

Bilingualism is a controversial issue



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However, defining bilingualism and bilinguals is more difficult than what the people think. This is due to bilingualism's multidimensional aspects as been stated by many linguists, educationalists, and psycholinguists. For example, Hofmann (1991), mentions that the multi-faceted phenomenon of bilingualism is the most remarkable and significant feature which is expected to centre the point of difficulty when defining bilingualism from one dimension. Moreover, Hamers & Blanc (2000, pp. 3 & 23) provide a similar point of view and they highlight multidimensionality as being one weakness of bilingualism because when defining it, only one dimension would be taken into account, ignoring other sides of bilingualism. They add a number of various definitions of bilingualism which are one sided as they believe. For example, a definition of bilingualism may concern competence, without the other significant dimensions.

Baker & Jones (1998) become more specific in explaining the multidimensionality of bilingualism and they assert that there are five main issues that show the difficulty of defining bilingualism very concisely. Also, they show that there might be degrees of bilingualism which vary in the same person over time. The five issues are as the following:

There is distinction between ability in language and use of language. They are two separate things. For example, a bilingual person has the ability to speak two languages very fluently, but he or she uses and practices only one of the two languages regardless whether it is the native language or the second language. Another bilingual person has the ability to speak two languages but he or she has some problems in speaking one of the two languages regardless whether it is the native language or the second

language, but this person uses and practices both languages regularly. This distinction can be referred to the degree of difference between proficiency or competence of language (ability) and function of that language (use).

Proficiency may vary in a language. For example, the abilities of a bilingual person will vary in using a language among the four skills of that language (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), where that person might be very good in speaking A language but when it comes to writing, the person will use B language to write or read, because his or her ability of writing in A language is weak or low. Another bilingual person might have good abilities (proficiency) in speaking and writing of a language, but he or she cannot use and practice (speak or write) that language, so he or she tends to use another language. This is called receptive competence.

Few bilingual people are equally proficient in both languages, but one language tends to be stronger and better developed than the other language. It is called the dominant language and it is not necessarily to be the first or native language.

Few bilinguals possess the same competence as monolinguals in either of their languages. This is because bilingual individuals utilize the languages they acquired for different functions and purposes.

A bilingual's competence in a language may vary over time and according to changing circumstances. For example, a child starts to learn a minor language at home or in the childhood. As time goes, he or she learns another language in the school or community and he or she will gradually lose the minor language, because it is out of use and that person became away from

the childhood; the situation where the minor language is used (Baker & Jones 1998).

Mackey (1967) supports Baker's & Jones' issues in a different way that there are four aspects should be taken into account when defining and describing bilingualism. They are overlapped to each other and cannot be treated separately. These aspects are degree, function, alteration, and interference. The degree of bilingualism indicates the proficiency and competence of language, which is the extent to which the bilingual knows each of the languages. The part of function focuses on the use and practice a bilingual has for the languages. How much each language is used and practiced by the bilingual? Alteration concentrates on the extent to which the bilingual switches between the languages (code switching). And interference is the degree to which a bilingual manages to keep the two languages separate or fused. Mackey adds that the four questions are overlapped to each other and they cannot be treated separately. For example, a bilingual's knowledge of a language will to some extent specify the functions to which it is put; and the vice versa. The contexts in which bilinguals have the opportunity to use language will affect their competence in it Adding to the previous points, Romaine (1995), states that proficiency and function are the factors which are related to the definition and description of bilingualism.

Bilingualism should be carefully viewed with great consideration to certain variables appearing in the coming definitions. Auer (1995) shows that bilingualism can be referred to the linguistic competences in more than one language. This bilingual competence can be " accessible via the analysis of well-formed sentences involving two languages which may be treated as a

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window on the bilingual mind” (Auer, 1995, p. 115). Clearly, psycholinguists deem bilingualism as hidden competence in bilinguals’ minds, and it can be revealed as bilinguals produce utterances. Conversely, Saunders (1988) declares that bilingualism has different associations in people’s minds.

In the issue of the definition of bilingualism, two distinctive sides have appeared which have been opposing each other in the way of defining bilinguals and bilingualism. The debate is centred about two definitions. In one side, there are some people who assume that bilingualism is being proficient in speaking two languages just like the native speakers. This is related to Leonard Bloomfield the most famous linguist on the first side of the issue. According to Hofmann (1991), Bloomfield pays special attention to users who become so proficient in the new language that they cannot be distinguished from the native speakers and he considers these users are bilinguals. He relates bilingualism to those individuals who speak a second language with high native level of proficiency. In 1933, Bloomfield published a book called *Language* which was an early book of modern linguistics and it defines bilingualism as “ In the extreme case of foreign language learning, the speaker becomes so proficient as to be indistinguishable from the native speakers round him. ...In this case where this perfect foreign language learning is not accompanied by loss of the native language, it results in bilingualism, (the) native-like control of two languages (Bloomfield, 1933, p. 55-56).

