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An Approach to Bilingualism: Theoretical Background
Applied to a Personal Experience

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ABSTRACT

SUMMARY

This is a descriptive paper that inquires into bilingualism, starting from my own personal experience as a bilingual person, always from an academic perspective, both linguistic and pedagogic. It contains 6 sections and a reference list. The sections of this paper consist of a short introduction to the subject, followed by a section on the historical origin of bilingualism and its causes; the existing theories and definitions of the concepts of bilingualism and a bilingual person, these being the central theme. This paper also contemplates other concepts related to the topic such as multilingualism and plurilingualism; a description of bilingualism from a pedagogical perspective briefly mentioning some of the most recognised methods used in bilingual language education; and finally, the relation and comparison of all the academic theory researched with my own personal experience, as well as a brief final conclusion.

Keywords:

Bilingualism, Bilingual, Multilingualism, Multilingual, Plurilinguism.

RESUMEN

Este es un trabajo descriptivo que indaga en el bilingüismo, partiendo de mi experiencia personal como persona bilingüe, siempre desde la perspectiva académica, tanto lingüística como pedagógica. Contiene 6 secciones y una lista bibliográfica. Los puntos tratados en este documento constan de una breve introducción en la materia, seguida de una sección sobre el origen histórico del bilingüismo y las causas originarias; las teorías existentes y definiciones lingüísticas sobre el concepto de bilingüismo y persona bilingüe en una línea central. También contempla otros conceptos relacionados como el multilingüismo y el plurilingüismo; una descripción del concepto desde una perspectiva más pedagógica mencionando brevemente algunos de los métodos pedagógicos más reconocidos relacionados con la enseñanza bilingüe; y para finalizar, la relación y comparación de toda la teoría académica investigada con mi experiencia personal, además de una breve conclusión final.

Palabras clave:

Bilingüismo, Bilingüe, Multilingüismo, Multilingüe, Plurilingüismo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bilingualism is a fact that is the order of the day, and, although it has existed for a very long time, it has only acquired true recognition during the XX and XXI centuries. Nowadays, we could say that mastery of a lingua franca has become a virtually indispensable requirement both in the working environment and within the educational system. In these and numerous other areas the ability to speak two or more languages is highly valued and sought-after, and even more so for what is commonly called the "bilingual level"¹. Moreover, in today's society bilingualism appears to be considered a relatively new phenomenon, and is currently a skill much in demand for business people.

But the truth is that many aspects of this phenomenon are still unknown, and there are many doubts and debates surrounding it, even though over the last two centuries it has been studied in depth from the perspective of diverse scientific fields (such as linguistics, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, etc.). Nevertheless, it seems there is still lack of consensus in defining the concept of bilingualism, and the different aspects and features that constitute it. There are many theories proposed regarding the origins, methodology, and conceptualization of bilingualism; and there are even practical applications for its measurement, as there are theorists and scholars who have considered the possibility that bilingualism may be a human capacity which has different levels and stages.

In this paper, I have carried out research mainly on some of the theories that exist about bilingualism, but also delving into the concepts of "multilingualism" and "plurilingualism" since, in my opinion, they ought not to be ignored, considering that they are phenomena closely linked to the subject matter that concerns us hereof. I will first start by going over the origins and causes of bilingualism. From there on, I will mention the different definitions and characterizations of the terms "bilingualism", "multilingualism" and "plurilingualism" as general concepts in order to be able to later study what hypotheses exist that establish what a bilingual person is precisely. Thereafter, I will examine the

¹ Bilingual level: It refers to a native-like competence as stated by SIL International (1999)

diverse approaches carried out by professionals who believe that bilingualism is an ability that can be taught, trained and improved. As a conclusion, this paper does not seek to provide a solution to all the debates and dilemmas that exist in relation to bilingualism (in fact, bilingualism is currently still an open debate) but, after examining all the aforementioned theoretical information about this topic, I will compare everything that has been deliberated with my own experience as a person with bilingual features, and I will state my opinion from my perspective as a bilingual individual. That is to say, the peculiarity of this work may not be in the research itself about bilingualism but in the chance to explore some of the definitions, causes and methodologies that we will later see reflected in a real case that covers the general profile of a "bilingual person" (on this occasion, myself). In short, studying bilingualism from the perspective of a bilingual person.

