Bilingualism and diglossia

In common parlance, countries are often referred to as being *bilingual* or *multilingual* when two or more languages are used for various purposes, including social communication and a range of more official domains. Thus, all three groups in the Appel & Muysken (1987) typology decribed above would be considered to be "bilingual".

However, although most countries make use of two or more languages in everyday life (as we have already seen), yet, not all people can claim to be linguistically *proficient* in more than one. Nevertheless, outside academic circles, countries are often erroneously referred to as being "bilingual" either by virtue of having *populations* where one group is bilingual and the other monolingual (Group 3), or where two languages co-exist and different groups use different languages, each one being monolingual (Group 1). Within academic circles, however, "bilingual" is a term which applies to the linguistic proficiency of *individuals*. Theoretically, therefore, a "bilingual" country would imply a country where the vast majority of its residents would be reasonably proficient in the use of two languages and could communicate with others by using both interchangeably. As one can see, according to the typology offered by Appel & Muysken (1987), this would only apply to a linguistic society conforming to the definition of Group 2. Linguistic societies in Groups 1 and 3 could not, consequently, be called *bilingual*. It is, therefore, important that we make a fundamental distinction by adopting different terminology for these groups. The correct academic term used to describe societies or communities where *different* languages are adopted by *different* groups of people is 'diglossia', a Greek word which simply means two languages.

Diglossia, then, refers to situations where two languages co-exist *territorially*, but where *both* are not necessarily spoken by the population as a whole. Reflecting, as it were, the various aspects of the two main categories of the study of bilingualism mentioned earlier, namely bilingualism in the individual and bilingualism in society, Fishman (1972) maintains that bilingualism is an area of study for psychologists and linguists whereas diglossia is a study area for sociologists and sociolinguists.

The term "diglossia" was originally coined by Ferguson (1959) to describe two versions of the *same* language which he described as "high" (H) and "low" (L):

> Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialect of the language, which may include a standard or regional standard, there is a very divergent, highly codified, often grammatically more complex, super-posed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of literature, heir of an earlier period or another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written purposes, but is not used in any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.
> (Ferguson, 1959: 336)

High and Low languages according to Ferguson's (1959) definition are used for different purposes in different domains; "high" being used in formal situations and "low" in informal settings. We can refer, for example, to Creole (L) and French (H) in Haiti; Swiss German (L) and High German (H) in Switzerland; colloquial Arabic (L) and Classical Arabic (H) in Egypt. Edwards (1994) in **Reading 3** also provides an example by referring to two versions of the Greek language; *dhimotiki* and *katharévus*, that is, the everyday spoken language and a purer, classical variety.

However, Fishman (1972) later adopted the term "diglossia" to refer to situations in which two *different* languages co-existed in close proximity, the terms "High" and "Low" being applied to denote the *status* level being enjoyed by one over the other. We, therefore, currently apply this term to the co-existence of two *different* languages within a geographical area and where one has higher status and prestige than the other.

Adopting and distinguishing between the terms 'bilingualism' and 'diglossia', however, also enabled Fishman (1980) to create a further range of permutations in order to describe four linguistic contexts involving:

1. Diglossia and bilingualism
2. Diglossia without bilingualism
3. Bilingualism without diglossia
4. Neither bilingualism nor diglossia

In the book which accompanies this course, Baker (2011: 68-69) provides an illustration of each linguistic situation:

1. Diglossia and Bilingualism
    - Everyone can use both the High Language and the Low Language
    - The High Language is used for one set of functions or domains
    - The Low Language is used for a different set of functions or domains.

Paraguay provides an example where Spanish (H) is adopted for formal, official domains such as administration and business, and Guarani (L) is used for informal domains such as the home, family and social communication.

2. Diglossia without Bilingualism
    - Two languages co-exist within the same geographical area
    - One group will speak one language and the other group will speak a different language.
      An example is Switzerland where speakers of German, French, Italian and Romansche are, generally speaking, located in different areas.

In this context, Baker (1993) refers to any fluent speakers of more than one language as possibly "the exception rather than the rule."
Fishman (1980) argues that diglossia with and without bilingualism tends to be a relatively stable linguistic situation. However, modern society is susceptible to the influence of many factors which affect language vitality, including ease of travel and communication and increased social and vocational mobility which makes language *shift* more likely than language stability (see below).

3. Bilingualism without diglossia
    - Most people will be bilingual
    - Both languages are used for any set of purposes, functions or domains.

