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THE BILINGUAL & THE BICULTURAL PERSON IN THE HEARING & IN THE DEAF WORLD

François Grosjean

Abstract

If we define the bilingual as a person who uses two or more languages (or dialects) in everyday life, then most Deaf people who sign and who use the majority language regularly (in its written form, for example) are bilingual. Deaf bilinguals share many similarities with hearing bilinguals (their diversity, the perception they have of their own bilingualism, their use of various language modes, etc.) but they are also characterized by a number of specificities (the lack of recognition of their bilingual status, the maintenance over time of their languages, the competence they have in certain language skills, their varying patterns of language knowledge and use, etc.). As concerns the bicultural, whom we can define as a person who lives in two or more cultures, who adapts to each and who blends aspects of each, there is little doubt that many Deaf are indeed bicultural. Some of the implications for the bilingual and bicultural education of Deaf children that emerge from these considerations are discussed in the paper.

The bilingual person.

Despite the fact that more than half the world's population uses two or more languages in everyday life, many erroneous beliefs still surround the notion of bilingualism. As for biculturalism, it is a concept that is evoked increasingly but that is rarely defined clearly. The aim of this paper is to examine both concepts and to determine how they apply to the Deaf person. In the first part, a number of issues pertaining to bilingualism will be addressed and the relevance they have to the bilingual Deaf will be discussed. In the second part, the bicultural person will be described, first in general terms, and then in relation to the Deaf. At the end of each part, some of the implications that these issues have for the bilingual and bicultural education of Deaf children will be mentioned.

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Although a few researchers have defined bilinguals as those who have native-like control of two or more languages, most others agree that this position is not realistic (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1986; Grosjean, 1982; Hakuta, 1986; Haugen, 1969; Romaine, 1989). If one were to count as bilingual only those people who pass as monolinguals in each of their languages, one would be left with no label for the vast majority of people who use two or more languages regularly but who do not have native-like fluency in each. This has led researchers to propose other definitions of bilingualism, such as: the ability to produce meaningful utterances in two (or more) languages, the command of at least one language skill (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in another language, the alternate use of several languages, etc. For our purposes, bilinguals are those people who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives. This includes people who have spoken skills in one language and written skills in the other (a situation that is akin to the Deaf who sign one language and read/write the other), people who speak two languages to varying degrees of proficiency (and who do not know how to read or write them), all the way to people who have complete skills in their two (or more) languages.

Bilinguals acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. It is precisely because the needs and uses of the languages are usually quite different that bilinguals rarely develop equal fluency in their languages. The level of fluency attained in a language (more precisely, in a language skill) will depend on the need for that language and will be domain-specific. It is thus perfectly normal to find bilinguals who can only read and write one of their languages, who have reduced speaking fluency in a language they only use with a limited number of people, or who can only speak about a particular subject in one of their languages.

Researchers are now starting to view the bilingual not so much as the sum of two (or more) complete or incomplete monolinguals but rather as a specific and fully competent speaker-hearer who has developed a communicative competence that is equal, but different in nature, to that of the monolingual. This competence makes use of one language, of the other, or of the two together (in the form of mixed language) depending on the situation, the topic, the interlocutor, etc. This view of bilingualism in turn has led to a refocusing of the procedure used to evaluate the bilingual's competencies. Bilinguals are now being studied in

terms of their total language repertoire, and the domains of use and the functions of the bilingual's various languages are being taken into account.

The bilingual's linguistic behavior

One of the most interesting aspects of bilingualism is the fact that two (or more) languages are in contact within the same person. This phenomenon, which has led to a vast body of research, can best be understood if one examines the bilingual's various language modes. In their everyday lives, bilinguals find themselves at various points along a situational continuum which induce different language modes. At one end of the continuum, bilinguals are in a totally monolingual mode in that they are speaking (or writing) to monolinguals of one—or the other—of the languages that they know. At the other end of the continuum, bilinguals find themselves in a bilingual language mode in that they are communicating with bilinguals who share their two languages and with whom they normally mix languages (i.e. code-switch and borrow). For convenience, we will refer to the two end points of the continuum when speaking of the monolingual or bilingual language modes, but we should keep in mind that these are end points and that intermediary modes do exist.