2. ORIGINS OF BILINGUALISM

To begin the research on bilingualism, it is necessary to first look at the context and origins of this phenomenon in as much as the theories and descriptions we are going to see later on in this research have their basis and their principles in the historical facts and the types of causes I am now about to discuss.

Generally speaking, without getting into the historical facts, according to François Grosjean (1982) in his work *Life with Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism*, there are several factors that can give rise to a bilingual condition. Bilingualism could be due to the migration of an individual or a group of people for political, social or economic reasons; it could also be for political-ideological circumstances as may be nationalisms and federalisms; or owing to cultural and educational causes. Grosjean (1982) explains and exemplifies each one of these factors with historical situations.

For the first reason given (migration for political, social and economic reasons), the most important and frequent type of migration that would trigger bilingual situations in the past centuries was by cause of military invasions and colonization (Mackey 1967). But, within this kind of migration, Brosnahan (1963) and Cooper (1978) have specified that, in order to transmit a language into another territory, the invasion should be carried out under certain conditions; for instance, in order for the language spread to be effective, the conquerors must be settled in the target country for a long period, the conquered territory should be multilingual and thus the invader's language can be used as a lingua franca which should reinforce either the social, political, educational or commercial options for the natives. According to Grosjean (1982), a good example of this language-spread source is the Roman occupation of Great Britain.

Lewis (1976) reports that when the Romans arrived in Britain, Celtic was the native language. It remained the first language of the population throughout the Roman occupation, but a number of Britons also learned and used Latin, which was used in the administration of the country, in the army (which recruited native Britons into its ranks) and in trade and commerce between Romans and Britons and with other parts of the empire. Use of Latin enabled native Britons to profit from the many advantages of the Roman Empire, including its schools, markets, public baths, and amusement places. (Grosjean 33)

Consequently, Latin was not an imposed language but it was the only way for the Britons or Gauls to become part of the Empire and to gain certain privileges, especially for traders and other inhabitants of the urban areas. Traders and people living in the city were generally the people who became bilingual owing to the fact they were in close contact with the invaders (who normally settled in the civic areas) unlike those who lived in rural areas (Mackey 1967).

Other political and ideological reasons that lead to bilingualism, closely related to the invasions and conquests above mentioned, are persecutions and exoduses, for instance: the exodus of Russians after the revolution that took place in 1917 or that of Cubans when Fidel Castro took over power (Grosjean 32); and also nationalism and federalism. As to the

latter, nationalistic ideology introduces, in most cases, the idea of a national language prevailing over regional languages which often results in a development of bilingualism by a portion of the population that speak their regional or native language together with the imposed national language. The following quotation by Davies (qtd. in Fishman 49) exemplifies the importance and power that language has from a nationalistic point of view: *“A people without a language of its own is only half a nation. A nation should guard its language more than its territories---‘tis a surer barrier, a more important frontier than fortress or river.”* (Fishman 49)

Related to all these settlements, invasions, and impositions, is the fact that throughout history, bilingualism has emerged as a result of the domination that some languages have had in educational and cultural aspects. Such is the case, for example, of the French language which dominated the cultural life in Europe during the Crusades and throughout the reign of Louis XIV; Italian during the Renaissance; or in present times English, considering that it is the most commonly used international language, particularly in science, business and the mass media.

In short, bilingualism phenomena emerge as a linguistic consequence of such political and ideological facts. This linguistic situation can come imposed by law (just as happens in nationalistic and federalist occupations) or, despite not being legally regulated, it may come as an almost mandatory reality for the invaded or dominated population in order to become integrated into the new society; and sometimes as an accidental consequence for conquerors as a result of being in contact with the native populace.

