

BILINGUALISM: AN ASSET OR A BURDEN?

Ienneke I. Dewi

English Department, Faculty of Language and Culture, Bina Nusantara University,
Jl. Kemanggisian Ilir III No. 45 Kemanggisian/Palmerah, Jakarta Barat 11480, inneke@binus.edu
S3 Student English Applied Linguistic, Atma Jaya University

ABSTRACT

The article shows literary scholar opinion whether bilingualism is an asset or burden. The literary scholars see it from many aspects such as neuropsychological, cognitive, social, and psychology. From their research it found that generally bilingualism is an asset and not a burden. The analysis is also supported by argument and some examples from bilingual peoples.

Keywords: *bilingualism, neuropsychology, cognitive*

ABSTRAK

Artikel memaparkan suatu pergumulan pendapat apakah bilingualism merupakan aset atau beban. Pelbagai ahli melihat dari pelbagai aspek yaitu perkembangan bahasa, neuropsikologikal, kognitif, sosial, dan psikologi. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa secara umum bilingualisme merupakan aset dan bukan beban. Hal ini didukung oleh beberapa pendapat dan contoh dari orang yang bilingual.

Kata kunci: *bilingualisme, neuropsikologi, kognitif*

INTRODUCTION

Bilingualism which Hammers and Blanc (2000:6) defined as, “the state of an individual or a community characterized by the simultaneous presence of two languages,” had been in the world since a long time ago. Since the story of Babel Tower when people only had one language, human beings had been given a lot of languages so that they spread out in the world. Since then, human lived in groups depending on their languages.

Gea and Wulandari (2003) mentioned that people and their languages were divided into four big groups; Australoid (in Australia), Mongoloid (in Asia), Kaukasoid (in Europe), and Negroid (Africa). Then along with the time, the four big groups began to influence one another language by going to others' areas, having mixed marriage creating new languages here and there.

English, for example, which used to be a dialect in a very small area has now become an international language. According to Crystal (2003), the data in 2001 shows that English has been used by more than 58 countries in the world with the total population of 329,140,800 people as their native language not to mention the varieties of English that each country has. As L2, there have been 66 countries and 430,614,500 people using English as their second language. In its development from only a dialect in a small area in English to such number of countries and people, English must have undergone changes, influencing and being influenced by other languages. In such process, there have been a lot of people speaking two languages or more. Moreover, there are more and more countries and people learning English as a foreign language and that will add the number of people learning English and increase the number bilinguals in some varieties, people who speak more that two languages.

Indonesia which consists of various ethnics with their own languages undergoes the process of bilingualism and the development of the country result in the movement of the people from one place to another. When they move, they bring along their languages and get in touch with the language from other areas. This condition may cause the bilinguality of the person or the society.

As a nation, Indonesia has Indonesian as its national language which has to be learnt formally in schools. The Indonesian government has decided that English has also to be learnt formally at schools beginning from the Junior high schools, however, along with the people awareness that English has become the international language, there are more and more schools from Elementary or even kindergarten having English in their curriculum. Besides, there are more and more international schools established. By having that situation, it seems that it cannot be avoided having be more and more bilingual people in the world including in Indonesia with various levels of mastery of each language.

The problem is that whether mastering or learning two languages will be an asset or burden. This question is actually asking whether people will get a lot of benefits of losses when they able to master more than one languages. This paper intends to discuss the assumption that bilingualism as an asset considering the cognitive development, the neuropsychological and psychological aspects. Surely, the sociological cultural cannot be avoided as language cannot be separated with society and culture. In order to integrate those aspects, the nature of the language development is also discussed. Hopefully this discussion will encourage people to learn more if the answer is positive and to find a way to draw our children from being bilingual if the result is negative.

Language Development and Bilingualism

Language Development

In general, since a child was born, he has already experienced a language, at least the one (s) spoken by his parents and people around him. He begins to learn a language. The first process that he undergoes is hearing the language. Later on, little by little he is learning how to speak, how to read and how to write. The language that he learns or acquires, will be useful for him to communicate with people. As language and people cannot be separated from society and cultures (Kramsh, 2000), in acquiring a language, a child also learns the form and the function of a language, together with the values, the norms of the culture and society and later on uses it for the communication.

