

# Bilingualism and biculturalism

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Bilingualism and biculturalism are intertwined terms that have influenced the social model of modern society. As everyday passes by, the world keeps getting smaller and we continue conforming to the cultural norms of the global society. While bilingualism helps us to keep our native language intact, biculturalism reminds of our true roots. In a world with diminishing cultural boundary lines, bilingualism and biculturalism are critical factors that help preserve one's cultural identity. Bilingualism is basically the ability to comprehend and effectively communicate in two languages.

However, various experts have their own definition of bilingualism with certain nuances. For instance, a bilingual is one who is recognized as a native speaker by natives of both languages, according to a French linguist named Thiery (Chan 2). In recent times, the ability to construct and express complete, meaningful sentences is considered adequate for one to achieve bilingualism. B. Ways to measure bilingualism Bilingualism can be measured by evaluating the level of mastery of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in both languages.

Most bilinguals have superior command over one language compared to the other, as it is not very common for an individual to have equal mastery of both languages. Likewise, some bilinguals can understand a language better than they speak it; they are commonly referred to as receiving bilinguals. It is generally accepted among the linguist community that knowing a minimum of five thousand words in a language is necessary to carry out effective communication. C. Types of bilingualism

Various types of bilingualism have been found to exist as linguists continue to study the reasons and methods governing the existence of bilingualism.

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Sometimes, learning a second language might lead to the deterioration of one's native language. This negative impact over a person's native language is called as subtractive bilingualism. However, if second language proficiency is achieved without causing any negative impact on one's mother tongue, then it is known as additive bilingualism. When an individual's communication skills improve in general from the mastery of a second language, it is known as ascendant bilingualism.

In countries where people speaking a certain language are frowned upon, there is a tendency to conceal one's native language owing to the fear of being stigmatized. This phenomenon is known as covert bilingualism. On the other hand, some nations in the world have two official languages, as a result of having people from different cultural backgrounds speaking two different languages. Although not all people in the country speak or understand both the languages, such a country is known to exhibit societal bilingualism.

Bilingualism can be classified into infant bilingualism and artificial bilingualism, based on the nature of acquiring bilingualism. Infant bilingualism is a native way of acquiring both languages simultaneously, right from a very early age when a child begins to talk. This way of acquiring bilingualism would most probably result in one attaining almost equal proficiency in both languages. This is possible when both languages are a natural part of the child's environment. This usually happens when each parent is a native speaker of one language or if the parents are proficient in both languages.

This way, the child finds both languages natural since he/she is exposed to it since birth. Artificial bilingualism is a phenomenon according to which parents consciously try to pass on a language that is not either of their mother tongues, to the children. This could be a result of societal or cultural pressure to speak the language like a native speaker. Artificial bilingualism can have a negative impact if the parents try to force a language that they are not proficient at it, since this could lead the children to form an improper language model.

D. Biculturalism Biculturalism enables an individual to possess native-like knowledge of two cultures present in his/her country. Hence, a bicultural person would have the ability to relate to members of both cultures as well as act according to the demands of both cultures. True biculturalism is said to have been achieved if a person inherently feels like a part of both cultures. E. Biculturalism in society Biculturalism usually exists in a country where two different cultures or cultural identities are allowed to freely flourish within the society.

It is characterized by widespread occupation of people belonging to two diverse cultures. However, true biculturalism cannot exist in a country where one culture is suppressed or discriminated. Bicultural countries have official policies to protect the interest of both cultures. It also facilitates equitable status and rights to people belonging to both cultures without any prejudice. These countries also celebrate festivals pertaining to both cultures to preserve integrity of both cultures and foster the spirit of togetherness. E. 1 Biculturalism in Canada

Canada follows a policy of official bilingualism as it gives equal status to both English and French in its parliament and courts. This was done to preserve the cultural identity of French communities in Canada, as support for the French language in Canada had weakened and English had become the preferred language in business and politics, by the end of the nineteenth century. As the years passed by, Francophone communities outside of Quebec began to realize the extinction of their culture was inevitable, unless French-based education was made a top priority.

Certain political forces in Quebec had also wanted a separate state during the 1960s. Franco-Albertans living in Quebec called for bilingualism and biculturalism to ensure that Canada stayed united. This led to the proclamation of the Official Languages Act of 1969 announcing Canada as a bilingual nation (Alberta's Francophone Heritage 3). Today, Franco-Albertans are entitled to exclusive French-only education according to rights guaranteed by Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission, while French is also now used in government offices and hospitals in Alberta.

