

Analysis and Dimensions of Bilingualism

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Abstract

One of the earliest definitions of bilingualism consisted of using the term to define the natively like use of two languages by the same individual, but later academic scholars have broadened the scope of this definition to include other aspects in order to account for the influx of immigration into various areas around the globe and the need for these immigrants to speak two languages without an expert amount of fluency.

Here I have discussed the stages of bilingualism and how to categorize an individual, the type of bilingual he/she is. I have also taken an example of myself and have shown how the process works and can be used to analyse linguistic differences among individuals. I have also discussed here the necessary steps that we must follow for second language acquisition and the subjectivity that comes along with it. Lastly, I have generalized the bilingual results over multilingualism and explained how multilingualism comes into existence. Where the choice isn't available or in some cases, where it is completely a prospect of personal interest.

I hope through the course of study of these distinct branches of elementary linguistics, there would be an increase in the awareness of linguistic mental health, especially in kids, and general awareness of the fact that Language learning is a procedural way of life rather than a random one. Hope the content of this study helps build a conducive linguistic atmosphere and be an insignificant contributor in generating linguistic awareness across all parents, teachers, and students alike.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Categories, Dimensions, SLA, Multilingualism

Introduction

There are currently more than 7000 languages spoken around the globe and every human knows at least one language among these, spoken or signed. Linguistics is the science of language, including sounds, words, and grammar rules. Words in any language are finite, but sentences are not. It is this creative aspect of human language that sets it apart from other animal languages, which are essentially responses to different stimuli.

The rules of a language, also called grammar, are learned as one acquires a language. These rules include phonology, the sound system, morphology, the structure of words, syntax, the combination of words into sentences, semantics, how sounds and meanings are related, and the lexicon, or mental dictionary of words. When you know a language, you know words in that language, i.e., sound units that are related to specific meanings. However, the sounds and meanings of words are arbitrary. Usually, there is no relationship between the way a word is pronounced (or signed) and its meaning.

Definition

According to the American -Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) – "Bilingualism is the ability to communicate in more than one language and can be thought of as a continuum of language skills in which proficiency in any of the languages used may fluctuate over time and across social settings, conversational partners, and topics, among other variables (Grosjean, 1989; Bialystok, 2001)". However, Bilingualism is a controversial subject in terms of its true definition, its definition is a very subjective idea and particularly non-trivial. It is argued on one side that Bilingualism means being able to speak two languages perfectly, i.e., a native control in two languages. This is the narrow definition of Bilingualism and is widely considered to be two monolinguals in one. Individuals owing to this definition have a particularly high level of proficiency in both written and oral modes of the

languages. Now a broader definition of bilingualism is, the individual possesses a minimal competence level in any one or more of the four language skills, i.e., listening, comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing, and can function at some level with substantial imperfection in their knowledge of the language yet could be referred as a bilingual individual. This definition is more trivial as this allows individuals to function at some level with more than one language. It is essentially the definition in accordance to which a lot of statistics are issued over the linguistic nature of a country, state, or region. It argues that bilinguals have varying proficiencies and/or speaking skills depending on the immediate area of expertise in which the individual is called upon to use their command of the two languages. Now, taking instances of both definitions, it is safe to say that a bilingual can be classified along a continuum, i.e., more like a time-dependent function where the extent is not important but basics are.

TYPES OF BILINGUALISM

I would like to make an assumption here, for the next course of the study, I would refer to the first language as L1 and the second language as L2. Now to consider the length of time that passes in learning L1 followed by L2, we arrive at two types of Bilingualism, i.e., Simultaneous Bilingualism and Sequential Bilingualism.

The former refers to the acquisition of two languages at the same time. Typically, both languages are introduced to the individual before the age of three. So, a Simultaneous Bilingual is defined as somebody who acquires the two languages as their first language. These are individuals who, given some time and with proper guidance show the prospect to follow the narrow definition of Bilingualism. Schools and the region i.e., the residence and citizenship in a country whose native language is not English play an important role in the implementation of this type. Sequential bilingualism, on the other hand, refers to L2 being introduced after age three at which time some level of proficiency has already been established in L1. Now, this is also referred to as Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Again, this could be arguably an optimized form of introducing the language which I too would prefer as I am a product of that system.

Interestingly an Indian like me is introduced to both the forms and only the guardian chooses which form to pursue, obviously through schools.

