

# BILINGUALISM

# INTRODUCTION

## STRUCTURE

- Some definitions and theoretical background
- Case studies
- Concluding remarks
- Questions from the audience

# INTRODUCTION

## DEFINING BILINGUALISM

- Maximalist definition: “native-like control of two languages” (Bloomfield, cited in Romaine, 1995: 11)
- Minimalist definition: “when the speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language” (Haugen, cited in Romaine, 1995: 11)
- Someone who can function in both languages in conversational interaction (Wei, 2007: 14)
- Bilinguality: the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication (Hamers & Blanc, 2000: 25)

# INTRODUCTION

## SOME TERMINOLOGY

- Children are more successful at learning a second language than adults, due to maturational constraints.
- Critical Period Hypothesis: period which lasts until puberty, after which time language acquisition becomes more difficult due to a loss of plasticity of the brain and the specialisation of the left hemisphere for language functions (Romaine, 1995: 238)
- Language Attrition: Structural loss of a first language, meaning a “change or reduction in form”, rather than loss of use (Köpke, 2004)
- Code-Switching: The juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems (Gumperz, 1982: 59)

# CASE STUDY 1

## YASMIN: YEMENI ADENI ARABIC

- Yasmin identifies as bilingual: Arabic and English.
- Not a simultaneous bilingual, someone who was exposed to two languages at the onset of language acquisition, because she did not acquire both languages at the same time.
- She would only switch to Arabic in certain social contexts, e.g. if she was speaking to her family.
- Weinreich states that the bilingual speaker would code switch “according to appropriate changes in the speech situation” (Weinreich, 1968): for example when speaking in Arabic with her parents, she would use some English words.
- This also supports the findings from Johnson and Newports 1989 study, where they noted that generally the earlier the L2 is acquired (in this case Lb), the proficiency of that language increases, due to the increased plasticity of the brain.

# CASE STUDY 2

## FARZANA: MIRPURI

- Born in London – back and forth from Pakistan until the age of 15.
- Length of residence: 32 years.
- Learnt Mirpuri as a mother tongue – upon arrival back to the U.K. she learnt Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu due to surrounding community. Languages are mutually intelligible when speakers of different languages can understand each other (DeFrancis, 1984).
- Learnt to read/write Urdu - Mirpuri (oral - no written)
- Integrative reasons – characterised by a desire to learn more about the second language group and to meet people. Instrumental reasons – characterised by an anticipated usefulness in one's career (Ely, 1986).
- Code-switches between Urdu and Mirpuri at home. Code-switching is the alternation of two or more languages in discourse (Auer, 2013).
- Weekly: Mirpuri (L1) (60%), Urdu (15%), Punjabi (10%), Hindi (10%) and English (5%).
- Mirpuri is the L1 – the other languages were learnt in adulthood.

# CASE STUDY 3

## AHMED: URDU

- Identifies as a bilingual speaker of Urdu and English
- Simultaneously bilingual as he was exposed to both languages at the same time initially in the critical period during the onset of language acquisition
- Classifies English as L1/LA and Urdu as L2/LB as over time he has gained increased knowledge of English and utilises the language more, only code switching to Urdu when necessary
- Weinreich notes that bilinguals only code switch “according to appropriate changes in the speech situation” Ahmed does not adhere to this value
- Schumann 1986 “social and emotional factors cluster into acculturation”: Ahmed immersed himself in the English speaking community, at the same time wishing to distance himself from the Pakistani culture
- In support of Johnson and Newport’s study (1989) Ahmed supports the fact that the earlier L2 is acquired the more proficient one will be in the language. Although Ahmed does not exercise Urdu as much he is still fully proficient in reading, speaking and writing

# CASE STUDY 4

## JOEY: RÉUNIONESE CREOLE AND FRENCH

- Joey Prianon was born in Reunion Island in 1995.
- He's an early consecutive bilingual as he "acquired two languages early in childhood" (Li Wei, 2006 p.6)
- He acquired his L1 (Réunionese creole) at home and his L2 (French) through school.
- Joey considers himself as a bilingual as he can "fluently speak Creole and French".
- Between the ages of 11-14 he lived in France. French overtook Creole as it is the official language.
- When aspects of an L1 and L2 are similar, positive transfer takes place from the L1 to the L2 (Lado, 1957).
- Joey experiences positive transfer as his Creole influences his French with his pronunciation and vocabulary.
- Being bilingual has many advantages, but he finds it hard and confusing.
- He mixes up the languages and code-switches which Gumperz (1982) defines as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems".
- Joey alternates between the languages as the vocabulary and humour is difficult to translate. But he'll also intentionally change languages.

"Tu sais que mi gagne coze créol"  
'You know that I can speak Creole'

# CASE STUDY 5

## DIANA: ROMANIAN & GERMAN

- Age of arrival: 13, Length of Residence: 8 years
- Learnt English as a foreign language at school in Romania since age 7 and German since age 11 at school and university, spent one year in Germany at age 20
- Weekly, English is used 80% of the time, German 15% and Romanian 5%
- Romanian used with family, German used in certain university courses and with some friends.
- Although Romanian is the L1, English is used with more ease and proficiency (LA).
- Activation Threshold Hypothesis (Paradis, cited in Schmid, 2011: 16) : because Romanian is used much less than English, its activation threshold when trying to retrieve items is raised due to the lack of stimulation
- “Memories are more accessible when the language used at encoding matches the language used at retrieval” (Marian & Neisser, cited in Martinovic & Altarriba, 2014: 295)

# CASE STUDY 6

## SHAM'S MOTHER: BANGLA

- Age of Arrival: 30, Length of Residence: 25 years
- My mother: Bangla (L1) and English (L2).
- Basic understanding of English but was not completely proficient in speaking or writing, rather she would be able to understand English
- She prefers to remain in an intermediate bilingual mode (Grosjean, 2001) using Bangla more than English.
- She feels as though Bangla is part of her identity and thus does not feel comfortable when being unable to speak it.
- Although her length of residency could be considered a main predictor variable (Schumann, 1986), My mum has lived in London for over 20 years. This suggests that identity appears to be main variable which determined her lack of proficiency in English.

# CASE STUDY 7

## ALIREZA: FARSI

- A bilingual speaker of Farsi (L1/LA) and English (L2/LB)
- L1 and L2 acquired at different stages
- Has been in the U.K. since age 16. Prior to this had a minimal understanding, spoken and written ability of English
- Has been in this country for nearly 40 years however still not proficient in English
- Schumann 1986 “social and emotional factors cluster into acculturation”: he did not integrate himself in the target language group (English speakers, in this case)
- The lack of linguistic proficiency can be classified in the predictor variables
- Due to the lack of proficiency, code switching wont occur

# CONCLUDING REMARKS

- The interviewees that acquired their L2 early in childhood (namely Yasmin, Ahmed, Diana) reported being more proficient in their L2 than in their L1 (supporting evidence for Johnson & Newport 1989)
- Motivations of learning an L2 for most interviewees were both instrumental (better study/employment opportunities) as well as integrative (desire to be a part of another culture/community).
- Drawback: puts into question their personal identity, especially if attrition in their L1 starts to occur - because contact with the culture associated with their L1 might diminish (acculturation).

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THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR  
ATTENTION

QUESTIONS?