All these developments with respect to biculturalism have kept Canada together as one nation and led to the revival of the French culture. E. 2 Biculturalism in Australia Australia was originally inhabited only by several indigenous tribes, until the European settlers started to immigrate there. These relatively new settlers started to control the ethnicity of the immigrants settling down to ensure that Australia had a cultural identity of a British Colony. Until 1973, the governments empowered by the Immigration Restriction Act followed the White Australia policy to keep a check on non-European immigration.

The racial injustice perpetrated by the White Australia policy official came to end by passing of the RacialDiscriminationAct in 1975. Australia started to rigorously follow a bicultural policy similar to Canada, opening its doors to several thousands of immigrants from all over the world. The extent of Australia's multicultural policy can be better understood from a 2005 Department of Immigration statistic which reports that forty percent of the contributing workforce in Australia had at least one parent born outside of Australia, while twenty-five percent of them were not originally born in Australia (Wikipedia 9).

Australian values of 'mateship' centered on equality, loyalty and friendship, have enshrined in its biculturalism policy and given equal rights to all Australian citizens irrespective of their ethnicity. Multiculturalism was initially perceived as the acceptance of people coming from different cultural backgrounds as members of Australian society. However, the significance of biculturalism has now deepened and empowered immigrants in Australia to express their cultural identity, thereby enabling them to experience both Australian culture as well as their native culture. E.

3 Biculturalism in the United States America, in spite of being one of most culturally diverse nations in the world and built on values of equality, does not officially have a federal multiculturalism policy. That being said, America does practices biculturalism on a social level as immigrants from various countries are freely allowed to practice their religion and exhibit their cultural identity. The Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 nullified quotas based on one's national origin. Since then, more twenty twenty-eight million people immigrants have legally been accepted by the United States of America.

Bilingualism is also prevalent in certain Southern states that are heavily populated with Spanish-speaking immigrants. F. The relationship of bilingualism to biculturalism Bilingualism and biculturalism are concepts that are very closely tied together. Bilingualism not only helps one to connect and effectively communicate with the society around him/her, but also enables a person to maintain command over his/her native language. Since language is the key to stay in touch with one's ethnic or national culture, bilingualism helps foster biculturalism as well.

F. 1. Origin of bilingualism in bicultural societies Canada was one of the pioneers of the New World to officially adopt the policy of bilingualism. In 1867, British North America Act was passed to legalize conversing in English as well as French in Canadian Parliament as well as Courts of Law, thereby paving the way for a bicultural state. As the world's political climate began to change during the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea of cultural pluralism started to gain momentum.

Biculturalism began in western world and paved the way for biculturalism to be adopted as a political policy in many other parts of the world. F. 2. Bilingual education Bilingual education is a method of teaching all subjects to students through a country's primary language as well as the student's native language. There are several types of approaches and programs available to carry out bilingual education. Transitional programs teach all subjects in the students' native language and English is taught as a separate subject until bilingual students can study along with other native students in normal classrooms.

Dual Language programs consist of an equal combination of students who are native English speakers as well students who have another common native language. These methods enable all students in the class to be bilingual and understand subject matter in both languages. Late-exit program is yet another method that is quite similar to transitional programs, but it also teaches all the subjects in English again to reinforce the subject content and achieve effective bilingualism. It is hard to generalize and develop a common plan to educate bilingual students.

For instance, in the US, young immigrants are either more educated or less educated native-born American students since immigrants from Asian countries are relatively well-educated compared to their South American counterparts, as a result of social and economic differences. Language maintenance and Language shift Language maintenance is an effort to preserve the linguistic ability of child in his/her native language, while not compromising on learning the popular secondary language at school. It can result from a passion for one's culture or a necessity to communicate with elder members in the family.

Career prospects due to international acclaim or the availability of media services such as television programs or books in one's native could also cause language maintenance. The avoidance of one's native language is known as language shift. For instance, bilingual children may stop using their mother tongue owing to a higher degree of English exposure in school. Other factors that influence language shift are fear of one's native language negatively influencing their English language skills or learning abilities.



Lack of parental encouragement to maintain one's native language can also lead to language shift. G. Transference Transference occurs when a person's native language negatively influences the way he/she uses another language or vice-versa. This influence can occur in the form of distinctive oral expressions i. e. accent or odd sentence compositions. It is classified into lexical, phonological, semantic, prosodic, tonemic, syntactic and pragmatic transferences.

## CONCLUSION

The concepts of bilingualism and biculturalism are two critical aspects that have held together societies comprising of several cultures, languages, races and ethnic backgrounds. Since transference or the deviation from the norms of a language could lead to language shift, proper bilingual education has to be provided to ensure that one is comfortable using both languages. Bilingualism, the preservation of one's native language accompanied by command over a country's primary language, is necessary to achieve biculturalism in a society as well retaining one's true cultural identity.

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