However, Fishman (1972, 1980) considers such communities to be linguistically unstable and that, in future, one of the two languages will become dominant and serve more purposes, the other decreasing in its range of functions and status. Edwards (1994) **(Reading 3)** compares this to Gresham's Law (see Language Shift below). Although Dorian (2006) disagrees with Edwards as being "too extreme" **(Reading 4)**, it is a view also emphasised by Dressler & Wodak-Leodolter (1977: 5) who perceive

such instability as having a progressive inevitability in that the ultimate death of a language has its early beginnings in *language choice:*

> ... Language death is intimately connected with the related topics of language shift and language choice in multilingual communities.

4. Neither Bilingualism nor Diglossia. This could be:
    - a monolingual society, possibly where a minority language group is not influenced (or refuses to be influenced) by the majority language of its neighbouring country, as has been shown, for example, in relation to tribes of the Amazon

    - a country possibly forced to rid itself of linguistic diversity e.g. Cuba and the Dominican Republic where the native languages have been exterminated. We can also refer to efforts made to eradicate languages in the wake of colonisation, (often with an altruistic intention of promoting social progress).

With regard to the last point, and as mentioned earlier, colonialism has historically contributed to the minoritisation and eventual death of many languages. In **Reading 5**, Khleif, (1980: 15) refers to the concept of "internal colonialism" (Blauner, 1969) with regard to Britain and the dominance of English which contributed to the dramatic reduction in the number of Welsh and Gaelic speakers following the political annexation of Wales and Scotland in 1536 and 1707 respectively. This later quickened the process of further assimilation with England, both on cultural and structural dimensions (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1977). With regard to the Welsh language, for example, the following quotation reflects the *deliberate* nature of this assimilative process historically:

> It must always be the desire of a government to render its dominions, as far as possible, homogeneous. Sooner or later, the difference between Welsh and English will probably be effaced …. an event which is socially and politically so desirable. (Matthew Arnold, quoted in A.R.Jones & G. Thomas, 1973: 127)

Skutnabb- Kangas (1977) (see Baker, 2011: 392-93) differentiates between *economic-structural* assimilation and *cultural* assimilation. Although linguistic minorities often accept this process on an economic-structural level for material and economic reasons, cultural assimilation is often resisted in order to defend and preserve national identity and ethnicity, with language being an essential component.

The socio-political process opposite to assimilation is autonomy. In discussing political aspects of ethnicity, Khleif (1980) differentiates between *integrationist* autonomy and *separatist* autonomy and, in doing so, succeeds in illustrating how linguistic groups can resist the process of *total* assimilation. Khleif (1980) argues that *integrationist*- autonomy is compatible with *cultural nationalism* which emphasises the importance of language, history and education, whilst *separatist*-autonomy demands independent political powers. In a hegemonic political relationship between an ethnic minority and a dominant power, one can, therefore, tolerate cultural nationalism within a context of integrationist-autonomy without affecting the all-important political equilibrium. As Khleif (1980:2) states:

> …cultural nationalism is but nationalism with its political face dormant- it is an accommodationist type.

Figure 3 shows how these political dimensions which involve language are diametrically opposite to each other:

Fig. 3

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Economic-Structural Assimilation	Cultural Assimilation
Integrationist Autonomy (Cultural Nationalism)	Separatist Autonomy (Political Nationalism)

We shall return to examine political issues related to bilingualism later on when we study the process of language shift. Students are advised to read Chapters 17 and 18 of Baker (2011) (2017) which discuss various aspects of this dimension.

A stated previously, the study of societal bilingualism is essentially the study of *language contact* which has an inevitable *dynamic* dimension. Languages are rarely stable and are continually susceptible to external political and micro-political pressures, reflecting in turn processes of social change and conflict. Baker (1993) expresses this in terms of the provision of bilingual education:

> …bilingual education, whatever form it takes, cannot be properly understood unless it is connected to basic philosophies and politics in society. The activity of a bilingual classroom, and decisions about how to teach minority language children, are not based purely on educational preferences. Bilingual education does not just reflect curriculum decisions. Rather, bilingual education is surrounded and underpinned by basic beliefs about minority languages, minority cultures, in-migrants, equality of opportunity, the rights of individuals and the rights of language minority groups, assimilation and integration, desegregation and discrimination, pluralism and multiculturalism. (Baker 1993:247)

According to Appel & Muysken (1987):

> If one thing can be learned from language-contact studies, it is how important the overall social context is. Sociolinguistics is not like chemistry, and when you put two languages together the same thing does not always happen. (Appel & Muysken, 1987: 5)

