

THE EFFECTS OF BEING BILINGUAL IN THE MODERN WORLD: STUDENTS PERSPECTIVES ON THE ISSUE

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Abstract: The fact that knowing different languages enhances greater independence and communication has had an impact on the individuals' level of awareness nowadays. The desire to travel the world, chat on-line, live and study abroad etc. has made mastering different languages more than mandatory in today's world. Therefore, the term "connecting bridges of cultures" is the representative term which describes this situation. What does bilingualism refer to? The term "bilingualism"(noun) is defined as "fluency in or use of two languages." The research poses the following questions: 1. "What are the pros and cons of being bilingual at an early age?" 2. "What is the role of different factors in learning a second language?" and 3. "What is the effect on the process of language acquisition?" It will also examine the different factors in bilingual language learning such as: L1 transfer and interference, sequential learning, learner necessity, experience, exposure, intelligence, culture etc. The study was conducted at IBU. Participants in the study were a total of 22 graduating students of the ELT department. Their assumptions and personal theories regarding the issue, their argumentative feedback together with former research in the field will provide insights and further implications in the field.

Keywords: bilingualism, competency, interference, exposure, communication, students' perspective etc.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, immense wide-spread of languages due to the use of technology and due to globalization have occurred. This is evident in all parts of the world, however, the Balkan region I would imply, is one of the most noticed. The most important factor in the region is that of the diverse cultures and languages and of course, the variety that exists. The relationship among the different nationalities, the traditions, and to some extent, the similarities among the different languages, has made possible a longer co-existence of bilingualism and even multilingualism in the region. In such circumstances, an individual can code-switch from one language into the other with little or no L1 interference. The case shows a bilingual atmosphere and language learning setting due to the motivation, necessity and due to frequent interaction with the other nationalities i.e. in order to understand and be understood. What is bilingualism? Bloomfield (1933) defined bilingualism as 'native-like control of two languages.' (1933, pg.56) Haugen (1953) suggests that bilingualism begins 'at the point where a speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language'. (1953 pg. 7) Regarding language and its modalities, Steinberg & Sciarini (2006) state: "because language in all its' complexity can be acquired through a variety of modalities (speech, writing and signs), an adequate concept of bilingual should allow for any of these realizations, thus, we may say that a person is bilingual if he or she knows: two languages in the same modality i.e. two speech-based languages, or two sign-based languages or two languages based on different modalities (sign American plus spoken German, and/or written Sanskrit and spoken French) (2006, pgs. 160-161) The issue brings us to think and consider the following questions of relevance:

1. Is it a good idea to become bilingual?
2. Will learning a second language affect ones' intelligence?
3. Should a young child learn a second language?

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Recent research poses the question: "*Is bilingualism beneficial or detrimental?*" and provides evidence of both. The relevance of the question would be defined under circumstances and of course, with individuals that belong to this category i.e. bilinguals. Therefore, participants in the case study provided feedback regarding different factors such as: necessity, exposure, interaction, intelligence, culture and motor skills and their influence in own experience.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research poses the following questions:

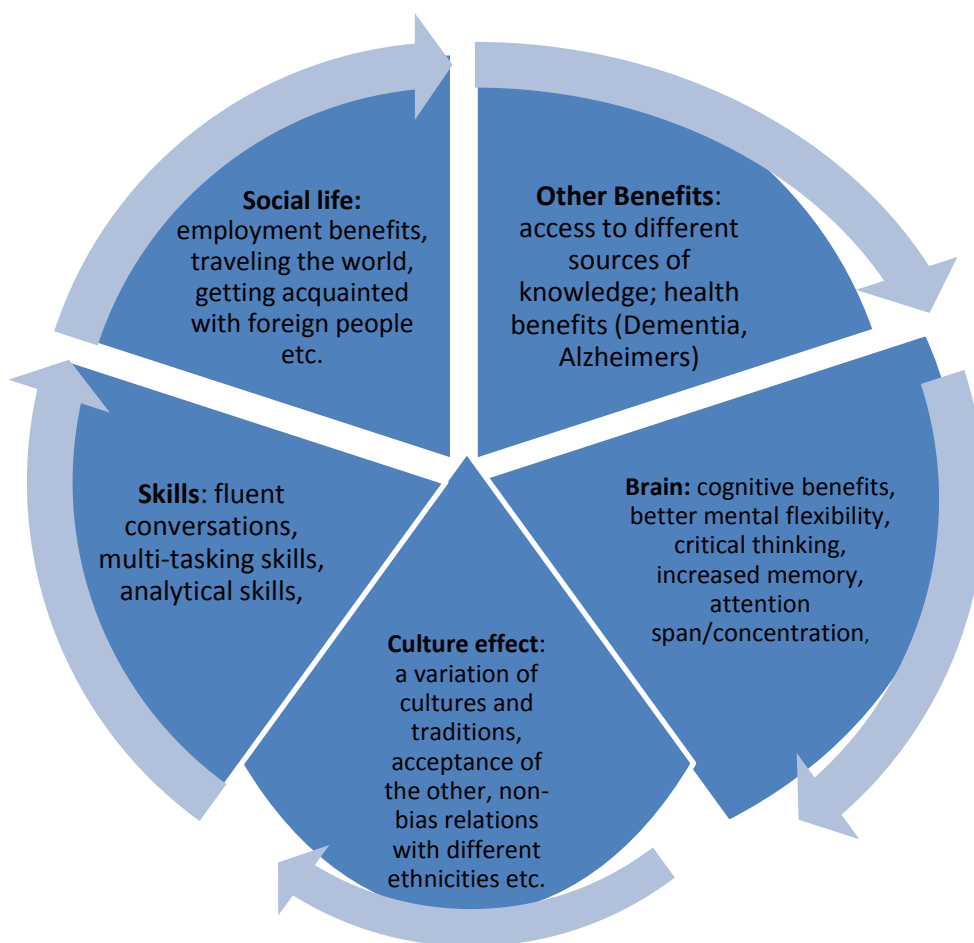
1. "What are the pros and cons of being bilingual at an early age?"