a. The monolingual language mode

In this mode, bilinguals adopt the language of the monolingual interlocutor(s) and deactivate their other language as completely as possible. Bilinguals who manage to do this totally and, in addition, who speak the language fluently and have no foreign accent in it, will often "pass" as monolinguals in that language. Although such cases are relatively rare, it is precisely these that have led people to think that bilinguals are (or should be) two monolinguals in one person. In fact, deactivation of the other language is rarely total as is clearly seen in the interferences bilinguals produce. An interference is a speaker-specific deviation from the language being spoken due to the influence of the other "deactivated" language. Interferences can occur at all levels of language (phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic) and in all modalities (spoken, written or sign). They are of two kinds: static interferences which reflect permanent traces of one language on the other and dynamic interferences which are the

ephemeral intrusions of the other language. In addition, if one of the bilingual's languages is mastered only to a certain level of proficiency, deviations due to the person's interlanguage (also known as within-language deviations) will also occur. These include over generalizations, simplifications, as well as hypercorrections and the avoidance of certain words (or signs) and expressions. It should be noted, finally, that interferences and within- language deviations, although sometimes quite apparent (such as a foreign accent), do not usually interfere with communication.

b. The bilingual language mode

In this mode, bilinguals interact with one another. First, they adopt a language to use together, which is known as the "base language" (or sometimes the "host" or "matrix" language). This process is called "language choice" and is governed by a number of factors: the interlocutors involved, the situation of the interaction, the content of the discourse and the function of the interaction. Language choice is a well- learned behavior but it is also a very complex phenomenon which only becomes apparent when it breaks down.

Once a base language has been chosen, bilinguals can bring in the other language (the "guest" or "embedded" language) in various ways. One of these ways is to code-switch, that is to shift completely to the other language for a word, a phrase, a sentence. Recently, code-switching has received considerable attention from researchers. For example, sociolinguists have concentrated on when and why switching takes place in the social context, and linguists have sought to study the types of code-switches that occur (single words, phrases, clauses, sentences, etc.) as well as the linguistic constraints that govern their appearance. Although there is still considerable controversy over this latter aspect it is now clear that switching is not simply a haphazard behavior due to some form of "semilingualism" but that it is, instead, a well governed process used as a communicative strategy to convey linguistic and social information.

The other way bilinguals can bring in the other, less activated, language is to borrow a word or short expression from that language and to adapt it morphologically (and often phonologically) into the base language. Thus, unlike code-switching which is the juxtaposition of two languages, borrowing is the integration of one language into another. Most often both the form and the con-

tent of a word are borrowed (to produce what has been called a loan word or more simply a borrowing). Another type of borrowing, called a long shift, consists in either taking a word in the base language and extending its meaning to correspond to that of a word in the other language, or rearranging words in the base language along a pattern provided by the other language and thus creating a new meaning. It is important to distinguish idiosyncratic loans from words which have become part of a language community's vocabulary and which monolinguals also use (called "language borrowings" or "established loans").

The Deaf bilingual.

The bilingualism of the Deaf remains a poorly understood topic despite the fact that most Deaf people are indeed bilingual. (On this topic, see among others, Battison, 1978; Bernstein, Maxwell and Matthews, 1985; Davis, 1989; Frishberg, 1984; Grosjean, 1986; Kannapell, 1974; Kettrick and Hatfield, 1986; Lee, 1983; Lucas, 1989; Lucas and Valli, 1992; Stokoe, 1969; Volterra and Erting, 1990). The bilingualism present in the Deaf community is a form of minority language bilingualism in which the members of the Deaf community acquire and use both the minority language (sign language) and the majority language in its written form and sometimes in its spoken or even signed form. (We will use the labels "sign language" and "majority language" throughout our text as we do not want to restrict ourselves to the case of one language pair, e.g. ASL and English, FSL (LSF) and French, etc.). Sign language bilingualism can, of course, also involve the knowledge and use of two or more different sign languages but this form of bilingualism is less common in the Deaf community and has been the object of fewer studies. Thus, given the definition of bilingualism presented above, most Deaf people who sign and who use the majority language (in its written form, for example) in their everyday lives are indeed bilingual.

