
UNIT 3 BILINGUALISM

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to

- Understand the meaning and nature of bilingualism
- Get an insight into the different dimensions of bilingualism
- Appreciate the difference between different kinds/degrees of bilingualism
- Develop a proper perspective on bilingualism and its implications for language use, language education and language dynamics
- Understand how bilingualism may lead to new power and prestige equations as far as languages are concerned.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

India has a long tradition of grassroots bilingualism. As an Indian, perhaps all of you take this fact for granted. However, if you understand what is bilingualism, it will help you understand your society better, as well as understand the complexity of the Indian sociolinguistic scenario.

Bilingualism refers to the proficiency in the use of more than one language. Till some time back it was believed that monolingualism, or the use of one language, was the norm in most parts (especially developed countries) of the world and that bilingualism was some kind of aberrant or unusual phenomenon. In recent times however, it has been gradually realised that all of us (including the so-called monolinguals) are essentially bilinguals, because even where one is supposedly using only one language (say English) one does control and employ several styles, registers and dialects of the same language. Strictly speaking, however, the term bilingualism is used to refer to situations where two or more distinct languages are involved. As a matter of fact, some people prefer to use the term bilingualism to refer to a 'two language' situation, and use the term multilingualism for situations where more than two language are involved. The term 'bilingualism' has now, however, come to be accepted as the standard cover term for referring to all situations involving two or more languages. Another thing that one must remember is that the term bilingualism is used to refer to the learning of, proficiency in and use of two or more languages. It

is an individual accomplishment, and may characterise whole groups or communities or societies. Thus one can talk of bilingual individuals or communities that are characterised by wide-spread bilingualism. On the other hand, one uses the term multilingualism to refer to the presence of several languages in a country. For instance, when we say that India is a multilingual country, what we imply is that there are several languages spoken and used in India. In the sections that follow we shall concentrate on Bilingualism and look at its various dimensions.

3.2 ON DEFINING BILINGUALISM

Any number of definitions of Bilingualism are available in the literature. We give below some of the more well-known definitions which focus on different dimensions of this phenomenon. Consider the following:

- (a) Bilingualism refers to "a native-like control of two languages" (Leonard Bloomfield)
- (b) Bilingualism is "the practice of using two languages simultaneously" (Uriel Weinreich)
- (c) Bilingualism refers to "the simultaneous learning of two languages...."(Arsenian)
- (d) Bilingualism is "the ability to use two language in the environment of the native language." (Diebold)

The above definitions, it will be noticed, focus on different dimensions of bilingualism and look at it from distinct perspectives. Thus while (c) focuses on the learning of two languages, (a) refers to the control over or proficiency in two languages and emphasizes equal, native-like control. Definition (b) clearly refers to the use of two languages, and (d) adds another dimension by referring to the ability to use two languages in the environment of the native language or L1. We shall discuss each of these separately in the sections that follow, using the terms L1 for the native language or first language and L2 for the second language or other language. Suffice it to say for the moment, that L2, for the purpose of our discussion, may be a closely related language (e.g. Oriya for a native speaker of Bangla) or a not so closely related language (e.g. Bangla for a native speaker of Tamil); a foreign language (e.g. English for speakers of Indian languages, or a classical language (e.g. Latin or Greek or Sanskrit). As a matter of fact, towards the end of this unit we purpose to present a typological sketch of bilingualism, giving an integrated view of this complex phenomenon.

3.3. BECOMING A BILINGUAL

As pointed out in the introduction, one of the important dimensions in any discussion of bilingualism, is the process of learning a second language (L2). In order to understand this process of learning, one has to find answers to the following questions:

- a) When and in what circumstances does the learning of L2 take place?
- b) What are the motivations for learning the L2?
- c) How is the learning of L2 encouraged and supported by the society of which the learner is a member?