As a consequence of Bloomfield’s definition, Hoffmann (1991) raises some questions, where he believes that Bloomfield has a clear idea of bilingualism, but there is some inconsistency on his definition of bilingualism. For

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example, if there is no definition for ‘ a degree of perfection’ in bilingualism, so how could Bloomfield talk of ‘ perfect foreign language learning?’

Continuing with Romaine (1995), who says that the previous definition identifies ‘ native like control of two languages as being the norm for bilingualism. Moreover, Hamers & Blanc (2000) add that Bloomfield concentrates on the one dimension which is proficiency in language and this is not satisfying, because it is one of the weaknesses in defining bilingualism. As a consequence of Bloomfield’s definition, Also, Saunders (1988) stresses that this definition is restrictively limited to bilingual individuals who master their two languages completely.

The previous views towards Bloomfield’s definition show the reasons of having another side of defining the term bilingualism. Moving to the other most different side of defining and describing bilingualism, bilinguals who have no native speakers’ competence in both languages reject that definition utterly and a number of definitions opposing Bloomfield’s notion have been placed by many linguists. For example, Saunders (1988) argues that many bilinguals comprehend a foreign language without having the ability to speak it fluently. Therefore, linguists define bilingualism as the bilinguals’ capability of using and speaking two distinctive languages at any level of competency. After all these various arguments regarding bilingualism’s nature, it is clear that bilingual individuals have different degrees of competence in the second language. Also, comes in the other side, Haugen (1953, p. 7) who shows that if an individual of any language could produce complete meaningful sentences in any other language, he or she would be a bilingual. One more definition contradicting Bloomfield’s is

Macnamara's definition. Macnamara (1967a) cited in Hamers & Blanc (2000, p. 6) who defines a bilingual as ' anyone who possesses a minimal competence in only one of the four skills, listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing in a language other than his mother tongue.'

There is a collection of other definitions of bilingualism between the above most two distinctive sides of definitions. That collection appeared to align for either side. For example, Hamers & Blanc (2000, p. 6-7) note that Titone (1972) defines bilingualism as ' the individual's capacity to speak a second language while following the concepts and structures of that language rather than paraphrasing his or her mother tongue.'

All the previous distinguishing definitions show the degree of difficulty in providing a concise definition of a bilingual and bilingualism, because most of the definitions are seen to be lacking specificity and clarity in the main points on them like ' native-like competence', ' minimal proficiency in a second language', and ' following the concept of structures of the second language' (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, p. 6-7).

In the case of bilingualism at HCT, Macnamara's definition of bilingualism seems to be the most appropriate one to the foundation year students' capability of English and this is due to their level of English which is not as much as Bloomfield's notion of ' native like control of two languages'.

2. 2 Types of bilinguals:

Bilinguals in the world have been categorised into groups depending on certain points. The Finnish linguist Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) discusses this part of the issue of bilingualism and she proposes that bilinguals in the world

can be classified into four different groups and there are some factors should be taken into account to distinguish between these groups. The factors are: the pressure to become bilingual, the prerequisites for bilingualism, the method used to achieve bilingualism, and the consequences in the case of failure. Skutnabb-Kangas focuses mainly on children bilinguals in her classification, but this classification to some extent might apply on bilinguals other than children. She classifies the groups as the following:

Elite bilinguals: this group consists of people who have chosen to learn another language and become bilingual and in most cases they are not forced to bilingualism. Most of the bilinguals in this group are upper and middle class people. For example, some of them become bilinguals for the sake of studying or working abroad such as winning scholarships or having business, while others move and change their country of residence, so they want to learn the language of the target country. Regarding the factor of pressure, elite bilinguals volunteer to learn a second language and there is mostly no pressure, unless the children from the families who move to other countries might feel the pressure since they have to learn the language of the new country. In this group, the bilinguals' prerequisites are seen to be most often suitable for them, because this is their choice of being bilinguals. In the case of children, the parents make their children acquire the mother tongue very well, so they will not lose it when learning another language. When they live abroad, the children then will be encouraged to learn a second language which is expected to be used most often, however they will still use the mother tongue at least within the home environment. The method of achieving bilingualism for elite bilinguals is a combination of the “

natural method” and teaching as Skutnabb-Kangas states, where children or other bilinguals will face situations in which they must speak and communicate in the foreign language. Besides, they will be taught the foreign language in their home country as well as in the target country. In the case of failure for elite bilinguals, there are no serious consequences when not making a positive progress in learning a second language. For example, children or bilinguals might have less contact with native speakers and in some cases they will accompany speakers of their own mother tongue.

