

# WHAT IS BILINGUALISM? WHY ALWAYS PROBLEMATIC?

I Gede Yoga Permana  
English Education Department Postgraduate Program  
UNDIKSHA

## A. What is Bilingualism?

From year to year, researchers have been seeking the exact definition of bilingualism but still there is no definition that can be used as pure reference to define bilingualism. Many experts have different definition on what is meant by bilingualism and the definition given sometimes contrast with the other definition. This may be caused by the flexibility of the concept of bilingualism that is changing over the past decades. Liddicoat in his famous sentences said “it is not easy to formulate a generally accepted definition of bilingualism. However, the explanation given by Moradi (2014) regarding bilingualism probably could be used as common definition of bilingualism. He said that bilingualism is defined as the use of at least two languages either by an individual or by a group of speakers. This definition actually supports the definition explained by Grosjean (1982). He said “Bilingualism is the regular use of two (or more) languages, and bilinguals are those people who need and use two (or more) languages in their everyday lives’. Hamers and Blanc (2000:6) also supported the previous explanations. They said people who can speak two languages as native languages can be defined as bilingual. From these claims, another question raised, who should be called as bilingual? Or what criterion is used to define someone as bilingual?. However, characterizing bilingualism may be problematic since people with

bilingual attributes can be characterized as bilingual. Definitions of bilingualism range from a minimal proficiency in two languages, to an advanced level of proficiency which allows the speaker to function and appear as a native-like speaker of two languages. A person may call themselves as bilingual but only in the level of ability to converse and communicate orally.

## **B. Types of Bilingualism**

According to Wei (2000) , there are 27 varieties of bilingualism (the table can be seen at the end of the chapter). In this paper, only four types of bilingualism that will be discussed. The four types of bilingualism are: early bilingualism, late bilingualism, additive bilingualism & subtractive bilingualism and passive bilingualism. In early bilingualism, there is simultaneous bilingualism. In which sequential bilingualism happens when a young child has had critical and significant introduction to two languages from birth. Optimally, the youngster will have equivalent, quality background with both dialects. This simultaneous bilingualism occurred when the parents of a child came from different native language speaker. Parents tend to heritage their children with their mother tongue language to maintain prevent language lost. Simultaneous early bilingualism refers to a child who learns two languages at the same time, from birth. This generally produces a strong bilingualism, called additive bilingualism. This also implies that the child's language development is bilingual. Beside simultaneous bilingualism, there is successive early bilingualism which refers to a child who has already partially acquired a first language and then learns a second language early in childhood (for example, when a child moves to an environment where the dominant language is not his native language). Someone may become bilingual by learning a second language sometime after their first language which commonly known as sequential bilingualism or late bilingualism. This is what also distinguishes it from

early bilingualism. With the first language already acquired, the late bilingual uses their experience to learn the second language. Martin et al (2013) noticed that early bilinguals are used to control L1 and L2 from birth and they use both L1 and L2 on an everyday basis. Late bilinguals started to control L1 and L2 late in life and never did it on an everyday basis. As sustained by Kalia et al (2014), early bilinguals, exposed to two languages from infancy, spend a considerable amount of time during preverbal development processing speech streams from two different languages. The late bilingual, on the other hand, acquires their second language after their first language has already created an intricate lexical (sound), syntactic (rules of use) and semantic (word meanings) neural network.

Cobas and Chan (2001) explored the language development of children who are classified as simultaneous and sequential bilingualism. The findings can be seen on table 1 and 2.

Age	Stage	Milestone	Red Flag for language development problem
Birth to two months	Undifferentiated (contains element for both languages)	Cooing	
2-6 months	Undifferentiated	Babbling	No bilabial sounds
6-15 months	Undifferentiated	First words	Less than one new word per week
1-2 years	Undifferentiated	Language blend	Less than 20 words (2 languages combined) by 20 months
2-3 years	Undifferentiated	Language mixing	A countable number of words by 30 month. No word combination.
4 years and older	Differentiated	Uses each language as a separate system	

Table 1: Simultaneous acquisition of two languages.