Answer to question (a) would obviously relate to the age at which L2 is learnt and the kind of formal or informal training one received in L2. One may begin learning L2 at a very young age, almost as early as one learns L1; or one may learn it at a later period in one's life. For instance if we take the case of English, we will see that many Indian children begin learning it almost along with their L1, while others learn it

3.4 BEING A BILINGUAL

Depending on the quality and kind of learning, support and feedback with regard to L2, different people attain different levels of proficiency in L2. A report of UNESCO (1978) states that "Bilingualism is not an absolute state, not an 'all-or-none' phenomenon, but a relative state". It may range from a smattering of L2, through "a minimal but sufficiently functional competence in the operational control of a second language (L2) to what Bloomfield calls 'a native-like competence'.

In the literature on bilingualism we find a three-fold distinction with regard to proficiency in L2. Thus we find references to **compound bilinguals**, **coordinate bilinguals** and **subordinate bilinguals**. Researches by linguists, psycholinguists and others suggest that the subordinate bilingual is a person who has been taught the L2 through the Grammar-Translation method and is at the beginner's stage in his/her control over the L2. S/he operates with a simple mechanism whereby items of L1 are translated into equivalent items of L2. For instance for a subordinate Hindi-English bilingual, the L1 (Hindi) word /ghoRa/ which refers to a 'horse' has the translation equivalent /hors/in L2 (English). The other term used for a bilingual who operates in this manner is '**incipient bilingual**'. Children, when they begin to learn a second language, often operate in this manner, just as some adults do when they learn the L2 for restricted purposes. They operate by simply asking the question: "what is /ghoRa/ in English?" and come up with the word 'horse'. Such incipient bilinguals (subordinate bilinguals) obviously have minimal proficiency in the L2 and proceed on the basis of item to item translation.

The next stage in bilingual proficiency is reached when one becomes a coordinate bilingual. The coordinate bilingual, it is suggested, operated with two separate semantic bases - one for L1 and other for L2. Thus, rather than using the simple procedure of item-to-item translation, the coordinate bilingual seems to operate with two separate items (referents) and produces the matching linguistic signs in the two languages concerned. Thus, for the Hind-English coordinate bilingual, there seem to be two referents, one of which calls up the Hindi linguistic item 'ghoRa' and the other calls up the English item 'horse' without having to take recourse to the mechanism of translation. Most intermediate level learners of an L2 can be called coordinate bilinguals who have begun to 'think' in L2' and have thus risen beyond the stage where they have to search for item-wise translation equivalents in L2. They may be referred to as '**partial bilinguals**' as opposed to the incipient bilinguals discussed in the previous paragraph.

The third kind of bilingual has been referred to as compound bilingual. This bilingual, it has been suggested, operates with a fused or single semantic base, a single set of referents (a single reality, as it were) and has complete control over the two linguistic codes: L1 and L2. Unlike the subordinate or the coordinate bilinguals, s/he can, at will, call up items of L1 or L2 without having to translate or without feeling that s/he is referring to two different objects or referents. Most advanced learners of L2 may be said to have become compound bilingual: those who have '**native-like competence in the two languages**', and feel equally 'at home' in them. The other term often used to refer to such bilinguals in '**full bilinguals**'.

The following table will clarify further the parallelism between the different sets of terms one comes across in the literature.

either from the age of five or ten, or even later, depending on the kind of school they go to or due to other circumstances. Some learn English both informally and formally, while others get to learn it only formally in the classroom. This has obvious implications for the amount of exposure one has in L2, as well as, for the degree of proficiency one attains in it. Those who learn L2 at an early age and continue to grow up in circumstances that provide adequate exposure and reinforcement to L2, naturally attain greater fluency and proficiency in it. They also find it much easier to learn L2 than those whose process of learning begins at some later stage or in different circumstances. To make the point clear, let us think of the difference between a child belonging to an educated, affluent family in a metropolitan city, who is sent to an English medium public school, and a child belonging to a lower middle-class family in a small town or village, who goes to a Government school and starts learning English only in class V, and that too only as a subject. Moreover, it is also important to remember that the early years of one's life are the best time for learning an L2.