Children from linguistic majorities: this group consists mainly of children who learn a language at school other than their mother tongue and this language is more likely to be a minority language, where children or bilinguals from such groups will learn it for certain reasons. This minority language is used either for the enhancement of its prestige, Hoffmann (1991) provides an example of learning French in Canada. Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) continues that a language might be regarded as being highly beneficial in the field of education and also in getting good occupations in a country, so this language will be used in immersion programmes or in foreign language classes, Hoffmann (1991) mentions the case of using English as a foreign language in Netherlands as an example for the second reason (Hoffmann, 1991). Another example for the later reason could be the situation of teaching English in almost all the educational institutions in Oman and using it widely in most of the occupations in the various fields of work. There is little or no pressure on the children or other people of this group to learn a second language. The family and the society might be a source of pressure

for the children; the parents will motivate their children to become bilinguals for either of the reasons been mentioned previously at least. The members of this group are taught to learn a second language and the methods used in teaching are believed to be better than the methods used for the rest of the groups, because these methods involve well-prepared materials that aid the learning of the second language. The consequences of failure in learning the language and being bilingual are small and this might result that people of this group will use the mother tongue in the society and they will have less opportunities of getting better jobs.

According to Hoffmann (1991) the members of the preceding two groups come from monolingual backgrounds. In the contrary, the members of the following two groups are from bilingual backgrounds

Children from bilingual families: this group consists of children who come from bilingual families which are the families that the parents have two different mother languages. For example, a family in Finland where the father's mother language is Finnish and the mother's is Swedish. In this case there is some pressure on the children to be able to speak with their parents in their mother tongues. Besides, the society will push and encourage the children to learn the language used officially in the country which is more likely to be the mother language of either parent, and this helps the children to integrate in the society and to be successful at school. However, in this case the children become monolingual and there are some possible problems in the relationship between them and one or both of their parents, because these children lack complete bilingualism of both parents mother tongues. In the case of failure, the children of this group will face some

problems and there might be negative consequences within the family environment. For example, a child has negative relationship with one of the parents because he or she fails in being bilingual and learning the mother language of the father or mother.

Children from linguistic minorities: this group consists of children whose parents use a language of the minority. For example, a family in Canada, where both parents speak French (minority). In this case, there will be strong pressure from the society and the family on this group of children to become bilingual and learn the language of the majority (English) in order to successfully contact in that society and cope up with the others from majority groups. The methods and materials used to achieve bilingualism need to be more developed, because they still have not reached the level of the high expectations. In the case of failure, the children of this group will face consequences that are thought to be greater than for any of the other previous groups as Skutnabb-Kangas shows that the failure of being bilingual may be catastrophic. For example, the children might lose most of the educational and future opportunities and their contact with the society will be very limited.

2.3 Reasons of being bilingual:

Saunders (1988, p. 1) states that Fishman, a well-known writer in bilingualism, declares that “ more than half of the world’s population today uses more than one language while engaging in activities basic to human needs”. Also, Baker & Jones (1998) add that nowadays, most people in the world live in bilingual environments where two or more languages are used. Numerous causes contribute to the emergence and dominance of

bilingualism. There are various optional or compulsory factors. According to Baker & Jones (1998), emigration, economic trade and colonisation are main factors that facilitated the dominance of bilingualism over monolingualism. Emigration is a major factor of being bilingual, whereas emigrants move from their own countries to other countries, because of various reasons. For example, some of them escape from wars or poverty in their countries to search for better life in foreign linguistic communities. As a result, they will be forced to learn the language of the host countries and in order to have wider contact opportunities and more employment availability. According to Saunders (1988), most emigrants speak the language of the new culture and environment. In Australia, for instance, 86.3% of emigrants speak their second language more than their home languages. Saunders also states that commerce and trade are critical factors motivating people to acquire a second language. Most economic business and commercial markets involve bilingual individuals to deal with customers from multicultural areas.

Furthermore, Baker & Jones (1998) highlight that the existence of bilingualism has also increased because of the mass communication systems such as television, telephone, radio and computers which increased the contacts between members of a variety of languages. (Baker & Jones 1998). Another factor is the Geographical proximity of two countries which is a possible factor leading to bilingualism, where people of the two communities need the communication among each other for different purposes like trade and other social relations like marriage resulting in bilingual families.

