit from their multilingualism and the bilingual opportunities that the schools provide. For example, Hall et al. (2002) noted how attendance at supplementary schools provides "a way of reclaiming the specificity of cultural and social identity . . . missing from mainstream schooling" (p. 409). In their comparative study of provision, purposes, and pedagogy of supplementary schooling in Leeds (UK) and Oslo (Norway), Hall et al. found that supplementary education "imbues its participants with a sense of belonging to a community that supports them practically, culturally, socially, emotionally and spiritually" (p. 410). These important issues can be linked back to the social experiences of using languages, rather than simply the celebration of linguistic diversity. Such educational opportunities provide a safe haven for young people from the new minorities to use their

bilingualism in creative and flexible ways (cf. García and Li 2014). Nevertheless, relatively little is still known about the educational pedagogies of such schooling as well as the relationship between mainstream and supplementary education.

Challenges and Future Directions

The highly politicized nature of bilingual education, especially the education of children from immigrant and minority ethnic backgrounds, poses an important challenge to both policy and research in this area. Important questions need to be addressed, such as: Why are there different viewpoints about linguistic minorities and bilingual education? Why do some people prefer the assimilation of linguistic minorities and others prefer linguistic diversity? What role can schools play in a more multicultural and less racist society? Ideally, a bilingual educational program should aim to produce bilingual products in the form of bilingual speakers, though in practice it is often the case only one language is taught or used in the actual classroom. Many of the so-called bilingual education programs in the UK and Europe, for example, are in fact English or other European language programs for children whose first languages are different. In the meantime, the heritage/community language schools often insist on teaching or using their heritage/community language only. The official discourse does not encourage students and teachers to practice bilingualism in the heritage/community education context.

Yet the most important feature of a bilingual being is bilingual practice, and the form of practice that is most distinctly bilingual is code-switching. In the last four decades, code-switching has attracted a considerable amount of interest in various branches of linguistics, including sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. The vast majority of this work, however, focuses on noninstitutional contexts. There is an urgent need to extend our knowledge of code-switching in specific institutional contexts, for example, the classroom. Real tensions are often found in such educational contexts. Whereas code-switching in the community is regarded as acceptable bilingual talk, the same cannot be said to be the case for many classroom contexts (Canagarajah 2011; Lin and Martin 2005). Indeed, the literature on classroom code-switching is littered with metaphors which underpin such conflict. Examples are the notions of "collusion," "safe talk," "sabotage," and "incomplete journeys" (reviewed in García and Li 2014). Further research on the use, conflict, and tensions of code-switching in the classroom will not only help to focus on what really matters to bilingual individuals in real life but also extend and link the fields of education, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics (García and Li 2014).

Cross-References

► Code-Switching in the Classroom: Research Paradigms and Approaches
► From Researching Translanguaging to Translanguaging Research

Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

Lynn Fogle and Kendall King: Bi- and Multilingual Family Language Socialization. In Volume: Language Socialization

Ofelia García and Angel M.Y. Lin: Translanguaging in Bilingual Education. In Volume: Bilingual Education

Stephen May: Bilingual Education: What the Research Tells Us. In Volume: Bilingual Education

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