Question (b) relates to 'why' one learns an L2. While learning of L1 is a necessary and inevitable consequence of growing up and socialization in a community, L2 may be learnt for a variety of reasons. One may learn a classical language as an L2 for purposes of acquainting oneself with one's heritage. In such cases (for instance, if one were to learn Sanskrit as an L2 in the Indian context) the purpose is limited to the consultation of Sanskrit texts and the chances are that one would hardly ever use it in day-do-day interactions with other members of the community. It would remain a means of accessing knowledge and not become a means of communication and interaction. Moreover, the number of people in the community learning Sanskrit as an L2 will always be rather limited, as also the exposure to spoken Sanskrit would be rare. Compare this with one who learns a modern Indian language as L2 (e.g. a native speaker of Tamil learning Hindi as an L2). Here the motivation would be entirely different. The Tamil-speaker who learns Hindi, would do so not only for familiarising him/herself with Hindi literature and cultural patterns associated with Hindi, but s/he would also have the added motivation of interacting with Hindi speakers and using Hindi in a wide variety of domains and situations in his/her life - situations pertaining to socialization, employment, mass-media, trade, etc. Thus Hindi as an L2 would become a vibrant part of his/her verbal repertoire and would be put to active use, both in the spoken and written forms. Yet again, one might learn German or French or Spanish (in the Indian context). In such a case the motivation would be to acquaint oneself with French or German or Spanish culture and literature, possibly to visit countries where these languages are spoken, for purposes of tourism or for higher studies, etc. A speaker of Hindi, learning French as L2 would find very few other users of French in India and would need French only on very limited occasions, and for very limited purposes. Exposure to French too would be limited, and continued, stable proficiency in French would be extremely difficult to maintain. Compare this with the case of a person who learns English as L2 in the Indian context. His/her reasons for learning English as L2 in the Indian context would be many — education (especially higher education), employment, upward social mobility, ability to interact and socialise at the inter-regional level, prestige, etc. For him/her English as L2 would be quite different, in terms of the functions it performs, from Sanskrit or another modern Indian language or French/German.

Thus, one may learn an L2 for a host of different reasons and with varying degrees of motivation. The purposes for which L2 is learnt may range from very limited to very extensive. All this, as we shall see, has serious implications for the amount of learning and the quality of learning of L2 that takes place.

Question (c) above, again, has important bearing on the kind of L2 learning that takes place. A glance at the Indian scene would immediately reveal how a society supports, encourages or demands the learning of L2 differentially. Taking the example of a person for whom Hindi is L1, one can immediately see how the Indian

social context extends differential pressure and provides differential support for the learning of Sanskrit, Gujarati, Tamil, French and English to such a person.

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The next stage in bilingual proficiency is reached when one becomes a coordinate bilingual. The coordinate bilingual, it is suggested, operated with two separate semantic bases - one for L1 and other for L2. Thus, rather than using the simple procedure of item-to-item translation, the coordinate bilingual seems to operate with two separate items (referents) and produces the matching linguistic signs in the two languages concerned. Thus, for the Hind-English coordinate bilingual, there seem to be two referents, one of which calls up the Hindi linguistic item 'ghoRa' and the other calls up the English item 'horse' without having to take recourse to the mechanism of translation. Most intermediate level learners of an L2 can be called coordinate bilinguals who have begun to 'think' in L2' and have thus risen beyond the stage where they have to search for item-wise translation equivalents in L2. They may be referred to as 'partial bilinguals' as opposed to the incipient bilinguals discussed in the previous paragraph.

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The following table will clarify further the parallelism between the different sets of terms one comes across in the literature.

