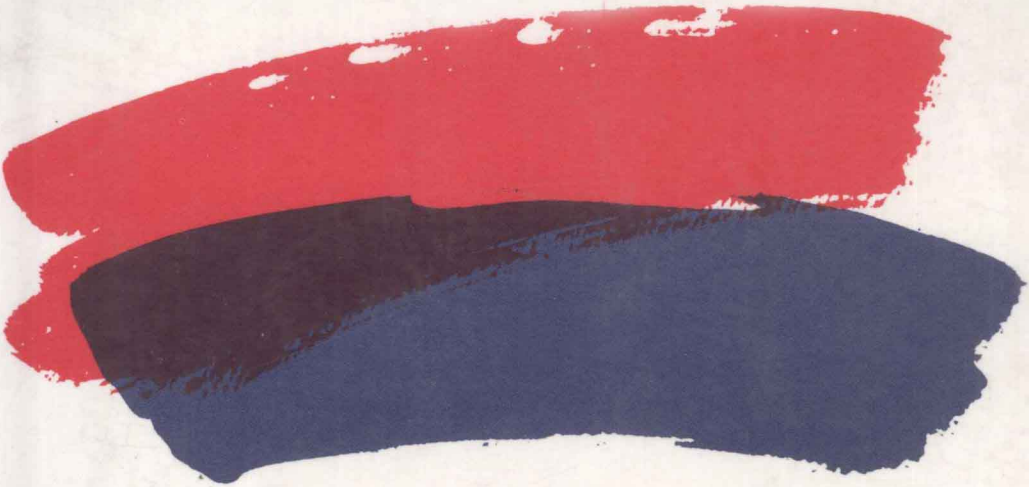

Life with Two Languages

An Introduction to Bilingualism

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A ma femme Lysiane, pour ses encouragements
et son bilinguisme éclairant, and to my sons,
Marc and Eric, for their monolingualism,
so categorical and yet so natural

Preface

This book is about people who use two or more languages in their everyday life. Contrary to general belief, bilinguals are rarely equally fluent in their languages; some speak one language better than another, others use one of their languages in specific situations, and others still can only read or write one of the languages they speak. And yet, what characterizes all of them is that they interact with the world around them in two or more languages. Bilingualism is present in practically every country of the world, in all classes of society, in all age groups; in fact, it has been estimated that half the world's population is bilingual. This book is about those people.

There are several aims to this book. The first is to present a general and comprehensive introduction to bilingualism. Literally hundreds of books have been written about this topic, and yet most are either too advanced for the general reader or too specialized, dealing with such specific topics as bilingual education, the neurolinguistics of bilingualism, interference and code-switching, or the simultaneous acquisition of two languages by children. In this book I attempt to survey the vast and complex field of bilingualism: bilingualism in the world and in the United States, bilingualism in society, the bilingual child and the bilingual adult, and finally, bilingual speech and language. My hope is that readers will turn to more specialized works to deepen their understanding of the particular areas that interest them.

A second aim of this book is to separate fact from fiction about bilinguals and bilingualism. Using two or more languages in one's everyday life is as natural to the bilingual as using only one language is to the monolingual. People rarely make a conscious decision to become bilingual; it happens because their interaction with the world around them requires the use of two languages. In this book I attempt to show how natural this really is. For me, both as a bilingual and as a psycholinguist, bilingualism is neither a problem nor an asset but quite simply a fact of life that should be dealt with in as unbiased a way as possible.

This leads to the third aim of this book: to allow bilinguals to speak about their bilingualism. Too much has been written by people who see the topic through the eyes of monolinguals. To avoid this, I have included boxes in the text in which bilinguals tell about their experiences: how they use their two (or more) languages, their attitudes toward bilingualism, their educational experiences, their feelings about code-switching and language borrowing, and the differences they feel exist (or do not exist) between themselves and monolinguals. These first-hand accounts play an important role in the general organization of this book.