2. 3. 1 Education as a great reason of being bilingual:

Education is one of the most fundamental factors pushing or motivating individuals to learn a second language. Being bilingual through education can be optional or obligatory. I notice that, in all Arab Gulf countries, most school students become bilingual due to their learning of English as a compulsory subject. However, there are some students, including colleges and universities students, who learn their second language English as an optional subject. The learning of English in these countries seems to be the result of the international relations between them and the United Kingdom. It is worth mentioning that the main focus of my research paper is being bilingual due to education. Adding to the above motives of bilingualism, there are different bilingual education programmes that have been suggested as aiding the increase of bilingualism. (Baker & Jones 1998).

According to Baker & Jones (1998), bilingual education has been widely considered as the capability of using two languages at school. However, it is a more complex phenomenon. Baker (1988) notes that bilingual education could be referred to any program aiming to teach students a second language besides their mother tongue at school. Moreover, Hamers & Blanc (2000, p. 321) mentions that “ the term ‘ bilingual education’ is used to describe a variety of educational programs involving two or more languages to varying degrees. While, Bialystok (2001) asserts that Brisk describes that the term ‘ bilingual education’ is used in a different way in a number of different countries. For example, in the USA, bilingual education means teaching English to children whose native language is not English. In Europe, it refers to the education used in schools where two languages are involved

in teaching different school subjects. These various definitions of bilingual education assure the complexity of this phenomenon.

Ferguson et al., (1977) cited in Baker & Jones (1998, p. 465) provides a number of aims of bilingual education. Some of them are as the following:

Bilingual education used to assimilate individuals or groups into the mainstream of society to socialize with people for full participation in the community.

To enable people to communicate with the outside world.

To provide language skills which are remarkable, aiding employment and status.

To deepen understanding of language and culture.

To give equal status in law of language of unequal status in daily life.

The above aims show that bilingual education does not always concern the use of two languages in the classroom and it takes various classifications, where there are 'weak' and 'strong' forms of bilingual education programmes. The 'weak' forms of bilingual education programmes aim to make children of minority language learn and transfer to the language and culture of majority resulting in monolingualism or limited bilingualism. In contrast, the 'strong' forms of bilingual education aim to make students proficient in their own language as well as the language of majority resulting in full bilingualism.

According to Baker (1988), bilingual education is classified to “ elitist bilingualism” and “ folk bilingualism” in accordance to the incentives of being bilingual. Elitist bilingualism is regarded as a reward offered to certain special individuals by government. Some students, for instance, are rewarded by being allowed to study abroad or study in prestigious universities in their countries. On the other hand, folk bilingual education is deemed a crucial need people have to meet in order to remain alive. As mentioned in the previous section that when immigrants move to a new place, they acquire the language of that place so that they can interact with people there.

Bilingual education is also categorised into “ immersion and submersion bilingual education” based on the use of both languages in learning. The immersion education is belongs to the ‘ strong’ forms of bilingual education. In immersion education, students are allowed to speak their mother tongue while experiencing their subjects and communicating with teachers. They learn the second language gradually as time goes by. Baker (1993) states that the immersion bilingual education started in Canada in 1965 where an experiment was done on a class of pupils and the aims were to make those pupils competent in using French and to reach good achievement levels in the curriculum involving the English language as well as appreciating the culture and traditions of French speaking Canadians and English speaking Canadians. On the other hand, students are not allowed to speak their home language in the submersion bilingual education, which is one of the ‘ weak’ forms of bilingual education. They are taught all their subjects in their second language.

According to the major used language, bilingual education can be also categorised into “transitional and maintenance or enrichment bilingual educations”. The ‘weak’ form transitional bilingual education essentially aims to develop and make students fluent in one language only, which is the majority language. Therefore, this bilingual education focuses on the bilingual’s first language in the learning procedures with few extra classes to learn the second language leading to a limited bilingualism. For example, in the USA and Europe, the minority of languages are taken into account and cured in order to make the minority groups to be able to continue the education in English or other majority languages. While, the ‘strong’ form maintenance or enrichment bilingual education aims to teach children their subjects with both languages to guarantee that children get good levels of proficiency in both languages. Baker indicates that some students are taught some subjects such as grammar in their native language, while mathematics is learned in the second language. Consequently, students master both languages, and the two languages are developed simultaneously with complete bilingualism. This type of education is used for example in Canada and Wales as Baker (1988, p. 47) shows that “English speakers are taught French or Welsh to enable them to be fully bilingual” (Baker 1988). I assume that maintenance or enrichment bilingual education refers to the same kind of education used in Oman but, here, the government uses the term dual education to refer to it.