In the development, a child internalizes the function and forms of the language together with the social values (Hammers and Blanc, 2000) . For example when a child learn the form *Good Morning*, he also learns that the expression is used for greeting other people and while saying that, he should behave accordingly e.g. in Japanese in expressing *Ohayo Gosaimaze (Good morning)* the child should bow; or in Indonesia, especially in Central Java, the child should nod his head. A child learns that if he does this he will be considered polite and accepted in his social network. In this case, Hammers and Blanc (2000:112) said,

“The social representation of language – comprising shared meanings, social schemata and the internalization of social values – plays an essential role in the development of cultural identity. These social cognitive processes determine, in turn, the motivational processes for learning or using a language into different functions.”

However, before a child is motivated whether to use the language or not, there is another factor involved that is the valorization of the language; of the function and form. The more positive experiences the child undergoes using the language, the more motivated he will learn and use the language. These three stages of development, internalization, valorization and motivation becomes basic foundation for a child whether he will develop the language conceptually and communicatively or not (Hammers and Blanc 2000). The language developed can be used as the cognitive tool that is to organize his way of thinking and can become the object of cognitive processing in terms of analyzing and controlling.

Bilingualism

The very simple definition regarding bilingualism was given by Weinrich (1968:1) as quoted by Hoffmann (1996) by saying that, “The practice of alternately using two languages will be called bilingualism, and the person involved, bilingual.” Richards *et.al.* (1992: 34) and Hammers and Blanc (2000) agreed that bilingualism involves society and personal. The detailed definition Hammer and Blanc (2000:6) including the term bilinguality in bilingualism, states that, “bilinguality refers to the psychological state of an individual . . . and bilingualism refer to the state of a linguistic community.” Hammers and Blanc also mention psychological, cognitive, psycholinguistic, social psychological, social psychological, social sociological, sociolinguistic, socio-cultural and linguistic dimensions which form bilingualism.

Interestingly Skutnabb-Kangas (1984:91) quoted by Hoffmann (1996: 27) four criterion in defining bilingualism i.e. Origin meaning where how the languages are learnt and used the languages; Competence indicating the level of the proficiency of the two languages; Function referring to the function of each language and attitude indicating internal identification and external identification meaning how far the child is identified himself in the two languages. In line with those criterions, Hammers and Blanc (2000:25) mentioned 6 dimensions i.e. the competence in both languages, to

cognitive organization, age of acquisition, the presence of L2 community in environment, the relative status of the two languages and group membership and cultural identity.

Thus when dealing with bilingualism, actually we combine the pattern of the language development of L1 and the one that of L2 by considering the dimensions mentioned above. Also, in order to say whether bilingualism an asset or a burden, we should consider the dimensions and the researches done concerning the comparisons of the monolingual and bilingual ability in several areas. In this paper, two kinds of the results of the researches regarding cognitive and social psychological aspects will be presented. However, before looking at the results of the two aspects, another aspect, that is biological aspects represented in neuropsychological aspects will be looked through in order to complete the results

Neuropsychological Aspects

Basically the neuro-linguistics study is based on how our brain works. The brain consists of two hemispheres, the left and the right ones. The left one has logical, convergent, analytic, sequential, and propositional functions and the right one has intuitive, divergent, holistic, parallel, and appositional functions. Language belongs to the left hemisphere.

Some parts of the brain play a very important role in processing the information which is received as well as is produced or responded. In order to speak the written word that is read, the information that is received by the Primary Visual cortex is sent to the posterior speech area, including Wernicke's area. After that, the information goes to Broca's area and then to the Primary Motor Cortex. On the other hand, to speak a word that is heard, first the information should be received by the primary auditory cortex and then transmitted to the posterior speech area including Wernicke's area, and finally it is sent to the primary motor.

Hammers and Blanc (2000: 158-159) made the conclusion from the researches regarding the functions of the brain related to language functions as follows:

1. There is no clear evidence whether cerebral organization is different in bilinguals and in monolingual
2. The mechanism is not separated for different languages
3. There are not age-of acquisition differences in cerebral processing meaning that the process of language learning is the same for any kinds of bilinguals
4. There are not enough evidences and experiments proving that differences in learning situations, in competence and in language structure have different effects on cerebral organization.
5. There are only small number of data indicating that the same cerebral structures involved in the language of bilinguals using an articulate and a signed language
6. Different languages do not rely on different cerebral structures. The learning of the language by bilinguals is the same as that of monolinguals.