Two more points need to be made. The first is that although I have put the stress in the book on *bi*lingualism—the regular use of two languages—much of what is written applies equally well to multilingualism (as it does, for that matter, to bidialectalism and multidialectalism). The second point is that I do not deal with second-language learning in the classroom. Although first and second language acquisition in the bilingual child is examined closely in Chapter 4, the stress throughout the book is on the *natural* acquisition and use of two or more languages. Formal language learning is not discussed.

Because of its scope, this work should be of interest to a wide audience. It can be used as primary reading material in courses on bilingualism, languages in contact, language borrowing, and minority languages. It can also be used as supplementary reading in courses on the psychology of language, the sociology of language, general linguistics, elementary and secondary education, special education, speech and hearing, and political science. The linguist may wish to consult Chapter 6, which surveys the literature on bilingual speech and language. The psychologist may want to read Chapters 4 and 5, which deal with how the bilingual acquires and processes two languages, as well as the apparent effects of bilingualism. The educator will find extensive discussion of bilingualism and education in

Chapters 1 and 4 and of bilingual education in the United States in Chapter 2. The sociologist may want to read the sections that deal with linguistic minorities (Chapter 1) and those that examine attitudes to languages and language groups, biculturalism, language choice, and code-switching (in Chapter 3). This book is also written for the lay person interested in languages in contact and in bilingualism. I have attempted to reduce to a minimum the linguistic terminology and have written the book in a nontechnical style. It is my hope that the general public—among them many bilinguals—will read this book to learn more about people who live with two languages.

To conclude, I wish to thank the many people who have helped me in preparing this book. First and foremost are those who believed in it and who gave me their much-needed support throughout the project: Eric Wanner of Harvard University Press, friends and colleagues at Northeastern University, as well as the members of my family, especially my wife, Lysiane. I also wish to acknowledge the very kind and constant support of Dr. Einar Haugen. His writings were a great source of inspiration to me, as were the many hours we spent together talking about bilingualism. In addition, Dr. Haugen read and gave me written comments on every chapter. I could not have had a better mentor. My warmest thanks also go to the four reviewers of the book whose comments I found very helpful. A number of colleagues very kindly took the time to read chapters and to give me comments on them. They are: Robbin Battison, Maria Brisk, Jim Gee, Fred Genesee, Kenji Hakuta, Judy Kegl, Harlan Lane, Joanne Miller, Michel Paradis, Shana Poplack, Carlos Soares, Richard Tucker, Calvin Veltman, and Dorothy Waggoner. To all of them I express my deep appreciation. I also wish to thank the many bilinguals who agreed to share with me their experiences: many of their first-hand accounts are included in this book, and these give it a dimension that I believe important. I am indebted to all those who have helped me put this book together: Marjorie Goldstein, who gathered the "raw material" for me; Janie Simmons de Garcia, who checked the quotes and references; Kristine Smith, who drew the figures in Chapter 2; Ivy Dodge, who coordinated the typing effort; and Sheila Duquette, Valerie Hawkes-Howat, and Theresa Massa, who typed and retyped the manuscript. To all my sincere thanks. And finally I wish to express my deep appreciation to Peg Anderson for her very thorough and very constructive copy editing of the book.

Life with Two Languages

Contents

1 *Bilingualism in the World*

To the average person in the United States or Europe bilingualism—the regular use of two or more languages—is a rather special language phenomenon restricted to a few countries such as Canada, Belgium, or Switzerland, where, presumably, every citizen is bilingual. This average person would say that very few people in the world are bilingual or multilingual; the majority is monolingual, that is, uses only one language on a regular basis. After all, isn't Russian the language of all Russians, English the language of all Americans and British, French the language of all the French, and so on?

But if we question a citizen of an African or Asian nation, Tanzania or Malaysia, for example, we would get a very different answer: bilingualism is the norm; most people speak two or more languages, and a large proportion of the world's population is bilingual.

This second point of view is in fact much nearer the truth: bilingualism is present in practically every country of the world, in all classes of society, and in all age groups. In fact it is difficult to find a society that is genuinely monolingual. Not only is bilingualism worldwide, it is a phenomenon that has existed since the beginning of language in human history. It is probably true that no language group has ever existed in isolation from other language groups, and the history of languages is replete with examples of language contact leading to some form of bilingualism.

