Dimensions of bilingual acquisition and attrition

How do we define bilingualism?

There are many ways to define who is considered bilingual or multilingual.

- *Bilingualism means having a "native like control of two languages" (Bloomfield, 1933: 53)*

- *"Bilingualism is the use of two or more languages (or dialects) in everyday life" (Grosjean & Li, 2013: 7)*

- These two differing opinions are very interesting as one defines it as being two languages you are very fluent in, to the extent where you may be considered a native. Whereas, Grosjean's defines it as languages you may use in everyday life, he doesn't focus on the extent the speaker knows these languages – just as long as they use them they can be considered bilingual.

Maximum - Maximum Continuum
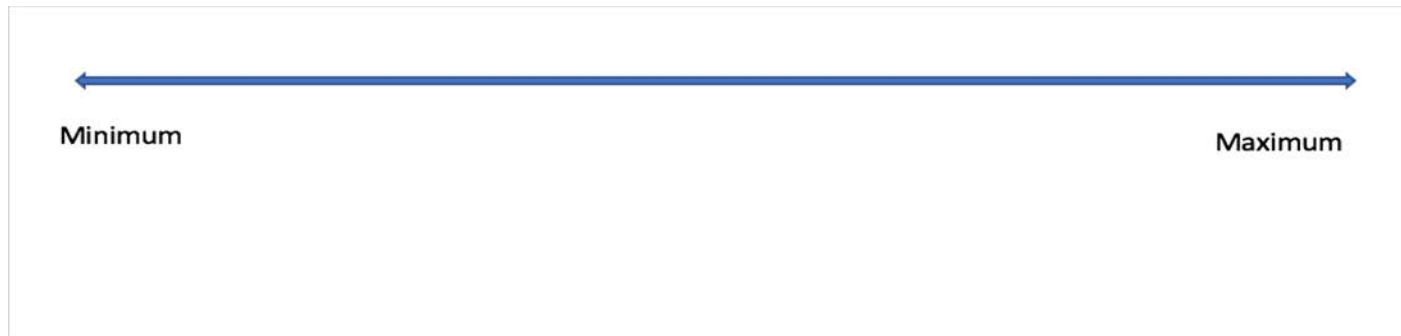
Minimalist Definition:

" a person that can use a single expression in a foreign language"

Maximalist Definition:

'a person that uses elements deviant with respect to the norm in one of the languages is not a bilingual'

This is a subjective scale, however, arguably, it is the way an individual identifies which determines if/if not they are bilingual. This attitude aligns with the Sociolinguistic Perspective on Bilingualism.

Likert Scale -

Minimum ←———————————————————————————→ Maximum

Key Definitions:

- **Attrition:** The loss, or changes to, grammatical and other features of a language, as a result of declining use by speakers who have changed their linguistic environment and language habits.' (Schmid, 2011)

- **Proficiency:** the ability of an individual to speak or perform in a language"

- **Code-switching:** refers to the use of various linguistic units from two grammatical systems. Theres two types, across sentence which is inter sentential and sentential, within a sentence. It is motivated by social and psychological factors"

- **Types of Bilinguals:**

Successive/ consecutive bilingual: second language is added after the first has begun to develop.

Simultaneous bilingual: two languages are present from the onset of speech

Passive bilinguals: have receptive ability to (understand reading + writing)

Interview Questions

- 1) Do you speak more than one language? (Name languages)
- 2) Which language did you learn first?
- 3) Which language do you speak more? (What environment?)
- 4) Is there any associated prestige?
- 5) What modes can you use? Are any stronger? (modes include speaking, reading, writing etc.)
- 6) How did you learn you L2? (parents, classroom setting etc.)
- 7) Do you codeswitch? (switching between both languages – what contexts/ with whom)
- 8) Has your L2 influenced L1?
- 9) Do you see yourself as bilingual/ multilingual? What about bicultural?

WHY WE ASKED THESE QUESTIONS?

-To gain knowledge of the 3 Language Parameters:

Language Use, Proficiency and Age of Acquisition.