Deaf bilinguals share many similarities with hearing bilinguals. First, they are very diverse. Depending on their degree of hearing loss, the language(s) used in childhood, their education, their occupation, their social networks, etc., they have developed competencies in their languages (sign language and the majority language) to varying degrees. This, of course, is no different from hearing bilinguals who are also very diverse in their knowledge

and use of their languages.

Second, most Deaf bilinguals do not judge themselves to be bilingual. In some countries, some Deaf people may not be aware that sign language is different from the majority language, and in general many Deaf do not think they are bilingual because they do not fully master all the skills that accompany the majority language (or, at times, the sign language). This is a well-known phenomenon found among many bilinguals, be they hearing or Deaf, who have a tendency to evaluate their language competencies as inadequate. Some criticize their mastery of language skills, others strive their hardest to reach monolingual norms, others hide their knowledge of their "weaker" language, and most simply do not perceive themselves as being bilingual even though they use two (or more) languages regularly.

Third, like hearing bilinguals, Deaf bilinguals find themselves in their everyday lives at various points along the language mode continuum. When they are communicating with monolinguals they restrict themselves to just one language and are therefore in a monolingual mode. They deactivate the other language and remain, as best they can, within the confines of the language being used (for example, a written form of the majority language). At other times, Deaf bilinguals find themselves in a bilingual mode, that is with other bilinguals who share to some extent their two languages—sign language and the majority language—and with whom they can mix their languages. Here, depending on such factors as their knowledge of the two languages, the person(s) being addressed, the situation, the topic, the function of the interaction, etc., they choose a base language usually a form of sign language (the natural sign language of the community or a signed version of the spoken language). Then, according to various momentary needs, and by means of signing, fingerspelling, mouthing, etc., they bring in the other language in the form of code- switches or borrowings. The result has recently been called contact signing (Lucas and Valli, 1992).

Although the bilingualism of the Deaf shares many characteristics with that of hearing people, a number of aspects are specific to the Deaf group. First, until recently there has been little recognition of Deaf people's bilingual status. They are still seen by many as monolingual in the majority language whereas in fact many are bilingual in that language and in sign. Second, Deaf bilinguals, because of their hearing loss, will remain bilingual

throughout their lives and from generation to generation. This is not always the case with other minority groups who, over the years, can shift to a form of monolingualism (either in the majority language, in the minority language or in some other form of language).

Third, and again due to the hearing loss, certain language skills in the majority language (speaking, above all) may never be acquired fully by Deaf bilinguals. Fourth, although movement takes place along the language mode continuum, Deaf bilinguals rarely find themselves at the monolingual sign language end. Thus, unless they are communicating with a monolingual member of the majority language (via the written modality, for example), they will most often be with other bilinguals and will be thus be in a bilingual language mode.

Fifth, the patterns of language knowledge and use appear to be somewhat different, and probably more complex, than in spoken language bilingualism. When a sign language bilingual uses sign language with one interlocutor, a form of signed spoken language with another, a mixture of the two with a third, a form of simultaneous communication (sign and speech) with a fourth, etc., the diverse behaviors are the result of a number of complex factors:

(a) The bilingual's actual knowledge of the sign language and of the majority language. This competence, in terms of linguistic rules and lexical knowledge, can often be characterized in terms of how prototypical it is.

(b) The modalities (or channels) of production: manual (sign, fingerspelling), oral (speech, mouthing with or without voice), written, etc. Some of these modalities are more appropriate for one of the two languages (speech or writing for the majority language) but others, such as the sign modality, can be used, to some extent at least, for one or the other language. How these modalities are combined during the interaction is of particular interest.

(c) The presence of the other language in the bilingual communication mode. Here, either one language is chosen as the base language and the other language is called in at various points in time or a third system emerges that combines the two languages (what Lucas and Valli (1992) call contact signing). In both cases, the languages can interact in a sequential manner (as in code-switching) or in a simultaneous manner (signing and mouthing) and can involve various modalities (Frishberg, 1984).

Implications for bilingual & bicultural education.