Now, Simultaneous Bilingualism may feel exhaustive in the beginning and the responses of that individual to the approach are of paramount importance but once that initial period of adjustment subsides, the individual is more likely to attain perfect native mastery over both L1 and L2, trending more towards the narrow definition. However, a safer and more stable initiation would be sequential bilingualism as, it may so happen simultaneous bilingualism feels very much of a load to that individual whose age is less than three, thus creating a dangerous void in learning which may be a cause of problems later.

Sequential bilingualism also creates a positive cognitive response in the individual feeling which, their approach in learning L2 post L1 seems more structured.

KEY DIMENSIONS TO DISTINGUISH BILINGUAL

- Age of Acquisition of L2
- Circumstances leading to Bilingualism
- Description of Functional Ability in L2
- Description of the relationship between L1 and L2
- Description of the context of Acquisitions and its effects on bilinguals two language systems
- Description of Stages in the Lives of Bilinguals

Age of Acquisition of L2

Based on this parameter, a bilingual can be assigned two levels, an Early Bilingual and a Late Bilingual.

An Early Bilingual is someone who acquired L2 in infancy or early childhood and a late bilingual is

the one who acquired L2 in adolescence or adulthood. Early bilinguals are very much common in countries where the native tongue is not English. In countries like India, the bilinguals are mainly English and Hindi-speaking individuals who are introduced to L2 in most cases as early bilinguals. Now 26% of the Indian population is bilingual, which is approximately 314.9 million. However, in America, the number is a mere 20 % of the total population, which is approximately 66 million, where most of them are late bilinguals. Thus, the difference between early and late bilinguals is a very regional understanding.

Circumstances leading to Bilingualism

This leads us to the factor of former education received in each language, based on which bilinguals are assigned to two levels, an Elite /Academic/Elective Bilingual and a Natural/Folk/Circumstantial Bilingual.

Elite Bilinguals are defined as the one who chooses to become a bilingual, i.e., chooses to study an L2 out of sheer interest or for professional reasons or academic reasons. This is generally characterized by men and women who give value to the language learned. This generally isn't backed up by reasons like peer pressure or social reasons and is fundamentally voluntary. The circumstantial parameters, in this case, could be just seeking, that's it. These men or women, in most cases, satisfy the narrow definition of Bilingualism. They generally and gradually master the language and develop strong fundamentals of it.

A Natural Bilingual is forced by circumstances to become bilingual and is usually a part of a group of individuals who become bilinguals. These are people who grow up in communities where several languages are spoken and the second language acquisition could be imposed upon the individual due to several factor stitches such as needing to speak the language to learn at school, to talk to a friend maybe. However, it must be noted that this imposition of language learning may affect the person's attitude towards learning in a pessimistic sense.

Let's take an example to get a proper idea. I live in India, where there are 22 official languages. So, if

a person leaves their state, there is a greater probability that he/she may have to face a linguistic barrier in the other states due to vast to narrow differences of language and dialect. Thus, that person faces trouble to even locomote or find places due to this barrier of the tongue. This forces him to learn this language unconditionally. In the process, he may fall in love with the language which is statistically less probable, or he may leave the state out of frustration and exasperation of not being able to belong there. Now, this is under the assumption that that person is not having people from his state with who he has an acquaintance. That person may also resent the language followed by the culture and people associated with it.

The characteristics of Natural Bilinguals which we just discussed are reflected in the following definition of English Language Learners or ELLs, a universally accepted term that is commonly used in k through 12 settings that refers to language minority students in the USA who would learn English as a majority language for social integration and educational purposes. This definition also projects that ELLs are considered to be Natural/Folk/Circumstantial Bilinguals because they are learning English not by their own volition but as the definition suggests for social integration and definition purposes.

Description of Functional Ability in L2

When comparing bilinguals based on their functional ability or degree of proficiency in L2, a bilingual can be assigned one of three labels:

Receptive Bilingual – Can comprehend L2 when it is spoken or written,

Incipient Bilingual – One who is beginning to acquire L2 as a language form

Productive Bilingual – One who can speak and/or write the L2

Generally, in nations where there is a vast diversity of linguistics, particularly like in all Indian states, being a Receptive Bilingual in the language of the state is a must. This again leads us to the fact of being a Circumstantial Bilingual but restricts us to the mode of reception but surely not as an incipient. Let's say that the same person in the above discussion feels to reside in the state and gets a

family. The infant born would first be an Incipient Bilingual. However, it is obvious to note that every person should strive to be a Productive Bilingual at every cost.