- *to see if there were any correlations between the language's prestige and the speakers fluency in it.*

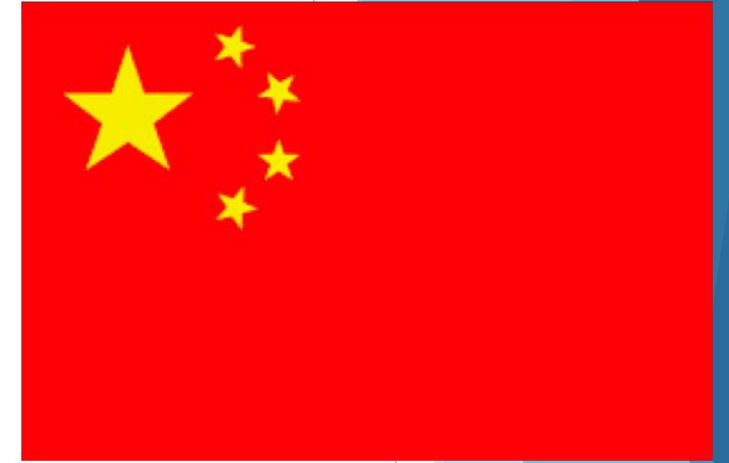- *to draw comparisons between their fluency and whether or not they considered themselves bilingual or bicultural.*

Participant 1 – Aged 20, Vietnamese

- 1) Yes, Vietnamese (native language) and English (L2).

- 2) Vietnamese.

- 3) Vietnamese: daily basis (home in Vietnam & working environment)

  however with clients the participants will use English and when studying.

- 4) Yes

- 5) All modes: strengths – reading and listening/understanding

  weaknesses – writing and speaking.

- 6) Primary school.

- 7) Yes.

  English – more quick and effective to convert my idea

  keep some secrets with other people

- 8) Yes.

- 9) Yes they consider themselves both bilingual and multilingual

Participant 2 - Age 22, Mandarin

- 1) Yes. English and Mandarin
- 2) Mandarin
- 3) Mandarin. At home, with friends and family. But English is used in formal settings, e.g. during university,
- 4) Yes
- 5) They can read well, speaking and understanding is too. Writing can sometimes be difficult.
- 6) Learnt English in early education – requirement in China.
- 7) Yes, but only with my friends. Sometimes during class, to help with understanding.
- 8) No.
- 9) Yes they considered themselves both bilingual and bicultural.

Participant 3 – A Successive Bilingual; Aged 49, Gujarati

- 1) Yes, Gujarati and English.

- 2) Gujarati was learnt first.

- 3) English is spoken more in everyday life, with immediate family, friends and at work. Gujarati is spoken to parents and elders due to language barriers.

- 4) No prestige associated with Gujarati, however the participant feels speaking the language helps her identify with her culture.

- 5) All modes of English are used. Only ever spoken and understood Gujarati.

- 6) English was acquired during early education, whereas Gujarati was learnt at home.

- 7) Codeswitches between languages when speaking Gujarati due to lack of vocabulary and ease of speaking English.

- 8 No, but L2 influenced L1; when speaking Gujarati the participant has an English accent and there is a restricted vocabulary.

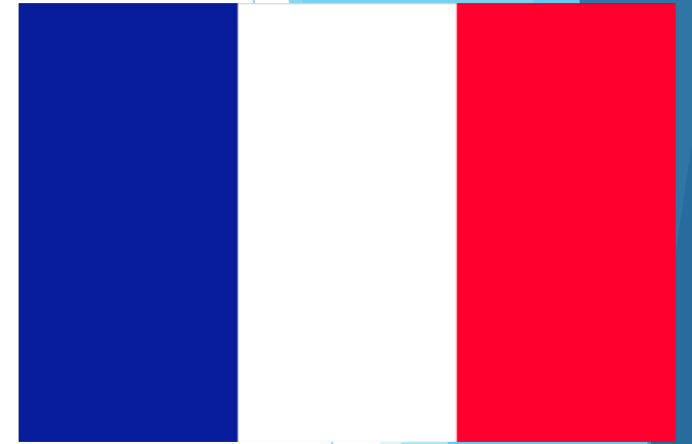- 9) Doesn't identify as bicultural but does identify as bilingual.