A number of implications emerge from what we are starting to know about the bilingualism of Deaf people. First, it is necessary to continue studying Deaf bilingualism (its development, its various facets, etc.) and to inform parents and educators about it. Too many stereotypes still surround bilingualism, be it between two spoken languages or between a sign language and a spoken language. Second, it is important that Deaf people realize that they are indeed bilingual, that they accept this fact and that they take pride in it. They are not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals but an integrated whole with a unique communicative competence. Third, it is critical that Deaf children be brought up bilingual—with sign language as their primary language and with the majority language (especially in its written modality) as a second language.

How this is done is clearly a challenge for parents, educators and members of the linguistic communities involved. What is certain, however, is that children need to learn, among other things, that there are various languages and language modes and that they have to use them at different times and with different interlocutors. To achieve this, they should interact with various people (family, friends, teachers, etc.) with whom they need to use one or the other language and a variety of modes: the sign language monolingual mode with certain Deaf people, the majority language monolingual mode with most members of the hearing majority and, finally, the sign language bilingual mode with other members of their community and with hearing signers. It is important that role models be offered to them for each language and each type of language mode and that they develop a need for each. As is well known, children only become bilingual if they have to, that is, if their life requires the use of two (or more) languages and language modes.

The bicultural person

Even though one sees the term "bicultural" almost as often as the word "bilingual" (in the title of educational programs, in state or federal laws, on the cover of books, etc.) one knows much less about biculturalism. And yet many people are bicultural (although they are not as numerous as bilinguals) and many of the

"advantages" or "disadvantages" of bilingualism are, in fact, tied to biculturalism and not to bilingualism. We should note at this point that bilingualism and biculturalism are not necessarily coextensive. Many people are bilingual without being bicultural (members of diglossic communities, inhabitants of countries that have lingua francas, etc.) and, similarly, some people are bicultural without being bilingual (members of a minority culture who no longer know the minority language but who retain other aspects of that culture, for example).

Before attempting to define the bicultural person, it is important to explain what we mean by culture. For our purpose here, culture reflects all the facets of life of a group of people: its organization, its rules, its behaviors, its beliefs, its values, its traditions, etc. As humans, we belong to a number of cultures (or cultural networks): major cultures (national, linguistic, social, religious, etc.) and minor cultures (occupation, sport, hobby, etc.). What is interesting is that some cultures are complementary (it is permissible to belong to several or all of these at the same time) whereas others are mutually exclusive (belonging to one and the other is unacceptable and thereby raises problems; thus it was practically impossible during the Second World War to be both Japanese and American just as it is currently difficult to be both Croatian and Serb). In what follows, we will concentrate on people who belong to two major (often mutually exclusive) cultures.

Biculturals are characterized by at least three traits: (a) they live in two or more cultures, (b) they adapt, at least in part, to these cultures (their attitudes, behaviors, values, etc.), and (c) they blend aspects of these cultures. This latter point is important as it means that not all behaviors, beliefs and attitudes can be modified according to the cultural situation the bicultural person is currently in. The French-German bicultural, for example, blends aspects of both the French and of the German culture and cannot, therefore, be 100% French in France and 100% German in Germany, however hard he or she tries. This aspect is a differentiating factor between bilingualism and biculturalism: bilinguals can usually deactivate one language and only use the other in certain situations (at least to a very great extent), whereas biculturals cannot always deactivate certain traits of their other culture when in a monocultural environment.

Other criteria have been put forward to define the bicultural such as accepting one's bicultural status, having a good understanding of a second culture, being born bicultural, etc., but these are probably not as important as the three we have put forward: living in two cultures, adapting to them and blending aspects of each. Of course, the balanced bicultural who is as much part of one culture as of another is as rare as the balanced bilingual who is as fluent in all skills of one language as of another. Most biculturals have stronger ties with one culture than with another (at least in certain domains of life) but this in no way makes them less bicultural.

Unfortunately, one knows very little about the bicultural's cultural behavior: which aspects of a culture are adaptable to a specific cultural situation and which are not; how biculturals interact with the two (or more) cultures they belong to; how they switch from one culture to another, etc. What is sure is that, like bilinguals, they often find themselves at various points along a situational continuum which require different types of behavior. At one end, they are in a monocultural mode and must deactivate as best they can their other culture. (The blending component in biculturals makes this practically impossible, hence the frequent presence of cultural interferences). At the other end, they are with other biculturals like themselves with whom they use a cultural base to interact (the behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, etc. of one culture) and into which they bring the other culture in the form of cultural switches and borrowings when they choose to.