In short, it can be concluded that biologically, concerning the way of our brain processes the information concerning the language, or the biological process of the people's acquiring the language, actually there is no difference between monolinguals and bilinguals. Biologically, the process is the same.

Bilingualism and Cognitive Development

Cognitive development and bilingualism relates each other in the role of language. Cognitive development is defined as "the construction of thought processes, including remembering, problem solving, and decision-making, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood." (*Miller-Keane in <http://www.healthofchildren.com/C/Cognitive-Development.html>*). Vygotsky (1962) as quoted by Hammers and Blanc (2000:82) points out that, "language plays an essential role in cognitive

development.” Language is a crucial tool in shaping cognition, which enables a child to organize abstract thoughts. The function indicates that cognitive development also covers intelligence, creative thinking and metalinguistics.

Regarding bilingualism and cognitive development, (Bialystock & Ryan, 1985a; Bialystok, 1991) argue that bilingual children may have greater cognitive control of information processing than do monolingual children. However, in the following, the researches concerning bilingualism and IQ, Bilingualism and creative thinking, bilingualism and those areas are explored.

Bilingualism and IQ

In general, Baker (2001), Baker (2000) and Hoffmann (1991) divided the researches on bilingualism and IQ in three periods i.e. *detrimental effects*, *neutral effects* and *additive effects*. The time of the periods sometimes overlaps. The first period lasted from 1920s to 1960s with the results that in general monolinguals were better than bilinguals in IQ test. The results concluded that bilinguals were mentally confused and bilinguality disrupted thinking. However, the researches were found to have weaknesses such as in measuring the intelligence, methods, in the analysis and in the context. Examples of the research can be found in Saer (1923) in Hoffmann (1996). The result of the second period - *the neutral effects* indicated that there was no difference or insignificant difference between bilinguals and monolinguals terms of their IQ such as in Arsenian (1937) and Darcy (1953) in Hoffmann (1996); in Magnamara (1996) reported in Hammer and Blanc (2000).

The last period – the additive effects beginning in 1962 by Peal and Lambert (1962) in Hammer and Blanc (2000), Hoffman (1996) and Colin (2001) showed that in most areas bilinguals are more superior than monolinguals. In this research Peal and Lambert (1962:16) as quoted by Hoffmann (1996:123) found that, “bilinguals scored more highly than monolinguals in both verbal and non-verbal measurements of intelligence”

Hoffmann (2000) also reported three more researches; Anita Ianco-Worrall’s (1972) studying bilinguals English – African in South Africa for their metalinguistic ability; Sandra Ben-Zeev (1976) observing cognitive flexibility of Hebrew – English children from Israel and USA. The results were that the metalinguistic awareness and the cognitive ability of the bilinguals were better than those of monolinguals.

Bilingualism and Creative Thinking

The researches done indicate that bilinguals are better in creative thinking than those of monolinguals. The research by Dennis C. Carringer (1974) tested the creative thinking of bilinguals and monolinguals using the Mexican youths and found out that bilinguals are more creative in verbal flexibility, verbal originality and the difference is significantly higher in bilinguals. In this research he also used the sex and interaction sex as his variables but they are not significant.

Collins (2001, 144) using the term ‘divergent’ instead of creative thinking mentioned that “a child having creative thinking is more creative, imaginative, elastic, open minded and free in thinking”. He also put forward the researches on additive bilinguals done by Baker 1988 and Ricciardelli (1992) in some countries such as Ireland, Malaysia, Eastern Europe, Canada, Singapore, Mexico and the US in which the sampling bilinguals used English plus Chinese, Bahasa Melayu, Tamil, Polish, German., Greek, Spanish, French, Ukrainian, Yoruba, Welsh, Italian or Kannada. The results indicate that bilinguals are superior to monolinguals on divergent thinking. Baker (2000: 40) said that

Bilinguals have thinking advantages over monolinguals Researches across continents in the world show that they tend to be fluent, flexible, original and are able to elaborate to the type of an open ended question.

Baker gives an example if a child is asked a question: how many uses can you think for a brick? The monolinguals just answer by showing two or three functions – the most common one such as building walls, building a house but the bilingual ones can answer the question more creatively by saying: blocking up a rabbit hole, breaking a window, using a birth bath, as a plumb line, as an abstract sculpture in an art exhibition (Figure 3).