Participant 3 - continued

- Proficiency of Gujarati improved significantly when she visited India for 3 weeks- Gujarati was the dominant language and individual felt more confident and fluent in L1.

- Identifies as Bilingual, however the participant highlighted that she is only bilingual in 'some environment'. States that she can 'get by' socially but lacks the vocabulary to interact in Business etc.
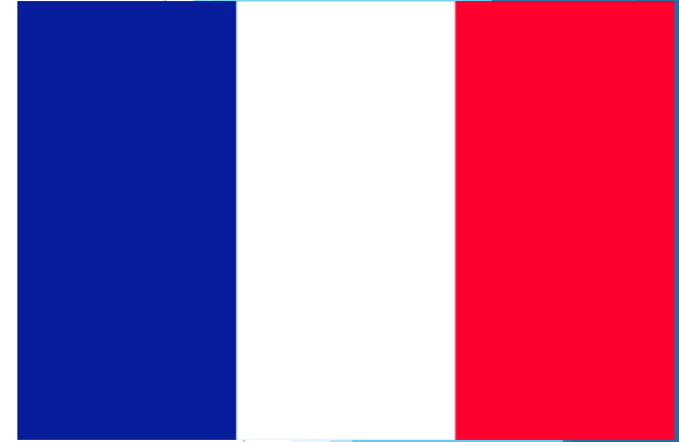
Participant 4 - Aged 19, French.

- 1) Yes, English and French.

- 2) French was learnt first. L2 is English but is spoken more in everyday life. French is studied at university.

- 3) French is spoken amongst peers in class and with family; mother is native French.

- 4) No prestige with French.

- 5) All modes of French and English. In French, most proficient in understanding and speaking; Perceptive and Active Bilingual.

- 6) French was learnt until the participant began early education, then learnt English at a young age. French was learnt in High School and subsequently, University too.

- 7) Doesn't codeswitch.

- 8) French was easier to learn as he knows English. Beginning to learn Spanish too. Languages are similar and so for the participant it makes it easier to acquire it.

- 9) They do identify as Bilingual and could "get by in France" and 'probably sounds like a native'.

Participant 4 – continued.

- Knowledge of Grammar of his L2 is more comprehensive than most, since French is studied to a high level.

- French was acquire out of choice eg. Studying at University. Therefore, personally motivated which may have lead him to a high level of proficiency later in life.

- Not always the earlier the L2 Acquisition the more proficient, since this participant says before University (Aged 17/18) he wouldn't have defined himself as Bilingual.

- Contrasts the CPH and biology as this acquisition is more socially motivated at a later aged

Participant 5 – Aged 17, Somali.

▶ 1) Yes, English and Somali.

▶ 2) Both languages were learnt at the same time.

▶ 3) They speak English more on a day to day basis, at work, with friends and even family at times.

▶ 4) No.

▶ 5) For English all modes are very strong. With Somali the participant was able to understand very well.

▶ 6) Both languages were learnt in the home, but English was used more once education began

▶ 7) All the time when speaking with parents or elders.

▶ 8) The participants use of Somali, they 'mix the two' when speaking and often have to translate sentences from Somali into English in their heads in order to understand

▶ 9) Yes, both

Participant 5 cont.

- The interviewee could be defined as a simultaneous or early bilingual as they were exposed to two languages from the onset of speech.

- It's difficult to say whether attrition occurred, or whether there was instead incomplete acquisition as the languages were being acquired at the same time.

- The participant is also trying to learn a third language, and is finding it very difficult – suggesting that the idea that CPH does exist for L2 acquisition.

- Scovel (1988) suggests that learners who start to learn a second language later than 12, will never be able to pass as native speakers.