Description of the relationship between L1 and L2

When comparing people based on the description and their relationship between L1 and L2, a bilingual can be assigned two labels:

Ambilingual – An individual with native competency in two languages or two native speakers in one.

Equilingual /Balanced Bilingual - The one who has proficiency in both languages.

However, Equilingual individuals may or may not use their L2 in native proficiency. So, similar terms don't mean a complete mastery of both rather the definition stands on the imperfection of languages but within a certain rounding term.

Description of the context of Acquisitions and its effects on bilinguals and two language systems

This heavily relies on the circumstances under which these two languages are used and the pattern of the use of two languages and the surrounding community, a bilingual can be assigned one of two labels:

Co-ordinate Bilingual - This refers to the individual who has acquired languages in a different cultural context and whose language systems for each language are separate. The individual learns the language separately or in separate environments, and maintains this separation after mastering both languages. This has a very common example where a student learns his native language at home and speaks a different language in school that he learns over there. The use of languages is completely circumstantial and environment-dependent, the memory of the language distinctively relies on time and place and they remain discrete in the mind of a student. However, there is a chance that they amalgamate with each other as the time frame changes from childhood to finally an adult and the barrier is slowly broken. The converse would be that this individual continues to maintain the barrier which is highly exceptional and requires immense control over one's mind to practice that for a lifetime.

Compound Bilingual - This is where the individual acquires languages in the same context and whose language systems are merged to some degree. In this type, there is no such dividing line as there is in co-ordinate bilingualism. The individual learns the languages in the same environment in context and the languages are often used concurrently or even interchangeably. This generally happens when a child is raised by bilingual parents and both languages are used at home. In the child's mind, the languages are not separate and can be switched between at will, even while speaking.

In India, in urban cultures of any state, kids are generally raised by bilingual parents. Thus, in an urban school, there could be a probability of finding bilingual kids studying in it. However, we could see the difference in rural India, as coordinate bilinguals are very much into existence owing to the poor literacy rate. In the census 2011, the literacy rate of rural India was 67.77 % and that of urban was 84.11. This disparity creates a distinction between the coordinate bilinguals and the urban bilinguals which existed in the country.

Description of Stages in the Lives of Bilinguals

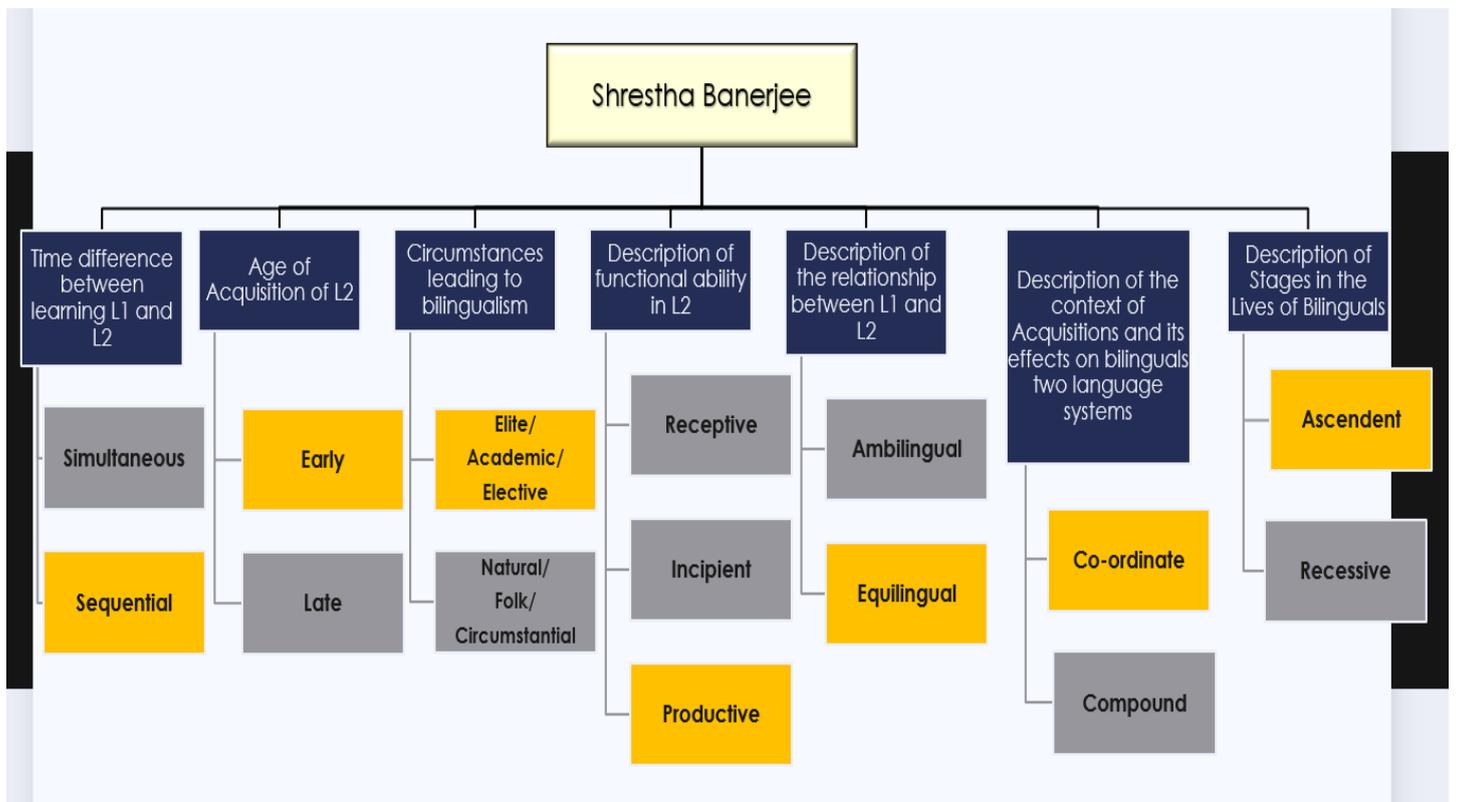
The stages of life of the person with relation to the language learning in use. Here, the bilingual can be assigned one of two levels:

Ascendant Bilingual : This is assigned to a type of individuals whose functional ability in L2 is growing.

Recessive Bilingual : Individuals whose functional ability in L2 is decreasing. This means that the individual is not using the language or simply put, practicing it in any form. This may result in the loss of the language. This generally happens when in the incipient or recipient stage of bilinguals where the requirement or circumstances involving the use of that L2 may diminish along with the interest to learn the language, finally resulting in erasing the language from memory.

My linguistic Analysis over Me

Now, here I have applied the terms I have just discussed over myself as I am a bilingual individual having Bengali and English as my L1 and L2. I have gone ahead and assigned correct labels to each one of the key dimensions of the terms we have discussed.



1. I would consider myself a Sequential Bilingual as opposed to a simultaneous bilingual as I learned Bengali first and spoke Bengali until age 3 when I started my kindergarten where I was introduced to English. Because I had an established proficiency in my primary language before learning my L2, I would be defined as sequential bilingual.
2. In terms of how old I was when I was first introduced to my L2, i.e., English, I would be considered an early bilingual as opposed to late bilingual as I acquired my L2 in early childhood rather than in adolescence or adulthood.
3. In terms of the circumstances leading to bilingualism, I would be considered an Elite/Academic/Elective Bilingual as opposed to Natural/Folk/Circumstantial because I chose to take English as my L2 in my kindergarten.
4. In terms of my functional ability in L2, I would be considered a Productive Bilingual as I can read and write in English. Ironically enough I am writing this article in English which is a testimonial enough to my functional ability on the language.
5. In terms of my relationship between English and Bengali, I would be considered an Equilingual rather than an Ambilingual as I am proficient in both languages but not competent enough in English to equate with my proficiency in my native tongue i.e., Bengali.
6. In terms of the context in which I acquired and use each language, I would be considered a Coordinate Bilingual rather than a Compound Bilingual because I acquired Bengali in my home and social environments and acquired English in my academic environment and I continue to use each language in those same contexts for the majority of the time.
7. In terms of the stage of life I am in terms of my language learning, it is surely Ascendant as I have not stopped practicing my L2 which I am using to write even now.

Now I would like to highlight the process, rather the most optimized procedure of acquiring L2 into the human mind. We arrive at the five stages of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). If we talk about the LAD (Language Acquisition Device) as introduced by Noam Chomsky, it is inherent to human

nature to learn a language. I would now elaborate on the stages of acquiring L2 irrespective of age, circumstance, and other parameters. We can also call this a general theory of language acquisition.

