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**Bilinguals and bilingualism**

Children acquire language and social skills together. Their sensitivity to the social uses of languages is already apparent in their early learning of different varieties. Even while they are still in the babbling stage, many children have a different way of addressing small objects (animals, toys, other babies) from the way they address adults. If they do this, they are showing that they have learned that babies are talked to using a different variety. This register that is used to speak to babies is called baby talk, and has been shown to occur in many languages. From an early age, children learn that there is more than one variety of language.

There are in fact a vast set of social rules about language that a child must acquire to be successfully socialized. One is the rule for conversational organization. Knowing when to speak and when to be silent, how to enter a conversation, when to speak quietly, and when clearly, are all part of the conversational rules that children have to learn. Equally confusing at first are the pragmatic rules, such as comprehending that a question may be a request. We may be frustrated when speaking to child on the phone. 'Yes!' he answers when we ask 'Is your mother there?', making no effort to fetch her. Children have to learn the social conventions for language use. Learning these social conventions is a key component of socialization.

One of the most revealing opportunities for studying language socialization is in the case of children growing up bilingually, for they manage not just to keep the two languages separate, but to learn quickly which language to use to which person. They also realize which people can be addressed in a mixture of the two languages. In this way, bilingual children can be said to develop control over three distinct varieties of language. The study of bilingualism provides an excellent laboratory for learning how a child can learn to be a member of two (or more) distinct societies.

**The description of bilingualism**

While it is the case that even speakers of a single language (putative monolinguals) control various styles and levels of that language, it is very common that people develop some knowledge and ability in a second language and so become bilingual. The simplest definition of a bilingual is a person who has some functional ability in a second language. This may vary from a limited ability in one or more domains, to very strong command of both languages (which is sometimes called balanced bilingualism). The assumption that there must be a single definition leads to confusion, such as when one person is talking about the highly skilled multiple-domained balanced bilingualism of an expert translator and interpreter, and the other the uneven skills of a recent immigrant. Additional confusion is caused by the common use of the term bilingual to refer to a socially disfavored minority group: in Texas, for instance, it is restricted to Mexican-Americans.

Rather than worrying about definition, it is more useful to consider what is needed to describe the nature of an individual's bilingualism. Clearly, the first (and not necessarily easy) element is to identify each of the languages. We will often need to clarify which variety is involved: to distinguish between Cantonese and Putonghoa, or between Egyptian and Moroccan Arabic, or between High German and Swiss German. A second important feature is the way each language was acquired. It is useful to distinguish between mother (or native) tongue learning, second (or informal) language learning, and foreign (or additional) language learning. Each of these suggest different possible kinds of proficiency. It is useful also to note the age of learning and the time spent using the language. We describe two bilinguals in this way: ‘X is a native speaker of Cantonese and learned English in school. 'Y grew up speaking Moroccan Arabic, but was educated in French and has lived in Paris since the age of 15

Another set of distinctions is that of skill-reading, writing, speaking, understanding speech. It is not uncommon for people to speak one language and read and write another. Many Navajos use their own language in conversation, but read in English. Until the literacy campaigns of recent times, Ethiopians who spoke Amharic were more likely to read Gi’iz than Amharic. The receptive skills of reading and understanding speech are often stronger in a learned language than are the productive skills of speaking and writing. Many people obtain reading knowledge of a language at school, but cannot speak it.

In describing the bilingualism of an individual, another set of differences is often evident in the performance of certain internal functions. Bilinguals usually prefer one language for functions such as counting, doing arithmetic, dreaming (some people dream in language, others don't), cursing, or praying silently.

Another useful way to describe bilinguals is by describing the external functions they can perform in each language. These Silently. daily might be expressed as 'can-do ‘statements: X can read a newspaper, can carry on an informal conversation, can give a lecture. One special ability (not true in the case of all bilinguals) is the skill of translation from one language to the other. Another useful approach to describe a bilingual's language use is by domains rather than by functions. A domain, as we have discussed above on page 34, is an empirically determined cluster consisting of a location, a set of role- relationships, and a set of topics. Just as this notion was useful for identifying the use of registers, so it is useful for considering bilingualism. For each of the domains, a bilingual is likely to have a preferred language. Some examples of domains are shown in Table 5.1. Bilinguals have a repertoire of domain-related rules of language choice. The home-school or the home-work switch is probably the most common, with one language learned at home from parents and the second learned at school and used at work. When there is a language shift in progress, certain traditional domains may remain favored for the use of one language. For the Maori people, before the recent language revival activities began, the marae where traditional ceremonies and meetings took place remained the strongest bastion of Maori language use. The bilingualism we mentioned earlier in Swiss adults is domain-related, with High German used in the work domain and Swiss German in the home and neighborhood. In his study of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey, Fishman noted strong Spanish maintenance in home, neighborhood, and church, and strong English usage at school and at work. It is normal for immigrants to continue to use their original language in the home and in religious domains, while using the new language in work, education, and public domains.

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| Location | Role relationships | topics |
| Home | Mother, father, son… | Domestic, personal… |
| Neighborhood | Neighbor, shop-keeper... | Weather, shopping, greetings |
| School | Teacher, student… | Social greetings, educational |
| Church | Priest, parishioner… | Sermons, payers… |

Because domains are composite concepts, there is the Thus, two people who normally speak the standard language at work might use their home language there to signal either a change of role-relation (family member or friend rather than co- worker) or topic (a home or neighborhood topic) while still being in some location. We shall take this up again later when we talk about switching. At this point, the important notion is that a bilingual's use of his or her two languages is likely to vary considerably according to domain.