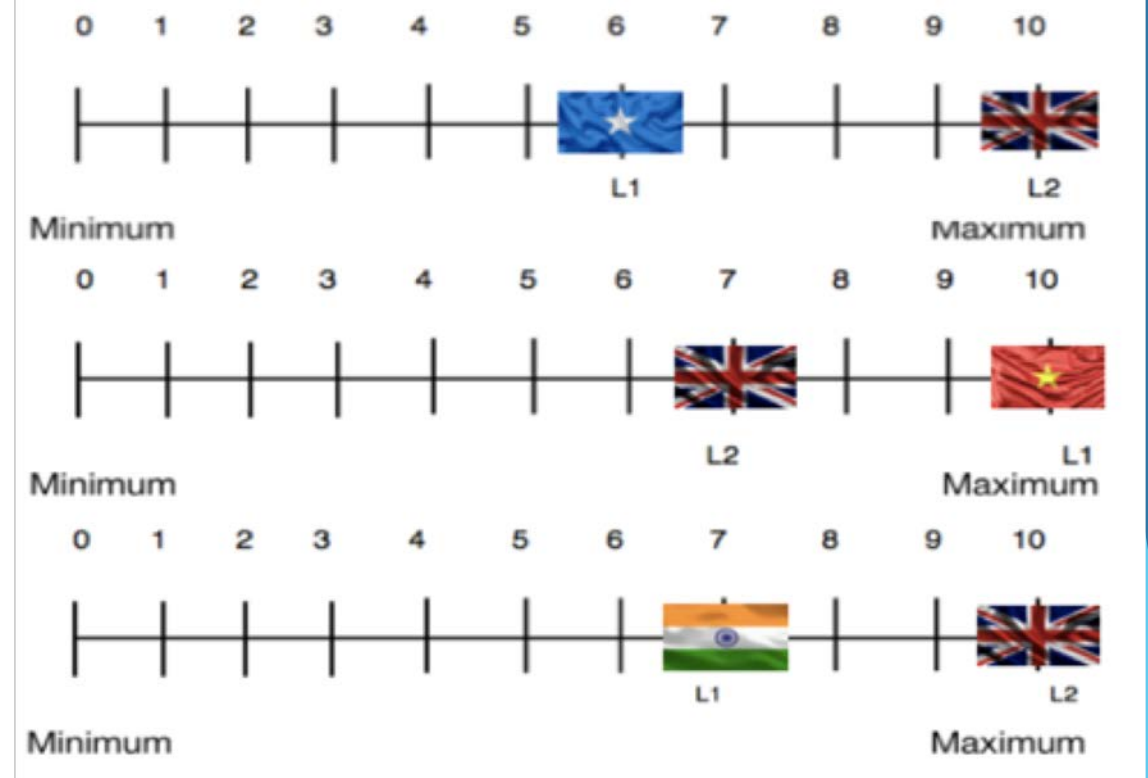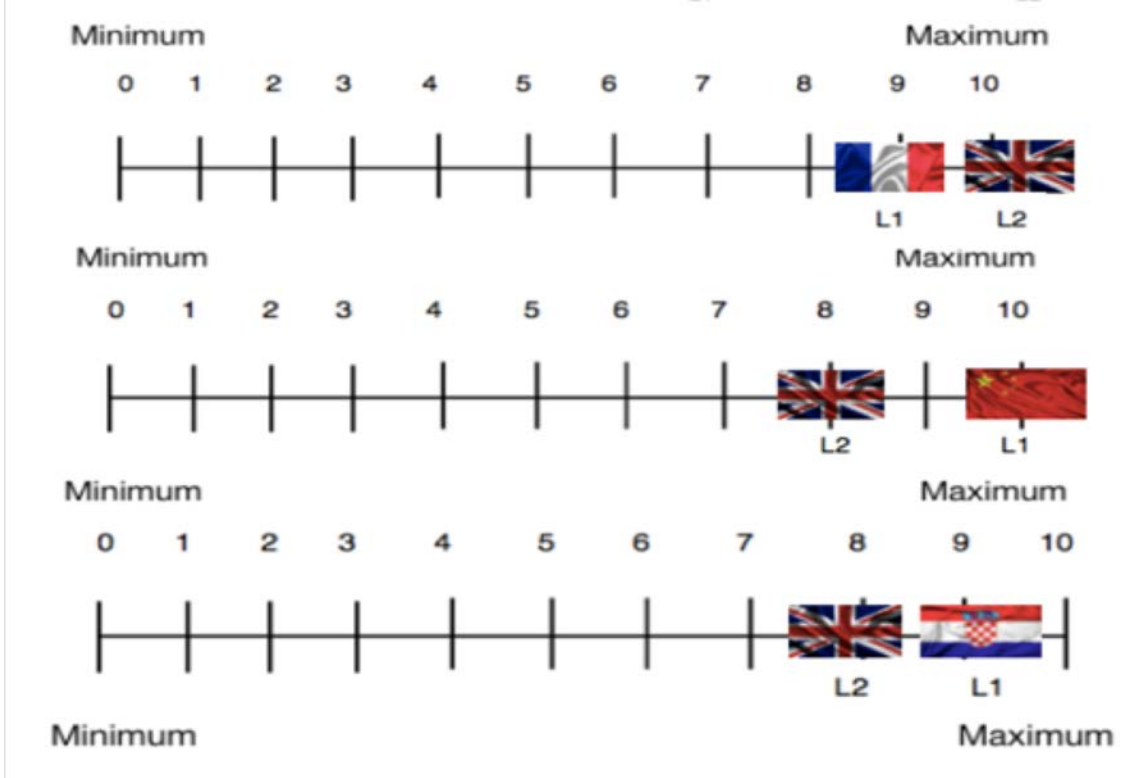# Participant 6 - Age 51, Croatian