Stage I	State II	Stage III
Incipient	Partial	Full
Beginner	Partial	Advanced
Subordinate	Coordinate	Compound
Inadequate	Adequate	Ambilingual

3.5 FUNCTIONING AS A BILINGUAL

In the foregoing sections we have briefly discussed the processes involved in becoming and being a bilingual. In this section we shall discuss the uses to which L2 or the second language is put, i.e. functioning as a bilingual. In order to make the discussion more meaningful for you we will sub-categorise the notion of function into "purposes" and "domains". We shall see that these two, when put together, give us a clear picture of how a bilingual functions, as well as, the functional load that the L2 has to bear.

3.5.1 Purposes

No one learns a language without a purpose. While the L1 (Mother tongue, it may be said) is acquired without any apparent purpose in mind, a second language is learnt for specific purposes. These purposes may range from restricted, rather limited use like interacting with neighbours, shopkeepers and like, or for seeking limited, though necessary information for getting about in a new place, or acquiring knowledge about other times, other people and other cultures, to a more extensive habitual use, along with one's L1, for almost all spheres and activities of life. It is useful to think of purposes for learning L2 in terms of the following:

- a. for interacting informally and casually with speakers of L2;
- b. for interacting with speakers of L2 in more formal settings;
- c. for purposes of academic advancement — reading books, consulting journals, listening to lectures, talks, etc;
- d. for getting access to both print and electronic media;
- e. for professionals/administrative purposes — for instance, for successfully functioning as a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, a salesman, a government officer, an ambassador, etc;
- f. for interacting with peer group in casual, informal or intimate encounters as well as, in more formal contexts;

It will be obvious from the foregoing that the L2 may serve either restricted or extended purposes relating to social, academic, professional and general purposes. In the context of becoming a bilingual in English (i.e. in addition to having one of the Indian languages as one's L1) all or some of the above purposes may motivate a person to learn it. As a matter of fact, we would see that for the average Indian bilingual who knows English as L2, it serves social, academic, professional and general purposes in varying degrees. By comparison, some of the other foreign languages (and even some of the other major Indian Languages) serve rather limited purposes.

tolerant and open-minded. As far as the question of bilingualism being a burden is concerned, studies have shown that bilingualism actually facilitates rather than hinders learning processes.

Consequences for the Bilingual Group

In cases when entire groups or communities are characterised by wide-spread bilingualism, i.e. the presence and use of two languages, there is a general tendency to allocate, different functional roles to the two languages. Thus the group may, by tacit consent, use one language for a set of functions and the other language for a different set of functions. Moreover, if the functions are seen to be in some kind of a hierarchical order, one language may come to be regarded as 'high' (H) and the other language (used for day-to-day, ordinary activities) may come to be regarded as 'Low' (L). When such a situation obtains, the two languages are said to be in a 'diglossic' relationship. In several cases, however, L1 and L2 operate in complementary roles and are (as in the case of Hindi-English) given equal value and respect. In cases of societal bilingualism, institutional support is given to the two languages and things are so structured and arranged as to provide equal opportunities for growth, spread and development of both L1 and L2. Such social groups are said to be in stable societal bilingualism.

Consequences for L1 and L2

When two languages (L1 and L2) are learnt, spoken and used by individuals and whole groups or communities, they come to form a kind of co-existent system in the linguistic repertoire of the bilinguals. The co-existence and habitual use of the two languages may have the following consequences.

- a. L1 and L2, due to mutual influence, may undergo structural changes at the level of sound, syntax, vocabulary and semantics
- b. The two languages may, in due course of time and due to various socio-historical reasons, come to be viewed and evaluated differentially. One language may for instance, come to be perceived as the language of education, opportunity, prestige or status, while the other may not be perceived to have these attributes. (Consider, for example, the use of English as opposed to some of the major Indian languages).
- c. Due to habitual use of L1 and L2 in different domains and situations, the bilingual users of the two language may begin to switch from L1 and L2 and vice-versa (known as code switching), or even to mix the two languages (known as 'code-mixing'). Such switching and mixing may come to gain wide currency as well as a kind of respectability and social acceptability and may, in fact, become a kind of new code/language.
- d. Where institutional and educational support is given to L1 and L2 in a large measure, it may come to be viewed as an imposition or an unwanted burden. It may also happen that the L2 is viewed as language of power, prestige and opportunity, leading to negative attitudes towards L1. In extreme cases such a situation may lead to partial or total loss of L1: Consider, for example, the case of L1 speakers of minor Indian languages learning a major Indian language as L2, or even some urban L1 speakers of major Indian languages learning English.