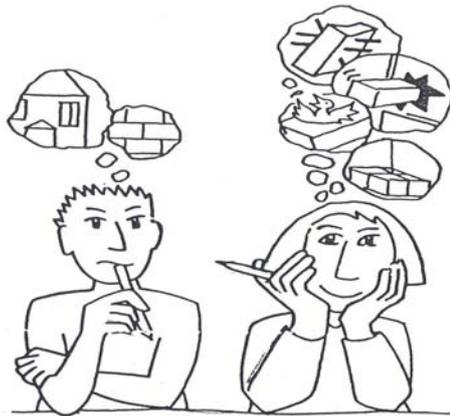


Figure 3: Bilinguals answering questions creatively (Baker 2000)

Bilingualism and Other Cognitive Abilities

Other researches regarding cognitive abilities such as in solving the problems, concentrating, handling multiple tasks and even in the cognitive ability in the old age, tend to report that bilinguals are better than monolinguals. Ellen Bialystok and Dana Shapero's (2005). Thus from the cognitive development studies the researches have proved that bilinguals are better in almost all aspects.

Bilingualism and Social Cultural, Psychological Aspects

When learning a language, a child has to learn the culture and the norms of the language as well, as language cannot be separated from culture. Whorf's hypothesis states that "the structure and the nature of the language used by a cultural group shapes the way in which its members think, attribute meaning and behave," (Whorf 1956 as quoted by Hamers and Blanc (2000)).

Referring to the language development model of Hamers and Blanc (2000:124), we can see that in acquiring a language either the first or second language or acquiring both languages, a child will undergo the same experience. In short, in learning a language a child must live in the interaction with the members of the society even from a small unit like family. Then he will internalize the social values, the culture together with the language he acquires. Then later on he will learn whether the language and culture he learns is valorized or not by the others and whether he would get some advantages or not. If he feels the benefits of the language, he will be motivated in learning more. Thus the process of internalization, valorization, and motivation is important for the child to develop the language as it is his experience.

In experiencing the process, the problem is whether the bilingual child will have problem so that will influence his behaviour? Will he get confused which one is his cultural and ethnic identity? In this case, the social psychological aspects in this case cannot be separated from the cultural identity, the social cultural aspect. The cognitive aspect i.e. the aptitude ("the set of skills similar to intelligence but more specifically related to L2" (Hamers and Blanc 200:229)) and affective aspects such as attitudes, anxiety, and self esteem lead to motivation aspects.

The combination of the social cultural and the social psychological would lie on one answer that is the valorization of the environment towards the language and actually towards the people and the value of having the second language. If the environment such as friends and society look down on the child native language or second language then he will not feel proud in having those languages. For example if somebody is good at speaking Irian language and Indonesian, and his environment looks down on the Irian people, the child will not be proud being an Irianish. Or on the other way around, a person learning Irian language and would like to take the Irian cultures that are uncommon and unaccepted in his environment, then he will not be accepted.

On the other hand, when a person is able to speak English or Chinese very fluently besides speaking Indonesian, people will appreciate him together with the culture as they know that English and Chinese will give benefits for those who master them. In this case a person will have no problem if, “he could identify positively with both his cultural /ethnic communication); his two languages should be highly valorized.” (Hamers and Blanc 2000:221). Then he will be able to have the two items above if he has good experience concerning his uses of the language.

Garcia (<http://si.unm.edu/Web%20Journals/Articles/Anna%20Garcia.html>) told her experience as a balanced trilingual person she never had problems and could switch the culture and the language smoothly due to the acceptance of her environment. However, when she was at school talking with her friends using the Tewa, she was punished by the teacher and later on she was told that at school she was not allowed to speak other languages but only English. She felt hurt and humiliated and felt that her identity as the Navayo people is not accepted.

On the other hand, a very interesting research done by Papavlow (1999) investigating the achievement and the socialization of 39 bilingual children in 210 monolingual children. The investigation was to find out the bilingual students’ problems in having bicultural environment, their language skill ability (aptitude), their academic achievement and the most important thing their acceptance of the majority and being accepted by them.