1) Yes, Croatian and English.

2) Croatian - learnt English at University in Croatia.

3) Both languages equally - son and husband are English but understand Croatian. L1 is spoken with friends and family in the homeland.

4) L1- No associated prestiges, however L2 in Croatia, English seen as imperative for education.

5) All modes - read and writing in English at university. Moved to the UK at 21 and learnt L2 more fluently. Also developed from career in the UK.

6) Learnt English (L2) at university. None of L1 speaking family speak English.

7) Yes - Codeswitch often especially in my home in the UK with husband and son. Tend to borrow taboo expressions from L2 and code mix them into L1.

8) Yes - accent effects how L2 phrases are pronounced. Syntactically can become muddled.

9) Yes - Communicates with proficiency in both languages in multiple environments. Also believes she is Bicultural at home in her L2 country (UK).

Participant 6 continued

- I would identify my participant as being both a:

- Sequential / consecutive bilingual - someone whose second language added at some stage after the first has begun to develop. The Bilingual Reader, Li Wei

- Secondary bilingual - someone whose second language had been added to their first language via instruction. The Bilingual Reader, Li Wei

- Research undertaken by Weinreich (1953,73) draws on the idea that a Bilingual can code-switch in the same sentence dependent on the context of the situation (eg: between more formal and informal topics).

