

Bilingual Development:

As in relation to describing levels of bilingual proficiency, terminology relating to bilingual *development* is sometimes used synonymously with more than one term being adopted for a certain aspect. However, two basic terms are widely acknowledged:

- Primary bilingualism
- Secondary bilingualism

Primary bilingualism means that dual competence is acquired at a relatively early age, whereas *secondary bilingualism* indicates that the second language has been acquired later, usually through some form of systematic instruction.

However, the two categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There could also be a *cultural* dimension to primary bilingualism.

Both terms are sometimes referred to alternatively as *circumstantial bilingualism* and *elective bilingualism* respectively, as by Skutnabb-Kangas (1981), and Adler (1977) refers to primary bilingualism as *ascribed bilingualism* and to secondary bilingualism as *achieved bilingualism*.

Baetens Beardsmore's (1986:28-29) further listing of terms may seem to reinforce the point made earlier about the possible confusion which can result from the profusion of terminology coined by various academics, emanating possibly from a desire to describe various situations more specifically, but whose professional autonomy can lead to inconsistency or duplication. Nevertheless, it will be seen that some distinguish bilingual development on the basis of *age of language acquisition*:

- Early bilingualism, meaning that both languages have been developed in the pre-adolescent stage and referred to by others as "infant bilingualism" (Haugen, 1956)
- Late bilingualism where the individual becomes proficient in an additional language after the age of approximately 11.

The element of socialisation is a fundamental difference between the two and the fact that early language acquisition is a crucial necessity for an individual to understand his environment and to be understood.

The terms *simultaneous* and *successive* are also adopted in relation to bilingual development. McLaughlin (1984), describes the first as a context in which a child is exposed to more than one language from the outset before the age of 3, (this usually being associated with the idea of 'one person/parent-one language' (OPOL) where each parent speaks a different language to the child) and successive bilingualism as applying to situations where the second language is added subsequently.

With relatively few exceptions, it is generally acknowledged that early bilingual acquisition has advantages over late bilingualism. Baetens Beardsmore (1986:32-35) tries to provide a balanced view of the debate surrounding both and the acquisition of another language.

It is also maintained that the following factors can affect the linguistic proficiency of individuals.

- age

- intelligence
- memory
- attitude
- motivation
- gender

Despite a common tendency perhaps to treat attitude and motivation as synonyms, it should be appreciated that the two can sometimes be very different. For example, having a dislike for a language (attitude) despite the need to acquire a level of proficiency in order to gain employment (motivation), or a liking unaccompanied by a desire to learn. This discussion, however, borders on the study of *language acquisition* which is a separate aspect of bilingualism.

Levels of Linguistic Competence

Various terms have been adopted in order to describe individuals who are accredited with having high levels of alleged 'equal' competence in two or more languages e.g. *balanced bilinguals* / *ambilinguals* / *equilinguals*, but, as previously suggested, there is confusion regarding which term should be used (Baetens Beardsmore, 1986).

We have already seen that the four basic language skills can be termed:

- Receptive (or Passive) Bilingualism (Listening and Reading)
- Productive (or Active) Bilingualism (Speaking and Writing).

The receptive and productive skills correlate and are two sides of the same coin in everyday usage. Unless one *deliberately* chooses not to exercise one's productive skills, however, the ability to use only receptive skills is normally seen as an indication of a lower level of linguistic proficiency. It is for this reason that the ability to exercise receptive skills only is referred to as *semibilingualism*. This, however, should not be confused with the term *semilingualism* or *double-semilingualism*.

Semilingualism

Semilingualism should not be confused with semibilingualism which Hockett (1958) coined to describe proficiency in *receptive* skills only.

Semilingualism is a term which was originally used to describe those who did not have competence in either language and which Hansegård (1975) defined as six linguistic weaknesses:

- size and breadth of vocabulary
- correctness
- automatism (unconscious language processing)
- neologization (language creation)
- emotive and cognitive control of language
- meanings and imagery

Rather than referring to the ability to use only receptive skills in a particular language therefore, semilingualism describes a state of *low proficiency in both languages* and an inability to use either 'competently'.

In 1927, Bloomfield described the bilingual language proficiency of a Red Indian tribesman as follows:

"White Thunder, a man around 40, speaks less English than Menomini, and that is a strong indictment, for his Menomini is atrocious. His vocabulary is small, his inflections are often barbarous, he constructs sentences of a few threadbare models. He may be said to speak no language tolerably." (Bloomfield, 1927: 437)

Semilingualism has since been seen as an issue with regard to minority-group speakers and compares with Hansegård's (1975) notion of *halvspråkighet* in relation to Finnish immigrant children living in Sweden whose limited Finnish-Swedish bilingualism is unfavourably compared with monoglot speakers of those languages in their respective countries. Baker (2017:10) however, refers to criticism of the use of the term and mentions five issues relating to a range of underlying factors, including those of a political and ideological nature. As Edwards (2006:10) states, the term semilingualism can, therefore, reflect deeper *sociolinguistic* aspects such as:

- majority and minority language groups
- domination and subordination
- oppression and victimisation

Baetens Beardsmore (1986:10-14) also discusses this linguistic phenomenon and its *political* connotations, pointing out that the debate in support of the notion is contradicted by the success of French-English bilingual immersion programmes in Canada, to which we can add the success of similar Welsh-English programmes in Wales. As a *linguistic* phenomenon, there have been later tendencies to dismiss the notion out of hand, as by Skutnabb-Kangas (1984: 248-49):

I do not consider semilingualism to be a linguistic or scientific concept at all. In my view it is a political concept.

and Martin-Jones (1989) who referred to it as "a half-baked theory of communicative competence."

Nevertheless, Baetens Beardsmore (1986:13) proposes that the term may have some "restricted usefulness" in describing individuals who, despite their inability to acquire a second language (L2) proficiency in a change of linguistic context, simultaneously lose command of their first language (L1) due to a lack of use in social contact; a situation which is compared with T'Sou's (1981) description of the Chinese SWONAL.

This discussion of semilingualism has lead us to consider language as a powerful and influential phenomenon in *political* terms, an issue which we shall study in greater depth in the next module (ECDA-7011: Societal Bilingualism).

People, groups, communities and even nations are often judged socially and educationally by their use of language. For example, one can consider the power of phonology or accent in the use of language and how one can be labelled

accordingly in social terms, even though it may not necessarily reflect the level of one's linguistic proficiency or intellectual ability. In terms of aspects such as political domination and subordination, therefore, language is an extremely powerful political tool.

BICS and CALP

In discussing levels of linguistic competence, Cummins (1984b) distinguished between what he referred to as:

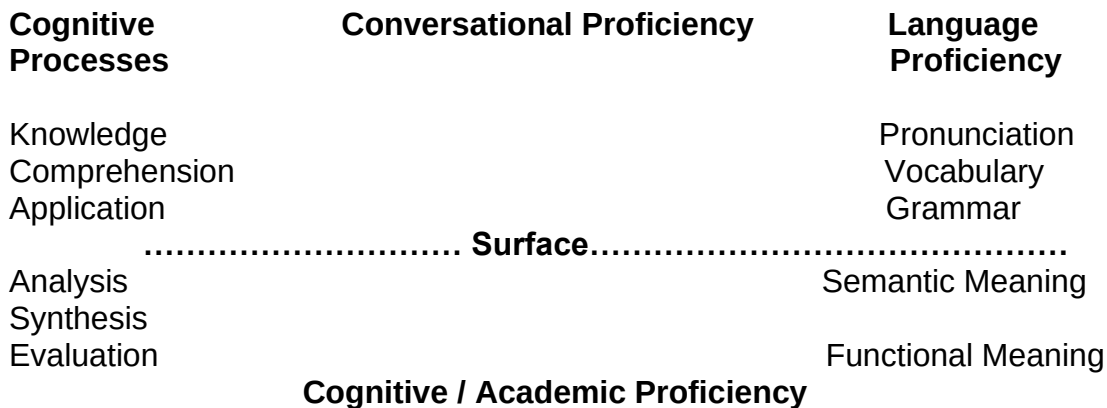
- Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and
- Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

These are terms which he later changed to Conversational Language Proficiency and Academic Language Proficiency respectively. This differentiation in levels of language competence may be said to relate also to what Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukomaa (1976) referred to earlier as:

- Surface fluency and
- Academically related aspects of language competence

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are those which are used at a more cognitively superficial level, as in ordinary everyday conversation, whereas Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency is required for situations such as academic study. Baker (2008: 175) illustrates the differences as in Figure 1:

Figure 1:



Cummins' (1984b) distinction between BICS and CALP therefore helps us to distinguish between conversational fluency and academic language competence. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are linguistic skills related to common "everyday" contexts which can be assessed on the basis of vocabulary and correct syntax etc. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills are those which are related to linguistic aspects in intelligence tests and involve the ability to analyse and synthesise information for example.

This distinction between levels of language proficiency has a particular relevance in the education of children. Based on their levels of apparent BICS fluency, children often appear to be sufficiently proficient to be educated through the medium of their second language. However, the blame for any *initial* inability,

weakness or failure shown by such individuals is often apportioned to bilingual education itself, seemingly reflecting a historical perception and allegation that it has a tendency to cause mental confusion. Such a situation is also reflected in the results of educational research. For example:

1. Minority-language students underachieving academically after being transferred to mainstream lessons despite appearing to be capable on the basis of perceived 'fluency' in their second language.
2. Some pupils in Canadian French-immersion education appearing to be behind their first-language contemporaries for a short while until their ability to deal with cognitively demanding issues allows them to catch up.