Regarding reasons resulting from social or economic migration, throughout history people have had to move from their country to other regions or countries in order to find work or better living conditions. In this situation, the immigrants will have to learn and use the language of the target country both at work and when communicating with the natives, although they may carry on using their mother tongue when at home or with closely related people from their own country. This will surely lead these immigrants to bilingualism in a very short time period. A historical example of social migration may be that of the potato

famine in Ireland during the 19th century. “*The potato famine in the 19th century in Ireland resulted in mass migration to the United States, where the Gaelic-speakers among the immigrants were forced to learn English to facilitate their entry into the English-speaking society.*” (Grosjean 32)

A more recent historical event is that of the economic crisis of 2008 with worldwide effects and which is still ongoing. This crisis has brought about as a consequence a great migration wave due to economic reasons forcing immigrant workers to be displaced from economically affected regions to other regions or nations (Grosjean 1982)

In addition to the social origin of bilingualism, Grosjean (1982) reminds us that one of the most immediate consequences of migration (whatever the reason for it is) is intermarriage between immigrants and natives or immigrants from different origins, indiscriminately. This, in turn, heightens the possibility of becoming bilingual (Grosjean 33)

In brief, we can say that among situations of social and economic migration bilingualism emerges as a necessity for individuals to survive and adapt to the host country.

Finally, as mentioned previously in this section, education has a very important role in the spread of bilingualism. The majority of educational systems are now based on bilingualism, that is to say students are taught in two languages or in another language that is not their mother tongue. Furthermore, students often carry out their studies in other countries either for complete or partial terms. This allows those students to become bilingual by being surrounded by natives and in a situation where it is mandatory to use the foreign language. Nonetheless, we have to bear in mind that, formerly, access to a bilingual or multilingual education was only possible for the elite. Widespread access to this type of education is a relatively recent event in history.

Among other important authors of opinions and theories is John Edwards (qtd. in Bathia and Ritchie 7) who, in *The Handbook of Bilingualism*, bears out all the above discussed stating that these linguistic realities “*arise in a number of ways. Immigrants*

whether settlers or invaders, bring languages into contact and sometimes, as with imperialist and colonial expansion, it is unnecessary for many people to physically move; their language may make its presence felt through military, religious, or economic force requiring relatively small numbers of soldiers, merchants, bureaucrats, and missionaries (...)” (Bathia and Ritchie 7) and that “*can also arise as a result of political union among different linguistic groups.*” (Bathia and Ritchie 7) Moreover, he adds one more situation where this kind of linguistic phenomena can also take place, namely in border areas (John Edwards in Bathia and Ritchie 7). As a conclusion, he remarks that all the above mentioned circumstances are considered the primary ones where bilingual situations can take place but that they are not the only ones (Edwards 7) “*Cultural and educational motivations can also expand linguistic repertoires – not only on an individual basis, but in more widespread fashion as well*” (Bathia and Ritchie 8)

Supporting the theory on bilingual spread owing to reasons of social and economic migration is the Council of Europe that in the *Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education* organized in 2015, the idea was discussed that, at the present time, we are exposed to greater linguistic diversity by agency of an increase in economic and professional mobility (Council of Europe 2008). In this sense, professional mobility is due to several reasons ranging from: a result of “*proximity of the countries concerned to other countries situated on the same continent or even on the other side of a shared border, and may only be temporary*” (Council of Europe 4), which is related to John Edward’s point of view concerning linguistic exchange taking place in border areas; or as a consequence of “*forced departures or flight from countries and cultures which are much more distant*” (Council of Europe 4)

As a conclusion of all this historical and contextual background, I would say that: bilingualism, throughout history, has emerged as a result of a concrete situation, but we could also claim that, in earlier times, being able to speak more than one language was a privilege available to very few, as well as being a medium mostly used to achieve something; whereas, at this moment, it is almost a fundamental condition of individuals, and virtually an inevitable fact.