- He states that ''*the ideal bilingual switches from one language to the other according to appropriate changes in the speech situation*''.
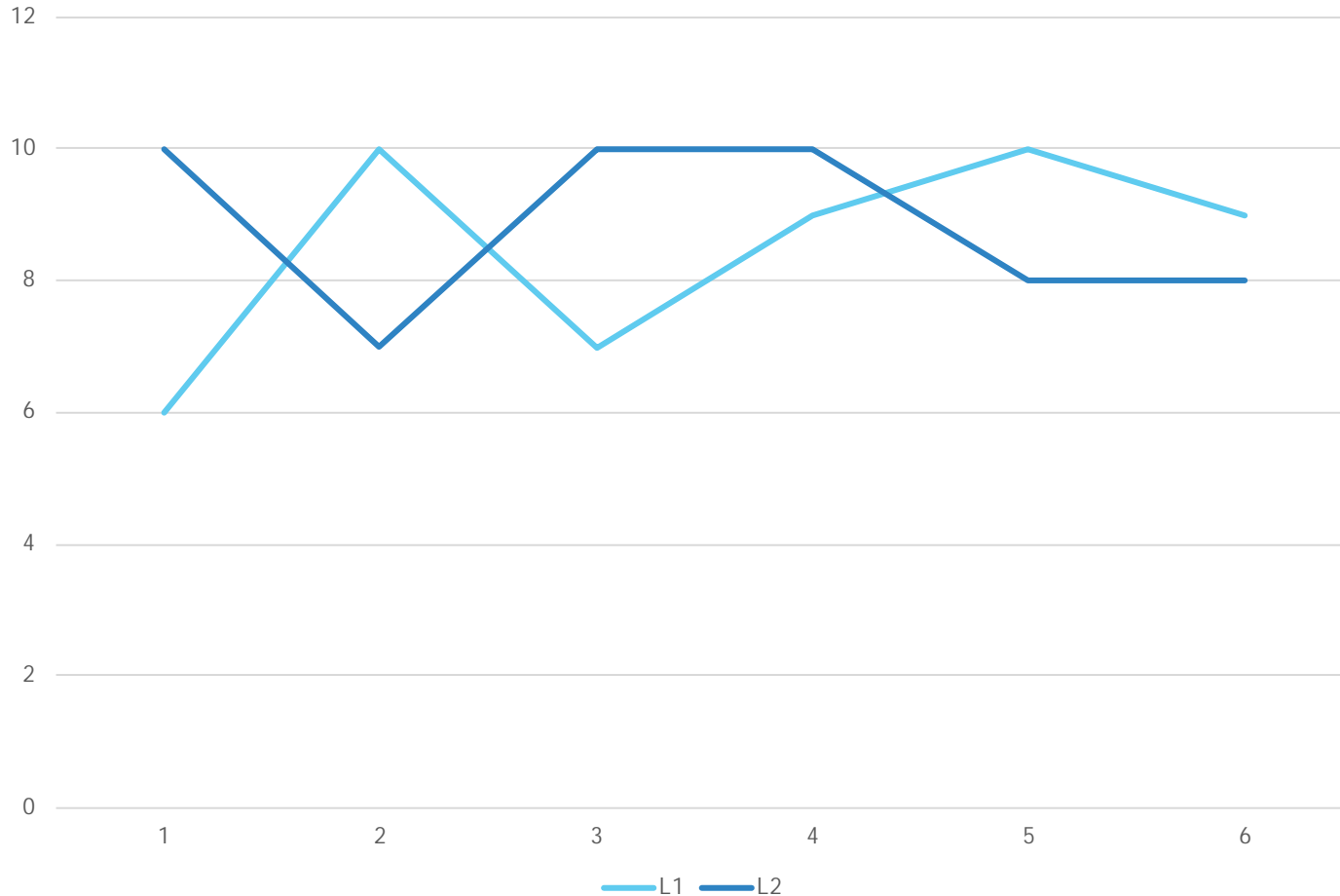
- Three of the participants put themselves firmly on the maximum end of the scale, the other three were rated 7 and above. This is interesting as 5 of the participants began to class themselves as bilingual after they were fully immersed in English dominated environments.

- We can also see the length of residency had an effect of the proficiency rating of L1 speakers, 3 of the participants who lived in their home country rated themselves highly on the scale. Bhatia and Ritchie (2012), Gaelic bilinguals in Ireland or Scotland whose fluencies result from growing up in a particular location, eg: Edinburgh Dublin or Glasgow. May have different settings to become bilingual.

- In two cases, for the Gujarati and Somali participants, their L1 wasn't rated as highly as the others. This could be due to the fact that their education played a role. Their L2's became their LA's as it was used more often in everyday life. "Cultural and educational motives can also expand linguistic repertoires, not only on an individual basis, but in a more widespread fashion as well." (Bhatia and Ritchie, 2012)

Conclusion, contd.

Minimum-Maxium - L1 and L2 ratings.

Overall, we can see that there are no clear correlations between all 6 interviewees, this is due to a range of factors including, age, length of residence, proficiency and education.

From this we can conclude that, although the participants fit into some aspects of different definitions on bilingualism, there is not one clear definition that they completely identify with.

The sociolinguistic perspective on bilingualism: is how an individual identifies which determines whether or not they are/are not bilingual or multilingual. Therefore, there is no singular definition which defines a multilingual

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