

***Dimensions of bilingual  
acquisition and  
attrition***

# How do we define Bilingualism?

- Bilingualism means having a “native-like control of two languages” (Bloomfield, 1933: 53)
- “Bilingualism begins when the speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language” (Haugen, 1953:7)
- “Bilingualism is the regular use of two (or more) languages, and bilinguals are those people who need and use two (or more) languages in their everyday lives” (Grosjean, 1992: 51)

However...

# Key Definitions

- **Code-switching:** ‘Code Switching- according to Gumperz (1982, 59), this refers to “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems.”
- **Borrowing:** ‘The incorporation of foreign features into a group's native language by speakers of that language: the native language is maintained but is changed by the addition of the incorporated features’. (Thomason and Kaufman 1988, p. 37)
- **Attrition:** ‘The non-pathological loss of a language in, usually, bilingual subjects’ (Köpke, 2004)
- **Simultaneous bilingualism:** McLaughlin (1978, as cited in Romaine, 1995, 181) suggests that it refers to the acquisition of more than one language up to age 3.
- **Sequential Bilingualism:** ‘When a person acquires one language before the other’. (Romaine, 1995, 181)
- **Early bilingual:** ‘Someone who has acquired two languages early in childhood’ (Li Wei 2006, p. 6)
- **Late bilingual:** ‘Someone who has become a bilingual after childhood’ (Li Wei 2006, p. 7)
- **Societal bilingualism:** ‘A bilingual community exists when at least two languages are commonly used by some members of the community’ (Appel & Muysken, 1987)
- **Incipient Bilingualism:** ‘Inability to produce complete meaningful utterances.’(Romaine, 1989: 11)

# How we asked our questions?

1. How many languages do you speak and what are they?
2. Which is your L1 and L2...?
3. In what contexts do you use each language and how much?
4. Did you learn your languages through formal or informal education?
5. How proficient are you in speaking, writing, reading and understanding?
6. Do you code-switch?
7. What effect if any can you see from your L1 to L2 or vice versa?
8. What type of bilingual do I as the researcher consider them to be, if one at all?

# The maximum – minimum continuum

- Minimalist definition: *‘a person that can use a single expression in a foreign language is a bilingual’*
- Maximalist definition  
*‘a person that uses elements deviant with respect to the norm in one of the languages is not a bilingual’*





# Participant 1 – Hugh



1. Speaks three languages: English, Italian and Spanish.
2. L1: English (Language of study) L2: Italian L3: Spanish.
3. My participant receives education in both L1 and L3 equally. L2 is only used in Italy but rarely used in England.
4. L1 was learnt by being the language of the home and school, L2 was learnt from friends and living in Italy and L3 Learnt through formal education.
5. Feels he is proficient in speaking, reading, writing and understanding English, feels advanced in L3 but not perfect. L2 can read and understand more than he can speak and write = Incipient
6. Code-switches with other bilingual Spanish-English speakers.
  - Weinreich, U. (1953)
7. Has found he has undergone attrition.
  - Spelling
  - False friends

# Participant 1 continued...

8. Do I think this participant is Bilingual?

**Late sequential**



# Participant 2 – Fabiha



1. Speaks three languages Bangla, English and Arabic
2. L1: Bangla L2: English L3: Arabic
3. Bangla is used informally at home with family (grandma, uncles, aunts), English is used informally at home (with parents, siblings, cousins) and formally in education and in public. Arabic is used at home with family, at work when tutoring children and when in an Arab country with locals.
4. Bangla was learnt at home, English was learnt formally at school and Arabic was learnt online at home and formally in education at school.
5. I am not as fluent and confident in Bangla as I may have been because I use English all the time, English has taken over in all aspects of language use (speaking, reading, writing, listening. **Loss of Bangla (L1) → Loss of identify of origin .**
6. I code switch sometimes between all three languages.
7. L2 affects L1.



# Participant 2 continued..

- 8. Do I think this participant is Bilingual?

**Early simultaneous**



# Participant 3- Chloe



1. Welsh and English
2. L1 Welsh and L2 English
3. Uses Welsh at home and with family, uses English in education and around English speakers
4. Learnt Welsh informally at home through family and later formally at school. Learnt English formally at school (infrequent use of English at home)
5. Fully proficient in reading, writing, speaking and understanding in both Welsh and English although prefers to read in English and write in Welsh
6. Code – switches in both speech and writing and also borrows words from English
7. First language has a little effect on second mainly through code-switching rather than attrition.

# Participant 3 continued...

- 8. Do I think this participant is Bilingual?

**Early sequential**



# Participant 4 - Gozde



1. Cypriot Turkish, English, French and German
2. L1=Cypriot Turkish, L2= English L3= French and L4= German
3. This participant uses their L1 as their community language, their L2 is spoken when in England, French and German is spoken in educational contexts.
4. L1 was learnt informally at home through family, L2 learnt formally at school and through friends, L3 and L4 were formally learnt in higher education.
5. Are very proficient in speaking, writing, reading and understanding in their L1 and L2. L3 and L4 suggests incipient bilingualism.
6. Yes, I found code-switching for my participant at home and during teaching
7. L2 affects the L1

# Participant 4 continued...

- 8. Do I think this participant is Bilingual?

**Early simultaneous**



# Participant 5 – David



1. Speaks three different languages Cantonese, English, Mandarin and Regional dialect Chiuchowese.
2. L1 is Cantonese, L2 is English and L3 is Mandarin and L3 Regional dialect Chiuchowese.
3. This participant uses their L1 as their community language, their L2 is spoken when in educational contexts in Hong Kong and UK.
4. L1 was learnt informally at home through family and at school from nursery to high school, L2 was learnt at school from nursery to university.
5. Are very proficient in speaking, writing, reading and understanding in his L1. Less proficient at speaking, reading and writing in L2.
6. **Home:** Cantonese  $\leftrightarrow$  Regional Dialect      **Study:** Cantonese  $\leftrightarrow$  English
7. Has not experienced language attrition.

# Participant 5 continued...

- 8. Do I think this participant is Bilingual?

**Early sequential**



# Participant 6 –Angelica



1. English and Italian

2. L1: Italian L2: English

3. Language Use: Speaks English (40%) and Italian (60%) with friends in the UK. Only Italian in Italy

4. Learned L2 through formal education at 11, advanced level at 19 through informal language use – living and speaking with English speakers.

5. Fully proficient in L1. In L2 Reading and writing proficiency level is marginally higher than speaking and understanding.

6. Syntactical eg: *comunque poi dimmi a good time to come* ‘anyway later tell me a good time to come’

Lexical: Use of words eg. ‘involved’ from L2, whereas in L1 a less concise string of words would be needed.

7. False friends

*Annoiarsi/Annoy*

*quindi eri molto annoiata?* – intended: ‘so you were very annoyed?’

Actual translation: ‘so you were very bored?’



# Participant 6 continued...

- 8. Do I think this participant is Bilingual?

**Early / Late sequential**



# Conclusions

- Overall, we found as a group our participants learnt their L2/L3/L4 for educational and professional reasons.
- Participants reported code-switching single lexical items more than syntactic constructions. However, participants found it difficult to remember examples of spoken code-switching in the past, as it's often subconscious, showing that more implicit/passive methods would be more effective.
- In general we found that most of our participants displayed attrition in some form and there was a positive correlation between the L2 affecting the L1.
- “Bilingualism is for me the fundamental problem of linguistics”. (Jakobson, cited in Romaine, 1995)

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