3. DEFINING THE FIELD

Now that we have studied the historical background of bilingualism, and thus know where bilingualism comes from, we will continue researching into the topic from a linguistic perspective. We will see what concepts of bilingualism exist as a result of the study of those individuals living any of the above mentioned situations. However, before starting to develop the following section, I would like to briefly clarify some points concerning basic concepts and terminology belonging to the linguistic field. For instance, in the research literature, we talk about mono-, bi- or multilingual speakers (De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor 2005: unit A1); the speaker's mother tongue is referred to as L1, and the second language as L2 although, in the past, people also talked about L3, L4 and so on, but nowadays it is preferred to talk about Lx or simply L2 for any additional language (De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor 2005: unit A1).

3.1. BILINGUALISM, MULTILINGUALISM & PLURILINGUALISM

To start defining these concepts, we can refer to their terminological definition in the dictionaries.

On the one hand, according to the Collins English Dictionary, 'bilingual' as an adjective concerning a person is defined as "*Able to speak two languages, esp with fluency*" (*The Collins English Dictionary*.2015) while it can also refer to a communicative act "*Written or expressed in two languages.*" (*The Collins English Dictionary*.2015) On the other hand, in the same dictionary 'multilingual' is defined as "*Able to speak more than two languages*" (*The Collins English Dictionary*.2015) when concerning people, and "*Written*

or expressed in more than two languages” (The Collins English Dictionary.2015) in relation to a communicative situation. No entry for plurilingual, however, can be found in this dictionary or in any other recognised dictionary, but instead appears as a synonym of ‘multilingual’.

The next stage in our attempt to define these three important concepts will concern those definitions given by the theoreticians, experts in the field.

There are certain unresolved paradoxes in determining what is what, and where the limits are. While many experts have a fairly clear idea of what bilingualism consists of, although this may not be a closed idea in the sense that bilingualism for these authors may consist of many categories, others claim that we should indeed talk about multilingualism rather than bilingualism.

John Edwards (in Bathia and Ritchie 2006) could be considered one of the first group. Edwards stated that there are two types of bilingualism: individual bilingualism and collective bilingualism. The difference between these two types is that individual bilingualism “*may be less permanent, often reflecting a generational way-station on the road between two monolingualisms*” (Bathia and Ritchie 6), whereas collective bilingualism “*rests upon continuing necessities which become absent among most immigrant populations.*” (Bathia and Ritchie 6). This distinction between individual and collective bilingualism is related to the different causes of bilingualism explored in section 2. For instance, migration due to political and social reasons, together with invasions, are highly related to collective bilingualism whereas educational and economic causes, or any migration related to personal reasons, are mostly related to individual bilingualism.

The *Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education*, in which some specialists took part, forwarded the following theory: “*Every country has, as it were, its own multilingualism composed of “traditional” languages which form part of its cultural heritage. These include the national language(s) and its varieties, minority languages, regional languages or dialects.*” (Council of Europe 4). What is more, they add that “*Every language is plural. Even the most highly regulated of*

languages, perceived as “unified” and “homogeneous”, is actually a space of plurality composed of multiple intersecting variations.” (Council of Europe 5). These statements imply a change in our line of thought we have been following thus far in this paper. It would change just how we have understood bilingualism and multilingualism.

The reason is because these variations of the language to which they refer to are: Internal variations of the language both for synchronic and diachronic reasons; geographical variations in which, depending on the area, the same language is spoken in one way or another (as happens between Spain and Latin America or even within Latin America, or between England and the US); variations depending on the medium used; differences between written and spoken language; variations of register (when using a formal or colloquial register, etc.); variations depending on social class; variations depending on whether language is used in specialized, technical, scientific, etc. discourse; and even variations depending on the area where the language is applied, whether it is in science, video games, literature, and so forth.

All these variations, all this new way of understanding multilingualism would entail that every single person is multilingual even if s/he does not speak more than one language as long as they master their own language or are affected by any of those possible variations, and even those who do speak two languages should not be called bilingual but multilingual for the same reason.

