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Level: 3rd Year

Subject: Linguistics (Sociolinguistics)

1.2 Bilingualism

Monolingual communities worldwide are rare. Instead, most communities have more than one language variety at hand. Multilingualism is then obviously a more prevalent global condition than monolingualism. “A simple indication here is that something like 5,000 languages exist in a world divided into only 200 states”, i.e., about 25 languages per state (Edwards, 1994:44). Crystal (1997) estimates that about two-thirds of the world’s children grow up in a bilingual environment. Cortés (2013) also reports that more than half of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual: 56% of Europeans are bilingual, while 38% of the population in Great Britain, 35% in Canada, and 17% in the United States are bilingual.

The definition of bilingualism has always been a matter of debate. The dimension of such contention is clearly captured in the definitions of two linguists which could best be described as paradoxical:

 Bloomfield (1933:56) sees multilingualism as “a native-like control of two languages”. This is a narrow definition as it suits the person who uses two languages equally fluently. As such, it would automatically exclude, for instance, a beginning foreign/second language learner. It would also keep out the person who comprehends but does not produce utterances in a second language.

 Macnamara (1967a) uses a broad definition and observes that having a minimal competence in one of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in a language other than the mother tongue qualifies the person as a bilingual.

A number of other definitions lay between these two extreme edges. Mackey’s (1957) views “bilingualism as the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual” (in Beardsmore, 1986:1). Grosjean (1982) reveals a more adequate definition arguing that “the most relevant factor is the regular use of two languages”.

1.2.1 Types of Bilingualism

Theory-builders often draw a distinction between:

Individual bilingualism societal bilingualism

Micro level macro level

(Bilingualism as a personal) (Bilingualism as a group)

possession possession

1.2.1.1 Societal Bilingualism

Bilingualism is perceived as a societal attribute: it describes a particular society or nation in which more than one language is used and that a number of individuals can use these languages. Sociolinguists, like Mackey (1967), identify two types of societal bilingualism: de jure (official) bilingualism vs. de facto (in reality) bilingualism.

1. De jure bilingualism

Two or more languages are officially recognized within the speech community, generally by the constitution or linguistic laws. These languages are often supported by services of the central/local government (Media, public administration, schools, parliament, etc).

Examples of de jure multilingual communities

• Switzerland: is a de jure multilingual speech community since 4 languages are considered official: German, French, Italian and Romansh.

• Morocco is a de jure bilingual speech community (Arabic and Berber are official languages)

• South Africa: 11 official languages; all of them are formally equal.

• Kenya: Swahili and English are official languages

2. De facto bilingualism

Theis type of bilingualism appears when the actual linguistic situation in a nation acknowledges the existence of more than one language; this is apart from official recognition. To say it another way, official monolingual speech communities may expose other languages (probably minor) with no official status giving rise to de facto bilingualism.

Examples of de facto multilingual communities

• France: is officially (de jure) a monolingual community since its constitution recognizes French as the sole official language of the country. But it is a de facto (in reality) multilingual country as some other minor languages (e.g. Alsatian, Breton, Occitan, etc) in addition to immigrant languages (Portuguese, Arabic, etc) are used throughout the nation.

• Canada: de jure bilingual (English and French), but de facto multilingual country because other languages are also spoken in the country, like Mandarin, Italian, German, Penjabi, to count but a few.

1.2.1.2 Individual bilingualism

Individual bilingualism is perceived as an individual attribute denoting the individual’s ability to behave linguistically in more than one language. Hamers and Blanc (2000) use the term bilinguality to refer to individual bilingualism. Individual bilingualism is dependent on a number of internal and external factors, like upbringing, education, place of residence, age, attitude, motivation, etc.

There exist many distinctions and classifications of individual bilingualism, and writers generally consider four dimensions in their classification

 Cognitive organisation of the two languages

 Age of acquisition/learning

 Language proficiency

 Sequence of acquisition

Examples:

Classification according to the age of acquisition/learning:

 Early bilingualism: refers to a child who has simultaneously acquired the two languages (simultaneous or native bilingualism.) or who has already partially acquired a first language and then learns a second language early in childhood (Successive early bilingualism). Bilinguals of this sort are competent in both languages (additive bilingualism)

 Late bilingualism: concerns situations in which L2 is learned after the age of 6-7 (critical age). With the first language already acquired, late bilinguals use their first language experiences to enhance the learning of the second language.

Classification according to language proficiency:

Here, different distinctions are put forward. We mention what follows:

 balanced bilinguals: These people are equally competent in the two languages.

 unbalanced bilinguals: they do not use the two languages with equal ease.

 Active bilinguals: those individuals who can speak the two languages, i.e., their productive skills are developed in both languages.

 Passive bilinguals: those people who can understand the two languages. They will also speak one of these languages. Here only receptive skills are relatively developed in the second language.

Assignment:

1. Characterize societal bilingualism in Algeria

2. How would you qualify Algerians?

3. Provide the classification of individual bilingualism according to the cognitive otganization of languages and sequence of acquisition