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Red flag for language development problem</b>
First language	Normal acquisition sequence	Milestone abnormal
Second language		
Interactional period	Use nonverbal communication and fixed phrases	Echolalia
Inference period	Grammatical rules of first language are applied to the second language	Syntactic error in first language
Silent period	Selective mutism	Prolonged or true mutism
Code switching	Switches between languages in the same conversation	Word retrieval difficulties

Table 2: Sequential acquisition of two languages.

The existence of additive bilingualism refers to the situation where a person has acquired the two languages in a balanced manner. It is a strong bilingualism. Additive bilingualism occurs when learning a second language does not interfere with the learning of a first language. Both languages are developed (ESL Glossary). It is contradictory with the subtractive bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism directs to the situation where a person learns the second language to the detriment of the first language, especially if the first language is a minority language. According to ESL glossary, subtractive bilingualism appears when learning a second language interferes with the learning of a first language. The second language replaces the first language. This is commonly found in children who immigrate to a foreign country when they are young,

especially in cases of orphans who are deprived of their first language input. For this situation, authority of the first language becomes more less, while the authority of the other language (the more dominant language) optimizes. These expressions and concepts were created by Wallace Lambert, the Canadian researcher who has been given the title of “the father of bilingualism research”. The last type of bilingualism is passive bilingualism. It refers to being able to understand a second language without being able to speak it. According to Hockett (1958:16), a person might have no productive control over a language, but be able to understand utterances in it. In such instances he uses the term ‘semibilingualism’. These passive bilingual may lead to the loss of the minor language.

Type of Bilingual	Definition
Additive Bilingual	An individual whose two languages combine in a complementary and enriching fashion.
Ascendant Bilingual	An individual whose ability to function in a second language is developing due to increased use.
Balanced Bilingual (equilingual) (symmetrical bilingual) (ambilingual)	An individual whose mastery of two languages is roughly equivalent.
Compound Bilingual	An individual whose two languages are learnt at the same time, often in the same context.
Co-ordinate Bilingual	An individual whose two languages are learnt in distinctively separate contexts.
Covert Bilingual	An individual who conceals his or her knowledge of a given language due to an attitudinal disposition.
Diagonal Bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in a non-standard language or a dialect in an unrelated standard language.
Dominant Bilingual	An individual with greater proficiency in one of his or her languages and uses it significantly more than the other language(s).
Dormant Bilingual	An individual who has emigrated to a foreign country for a considerable period of time and has little opportunity to keep the first language actively in use.
Early Bilingual (Ascribed Bilingual)	An individual who has acquired two languages early in childhood

Functional Bilingual	An individual who can operate in two languages with or without full fluency for the task in hand.
Horizontal bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in two distinct languages which have a similar or equal status.
Incipient Bilingual	An individual at the early stages of bilingualism where one language is not fully developed.
Late Bilingual (achieved bilingual)	An individual who has become a bilingual later than childhood.
Maximal Bilingual	An individual with near native control of two or more languages.
Minimal Bilingual	An individual with only a few words and phrases in a second language.
Natural Bilingual (primary bilingual)	An individual who has not undergone any specific training and who is often not in position to translate or interpret with facility between two languages.
Productive Bilingual	An individual who not only understands but also speaks and possibly writes in two or more languages.
Receptive Bilingual (semibilingual) (asymmetrical bilingual) (passive bilingual)	An individual who understands a second language, in either its spoken or written form, or both, but does not necessarily speak or write it.
Recessive Bilingual	An individual who begins to feel some difficulty in either understanding or expressing him or herself with ease, due to lack of use.
Secondary Bilingual	An individual whose second language has been added to a first language via instruction.
Semilingual	An individual with insufficient knowledge of either language.
Simultaneous bilingual	An individual whose two languages are present from the onset of speech.
Subordinate bilingual	An individual who exhibits interference in his or her language usage by reducing the patterns of the second language to those of the first.
Subtractive bilingual	An individual whose second language is acquired at the expense of the aptitudes already acquired in the first language.
Successive bilingual (consecutive bilingual)	An individual whose second language is added at some stage after the first has begun to develop.
Vertical bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in a standard language and a distinct but related language or dialect.