In any case, we will focus on the first line of thought in order not to enter paradoxes that would make the research never-ending, and that we probably end up not solving owing to their high complexity. I should, therefore, clarify that I have introduced this theory as a counterpoint to the previous ones. Nevertheless, we will take some implicit concepts in this last theory which are competences, proficiency and functions since they are necessary to redefine the concept of plurilingualism, and they will be mentioned and discussed in later sections. Subsequently, we can now introduce the concept of plurilingualism as “*the capacity to successively acquire and use different competences in different languages, at*

different levels of proficiency and for different functions” (Council of Europe 8) and take it as a synonym for multilingualism because in essence they appear to be the same thing.

We ought not forget that both bilingualism and multilingualism imply an interaction not just between two or more languages but also between two or more cultures. In either case, there is intercultural contact. Hence, it seems mandatory to integrate the concept of ‘Intercultural competence’, it being the “*combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors which allow a speaker, to varying degrees, to recognize, understand, interpret and accept other ways of living and thinking beyond his or her home culture.*” (Council of Europe 8) This concept seems to me to be a central basis of bilingualism or multilingualism.

Starting from the premise that the capacity to speak leads to the ability to communicate, being able to speak more than one language enables us to communicate with people from more than one country. Consequently, if we take communication as a process in which a message (containing an idea, a concept, or a meaning) has to be transferred from a transmitter (in human communication this is the person that wants to convey the message, and who to do so has to choose the right signs or the right code in order for their message to be received and understood correctly) to a receiver (the person that has to interpret or decode the message). From there on, in order to complete the communication process properly and without difficulty, both transmitter and receiver have to share or know in which context the communication is taking place; they should also share some common knowledge, otherwise the communication process could fail, be interrupted or lead to misunderstandings. If we apply this to the subject matter, a bilingual and a multilingual person, in order to be able to communicate successfully in several languages, should have some knowledge about the culture of each of the countries or regions to which the languages s/he speaks belong to. In short, it is expected from a bilingual or multilingual person to have at least some intercultural competence that, as was said in the *Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education* does not necessarily have to be homogeneous at all levels but is moreover a competence gained through the personal experience of each individual (Council of Europe 2008).

As we have seen throughout this section, and as I mentioned in the introduction, defining the area we are researching into is not an easy thing to do owing to the existence of so many different theories and perspectives and its own complexity. Therefore, we will try to narrow down the research by observing the competences we have been talking about and by discussing the characteristics that some experts consider make a person bilingual, or the requirements to be met by someone to become so, depending on the school of thought each author follows.

3.2. FEATURES CONCERNING BILINGUALS

Taking into account the concepts that have been mentioned in sections 3 and 3.1, I will now proceed to relate those concepts with the characteristics and requirements that theorists believe a person must satisfy in order to be considered bilingual, which is the matter that concerns us.

There are many different perspectives when defining who is bilingual and what it is exactly that makes them bilingual. The most veteran theorists used to believe they had a definitive and precise explanation when defining a bilingual person and his or her competences. But this way of thinking has been evolving over the years. As time goes by, doubts arise among the scholars, and there are more and more debates opening up.

Formerly, it was thought that when a bilingual individual prospered in a language, s/he lost capacities in the other, but today, the advances in science have allowed us to develop this theory and, now what we know more about how our brain works, this belief has been undermined (Bathia and Ritchie 2006). More recently, it seemed that the focus was on fluency when it came to defining a bilingual person. Some schools of thought understand bilingualism as the possession of a high command of both languages together with equal

fluency in both. An example of this line of thought may be some definitions proposed in the dictionaries as we have seen in section 3.1, in which the notion of fluency appears when describing 'bilingual'. On the contrary, for some other scholars, the ability to produce correctly in the second language is enough for the speaker to be recognized as bilingual (Haugen 1953). Such generality is somehow related to the proposal that the Council of Europe launched stating that every language is plural which, as we have already mentioned, would imply a universal multilingualism, although in Haugen's line of thought it is necessary to produce in at least two different languages to no longer be classified as monolingual, and enter the bilingual or multilingual groups.

