

Changing public attitudes and perceptions

Needless to say, changing public perceptions of other languages hinges once more on deep-seated political ideologies regarding *what kind of society* the linguistic fabric should reflect and is, essentially, about attitudes and behaviour towards other *cultures*. In Chapter 18 of Baker (2017), Bourhis (2001) suggests that such attitudes and behaviour can reflect a typology of four political ideologies which he places on a continuum. Arguably, these ideologies can be coupled with varying language *policies* or linguistic orientations such as those described by Wiley (2015) also outlined in Chapter 18:

- pluralist ideology, as reflected in *promotion-oriented* language policies (Wiley, 2015)
- civic ideology, which adopts *tolerance-oriented* language policies
- assimilation ideology, facilitated by *restricted-oriented* language policies
- ethnist ideology, as demonstrated in *repression-oriented* language policies.

Whereas Bourhis (2001) extends the typology to include an ethnist ideology, in most contexts, however, political ‘propriety’ as well as legal requirements (both national and international) usually determine that a more socially ‘acceptable’ ideology falls somewhere between pluralist and assimilation.

However, changing human *behaviour*, (causally related to *attitude* as we saw in module ECDA-7011) furthermore involves changing what people *believe*, which, ultimately, depends on the provision of sound, reliable and valid information or evidence. Chin & Benne (1976) provide a model of change strategy which, arguably, is relevant to any attempt at dispelling any negative, prejudicial attitudes and ideas regarding bilingualism and bilingual education and, conversely, to promoting a positive process of normalisation.

Chin & Benne (1976) describe three strategies for effecting change:

- *empirical-rational* strategies: based on the premise that human beings are rational people and will change on the basis of self-interest and in reaction to what appears to be advantageous to them;
- *normative-re-educative* strategies: based on the assumption that the behaviour of most people conforms to social norms and that change can be created by changing those norms;

- *power-coercive* strategies: based on the assumption that change can be effected by forcing those with less power to comply with the wishes of those who have more.

The difference between the first two strategies is not as clear-cut as one would imagine. However, whereas normative-re-educative strategies still involve a degree of rational thought on behalf of individuals, individual behaviour is also affected by group dynamics and social norms. French & Bell (1990) provide an analogous illustration of the differences between these three strategies:

“Suppose that the Salk polio vaccine has just been invented, tested, and cleared for public use and that you are in charge of disseminating it to the public. Your procedure would depend upon which strategy of changing you believed in. If you espoused the empirical-rational theory of changing, then you would assume that all rational self-interested people (and that is everyone, just about) would use the vaccine if only they had information and knowledge about its availability and efficacy. *Your program, therefore, would be to disseminate the knowledge and information.* As a consequence, everyone would take the vaccine, since it would be in his or her best interests.

On the other hand, if you held a normative-re-educative belief about changing, you would do additional things. While you would not disbelieve or disregard people's intelligence, rationality, and self interest, you would also believe that many behaviours are rooted in socio-cultural norms, values and beliefs that must be changed for them to accept and use the vaccine. Some of these beliefs might be that 'all new drugs are dangerous until they have been on the market for 10 years. My neighbour, Mrs Jones, isn't going to use the vaccine, and neither am I since she's always right about these things; well, no one in my family has ever had polio, so I'm not afraid of getting it and don't need to be vaccinated'.

Holding to the second strategy of changing, you would assume that norms and values had to be changed, in addition to making the information available to the public. You would mount both an education campaign about the new drug and a re-education campaign to change some norms and values.

If you held to a power-coercive strategy of changing, your task would be straightforward, you would pass a law stating that all persons must get vaccinated, and you would ensure and enforce compliance to the law. If you had the power to pass the law, and power to enforce the law, the people would take the vaccine.” (French and Bell, 1990: 85-6)

With the exception of power-coercive strategies which require the enforcement of legislation, for example, the other two, to varying degrees, are dependent on individuals' reaction to rational thought, the provision of knowledge or evidence acting as a catalyst and a reason for a change in behaviour. However, as previously mentioned, human nature tends to react more favourably to that which is of *self-interest* so that the information provided must be of *personal advantage* if a successful change in behaviour is to be achieved.

Due to the fact that the more recent research on bilingualism seems to provide rather irrefutable evidence of its cognitive benefits, the issue seems to be partly one of eradicating the diametrically opposed political dimensions of 'language as a right' and 'language as a problem' from the public's perception of bilingual education and to promote it as a resource. This involves presenting bilingual education as a *non-politically-oriented* means of transmitting knowledge and skills to children in the same way as the currently predominant monolingual method, but with an added value. The research-based evidence appears to be sufficiently strong and irrefutable for empirical-rational and normative re-educative strategies to be adopted for its promotion within education systems world-wide.

However, when discussing the cognitive benefits of being bilingual, one is, of course, reminded of the need to be realistic with regard to the amount of influence academic research can have on individual members of the public and the public generally. Such research, regrettably, often has a tendency to gather dust; at best, having been ignored by politicians and policy-makers for being politically too sensitive for consideration, let alone implementation; at worst, not having even reached the eyes and ears of those in authority and who have the power to 'make things happen'. However, even when the results of such research reach the light of day in the public domain and are given general publicity by the media for instance, its influence on members of the public as *individuals* and *groups* is often minimal. One only has to consider what influence research in the adverse effects of smoking (and over fifty years of constant publicity) has had on the general public world-wide.