These then are the different aspects of bilingualism that should be kept in mind. It is a complex and fascinating phenomenon and, as indicated earlier in the unit, we present below, a typological diagram of bilingualism.

3.5.2 Domains

It is customary to divide human activity into several domains. All these domains when put together, account for most of the things that an average human being does or is expected to do. For the purpose of our discussions we shall operate with the following domains:

1. Family
2. Neighbourhood
3. School
4. Trade and commerce
5. Government and administration
6. Work-place
7. Religion

While discussing the functions of L2 it is worthwhile to try and find out which domain of life of the bilingual it enters, and which it does not enter. Again, within each domain it is possible to think of interactional situations in which L1 and L2 or one of them may be used. Thus, within the domain 'School', and again taking the example of Hindi-English bilinguals, one may ask whether English as L2 is used as medium of instruction or only taught as a subject; whether it is needed only for interaction within the classroom or outside the classroom too; whether English is used in peer-group interaction in the playing fields and school compound, and so on. Within the family domain, again one might ask whether English, along with L1, is used between child and parents, between child and grandparents, among siblings (brother and sisters), with visitors and callers, and so on. Answers to these questions, coupled with the specification of purposes which L2 serves, gives us a fairly complete picture of the way a bilingual functions and the role(s) that L2 plays in his/her life.

3.6 CONSEQUENCES OF BILINGUALISM

What happens when individuals or groups become bilingual? It would be useful to try and answer this question in terms of the bilingual individual, the social group of which s/he is a member and the languages (L1 and L2) that are involved. The question, can, thus, be reformulated as follows:

- a. What consequences does bilingualism have for the individual?
 - b. What consequences does bilingualism have for the social group which is characterised by widespread bilingualism?
 - c. What consequences does bilingualism have for the two language concerned?
- In the following section we shall deal with these questions briefly.

Consequences for the Individual

Time was when there was a fairly widespread belief that bilingualism was some kind of an aberration rather than a normal human condition. It was also believed that bilingualism was a hindrance to learning development. All this has changed now. It has been accepted that bilingualism is not an obstacle or a burden; it is, rather, an enabling and enriching phenomenon. Knowing two or more languages rather than only one, not only enriches a person's linguistic repertoire, it also makes the bilingual person more versatile in communicative and interactional terms, more open-minded, and more receptive to varied cultural conventions and customs and usages. Bilingualism also increases a person's reach in terms of information and knowledge. All these have a far more important consequence, in that, by increasing a person's receptivity, access and awareness, bilingualism also tends to make him more

tolerant and open-minded. As far as the question of bilingualism being a burden is concerned, studies have shown that bilingualism actually facilitates rather than hinders learning processes.

Consequences for the Bilingual Group

In cases when entire groups or communities are characterised by wide-spread bilingualism, i.e. the presence and use of two languages, there is a general tendency to allocate different functional roles to the two languages. Thus the group may, by tacit consent, use one language for a set of functions and the other language for a different set of functions. Moreover, if the functions are seen to be in some kind of a hierarchical order, one language may come to be regarded as 'high' (H) and the other language (used for day-to-day, ordinary activities) may come to be regarded as 'Low' (L). When such a situation obtains, the two languages are said to be in a 'diglossic' relationship. In several cases, however, L1 and L2 operate in complementary roles and are (as in the case of Hindi-English) given equal value and respect. In cases of societal bilingualism, institutional support is given to the two languages and things are so structured and arranged as to provide equal opportunities for growth, spread and development of both L1 and L2. Such social groups are said to be in stable societal bilingualism.