Table 3: A variety of bilinguals (Wei 2000: 6-7)

## C. Research on Bilingualism

Research on bilingualism also showed a contrary. Konnikova (2015) mentioned that for the first half of the twentieth century, researchers actually thought that bilingualism put a child at a disadvantage, something that hurt her I.Q. and verbal development. But, in recent years, the notion of a bilingual advantage has emerged from research to the contrary, research that has seemed both far-reaching and compelling, much of it coming from the careful work of the psychologist Ellen Bialystok.

In the development of bilingualism concept, there are different thought on who should be called as bilingual or how someone is called as bilingual. Baker (2001) asked “Is someone bilingual if they are fluent in one language but less than fluent in their other language? Is someone bilingual if they rarely or never use one of their languages?” Liddicot in his book tries to give information on how expert viewed the concept of being bilingual. From his point of view, appeared two genres of bilingualism and these two genres have different sight on defining the term “bilingual”. The extremist side called someone as bilingual if he/she is able to speak two languages as native-like control of one of both languages. There are large numbers of people who are able to speak two languages or more but they don’t have native-control of one or both languages. The term native-like control was firstly introduced by a famous linguist namely Bloomfield in 1933. The other terminology related to extreme “bilingual” was given by Haugen in 1953 as cited in Karanhan (2005). He suggests that bilingualism begins at the point where a speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in other language. At this point it can be said that extremist side appeared in the early development of bilingualism and

from extremist side point of view, being bilingual is an ability to speak two or more languages perfectly as the native speaker do.

In contrast, Diebold (1961) in Laddicoat (1991) described bilingualism has begun when a person start to understand utterance in second language, but is unable to produce utterance. He also introduced the term incipient bilingualism allows people with minimal competence in a second language to squeeze into the bilingual category. The movement by Dieblod has raised another genre of bilingualism which is called minimalist bilingualism. The minimalist genre defines a person as bilingual if they are able to speak second language or foreign language even they don't have native-like control as what extremist mentioned. Macnamara in Hamers & Blanc (1983) mentioned that a bilingual is anyone who possesses a minimal competence in only one of four major skills; speaking, writing, reading and listening comprehension in a language other than his mother tongue. At this point of view, someone is called bilingual if they are able to speak two languages without considering how good they are in using both languages as long as the hearer understands to what they are saying.

## **D. The Effect of Bilingualism**

Despite the debates on bilingualism concept, researchers also try to explore the effect of bilingualism on micro space and macro space. What I meant by micro space is that the effect of bilingualism on personal (bilingual person) level. On personal level, bilingualism can be started in early age of human being. Takala (2016) said, when parents are speaking different languages with and to the child, he or she will most likely acquired both languages automatically. In the past, researchers used their own children as subject of bilingualism project. They observed how



bilingualism process affecting their children intelligence. They found that bilingualism has mostly affecting children's cognitive ability. In their findings, the first stage of bilingualism started when bilingual children used code switching and code mixing in their communication especially with their parents. Code switching and code mixing used by bilingual children showed that they have a good cognitive skill. In other hand, it showed that the children have started to be native-control of both languages. As supported by Macrory in Gauthier (2012, he mentioned that the ability of code switching or code mixing is not negative, instead children know that they are using two different languages and they are able to separate the vocabulary. Additionally, some studies show that bilingual speakers score higher on IQ tests than monolingual speakers. Weiten (2010) in Gaunthier (2012) stated, "When middle-class bilingual subjects who are fluent in both languages are studied, they tend to score somewhat higher than monolingual subjects on measures of cognitive flexibility, analytical reasoning, selective attention, and metalinguistic awareness. Crosby and Prescod did a research to seek the effect of bilingualism on cognitive abilities. The results were surprisingly positive in favor of bilingual children. Bilingual children have better reading comprehension rather than monolingual children. They also added Bilingual children had greater cognitive abilities in reading comprehension due to the mental flexibility they acquired when learning a second language. Having two languages at their disposal, bilingual children were able to understand concepts in either language and apply it to the other, he added. Since bilingual children can switch between languages, they grow more adaptable ways to deal with issues. Their capacity to peruse and think in two unique languages advances larger amounts of dynamic thought, which is fundamentally essential in learning (Diaz,1985). Many researches have confirmed the academic and cognitive benefits of language learning.