Being realistic with regard to the tenuous interface between members of the public and the world of academic educational research therefore, it could be argued that much of the information on the cognitive benefits of being bilingual is unlikely to have any major effect. The comparison with world-wide anti-smoking campaigns, however, succeeds in highlighting one fundamental difference, namely, the element of *self-interest* which is

crucial in bringing about the required change in human behaviour. Giving up the smoking habit, of course, does involve self-interest in terms of *health* but not *pleasure*, hence the duality in public response to such campaigning generally. However, ensuring cognitive benefits by the provision of effective models of bilingual education which results in *balanced* proficiency does not involve such a duality or personal self-sacrifice, which is why politicians and policy-makers should respond more energetically to the recent research evidence available and act accordingly for the benefit of society as a whole.

However, adopting appropriate rational-empirical and normative-re-educative strategies requires more than providing strong research-based evidence which, it is argued, is already available. It also requires *the political will to act*. This is easier said than done quite often since it can spell potential career disaster for some politicians. Whereas speaking *against* the influx of racial minorities into the UK (particularly England) resulted in the loss of Enoch Powell's office in the Shadow Cabinet in the 1960s, speaking *for* multiculturalism can be equally politically damaging. It is for this reason that any changes within the system is usually (if not always) accomplished by tweaking rather than by radical 'surgery'. Baker (2011: 402-3) contrasts two approaches to achieving change which he refers to as '*functional or conflict* (Paulston, 1992); the balanced 'clockwork mechanism' of functional theory being designed to maintain political equilibrium whilst conflict theory encourages a more radical, interventionist approach. As Baker (2011: 403) states:

...within the conflict perspective, bilingual education should attempt to remedy... inequality and injustice by positive affirmative action. Bilingual education should be interventionist, even clashing with dominant viewpoints. *Bilingual education can serve to encourage social, economic and educational change and cultural pluralism.* (Italics added)

With regard to power of persuasion and the crucial need for any evidence underpinning a rational-empirical strategy to be totally convincing and compelling in its appeal to both politicians and parents, some of the benefits which are often mentioned in efforts to promote bilingual education may well lack sufficient clout. For example, one must question the extent to which the following, despite their undisputed validity, would be perceived as meaningful *self-interest reasons* by most parents, since they are based on cultural values and social circumstances which would neither appeal nor apply to all concerned:

- Twice the enjoyment of reading and writing; the ability to read in two languages opening a door to two literatures, thus providing individuals with a better understanding of different traditions, ideas and ways of thinking and behaving, (but meaningless to those who only read a daily tabloid);
- Access to two cultures; bilingualism opening the door to a wealth of other historical traditions, literature and music (but inapplicable to those who are not culturally-oriented);
- Communication with the whole family and the community, so that where two parents speak different languages the bilingual child will be able to communicate in both languages, thus enabling a close and special relationship to develop with each parent and a bridge to be built across generations, as with grandparents, (but dependent on a wide range of linguistic, social and circumstantial variables);
- Security in identity, the use of the mother tongue being for many an integral part of their national identity, symbolising more than a means of communication and, therefore, a connecting link with their roots and their heritage, (but inapplicable to those whose identity needs are satisfied and fulfilled by *symbolic* national trappings rather than language).

Evidence related to the steady growth of bilingual education in Wales, however, shows that many of these factors *do* play a significant part in parents' choice of a bilingual education for their children (Campbell & Packer, not dated), factors which broadly relate to *integrational motivation* as expounded by Gardner & Lambert (1972). Nevertheless, what Gardner & Lambert (1972) refer to as *instrumental motivation* also seems to be a significant driving force since there is also a widespread perception of Welsh-medium schools as establishments of high academic standards ensuring career success and social-mobility.

However, the wide ranging and complex reasons which exist within this integrational-instrumental motivation dichotomy are continually subject to a range of *unstable* external political, social and economic contextual factors which, as mentioned previously, can act as both driving-forces *and* restraining-forces (Lewin, 1951) *for* and *against* further growth. Despite their unquestionable validity for many, such factors ignore the more rational, research-based, cognition-related evidence available which, arguably, should have a 'self-interest' appeal to *all* parents if provided with adequate knowledge and information. As in the case of medical research which continually adds to the store of knowledge available to professionals in the treatment of various physical conditions,

rather than being a bone of contention and a source of heated debate on political dimensions, it would seem perfectly reasonable that anything which can be proved to be of *cognitive* benefit should be *systematically* incorporated in any educational provision and marketed as a beneficial resource.

Both education and medicine (as opposed to health) are, theoretically, domains which are the preserve of respective professionals; nevertheless, it seems that education can generate far more political fervour and debate than medicine, primarily due to the fact that in many countries education has increasingly become part of the *public* domain. Parental and public involvement in education in the United Kingdom, for example, has been increasingly reflected in legislation over past decades, illustrating a democratic right to contribute to educational debate. Such a process of *democratisation* has, possibly, diminished the public's perception of education as a highly specialised academic field, so that the validity and reliability of academic educational *research* also is consequently perceived as being 'open' to public opinion. Unlike medical research, therefore, which attracts immediate publicity, yet is respectfully perceived as being the esoteric property of a 'closed' medical profession, educational research often tends to enter a wider and more 'open', democratic and public arena and is, consequently, subject to uninformed prejudice and unresolved political debate. As previously described, research in bilingualism and bilingual education has historically been an area of particular controversy, and currently remains so.