In this chapter I will describe the wide-ranging characteristics of bilingualism in the world, first examining where bilingualism can be found: in countries that are supposedly monolingual, such as Germany, Japan, and France; in "bilingual" countries such as Canada, Belgium, and Finland; and in "multilingual" countries such as India and the Soviet Union. Secondly, I will show how certain nations support their linguistic minorities whereas others neglect or repress them, and I will enumerate the problems—social, cultural, and educational—these minorities face. I will then discuss the origins of bilingualism and study such factors as military conquest and colonization, nationalism and political federalism, education, urbanization, and intermarriage. And I will end by describing the two main outcomes: prolonged and stable bilingualism or, as often happens, a shift to monolingualism. Above all in this chapter, I will attempt to show the truth of a statement made by Lewis (1976): "Bilingualism has been and is nearer to the normal situation than most people are willing to believe" (p. 151).

The Extent of Bilingualism

It is an interesting fact that no really precise statistics exist concerning the number and distribution of speakers of two or more languages in the nations of the world. Although almost all current encyclopedias and survey books list the main languages of the world, the number of people that speak them, and where they are spoken, there are no comparable figures on the use of two or more languages. This can be accounted for partly by the fact that there is no widely accepted definition of the concept of bilingualism. As we will see in a later chapter, the term has often been paired with such modifiers as "early" and "late," "receptive" and "productive," "fluent" and "nonfluent," "balanced," "functional," and so on. Also, not all countries or world institutions are interested in bi- or multilingualism, even when it affects them directly.

And yet, to the inquisitive researcher, bilingualism offers a fascinating and varied set of patterns, as shown by Mackey (1967, 1976). In the border areas between two language groups—as between Spanish-speaking Mexico and English-speaking America—economic and commercial factors lead many people to use both languages on a regular basis. Bilingualism is also present in specific areas of some countries where linguistic minorities are concentrated. Thus in Brittany most speakers of Breton (a Celtic language) also speak French, and in Wales, most users of Welsh (also a Celtic lan-

guage) speak English. Bilingualism in some countries is spread throughout a population, as in Paraguay, where Guarani-Spanish bilingualism is found in all areas. In some parts of the world bilingualism exists mainly in urban areas: in the town of Madina, Ghana, for instance, over eighty different languages are in contact, and most inhabitants speak at least three languages (Berry, 1971). In New Guinea, on the other hand, where the society is still mainly rural, many inhabitants speak two or more languages, and in the area straddling the Brazil–Colombia border, a mere 10,000 people speak some twenty-five languages, and most individuals are bi- or trilingual (Sorensen, 1967).

Bilingualism is also common in certain occupations. For example, most of the construction workers in Switzerland are immigrant workers from Italy and speak either French or Swiss German, depending on the area of Switzerland, in addition to their native language. Many diplomats know and use several languages on a regular basis. Bilingualism may also vary according to social class. For example, all members of the aristocracy in Czarist Russia were bilingual in Russian and French, as is clearly illustrated in Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* where the main characters often switch from Russian to French. Both age and sex may be factors in bilingualism; for example, the wives of immigrant workers from Turkey or Portugal living in Germany rarely learn German, whereas their husbands must have some knowledge of the language in order to work. Finally, bilingualism is affected by the degree of contact between two language groups; in Belgium, for example, there is everyday contact between Flemish and French speakers, whereas Lapps in Sweden know some Swedish but do not often have to use it (Mackey, 1967).

National Patterns of Bilingualism

These patterns could be expanded and others added, but I prefer to begin by examining the extent of bilingualism within the nations of the world. A first approach proposed by Mackey (1967) is to compare the number of languages in the world to the number of countries. If there are about as many languages as there are nations, it will indicate that bilingualism is not such an important phenomenon after all. But the more language groups there are, and the more concentrated they are in specific geographical or political areas, the more likely the spread of bilingualism. The reason is quite simply that different language groups living next to each other need to communicate. Either one group will learn the language of the other, or

both groups will learn a third language for between-group communication, or lingua franca. The overall result will be a state of bilingualism.