2. 4 Social attitudes towards bilingualism:

Attitudes are the internal thoughts, feelings and tendencies in behaviours that an individual embodies in various contexts. They are difficult to be

measured and significant in the thinking and they influence behaviours of individuals and groups. Language attitudes have a pivotal role in the learning of a second language or the loss of the native language. For example, research indicates that an individual will learn a language faster and better than others if his or her attitudes towards that language are positive. Moreover, bilingual education is also influenced by the attitudes of bilinguals being taught where their attitudes will be the reason behind the success and development or the failure of a bilingual education programme. (Baker & Jones 1998).

According to Baker & Jones (1998), there are different types of attitudes to languages. The one related to this research study is the 'attitude to learning a new language' since this paper considers the effects of learning English as a new language on HCT foundation year students' social life in Oman.

International research focused on the motivations and reasons that make students learn new languages has found that some individuals have the ability to learn a second language quicker and better ways and this due to their positive attitudes towards that certain language and this has been indicated by a research as I mentioned in the first paragraph of this section that positive attitudes to a language will aid the learning of that language.

Also, research has found that people in England and the USA have less positive attitudes towards learning a second language than people in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and mainland Europe, where in the latter places; bilingualism is more typical, desirable, and valuable. The reasons might be the consideration of English as a dominant language across the world, so

people need to learn it for better employments' purposes, wider range of contacts and relationships, as well as travel (Baker & Jones 1998).

Attitudes to a language are categorised into 'integrative' and 'instrumental' attitudes. 'Integrative attitudes' are the ones that people have when they seek for example, jobs require a second language, read the literature of a second language, socialise with natives of a second language and all this in order to learn that second language and identify different language communities. In the contrary, 'Instrumental attitudes' are the ones that people have when learning a second language for different purposes. For example, they learn a language to pass exams, to find better and more job opportunities, or to help their children in their bilingual education programmes (Baker & Jones 1998).

Baker & Jones (1998) also note that research explains that 'integrative' attitudes and motivations are more helpful in making individuals proficient in the second language, because they provide them with positive attitudes resulting in long term motivation to learn a language, while 'instrumental' attitudes provide short term motivation that will fade for example, an individual has passed in the exam and reached the goals of learning a second language. However, the opposite is a possibility where 'instrumental' attitudes and motivation would be more powerful than 'integrative' attitudes and motivation in learning a language. For example, in India, some Indian students gave 'instrumental' reasons for learning English rather than 'integrative' reasons. They show that English is important in education and future employment and without the need for them; the students would not have learned English.

In accordance to the data collected for this research study, the case is that most of the foundation year students at HCT in Oman provided a mixture of both ‘instrumental’ and ‘integrative’ reasons for learning English and it can be noticed that ‘instrumental’ reasons have greater effect than the ‘integrative’ reasons and this will be discussed in the following chapter.

Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) states that bilingualism has been seen in a very negative way in the past and as time was passing by the attitudes towards bilingualism have changed and the negativity has diminished. For example, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were many statements and investigations that have negative attitudes to bilingualism. They stated that bilingual individuals are for example, lazy, stupid, unreliable, morally inferior, and so on.

Romaine (1995, p. 303) has conducted a study to investigate attitudes relating to a second language in the “Punjabi/English bilingual community in Britain.” Romaine has found out that most of her subjects believe that culture is deeply affected by language, for culture cannot be protected without conserving language. In this particular studied community, learners are only taught their second language, which is English, in schools regarding to the assumption that they have already mastered their home language. Therefore, Romaine has reported that the majority of her samples, including parents, prefer their children to be taught using their home language rather than the second language regardless of the latter’s language qualities. Romaine’s study shows that monolingual parents feel embarrassed when their bilingual children speak the second language, widely in the society and even in front of the traditional and older generation relatives and guests.

Romaine's study somehow conforms to the results that Huddy and Sears (1984) have found in their survey implemented for 1, 570 non Hispanic subjects. They have discovered that people often consider bilingual education as a great factor affecting their culture and language. However, it is obvious that most countries all over the world implementing bilingual education, regardless of its classifications, teach their students English. Those countries believe in the great benefits of having a second language like English.

White et al., (2002) declare that New Zealand offers non-English native speakers great opportunities to learn English, for it believes that English is currently very crucial in all life aspects. English skills should be improved as it “ is critical in facilitating social contacts, in enhancing employment and educational opportunities, and in providing the basis for p