There are many tests created by psycholinguists to measure fluency and thus bilingualism but, as John Edwards (qtd in Bathia and Ritchie 13) says these tests "*rest upon the ability (and willingness) to self-report accurately.*" (Bathia and Ritchie 13) However, linguists such as Grosjean (1982) do not believe in fluency as a determinant, and claim that there are many other factors that should be taken into account. Factors like: the regular use of both languages; the need to achieve the four basic skills that are listening, speaking, reading and writing in at least one of the languages (although not all linguists agree on this factor, as we will see later on); biological components like age or gender; psychological aspects like attitude and memory, etc.

Apparently, there is no consensus when deciding whether bilingualism is measurable or not, and if it is, the question still is how and what should be measured. Nonetheless, many theoreticians agree that, even if we state that bilingualism consists of several factors, it is very rare to find a case in which all of the skills are balanced and are equivalent in both languages. Leonard Bloomfield affirms "*In the extreme case of foreign language learning, the speaker becomes so proficient as to be indistinguishable from the native speakers round him... In the cases where this perfect foreign-language learning is not accompanied by loss of the native language, it results in bilingualism, [the] native-like control of two languages.*" (Bloomfield 55-56). Also related to this full integration of the individual in the target community, Thiery (1978), on the other hand, assures that "*A true bilingual is someone who is taken to be one of themselves by the members of two different linguistic*

communities, at roughly the same social and cultural level.” (Thiery 146) However, considering bilingual only those people who are able to function in two languages exactly as monolinguals would do in their respective language, would generate another problem: what to do with those people who speak two languages although not at a native-like level in either? This kind of speaker is not monolingual but according to Bloomfield’s definition, they would not be bilingual either. (Grosjean. 1982)

Returning to the issue of the four skills, Macnamara (1967a) is one of those linguists who does agree on the fact that speaking, listening, reading, and writing can define a bilingual person, although for him it is not necessary to succeed in all four of them; achieving just one of these language skills to a minimal degree in the second language would be enough to be bilingual. Here Grosjean supports Macnamara’s point of view and disagrees with Bloomfield by stating that:

Most bilinguals use their languages for different purposes and in different situations, and hence “balanced” bilinguals, those who are equally fluent in both languages, are probably the exception and not the norm. A bilingual develops the four basic skills in each language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) to the levels required by the environment, and it is rare that an identical level is needed for each skill. (Grosjean 235)

This would be a more balanced and less radical proposal if compared to the previous ones since it does not require absolute language proficiency or high community integration of the individuals but rather the ability to perform well linguistically in the required field.

As there is so much confusion when it comes to deliberating what is valid and what is not when measuring bilingual capacities, some linguists have preferred to classify bilinguals depending on types of bilingualism. Thus, according to John Edwards (in Bathia and Ritchie 2006) we could distinguish between:

- Balanced, ambilingual, or equilingual bilinguals: Those who are very skilful in both languages.
- Receptive or passive bilingualism: When the bilingual can understand a language (either spoken or written) but s/he is not able to produce anything.

- Productive or active bilingualism: When the bilingual can understand a language (either spoken or written) and s/he is able to produce too.
- Additive bilingualism: This occurs when both languages are useful and valuable for the bilingual.
- Subtractive bilingualism: This arises when one language is more dominant than the other.
- Primary bilingualism: When the two languages are apprehended in a naturalistic way.
- Secondary bilingualism: When the bilingual acquires the two languages through formal instruction.

Nonetheless, Edwards (qtd in Bathia and Ritchie 13) specifies that *“These are not watertight compartments, of course. One might, for example, develop a fluent conversational grasp of a language in a relatively informal way, and only later feel the need to add some formal literacy skills.”* (Bathia and Ritchie 13) allowing the individual to move from one classification to another or, in other words, to improve some skills in a language without this implying being bilingual to a different degree or level. Improving skills in a language does not alter the bilingual quality of the individual.

The latter classification seems to cover all possible cases of bilingualism. In my opinion, it is the best suited to the present time since, nowadays, there are so many different cases of bilingualism and multilingualism, each one of them having emerged and evolved in such different situations and for diverse reasons. In such diversity, it seems to me somehow inappropriate to encompass all the possible cases in only one group.