The result shows that 70% of them did not have any problems in identifying themselves either in language or culture when they were in their family (their native culture) and when they were at school (new culture). It means that they were able to adjust themselves in the bicultural environment. They also said that they like their new country. Concerning the language aptitude, this research found out that the more the bilinguals know about their native language, the better score they have in spoken and written Greek. The academic results obtained by looking at their score in history and math, indicates that the scores of the bilinguals were slightly higher those of the monolinguals. In this case it was reported that the bilinguals received less exposure about the language, and received less homework because they had to work after school.

The research above shows that the success of the bilinguals in adjusting themselves so that they had no problems in bicultural environment and obtained good score. There is one more finding that might become the key of their motivation in adjusting and that leads them to success. The key is the acceptance. In this research it was found out that 64% of the monolinguals accepted them and 20% gave no opinion. Being accepted by 64% out of 210 is great. Also the bilingual students could accept the monolinguals as well. The acceptance by both sides indicating the valorization towards the person the language and the culture leads to the motivation in either adjusting themselves as well as learning the language more. Acceptance would likely be the key of the successful bilingual people.

One important thing mentioned by Hamers and Blanc (2001) and Baker (2001) is that bilingualism is not the cause of a person self esteem or bad behaviour. If there is, it is the result of other problems such as like racism, social problems.

Socially a person will get benefits from having two languages and two cultures as mentioned by Baker (2001:2). He said that a person will have advantages from being bilingual socially because, “he will have broader enculturation, a deeper multiculturalism and two language worlds of experience and because of that, he will realize the differences in society and have greater tolerance and less racism.” As a result he will be better in communication

If Baker (2000) mentions that bilinguality will “raise self esteem” and security in cultural identity, maybe the answer will be depend on (again) the valorization, the acceptance of the language from both the person and the society.

Bilingual People in Reality

To end the discussion, the last chapter will put forward the comments of bilingual people in telling their experience and some famous people who are bilinguals (Grosjean 1982)

The bilingual people will give comments by answering the following questions:

1. What are the inconveniences of being bilingual?
2. What are the advantages of being bilingual?
3. Do you feel that you are different from a monolingual?

The people asked have various backgrounds of languages, bilinguals, such as Luganda – English; Greek – English, Burmese – English; Trilingual Arabic-French, Armenian-Arabic, English, Bengali – Urdu – English and Arabic – English – French. In general the inconveniences of being bilingual are the tendency to mix the languages and the cultural identity. While the advantages are ranges from the economic, social status, and global community. Regarding the feelings, only one out of five persons interviewed said that he was different in a positive way such as better in understanding people, better in understanding films, books.

Interestingly, Grosjean (1982:285) gives the list famous people from various fields who are bilinguals.

Fields	Names	Languages
Politics	Indira Gandhi	Hindi, English
	Kurt Waldheim	German, English
	Henry Kissinger	German, English
Philosophy and Religion	Mahatma Gandhi	Gujarathi, Hindi, English
	Martin Luther	German, Latin
	Pope John Paul II	Polish, Latin Italian, English, German
Fine Arts and Cinema	Pablo Picasso	Spanish, French
	Sophia Loren	Italian, French, English
	Greta Garbo	Swedish, English
Science and social science	Marie Curie	Polish, French
	Roman Jakobson	Russian, French, English, German, Czech.
Literature	Joseph Conrad	Polish, French, English
	Samuel Beckett	English, French
	Rabindranath Tagore	Bengali, English
	John Milton	Latin, English
Music	George Frederic Handel	German, English
	Arthur Chopin	French, Polish

CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the statement that bilingualism is an asset instead of a burden. The discussion is done considering the language development, Neuropsychological aspects, cognitive development, social cultural and psychological aspects and it is ended with the comments of the real bilingual people and names of famous bilingual people.

A person will acquire his first and second (or two languages as his first language) using the same language development, i.e. in the context of society, in the interaction with other people. In this process he internalizes not only the language but the culture as well. Then he learns to valorize the culture and the language and if he gets good experience, he will be motivated.

From the Neuropsychological aspects, there is no difference between bilinguals and monolinguals in the process of language information. The researches in the cognitive development indicate that bilinguals are better than monolinguals in most aspects. The socio-cultural and psychological aspects show that the attitude of the person and the environment plays an important role in bilingualism. However, bilingualism does not cause any bad effects. The general results from the comments of bilingual people indicate that there are no negative effects in bilingualism. The problems mentioned are not significant and only situational. However they mentioned a lot of advantages. Thus this paper will conclude that bilingualism is an asset instead of a burden

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