Consequences for L1 and L2

When two languages (L1 and L2) are learnt, spoken and used by individuals and whole groups or communities, they come to form a kind of co-existent system in the linguistic repertoire of the bilinguals. The co-existence and habitual use of the two languages may have the following consequences.

- a. L1 and L2, due to mutual influence, may undergo structural changes at the level of sound, syntax, vocabulary and semantics
- b. The two languages may, in due course of time and due to various socio-historical reasons, come to be viewed and evaluated differentially. One language may for instance, come to be perceived as the language of education, opportunity, prestige or status, while the other may not be perceived to have these attributes. (Consider, for example, the use of English as opposed to some of the major Indian languages).
- c. Due to habitual use of L1 and L2 in different domains and situations, the bilingual users of the two language may begin to switch from L1 and L2 and vice-versa (known as code switching), or even to mix the two languages (known as 'code-mixing'). Such switching and mixing may come to gain wide currency as well as a kind of respectability and social acceptability and may, in fact, become a kind of new code/language.
- d. Where institutional and educational support is given to L1 and L2 in a large measure, it may come to be viewed as an imposition or an unwanted burden. It may also happen that the L2 is viewed as language of power, prestige and opportunity, leading to negative attitudes towards L1. In extreme cases such a situation may lead to partial or total loss of L1: Consider, for example, the case of L1 speakers of minor Indian languages learning a major Indian language as L2, or even some urban L1 speakers of major Indian languages learning English.

These then are the different aspects of bilingualism that should be kept in mind. It is a complex and fascinating phenomenon and, as indicated earlier in the unit, we present below, a typological diagram of bilingualism.

Function Status	Supplementary Vehicular language	Complementary Official/Link/ Language	Auxilliary Library Language	Equative Alternate Language
Type of Bilingualism	Isolated Bilingualism	Societal Bilingualism	Cultural Bilingualism	Equative Bilingualism
Type of Bilinguals	Unstable Bilinguals	Stable Bilinguals	Passive Bilinguals	Ambilinguals
L2 learning situation	Foreign language	Second language	Classical language	Bilingual Education

3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed three important dimensions of bilingualism viz. becoming a bilingual, being a bilingual and functioning as a bilingual.

We have also discussed, albeit briefly, some of the major consequences of bilingualism in terms of the bilingual individual and the society which sustains bilingualism. We have also indicated how different languages in a bilingual context may lead to new power/status equations and this may have attitudinal implications.

At the end we have provided a typological chart of different kinds of bilingualism.

3.8 KEY WORDS

bilingualism	use of at least two language (may be more) either by an individual or by a group of speakers
compound bilinguals	speakers whose languages are intermingled in the mind
coordinate bilinguals	speakers whose language are kept as separate systems
code switching	alternately using two languages
code mixing	mixing words of one language to the other
domain	an area of human activity in which one particular language is regularly used, although sometimes more than one language may be used.
incipient bilingual	speakers who have minimal control of L2
monolingual	a person who knows and uses one language
subordinate bilingual	speakers who translate an item in L1 into an equivalent item of L2

3.9 QUESTIONS

- Given an Indian language (your L1) and English, describe briefly the process whereby you became a bilingual.

2. What relationship, you think, exists between L2 learning situations and the degree of proficiency one attains in L2?
3. Describe succinctly your own use of English in different domains and situations.
4. How do you think English (as an L2) is perceived and valued in the pan-Indian bilingual context? What is your own perception?
5. Do you 'switch' or 'mix' languages? Give some examples. What is your attitude towards switching and mixing?
6. Discuss how bilingualism has been an enriching and enabling factor in your own life.
7. What relationship exists between Indian languages and English?
8. Do you think the extensive use of an L2 like English in the Indian context leads to negative attitudes towards Indian languages and diminishes use/functionality of these languages?

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