4. ACQUIRING A LANGUAGE

Until this point we have seen a brief part of the history of bilingualism and its originative causes; several definitions of the term itself; and precisely what skills are needed to become bilingual. I will now proceed, then, to examine how a second language², can be acquired and some methodological approaches that have been created throughout history with different purposes but each one of them focused on language teaching.

Language teaching is an important input for bilingualism since it provides the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to becoming bilingual, and is also closely related to one of the origins of bilingualism that is the educational factor.

As mentioned in section 2, a second language can be acquired through a formal education or through direct contact with natives in a natural context.

We say that a language has been learned in a naturalistic way when the individual has been surrounded by fluent speakers of the language, and s/he has not required an institutional training. In this case we should say that the language has been apprehended rather than learned. We say the language has been apprehended when it has been assimilated and internalised, which differs from learning a language in as much as the later implies memorising without an internalising the information (Hernandez, Mayra 2012). On the contrary, learning a language in a formal tutored way involves teacher instruction following a specific method (usually in a classroom setting) and generally a low exposure to native-like speakers. Naturalistic language acquisition is inherent in those situations we have seen in the origins section (page 7), where different languages are in contact like along frontiers; conquests or invasions; or for generational inheritance reasons whether resulting from a collective or individual migration for social, economic or political reasons; or for the intermarriage factor. Whereas formal language acquisition may be related to those

² Consider 'second language' as any other than the mother tongue. See section 3.

situations where there is a cultural influence or a necessity to acquire another language for economic reasons such as in order to fulfill a curriculum requirement to expand job opportunities or for promotion in a current job.

Let us remember that, at one time, bilingual or plurilingual education was only intended and accessible for the upper classes or the elite. Today, it is an inclusive education; everyone that can access some kind of instruction can master a language. Learning languages is open to everyone right now because there has been a change in perspective, in the sense that today's society understands bilingualism and multilingualism not as a privilege but almost as something functional and necessary (as regards to professional future, for example.) (Bathia and Ritchie 2006)

Along these lines, in regard to formal instruction, many methods exist for bilingual education as a result of all the educational process that has taken place over the years to this day. The following methods we are going to see are some of the most well-known approaches for teaching languages.

Since the 19th century, the Grammar-Translation method has been used for language teaching in secondary schools (Howatt & Widdowson 151), and it is often associated with learning extinct or 'dead' languages, such as Latin or Ancient Greek. However, it was the first method used to teach 'modern' languages like English or French. Previous to this method, language learning was mainly carried out through the translation of long texts. The Grammar-Translation Method, in turn, uses sentences as examples for certain grammatical points in order to make the learning easier. Yet many linguists found several drawbacks to this method, among them being: An excessive focus on grammar; an extensive use of the mother tongue to explain grammatical points and vocabulary (providing translation equivalents); the language that is to be learnt is talked about instead of being used in communication, etc. For these reasons, the Grammar-Translation Method would help to develop certain skills, such as writing or reading, but it would not be helpful for speaking and listening skills. In short, it is not a complete method and it would not be useful for communicative situations.

In response to the disadvantages of the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, also known as Natural or Conversational Method, was created. This method differs from the previous one in as much as it avoids using the learner's first language when explaining language use, and the focus in this method is on speaking and listening skills rather than reading and writing. Thus, the Direct Method would apply better for communicative situations. It is useful to develop bilingualism for social or work integration needs. This methodology would be later evolve into other methods.

The Grammar-Translation and Direct Method have been developed mainly to be applied in classroom environments and for educational purposes, but some language learning methods were developed for other practical reasons and not for students as may be the case of Audiolingualism, also called The Army Method. As its names suggests, it was developed for the US Army as a training method when the army posted soldiers all over the world following WWII. Since it was developed for military purposes, the method relies heavily on training and habit-formation processes, and it focuses on accuracy (Harmer 64). Thanks to the use of technology, learners are able to listen to audio input and also record their own language production in 'language labs' (Howatt & Widdowson 318ff). Nevertheless, this method requires technological equipment and a systematic training in order to prosper in the language production which would not be feasible for many people, and it trains in a specific area of the language, it does not cover general aspects of the language nor the culture (as mentioned in section 3.1, we can take bilingualism as something not only related to language but also to intercultural competences).