As it happens, there are from 3,000 to 4,000 languages in the world today (without counting the many sign languages of the deaf) and only about 150 countries to house them in. Although I will qualify this statement below, it is a first indication of how widespread language contact within countries must be. Most countries house a number of different languages, which *de facto* leads to language contact and bilingualism. Mackey (1967) points out two factors that modify this statement somewhat, however. First, some languages are numerically more important that others: in fact, eleven languages are spoken by as many as 70 percent of the world's population. The most important numerically are Chinese, about 900 million speakers; English, about 400 million; Spanish, about 231 million; Hindi, about 154 million; and Russian, about 130 million. The great majority of languages are spoken by far fewer people. For example, Afrikaans, a South African language, is spoken by 7 million people; Aymara, a South American Indian language, is used by 1 million speakers in Bolivia and Peru; and Batak, an Indonesian language, is spoken by 2 million. And many other languages (the 300 or so American Indian languages, for example) are used by even smaller groups, in some cases less than a thousand.

The second factor qualifying the "many languages but few countries" statement is that some languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, for example) are spoken natively in several countries, and others are restricted to very specific areas that correspond either to the political borders of a country (Icelandic is spoken only in Iceland), or to a particular geographical region (Basque is spoken in a small area divided between France and Spain).

However, even though not all languages have the same numerical importance or the same geographical distribution, most countries do house a number of different languages. Tiny Luxembourg has three languages: French, German, and Luxembourgian; Switzerland houses Swiss German, French, Italian, and Romansh; India has about 200 classified languages; Russia houses about 122; and other areas of the world are characterized by an even greater concentration of languages. On the island of New Guinea, for example, about 700 different languages—as different from one another as are French, English, and Russian—are spoken by not many more than three million inhabitants. This kind of language concentration cannot help but lead to bilingualism.

Bilingualism exists in three types of countries: "monolingual," "bilingual," and "multilingual." It is important to note that this progression in no way reflects the degree of bilingualism that really exists in these countries; as we will see, many so-called monolingual countries have a high percentage of speakers who use two or more languages on a regular basis, whereas many multilingual countries have rather few bilinguals. I have adopted this three-category approach to clarify the problem.

Monolingual Nations

It is practically impossible to locate a genuinely monolingual country, that is, one that does not contain one or several linguistic minorities whose members use, to some extent at least, both the majority and minority languages. Even in the countries of Europe or of North and South America, which we think of as monolingual, one is hard put to find a truly monolingual nation. France has a number of linguistic minorities: Bretons, Basques, Alsatians, Flemings, Catalans, Corsicans, Occitans, and North Africans. It has been estimated that approximately 6 percent of the present population of France uses two languages on a regular basis. In Great Britain, in addition to Welsh and Scottish Gaelic (the former used by about 800,000 speakers), one also finds Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages, spoken by immigrant groups from India, Pakistan, and East Africa, as well as West Indian Creole. And in Spain one finds speakers not only of Castilian Spanish but also of Catalan, Galician, and Basque. It has been calculated that some 12 million people in Spain speak a minority language, out of a population of 38 million.

BASICALLY MONOLINGUAL NATIONS Two countries that at first appear to be totally monolingual are Japan and Germany. Although Japan is a highly monolingual and monocultural society, it does have three small minority groups—Ainu, Koreans, and Chinese—totalling about a million in number, or 0.7 percent of the population. The oldest group is the Ainu, an indigenous Caucasoid people who now live only on the northern island of Hokkaido. The older members of the Ainu group still lead a traditional life and speak Ainu with one another, but the younger generations have been totally assimilated into Japanese society. The Koreans are the most numerous minority, representing about 0.5 percent of the population. Both the Koreans and Chinese were brought to Japan, often by force, in the 1920s and the 1930s. They live in the industrial cities

and lead an existence separate from that of the Japanese majority. They speak their respective languages (although most younger Koreans and Chinese also speak Japanese fluently), attend their own schools, and participate in their own community affairs. The Japanese make little effort to integrate them into the society, and there are numerous cases of discrimination against Koreans and Chinese in employment. Thus, although Japan is one of a very few countries with such a high proportion of people of one language and one culture (99.3 percent of the population is of Japanese origin), it is certain to retain its Chinese and Korean minorities, and hence bilingualism will continue for generations to come.