Research showed that being bilingual structurally changes the brain and that bilingual speakers have denser “gray matter” than monolinguals. Second language instruction appears to support creativity and complex problem solving. Several studies have also demonstrated benefits of foreign language study on the achievement of English language arts, showing that students who study a second language score better on achievement tests (Forzani 2008). Myler (2016) also reported the advantages of bilingualism. The advantage is in the level of the benefit of learning second language or/and foreign language. The advantages can be seen in the following table:

Ability to learn new words easily
Spotting rhymes and other associations between words
Ability to use possessed information in new ways
Word categorization
Coming up with solutions to problems
Good listening skills
Improved communication skills

Source: <http://www.omniglot.com/language/articles/bilingualadvantages.htm>

In the other hand, being bilingual has an effect on cultural level. Bilingual individual will know the culture of the languages. They will think more rational and analytical when facing problems by seeing or solving the problems with different perspective of culture. A bilingual individual will also have higher chance to work in other country, interact with other people from different county and understand foreign literature. Bilingual individuals are able to participate in global community i.e. an interpreter or/and translator. Imagine if there is no interpreter and translator, how we can understand foreign work or literature. Indeed the beautiful work of Dan Brown can't be enjoyed without the help of interpreter or translator. In addition, many industries require a workforce with language skills to be competitive and succeed in the global economy.

Many businesses and government employers also need bilingual individuals to communicate more effectively at home, where the constituency or “customer base” has become increasingly diverse. So, a conclusion that can be drawn is that research has shown that the brain of children who are able to speak two or more languages, have better cognitive ability rather than those children who are monolingual. They also have better access to get involved in global area.

Montenegro & Ricardo (2012) claimed that from a social perspective, bilingualism also affects societies or speech communities; in that sense, a bilingual community may be defined as the environment where two languages are spoken, or where all or some of their members are bilingual. In the level of social space, a country which has bilingual speaker will gain economic benefit. They can hold international conference, international meeting and they can promote what their country can offer to other country. Besides that, a bilingual country will gain benefit from tourism industry. Imagine if a county is monolingual country, the tourist will have difficult access to explore the country.

The bilingual story is not all positive, however. As reported by Bialystok and Craik (2010), studies of vocabulary knowledge have consistently reported lower scores for bilinguals in each language than for monolingual speakers of that language, and this deficit appears at all ages across the lifespan (Bialystok, 2001). Bialystok (2008) added that it is now well documented that bilinguals generally control a smaller vocabulary in each language than monolinguals. In a study examining receptive vocabulary scores in English for over 1,700 children between the ages of 3- and 10-years old, monolingual children obtained higher scores than bilingual children at every age, even though all the bilingual children were fluent in English

and used it daily at school. This finding is especially necessary for characterization of children's development because vocabulary size is a central measure of children's progress in both the oral and literate forms of language development. In some sense, vocabulary size serves as a proxy for the representational base of language that the child is constructing, with a richer and more diverse vocabulary reflecting a more elaborate understanding of language (Bialystok, 2008). Another weaknesses of being bilingual is that since in the brain of a bilingual individual has two languages that are continually dynamic, it may prompt to verbal aptitudes of a bilingual individual to be weaker than those prominent in monolingual speakers of the language. Diaz (1983) in Arnarsdóttir (2012) confirmed that studies of the relationship between bilingualism and intelligence commenced around the 1920s and were based on psychometric tests of intelligence.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

During early times of bilingualism, it was a commonly held belief that children should not be encouraged to master two languages simultaneously as it could lead to an intellectual and cognitive disadvantage as well as linguistic confusion. Then many studies have emerged to support the claims that bilingualism had negative effects on intelligence and cognitive ability. The results of such studies led the researchers to claim that bilingualism is a mental burden for bilingual children causing them uncertain and confused (McLaughlin, 1978 cited in Al-Amri 2013). In contrast, current bilingualism studies have suggested that being bilingual is beneficial even it started lately. On children level, being bilingual has increasingly helped the children cognitive ability. Indeed, this contrary will lure other research to dig more information about the concept of bilingualism which will be useful for everybody. Furthermore, it will be highly

suggested that research on bilingualism not only focus on cognitive dimension. Probably, bilingualism affecting psychological development, affective and psychomotor dimension. It is very obvious that bilingualism is very flexible concept as mentioned earlier that may cause debates of bilingualism will still exist even in the next 100 years of bilingualism development.

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