However, research in Canada, the USA and Europe shows that, where minority-language pupils are allowed to partly use their first language for their early education, no retardation is found in academic progress nor in the development of the majority language (L2). After developing cognitive skills in their first language, these are transferred to their second language also, thus reflecting the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 2000) (see Baker, 2017: 160) to which we shall refer again in module ECDA-7004: Cognitive Aspects of Bilingualism.

Baker (1993:138) gives an example of the difference between BICS and CALP which may explain the failure of some children from minority-language backgrounds within a majority-language education system when their linguistic skills at the level of CALP are not sufficiently developed to cope with the demands of the curriculum.

"You have 20 dollars. You have 6 dollars more than me. How many dollars do I have?"

At the CALP level, the child would correctly subtract. However, at the insufficiently developed BICS level, he/she might misinterpret the word 'more' by eliminating the word 'than' and then add-up, thus giving 26 as an incorrect answer. In relation to French immersion education, Hammerly (1989:29) states:

listeners to a second language interpret what they hear on the basis of the language or languages they know, eliminating what seems redundant, such as certain endings, little unstressed words like articles and prepositions and so forth, even though they are important in the second language.

As Baker (2011:172) states:

Cummins' (1984) distinction between BICS and CALP explains why such children tend to fail when mainstreamed. Their cognitive academic language proficiency is not developed enough to cope with the demands of the curriculum. What Cummins regards as essential in the bilingual education of children is that the 'common underlying proficiency' be well developed. That is, a child's language-cognitive abilities need to be sufficiently well developed to

cope with the curriculum processes of the classroom.

Baker (2017:164) draws attention to the fact that this concept of bilingual development has been criticised. Romaine (1995) argues that it is too simplistic and difficult to test empirically. However, with regard to the contention of Hamers & Blanc (2000:99) that it does not address the issue of *simultaneous* bilingualism, it may well be that it was not intended to do so and that the concept is primarily useful in describing the consecutive development of the L2 in what Chin & Wigglesworth (2007) (Reading 1) refer to as 'elective' bilingualism.

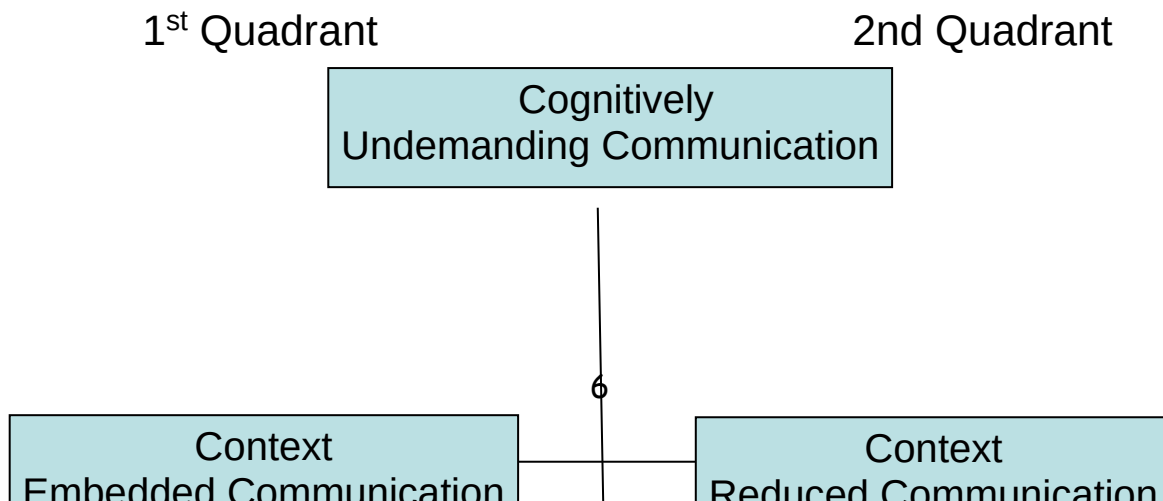
Cummins (2000) (included in Reading 1) shows that linked also to our understanding of language proficiency (as well as to aspects of teaching methodology) is the issue of whether or not a child's language competence is *context-embedded* or *context-reduced*.

Context-embedded proficiency is where communication and understanding are facilitated by contextual support, including the use of body language e.g. use of the hands, eyes, signs, inflection of the voice. In a classroom teaching situation this could also involve the use of audio-visual aids or artefacts.

Context-reduced proficiency, illustrating higher-order language skills, is where communication and understanding are not dependent on external or physical support or signals and where there is, for example, a need to analyse, synthesise, hypothesise and evaluate.

