

THE IMPORTANCE OF BILINGUALISM WHILE COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

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**“Learn a new language and get a new soul”
(Czech proverb)**

Abstract

The **objective** of this paper is to investigate Bilingualism and its impact and significance at Socio-psychological levels in the Indian context of present scenario. The idea behind this article came from a conversation I once had with an academic colleague. He was interested in cultural differences and international social work research. Barack Obama, The President of America, during one of his visits to India, began his speech by greeting Indians in their own language. He uttered words like ‘*Namaste India, Jai Hind, Mumbaikars* etc.

Now the question arises that why did Obama use these words? Today why the most powerful man of the most powerful country comes to India and needs to open his speech by welcoming us not with the words of his native language? Is this only a way of greeting? or something else which is socio-psychologically very deep. (Here I want to make one thing very clear that Obama is not familiar with Hindi language but he knows its importance that is why he has used it.)

In fact this speech of Obama shows that he knows the magic of language and how it is related with sentiments. As we all know about today’s American Economy and their weak market. America wants to join hands with India and we can see the role of the joining chain which in a way is Language and herein lies the underlying beauty and power of the use of two languages and this is technically known as Bilingualism, which I am discussing further in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Bilingualism is a worldwide phenomenon, a classical study, ”Languages in contact”(1953) by Uriel Weinreich is an excellent book and major contribution to the structural analysis of the linguistic system of bilinguals. It deals with how social contact leads to language contact.

In simple words by languages in contact we understand the psychological state of an individual who uses more than one language as well as the use of two or more codes in interpersonal and intergroup relations.

Defining Bilingualism

For all it is important to see that researchers use a wide variety of definitions of individual bilingualism. There are very strict and very demanding psycholinguistic definitions such as ; Bloomfield (1933) Claims that bilingual should possess, “native like control of two languages”.

In fact, Bilingualism is the practice of alternatively using two languages, customarily and with equal ease or ‘dual’ linguistic competence in one body.

In a fascinating discussion of what it means to be bilingual, Schrauf and Rubin (2003) suggest that bilingual people have two sets of memories. They ask, “might not the bilingual individual have at least two curriculum vitae, two chains of associations, two sets of memories?” (p. 124). The attempt to position bilingual speakers into two worlds, two languages, two sets of memories and two cultures is one that was prevalent in debates in the 1970s and 1980s around assimilation: they are torn in ways monolingual people are not.

Now the question crops up that what are the causes of bilingualism?

Education and Technological development, Industrialization, Urbanization, Migration, Religious conversion, Political affiliation. These are major causes of bilingualism and its effect or result is that, bilingual speakers are the initiators of the social as well as linguistic changes in speech communities.

PROCESSES ARISING OUT OF CONTACT BETWEEN PEOPLE SPEAKING DIFFERENT LANGUAGES FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES

Particularly, India is a country which has a large number of linguistically and culturally distinct communities with their own social and regional identities, therefore, any homogenizing, monolithic solution to language will not be successful in such scenario.

The element of language can be formed with the element of another language in a number of linguistic processing, arising out of languages in contact, such as, Borrowing, Language Change, Code-alternations as Code-mixing and Code Switching, Translations, Pidginization and Creolization. So while communicating across cultures people with different languages come in contact and this gives rise to these phenomenas.

Here I am focusing particularly on Code-Mixing and Code-Switching.

Code-Mixing

It is usually the fusion of single words or items from the other language into the main construction.

Code-Switching

It is the lifting of phrasal, clausal, or sentential structures of one language and replacing it with another. In syntactic terms, code-switching occurs in a discourse which is made up of sentences in language A and B.

Bilinguals sometime code-switch according to situations like Noun Phrase or Verb Phrase etc. but code-mixing occurs at random places.

Examples of Code-Mixing and Code-Switching.(Hindi and English)

Examples of Code-Mixing:

T.V. Commercials: ‘Yeh dil maange more’

‘Yeh dil maange jyada’

More is more punchy and catchy here as compared to zyada.