One aspect of biculturalism that is important, especially for bicultural children and adolescents, concerns the acceptance of one's bicultural identity. To be able to reach the point of saying, "I am bicultural, a member of culture A and of culture B", a bicultural person often has to go through a long and often trying, process. On the one hand, members of the two different cultures assess, indirectly of course, whether a person belongs to their culture or not by taking into account such factors as kinship, language, physical appearance, nationality, education, attitudes, etc. This double categorization, by each of the two cultural groups, can produce similar results (X is judged to belong solely to culture A or to culture B) or contradictory results (X is categorized

as a member of culture A by members of culture B and as a member of culture B by members of culture A). Not only is this latter categorization contradictory but it is often absolute in the sense that cultures do not readily accept that a person can be part of their culture and also part of another culture. The attitude is either "You are A" or "You are B" but rarely "You are A and B".

Faced with this double, often contradictory, categorization, biculturals have to reach a decision as to their own cultural identity. To do this they take into account the perception of the two cultures and bring in other factors such as their personal history, their identity needs, their knowledge of the languages and cultures involved, etc. The outcome of this long process is a decision to belong solely to culture A, to belong solely to culture B, to belong to neither culture A nor culture B, or to belong to both culture A and culture B. Of course, the optimal solution for biculturals is to opt for the fourth alternative, that is to accept their biculturalism, but unfortunately many biculturals, influenced as they are by the categorization of the cultural groups they belong to, choose one of the first three alternatives (A, B, neither A nor B). These solutions are not usually satisfactory as they do not truly reflect the bicultural person and they may have negative consequences later on. Those who choose either culture A or culture B (that is, turn away from one of their two cultures) are often dissatisfied with their decision, and those who reject both cultures feel uprooted, marginal or ambivalent. With time, and after a long, sometimes arduous process, most biculturals come to terms with their biculturalism. The lucky ones can belong to a new cultural group (see the many hyphenated groups in North America) and most others, who are isolated biculturals, will ultimately navigate with a certain degree of ease between and within their cultures.

Is the Deaf person bicultural?

Given what we have just said about biculturalism, we can ask two questions. First, are Deaf people bicultural, and second, if some are, what is being done to help them come to terms with their bicultural identity? As concerns the first question, there is probably little doubt that many Deaf meet the three criteria that we put forward above: They live in two or more cultures (their

family, friends, colleagues, etc. are either members of the Deaf community or of the hearing world); they adapt, at least in part, to these cultures; and they blend aspects of these cultures. Of course, such factors as deafness in the family, degree of hearing loss, type of education, etc. may lead some Deaf people to have fewer contacts with the hearing world while others have more (their bicultural dominance can thus differ), but it is nevertheless true that most Deaf people are not only bilingual but also bicultural. (This is also the case for hearing children of Deaf parents and for some hearing people who have developed strong ties with the Deaf community). Of course, most Deaf people are Deaf dominant biculturals in that they identify primarily with the Deaf community but many of them also have ties with the hearing world and interact with it and hence, in a sense, are also members of it. This brings us to the second question: What is being done to help Deaf people come to terms with their bicultural identity? Which in turn raises a number of subsidiary questions: What identity signals are being sent by the two cultures in question? Are they complementary or contradictory? What is the outcome of the identity decision taken by each Deaf person? Does the decision reflect that person's degree of biculturalism? Is the decision the right one for that person? As a hearing researcher with few ties with the Deaf community, I am in no position to give answers to these questions, but I do think that they should be addressed.

Implications for bilingual and bicultural education

It is important that Deaf children and adolescents be given every opportunity to learn about the cultures they belong to (the Deaf culture primarily but also, to some extent, the hearing culture), that they be able to interact with these cultures, and that they be able to go through the process of choosing the cultures or the culture they wish to identify with. It is the task of parents, family members, educators, and members of the cultures involved to make sure this process takes place as early and as smoothly as possible.

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