STAGES of LSA

1. Preproduction /Silent or Receptive Period
2. Early Production
3. Speech Emergence
4. Intermediate Fluency
5. Advanced or Continued Language Development

Preproduction /Silent or Receptive Period

This period spans from 0-6 months and the new learner develops a vocabulary of approximately 500 words. The learner has nominal oral skills in the second language and a cognitive approach to the language is not yet developed. They may respond to somebody speaking the second language in a non-verbal way such as pointing, gesturing, nodding, or drawing or through any other nonverbal communicative methods. This among researchers is a debatable phase as some argue that this phase is silent as the name suggests, others suggest that since language learning is a dynamic exercise, so maybe they practice whatever they learn resulting in a non-silent phase.

Early Production

This phase lasts for 6 months to a year and a new language learner develops a vocabulary of approximately 1000 words. During this time the learner will have a greater understanding while listening to the L2 and can produce words, phrases, or simple sentences though not essentially grammatically correct.

Speech Emergence

The third stage is speech emergence which is sometimes described as survival English, its duration is 1-3 yrs. and the new language learner develops a vocabulary of about 3000 words. During this time the individual gains a greater comprehension of the second language gains some reading and writing skills in the second language but still makes grammatical and pronunciation errors.

Intermediate Fluency

This duration lasts for 3-5 years and the vocabulary of the learner is approximately developed to 6000 words. The learner now starts expressing his/her feelings and starts to think in this language. He /She demonstrates increased levels of correctness in grammar, phrases, and punctuation while reading, writing, or speaking.

Advanced or Continued Language Development

This duration lasts for five to seven years and an individual develops a content area vocabulary or a vocabulary that consists of nearly all the words needed in the content area in which they use the L2. They begin using varied grammatical structures and vocabulary to express their views. By now the individual has mastered all of the complexity and nuances of the second language.

Our approach should be at maintaining these stages of language learning while administering the growth of L2 and not letting go of any stage and render the individual as a recessive bilingual. Furthermore, as we were under the impression that these stages are crucial to the language learning curve. It is also suggestive of the fact that SLA is not as trivial as it looks. An individual has to go through certain mental states and circumstantial obstacles to elaborately understand the subjective nature of acquiring a language.

INTERFERENCE/TRANSFER

It is just how our brain works in finding patterns in the system. Similarity and Symmetry are what govern our world. Language is no exception. A learner who has already learned the L1 to some extent starts finding similarities and known patterns in L2 and ends up transferring them due to a lack of linguistic knowledge of L2. These may include syntactic structures, grammatical methods,

word meanings, and even pragmatic performances like the non-verbal communication patterns from the dominant language to L2. Here I am quite sceptical over the extent of this transfer as it is extensively randomized over the age group. For an instance, the Bengali tones of sadness and humour are not so easily reflected over English thus rendering the whole idea of Language acquisition a partial failure. Keeping in the thread with the argument, ease of transfer from the L1 to L2 is optimized by the greater similarities in the language. If the dominant Language has fewer similarities, then the memory of L2 doesn't get to find a lot of symmetry thus it takes time to process the new data and store it in the memory. This process of language transfer is essentially the method by which mastering a third language with more similarities to L1 and L2 is easier as compared to L3. So, in a nutshell, the introduction of L1 may act as a promoter or an inhibitor for L2 based on the transfer symmetries from L1 to L2. Positive Transfer (facilitation) takes place when the structures of two languages completely align well with each other. Negative transfer (Inhibition) takes place when the structures of the languages are dissimilar which leads to systematic errors in learning of L2.

SILENT PERIOD

This was explored by us before, silent periods are when a child is first exposed to a new language, a significant time is spent by them just by observing others speaking the language. A similar condition arises when adults visit some foreign countries or states where they fail to comprehend the language and stare at people speaking to them. Interestingly enough, a child takes a much longer silent period to grasp and comprehend the new language.

CODESWITCHING

Codeswitching is a very common phenomenon for adults and children alike occurring in the process of learning L1 and L2. This is characterized by switching languages over phrases or sentences which

is essentially the substitution of words in L2 from L1. In the world of semantics, codeswitching is one of the most obvious types of forwarding cue transfer or the application of knowledge from one's native language in the acquisition of the L2. Normal adults codeswitch often to break the monotony of the sentence, also to emphasize what they are saying. Codeswitching in the write method has the potential to make a conversation, a presentation, or simply any form of verbal or written communication interesting and engaging. Children, on the other hand, codeswitch when they fail to express the same idea through the former language. Thus, for adults, codeswitching is an ornamental luxury, for children, it is a method of expression of thought.