West Germany also appears to be totally monolingual. By the end of the two world wars, the country had lost its territories in the north and east that contained a number of linguistic minorities (Danish, Polish, and Czech, for example), and the current borders of East and West Germany pretty much reflect—without counting Austria and Switzerland—the borders of the German language. And yet, in addition to 62 million West Germans there are about 4 million immigrant workers who speak their native tongue as well as some German on an every day basis. Immigrant workers first started to arrive in 1955 when the rebuilt German economy needed cheap labor. It has been estimated that about 10 percent of the labor force is made up of immigrant workers—from Turkey (1 million), Yugoslavia (700,000), Italy (500,000), Greece (300,000), and smaller numbers from Spain, Portugal, Holland, Austria, France, and so on. They are concentrated in industrial areas such as Berlin, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and the Ruhr.

As in other industrialized European nations, immigrant workers are brought in to fill the jobs that the country's own people do not want (those in heavy industry and textiles, and badly paid jobs such as construction work or garbage removal). But the "host" country does very little to help these immigrants and their families integrate themselves, at least temporarily, into the society. In fact, the official policy is to discourage them from settling down: they make up a temporary labor force that is hired or fired (and sent home) at the whim of the employers, and nothing is supposed to be done to alter this (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). The well-known saying clearly reflects the problem of these immigrant workers: "They called for labor but human beings arrived."

In a later section of this chapter we will examine the various problems faced by linguistic minorities that have lived in a country for generations. Immigrant workers face many similar problems,

along with hostility from the native population, segregation, cultural shock, and lack of official support for cultural and language maintenance. There are few or no radio and TV programs in the group's language, few courses to help them learn the language of the "host" country, little if any bilingual education for their children, and so on. What is true in West Germany is also true in France, with its 2 million North Africans; Great Britain, with Indians, Pakistanis, and West Indians; Scandinavia, with Greeks, Turks, and others; and other industrialized nations. All these monolingual countries have growing linguistic minorities, most of whose members are bilingual. The tragic problem is that these countries do not want to face the human repercussions of bringing in cheap labor, which leads to tension, grief, and violence.

BASICALLY MULTILINGUAL NATIONS So far we have talked about monolingual countries in which the official language is the mother tongue of the great majority of the inhabitants—what Kloss (1967) would call a genuine nation state. Thus French is the language of the great majority in France, and Swedish that of most inhabitants in Sweden. However, almost all these countries do have linguistic minorities which have either been present for centuries or which have arrived rather recently. Other countries are officially monolingual in that there is only one official language, but they house many linguistic minorities. Numerically, this category is much more important than that of the nation states.

In all parts of the world there are countries with one official language but with numerous other languages, especially in Africa and Asia as a result of colonization. Their political boundaries rarely reflect linguistic boundaries. On becoming independent, these countries had the problem of choosing an official administrative language (it therefore had to have a written form and a varied and extensive vocabulary) that could serve as a means of communication with neighboring states and as a symbol of nationhood. It was important to choose a language that would not favor one ethnic group over another, thus creating unnecessary tensions and a potential cleavage within the young nation. Two basic types of solution were adopted. The first was to choose a language spoken by a linguistic group within the country, as in Tanzania with Swahili as the official language, the Philippines with Filipino (based on native Tagalog), Indonesia with Bahasa-Indonesia, and Malaysia with Malay. Kloss (1968), calls these nations "endoglossic." The second solution was to choose a language from outside the nation, as in Sierra Leone,