

Understanding bilingualism

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Bilingualism

Individual bilingualism

Knowledge of 2 or more languages
Not necessarily at the same proficiency level

Social bilingualism

Influenced by sociopolitical context and language functionality

Bilingual continuum – Silva-Corvalán (2001)

The continuum reflects varying degrees of language knowledge and use

Multidimensional nature

Bilingual competence varies across dimensions: asymmetrical knowledge of the languages
Complex ability studied from different disciplines: linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pedagogy, political perspective



Individual bilingualism

Types

Early bilingualism. Both languages acquired before 12
> Simultaneous. Both languages acquired in early childhood
> Sequential. Second language acquired later
Late bilingualism. Second language acquired after 12

Acquisition context

Simultaneous. Family-centered, oral with meaningful interaction
Sequential. One language familiar, the other in school
Late bilingualism. In formal, natural or in combined contexts

Factors affecting usage

Age
Acquisition context
Personal situation
Social situation

Knowledge levels

Varies widely: not identical or balance
Influenced by context and mode of acquisition

Social bilingualism

Influencing factors

Historical-political events: migration, territorial expansion, globalization
Relationships among linguistic groups involve power and prestige dynamics

Political relations

Majority language. Strong and official
> Used in social, political and educational spheres
Minority language. Weak, unofficial
> Used for personal, familiar and everyday interactions

Social linguistic impact

Contact between languages results in linguistic repercussions:
> structural changes
> loans
> interferences
> code-switching



Attitudes towards bilingualism

Perceptions

Often viewed negatively: monolingualism is considered the norm
Assumptions of language acquisition put in disadvantage early bilinguals

Reasons

Bilingual behaviours are seen as language ignorance
Comparative studies between monolinguals and bilinguals are biased towards first group
> Grosjean (2008): investigations need to evaluate bilingual competence across both languages

Social influence

Socio-political status of a language influences attitudes and linguistic self-esteem
> Communities in social and political inferiority have lower linguistic self-esteem



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