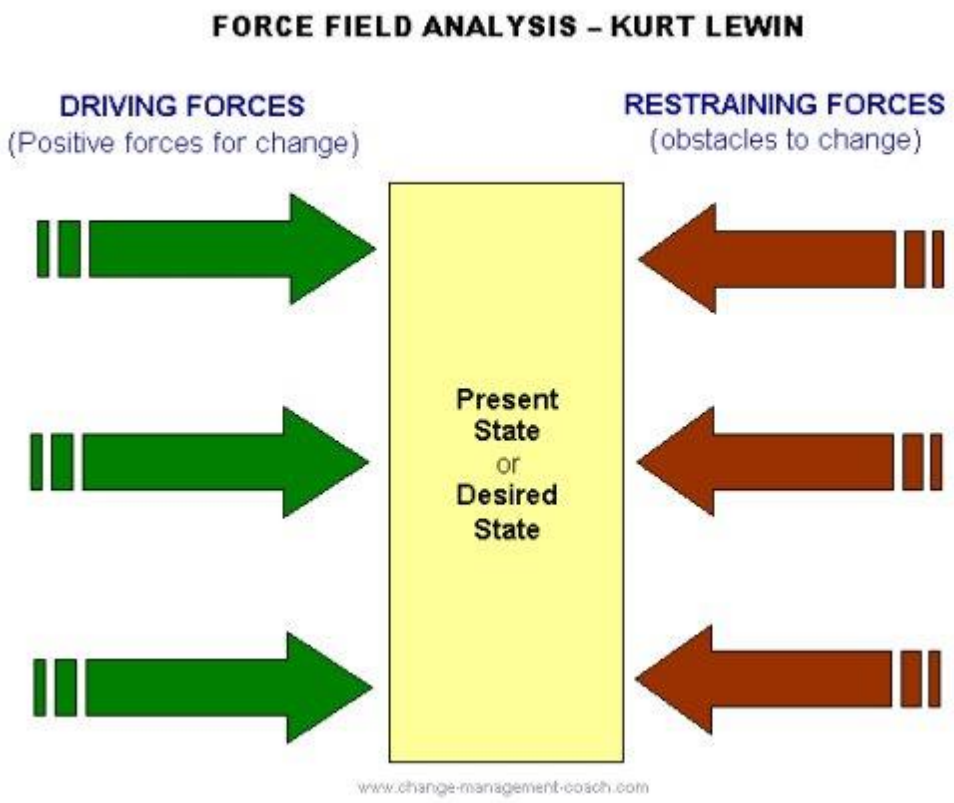
Being constantly susceptible to innumerable external forces including those of a political, economic and social nature and involving processes of *change* and/or *conflict*, Lewin's (1951) "force-field theory" is a very suitable model to illustrate the context in which most (and arguably all) languages exist. This model (Figure 4) can particularly be used to discuss the topic of language shift (see below).

Lewin's (1951) theory identifies two groups of environmental forces:

- *driving forces* which push in a given direction
- *restraining forces* which act by tending to decrease or resist the driving forces.

Driving forces initiate and promote change whereas restraining forces act as agents of a *status quo*. Lewin (1951) argues that, when these opposing forces are equal, a state of equilibrium exists. Obviously, with regard to language contact, political, economic and social issues as well as others (including religion in many cases) can act as both driving *and* restraining forces. In other words, both kinds of forces can involve a combination of different factors. Due to forces and pressures which can be *both internal and external*, languages are, therefore, rarely stable.

Figure 4



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Additive versus Subtractive Bilingualism

In relation to the various political, economic and social forces to which languages are susceptible and the societal contexts in which they exist, the terminology *additive* and *subtractive* is adopted. These terms are used in relation to both individual *and* societal bilingualism. Lambert (1974) first adopted the terms in the context of the former, 'additive' being used to refer to positive cognitive aspects of being bilingual, and 'subtractive' being applied to situations where bilingualism in the individual is perceived as having negative cognitive effects, as in the case of so-called *semilingualism*, for example, when both languages are underdeveloped (see module ECDA-7001).

However, these terms were later adopted by Landry, Allard & Théberge, (1991) and applied to *societal* contexts. In societal terms, therefore, 'additive' bilingualism refers to a context in which a language is highly valued and has status and vitality. 'Subtractive' bilingualism is where a language is undervalued and lacks status and prestige, often within a context of political hegemony.

As suggested previously, contact between languages can exist not only internationally but also *intra*-nationally (a term often depending, of course, on one's definition and political perception of a particular 'nation'). Either way, language contact almost inevitably leads to consequences of various kinds. In the previous module, for example, we discovered how this can result in one language borrowing from another, or in lexical and syntactical interference amongst speakers of either language. However, the political or micro-political dimensions which can impinge on the practice of bilingualism on a *societal* level can also involve issues of conflict and the inability of one language to retain its vitality.

Studying aspects of *linguistic vitality* leads us to other dimensions of societal bilingualism, such as language shift, language death, reversing language shift and language revitalisation. These sociolinguistic dimensions will, therefore, be examined in turn.