Newspaper

An English newspaper uses Hindi words: “Katy goes desi”

A Hindi newspaper uses English words: “Saadhe das hazaar auto ke permit nilambit”

Here, we can see that, how a hard core English newspaper of a Class uses Hindi words for reaching to the mass and how a hard core Hindi newspaper of mass uses English words for reaching to the class and this game of mass and class shows this power of using two languages.

Bolywood Movie Title

“Golmaal Three”

Bolywood Movie Song

“Jab life ho out of control”

Book Title

“The Oath of the Vayuputras” by Amish Tripathi

Some more random examples

‘Table-Kursi’

‘School-Bhavan’

‘Expect karna’

‘Fail hona’ etc.

These were the examples of Code-mixing, and it can be between any language like Urdu-Hindi, Sanskrit-Hindi for example:

‘aaie tashreef laaie’

‘pariksha-kaal pratyek varsh aataa hai’ etc.

Code-Switching

e.g.

T.V. Commercials

‘Amul the taste of India, jara si hansa dulaar jara sa, Amul the taste of India...’

Bolywood Movie Title

Daag, The fire

Bolywood Movie song

‘Give me some sun shine, give me some rain, give me another life I wanna grow up once again, saari umra hum mar-mar k ji lie kuch pal to ab hume jine do, jine do....’

‘what the thunder said’ (1922) from The Waste Land by T.S.Eliot.

“These fragments I have shored against my ruins

When then I’ll fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe

Data Dayadhvam Damyata...”

These are Sanskritized words taken from Brihadaranyaka Upnishad, meaning give, sympathies and self-control and the poem ends with the benediction, Shantih Shantih Shantih..

In fact, Code-Mixing and Code-Switching is an inevitable consequences of Bilingualism and Multilingualism. It takes place because of communicative needs and it has a role in the change and development of language.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Research addressing different language communities is burgeoning. Service providers and academics are increasingly employing bilingual community researchers or interpreters to carry out research. However, there is very little written about the effect of working with bilingual researchers.

Bilingual researchers are seen as unproblematically acting as bridges between communities just because they are bilingual. Their ties to communities, their use of language, and their perspectives on the research are rarely investigated. Language is tied in an unproblematic way to meaning, values, and beliefs. In this article, I use examples from my own research to question what it means to be bilingual and to do cross-language research. I argue that there is no straightforward way in which meanings can be read off from researchers' ties to language and that being bilingual is not the same for everyone.

There have been developments within sociolinguistics, particularly around what it means to be bilingual, that could make a valuable contribution to cross-language research across a range of disciplines and would go some way to re-dressing the current essentialist premise about what it means to be bilingual. For example, numerous authors have signalled the dangers of assuming that use of a language determines meanings or values within a language or culture (Ashcroft, 2003; de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2005; Gubbins & Holt, 2002; Harris & Rampton, 2003; Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2004; Wei, 2000a). Language is used to create and re-create social worlds and identities and no one person is positioned neutrally in these processes.

The problematisation of the links between languages, identities, and speech is relevant for all cross-language researchers. Within translation and interpretation studies researchers also point to the importance of language in constructing identities within oral and written accounts of people's lives (Simon, 1996; Spivak, 1992, 1993; Venuti, 1995, 1998). Language is used to construct accounts of who we are and how we differ from "others," i.e., those who are not like us. For example, Simon (1996) shows how translators produce accounts that are gendered. None of these writers argue that identity or perspective on issues is tied in any deterministic way to which language people speak. Rather they argue that possibilities for different perspectives of who we are can be opened up by examining the role of language in constructing identity and influencing how people see the social world.

Conclusion

A bilingual person is the agent of language and source of information. In fact Bilingualism is a global, multidimensional and complex phenomenon which simultaneously implies a state of bilinguality of individuals a state of languages in contact while communicating across cultures at the collective level. Therefore, this phenomenon should be studied at several levels of analysis; individuals with a unique set of languages, cultures and experiences that should be of value to a multicultural world.

At the end I would leave u all with a question to think that is this mix form of Hindi and English language, will become the part of Hindi language or not? Like Urdu has already become.

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