

ECDA-7004: Cognitive Aspects of Bilingualism

Foreword

This 30-credit module forms part of the MA Bilingualism and Multilingualism programme and introduces the student to cognitive aspects of bilingualism. As will be seen, the cognitive and intellectual aspects of being bilingual or multilingual have generated a range of conflicting viewpoints over the years engaging the attention of much academic debate as well as generating much uninformed prejudice. It is for this reason that attention will be given to both the historical and more recent research related to cognitive and metalinguistic aspects of bilingualism. However, although focusing mainly on this area, issues appertaining to the political, educational, economic and social implications of such research will also be examined.

Students are referred to various chapters of “Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism” (Baker, 2017) which accompanies this course, especially **Chapters 7 and 8**. You should always refer to these, either in order to find the information mentioned in this Guidance Handbook or to enhance, deepen and enrich your understanding of information already provided. However, as this module will also refer to what are alleged to be the political, educational, social and economic implications of more recent research, reference will also be made to **Chapters 17, 18 and 19** which can illustrate and elaborate upon some of these additional issues.

Also included in this Guidance Handbook for Module ECDA-7004: *Cognitive Aspects of Bilingualism* are readings legally photocopied for your convenience. These are:

Reading 1

Chin, N. B. & Wigglesworth, G., 2007. *Bilingualism: an advanced resource book*. London: Routledge

Reading 2

Nicoladis, E., (2008). Bilingualism and Language Cognitive Development. In J. Altarriba & R.R. Heredia (eds) *An Introduction to Bilingualism: Principles and Processes*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Reference is made to Baker (2017) and the Readings from time to time either in order to facilitate students’ *comprehension* of information already discussed or to provide *additional* information which is too detailed to be covered by the Guidance Handbook. However, for the convenience of students, the Guidance Handbook also *summarises* such

information on occasions to aid the learning process. Reference is also made very occasionally to Baker (2011) when information considered relevant has been omitted from the latest 2017 edition of the publication accompanying this programme.

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Assessment

Coursework: 100%

The module has two assignments (4,500 words each) which have an *equal weighting* of 50%.

The following are provided as exemplars:

Assignment 1 (50%)

Give a balanced account of the historical evidence for and against raising children bilingually, and to what extent do you consider the current evidence to be irrefutable?

Assignment 2 (50%)

What, if any, do you consider to be the educational, economic, social and political implications of the latest research into the cognitive and intellectual aspects of bilingualism and multilingualism?

Students will be provided with details at the start of the module. Although assignments can vary from one semester to another, the weighting and specified length of each will apply until any further notice.

Introduction

Bilingualism has been the subject of much controversy over the years, generating much debate about its possible cognitive and intellectual advantages and/or disadvantages and resulting in much uninformed criticism and blind prejudice. In view of such controversy, this module will aim to provide an account of prevalent public perceptions of bilingualism and bilinguals historically, reflecting early research and leading to what are more enlightened current attitudes based on more recent research. Such current research can, arguably, be said to have major political, educational, social and economic implications which often are not recognised, let alone addressed.

To highlight only one instance, the historical failure of the British educational system in the teaching of modern foreign languages (MFL) has been widely acknowledged both domestically and abroad. A report entitled *Language Matters* launched on 3 June, 2009 by the British Academy raised concerns that the future of the United Kingdom's world class research base might be threatened by the decline in modern language learning and called for a series of measures by universities and government bodies to address the danger. The Academy concluded that declining language skills were damaging the education system in a number of ways by:

- having a harmful impact on the ability of UK-born and UK-educated researchers to compete with their counterparts from overseas
- working against efforts to ensure that the UK is a world-class hub of research, which in turn is damaging to the UK's economy
- damaging the health of humanities and social science research
- affecting the UK's ability to address many of the most urgent global challenges.

On Wednesday, 9th February 2011, the British Academy launched a further report entitled *Language Matters More and More* making recommendations on how the higher education sector itself could increase language take-up at both school and university levels, whilst building the capacity of the UK's knowledge economy to meet national and international challenges.

It is ironic, of course, to see a report strongly supported by the UK government suddenly placing such an emphasis on foreign language teaching in schools and universities in the light of the UK's historical

imperialistic and negative attitude to multilingualism, particularly in the days of the British Empire and *linguistic colonialism*. Such a change reflects the fact that it was once “an empire on which the sun never set”, but no longer.

Whereas this module primarily addresses *cognitive* aspects of bilingualism, it will also endeavour to place research in this field of study in a wider *political* and *social* context. Such an approach reflects the inter-relatedness of the various components of this MA course and, in particular, this module with certain aspects of ECDA-7011: Societal Bilingualism.

In summary, therefore, it is suggested that while cognitive aspects of bilingualism can be studied in an academic vacuum, one must be aware that any historical attitudes and resultant prejudices relating to the adoption of other non-indigenous languages may be rooted (whether consciously or sub-consciously) in a *political* paradigm resulting in other dependent educational, social and economic variables. We shall firstly examine some historical aspects.