These dimensions, therefore, can be directly correlated to BICS and CALP (referred to in Figure B2.3.1 in Reading 1 and Figure 2 below as Cognitively Undemanding Communication and Cognitively Demanding Communication respectively) by placing each dimension on a continuum and on a different axis, thus creating four quadrants of language use:

- 1st Quadrant: Context-Embedded Cognitively Undemanding Communication
- 2nd Quadrant: Context-Reduced Cognitively Undemanding Communication
- 3rd Quadrant: Context-Embedded Cognitively Demanding Communication
- 4th Quadrant: Context-Reduced Cognitively Demanding Communication



3rd Quadrant

4th Quadrant

Figure 2 (Adapted from Cummins, 1981)

As Cummins (2000) states (Reading 1: 165):

While cognitive demands and contextual support are distinguished in the framework, it is not being suggested that these dimensions are independent of each other. In fact, as Frederickson and Cline (1990) point out, increasing contextual support will tend to lessen the cognitive demands- in other words, make tasks easier.

An attempt to place the four quadrants on one continuum would demonstrate the complexity of language development and proficiency *within* the two extreme points. Most would agree that the lowest level of proficiency would be demonstrated in the 1st Quadrant where the language would be cognitively undemanding (BICS) and where the communication process would be assisted by external support signals i.e. context-embedded.

Similarly, the 4th Quadrant would indicate high levels of proficiency with cognitively demanding language as well as the absence of any external support signals i.e. context-reduced. However, in terms of language development, *within* those two extreme points of the continuum, in which order would we place the 2nd and 3rd quadrants? The continuum would demonstrate, for example, that cognitively demanding language can be assisted by being context-embedded in the same way that cognitively undemanding language can also afford to be context-reduced on

occasions. In a very simple way, therefore, this demonstrates that language development does not necessarily happen in a *linear* fashion, and that there can be many variables at work in the process.

The above, obviously, relates to the development of an *individual* language. The simultaneous or consecutive development of a second language obviously demands further discussion. However, Cummins (1981) believes that second language (L2) competence in Quadrant 1 (surface fluency) can develop independently of the mother tongue (L1) surface fluency, whereas Quadrant 4 competence develops interdependently and can be promoted through the medium of one language or the other, or both interactively.

Reading 1 also makes reference to the ethnographic research carried out by Vincent (1996) in relation to second generation Salvadorean children in Washington who points to the deceptiveness of fluency at the level of only conversational proficiency (BICS). It also refers to an extract from Gibbons (1991:3) who, using the vernacular terminology 'playground language' and 'class room language', gives a clear concrete explanation of the difference in the use of the two levels of language within the school context.

As Gibbons (1995) (cited in Cummins, 2000) and Baker (2011: 175) show, the framework also has a particular relevance not only to the assessment of learning but also to the *methodology* adopted in teaching and the pedagogical process of '*scaffolding*' (Gibbons, 2002).

Cummins (1976) has also developed a theory of language development which is referred to as the *Threshold Theory* (see Baker, 2017: 159). This is a theoretical framework which couples proficiency levels with cognitive development and the possible advantages and disadvantages of different levels of bilingual competence in relation to academic success. Although this will be discussed in a later module (ECDA-7004) due to its relevance to cognitive aspects of bilingualism, it would also be useful to mention it briefly with regard to the present discussion.

The Threshold Theory incorporates the assessment of proficiency in both *absolute* and *relative* terms, that is, as an assessment of competence in each language in relation to monolingual speakers, and competence in both languages in relation to each other. Bilingual proficiency is referred to on three levels:

- limited bilingualism, where there is a lack of age-appropriate skills in *both* languages
- partial bilingualism, where there is age-appropriate linguistic development in *one* of the two
- proficient bilingualism, where there is age-appropriate proficiency in *both* languages

The main thrust of Cummins' (1976) theory is that limited bilingualism has negative cognitive effects in the classroom context, whereas proficient bilingualism leads to positive cognitive effects. Partial bilingualism, however, Cummins maintains has neutral consequences, that is, neither negative nor positive effects. Bialystok (2001), however, states that some research (Bialystok, 1988), (Cromdal, 1999) has also reported positive cognitive effects

for partial bilinguals and that Hakuta & Diaz (1985) show that the greatest cognitive benefit can come at an early stage of bilingualism when the gap between the two languages is greatest.

The above discussion illustrates the very fine line which exists in this field of study between the *measurement of levels* of bilingual proficiency on the one hand and *the cognitive effects of those levels* of proficiency on the other. As previously stated, whereas the study of the effects of bilingualism on cognition will be reserved for a later module, with regard to the parameter of the present module and in terms of measuring *levels* of proficiency, Cummins' (1979) theory (which he emphasizes is intended for application in the educational context only) is summarised in Reading 1 by Chin & Wigglesworth (2007:164):

Cummins argues that when children begin to attend a school system where the language of education is other than their first language, they will often develop conversational language proficiency relatively quickly. However, academic language proficiency takes much longer to acquire.