2. "What is the role of different factors in learning a second language?"
3. "What is the effect on the process of language acquisition?"

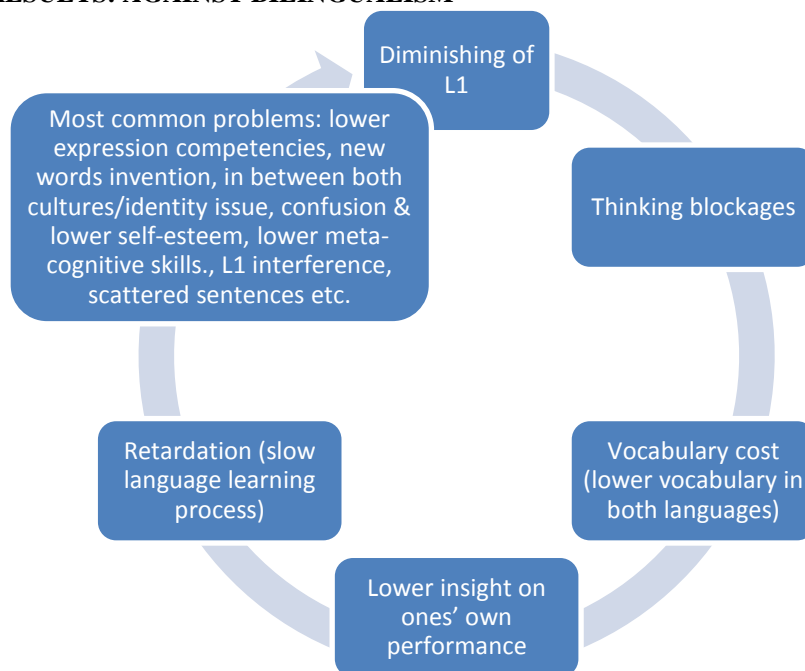
METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

The study was conducted at IBU. Participants in the study were a total of 22 graduating students of the ELT department. Students were divided into two groups: pro and against bilingualism. The first group had to defend their pro assumptions related to personal experience, while the second group were required to justify their negative assumptions. The categories were divided among the following: effects on the brain, cultural effects, effects on the skills, their social life, intelligence, language acquisition etc. i.e. positive and negative effects. Afterwards, students were required to write an essay on the influence of the different factors of learning a second language and the effect of bilingualism upon language acquisition.

OBTAINED RESULTS: PRO



OBTAINED RESULTS: AGAINST BILINGUALISM



STUDENT ESSAY RESPONSES SAMPLES

- How has being bilingual changed me?
- “Being bilingual has enhanced my academic, personal and social life in so many ways. Due to my upbringing in a multi-ethnic town, I developed a passion for learning about foreign languages and cultures.” (Gresa)
- “Languages have always played a very important role in my life. It goes way back to when I started “acquiring” German at the age of 2. It helped me meet new people, solving issues and feeling at home pretty much wherever I go” (Haris)
- “First and greatest change it made was self-confidence improvement. Regardless the mistakes during speech, I never feel ashamed nor do I struggle, because mistakes are the way of learning.. Secondly, my memory capacity has greatly improved. Thirdly, it literally pays off. My first pay check was earned thanks to the knowledge of foreign languages.” (Fahira)
- “I have learned English from a very early age- do not know if that counts as bilingual. However, my further education and my future has positively relied a whole lot on this language I learned from T.V. and the computer.” (Bobi)
- “From the experiences, I have had constant code-switching and a mixture of vocabulary and grammatical structures, I must admit it wasn’t easy. (Albanian, German, Serbian, English) However, benefits such as mental change, multi-tasking, memorization and cognitive processes are noticed.” (Agnesa)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS OBTAINED

- Regarding RQ1 "What are the pros and cons of being bilingual at an early age?" students responses proved that there were more pros than cons in learning two different languages at the same time. (they were previously mentioned)
- Regarding RQ2. "What is the role of different factors in learning a second language?" students responses implied that different factors such as motivation, necessity and experience all influence language learning.

- Regarding RQ3 “What is the effect on the process of language acquisition?” except for code-switching, retardation and L1 interference, students’ responses implied that cognitive benefits were present and of course greater mental flexibility.

OVERALL GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS

The class consists of bilinguals which agree that different factors such as: necessity, motivation and exposure have helped them gain language proficiency and have had a positive impact as well. The degree of necessity determines the overall achievement level, however, at an earlier age, children of course, have lower life demands or aims. Even so, language acquisition occurs more spontaneously than ever. Children’s curiosity prevails inner motivation in this case. Learners agree that they have generally had better results in their overall achievement due to knowing more than one language and that it has not prevented them from success.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The case study attempted to bring to light a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and bilingual (multi-lingual) classroom. All 22 students speak more than 1 language fluently and during their 4yrs of experience at IBU, have learned at least one additional language as well. They communicate and switch from one language to the other almost spontaneously, with little or no L1 interference. The more the variety, the better the understanding of the differences among them and the greater the acceptance. We concluded that the critical period hypothesis stands only for the native-like pronunciation, but that languages can be acquired perfectly even at an older age. The factor of motivation and necessity play a crucial role in language acquisition. We therefore highly recommend learning languages due to the many benefits that occur.

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