LANGUAGE LOSS

Subtractive Bilingualism or language loss occurs when an individual learns L2, he/she loses skills and fluency in L1 if the L1 is not reinforced or maintained through study and practice. This can be detrimental both in the cognitive and linguistic sense in a child's learning and to his/her family's lives. This is true if the child's parent speaks only the native language and none of the second language as the child's and parent's ability to communicate with each other decreases dramatically.

In India, this happens under exceptional circumstances, where the child studies L2 as English maybe, but his L1 skills in say Bengali is not reinforced by the guardian. Now in a volatile memory of a child, newer memory chunks replace the older memory of L1. This subtraction of L1 by L2 from the volatile memory of a child is a great problem as it may result in serious communication problems when the child reaches adolescence or before.

Reciprocally, additive Bilingualism occurs when a child learns L2, and his skills and fluency in L1 are maintained and reinforced through practice and rigor. Additive Bilingualism is the ideal language

ability for children to attain and all guardians should be aware of this as this is very important for the welfare and mental health of their child.

Now, we are at the climax of discussing bilingualism and using each instance to express our country, India's approach to it. The known trends of practices in Indian households when implementing the stages of learning L2 and how the based on the various parameters, we categorize a group of individuals into the known types of bilinguals. This bears great importance as while analysing linguistic data, these divisions help increase the efficiency of the data. Now we end our discussion of bilingualism and begin with multilingualism.

MULTILINGUALISM

Multilingual is defined as someone who speaks more than two languages, it is more commonly used to refer to a person who speaks more than four languages or more.

Multilingualism is a product of environment, early childhood exposure, and informal language acquisition. Interestingly, multilingualism is borne out of the learner's interest in most cases. Multilingualism is also a question of fate, birth, and parental choice. In countries like India, multilingualism exists when a child is raised by parents of different states, or safely enough having different native languages. Here, L1 is the mother tongue. L2 and L3 could be English or the native tongue of the father. The child raised doesn't have a choice in this course as to engage in verbal communication, both languages are a necessity.

POLYGLOT

A multilingual person knowing and having a high degree of proficiency in five or more languages.

These men are generally known to have a growing obsession about the language learning and are expected to reach be an elitist in it.

For an instance, translators across any state have this skill. Also, for these individuals, language learning isn't to make a conversation, it is an employable skill and must be used as one.

MONOLINGUALISM

Monolingualism is usually observed in English-speaking countries due to the perception that learning a second language is of little importance as the majority of the world already speaks English as the first or second language.

Bilingualism is the most prevalently observed language ability in the world and is more noticeable in the Hispanic community in the US, French-speaking countries in Africa, and the migrants who migrate from different countries to the US.

Trilingualism is prevalent in Hong Kong (Mandarin, Cantonese, English), also in India (Hindi, (native e.g., Bengali, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu), English), and more. Especially countries bore out of a lot of foreign influence or having vast, diversified cultures and dialect belong to this category.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TOWARDS A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY

There are several contributing factors towards a multilingual society, they mainly are :

Foreign Influence – Any foreign influence in society might give rise to hindrances in communication, thus multilingual dialect seems the way out of this barrier in communication. Also, living in a country that has a deep influence on other cultures might lead to the inhabitants to being multilingual.

Diversity in the vocabulary of native Language – It may so happen, the vocabulary of the native language is heavily backed up by the structure of other languages. Moroccan language is of that form. It has a heavy influence on Arabic, French and Spanish words, thus giving rise to a mixed dialect.

Different Language demands based on setting – This is highly circumstantial. This is the generalization of compound bilingualism were simply the no. of communities increases. For an instance, an individual speaks one language at home, other at school, another with friends, maybe a different one at work, and so forth. The diversity in linguistic workspaces generally.

Open borders to nations with different Languages - Having a porous linguistic boundary in nations, gives rise to more communal diversity which in turn gives rise to a multilingual society.

CONCLUSION

Lastly, I would like to conclude that language learning plays one of the most crucial roles in one's life and we must follow an optimized curriculum to ascend growth also beware of the fact that we aren't practicing subtractive bilingualism. This is especially important for the kids as they do not develop a sense of judgment and just follow their teacher and parents. parental guidance is primary to any language learning and the parent must ensure safe and healthy linguistic mental health for their kids. A kid may take more time to develop speech, a parent or a teacher must be patient enough and bear with the child. Maybe after developing an IQ towards the L1, the kid may simulate a positive transfer mechanism in grasping L2, which essentially is the most optimized form of Second Language Acquisition.

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