Following the introduction of these methods, language teaching went through a more experimental period, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Methods such as the Silent Way, Suggestopedia or Total Physical Response, were developed during this period and gave another perspective to language learning since they did not rely on any linguistic theory proposed until then. Some of them generated polemics and did not have any success, as was the case of The Silent Way, a mystical method created by Caleb Gattengo, in which the teacher has to be as silent as possible in order to encourage the learners to produce in the target language; or Suggestopedia developed by Georgi Lozanov, which is based on the

idea of learning through ‘suggestions’ (hence the name) and it claims that learners learn more quickly if they encounter language in a relaxed and anxiety-free environment, usually accompanied by classical music. But, as mentioned before, these methods were later on invalidated. Total Physical Response, is an experimental method relying on words used with physical actions. This also has several limitations because it relies heavily on commands, actions, and objects, which makes it difficult to convey abstract meaning, for instance; but it has the advantage of not forcing the learners to speak the target language from the very beginning. Considering attitude and other psychological and environmental factors is closely related to the theories that described bilingualism as a combination of conditional factors in sections 3.1 and 3.2. Linked to this belief that being able to communicate requires more than mere linguistic competence and in response to people’s opinion on how the new methods were inadequate, Communicative Language Teaching emerged. (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 115) That is to say, in this methodological approach, social context is taken into account, and grammar and vocabulary can be learnt from such context and through interaction between interlocutors. This method, then, satisfies a large group of needs that a person would have in order to become bilingual. Another complete method that covers all possible skills is the Task-Based Language Teaching which integrates theoretical and empirical foundations, with a focus on task-based activities to see what the learners are able to produce with the language (Norris 2009), or in other words, it is based on learning by doing.

During the 1990s, Noam Chomsky’s theory of the Universal Grammar (Chomsky’s view on how language works) influenced some language teaching methods like The Lexical Approach, devised by Michael Lewis and based on the assumption that language learning relies on being able to understand and produce lexical phrases. This method helped corpus linguistics to discover that the language we use is much less ‘creative’ than previously thought, implying a certain advantage when acquiring a language, and consequently, facilitating bilingualism.

5. MY OWN EXPERIENCE

Now that we have gone over all the theoretical background we need to know so as to properly understand bilingualism, I will proceed to compare and apply the theory to my own personal situation.

First of all, I will briefly explain my background; I will describe how I came into contact with my second language, and how my learning of it developed; and I will state my current circumstances. Finally, I will attempt to classify myself under the terms and definitions that we have been discussing.

5.1. BACKGROUND

Although I was born in Spain within a bilingual family where my father's L1 (mother tongue) was English and my mother's L1 was Spanish, I have not acquired both languages in the same way. Despite the fact both parents master the two languages (Spanish and English), since I grew up surrounded by Spanish native speakers I acquired this language as my mother tongue, whereas for English, the only contact (and more precisely, native-like contact) I had with this language was at home and occasionally when visiting or receiving visits from the paternal family. Therefore, Spanish is now my L1 and English my L2 (second language).

5.2. FIRST SYSTEMATIZED ACCESS TO THE SECOND LANGUAGE

Having said that, I did start learning the two languages in the same way: by listening at first and, when I was capable of producing words, by speaking. Regarding access to the learning, for my L1 (Spanish) I acquired this language in a naturalistic way (that is to say, surrounded by fluent speakers of the language) and since birth. This happened in a similar way with my L2 (English). I started learning it in a naturalistic way, although the amount of fluent speakers of the language was significantly lower and the learning did not take place in the native-speaking country as with the L1. Therefore, we could say that the origin of my bilingualism is as a result of intermarriage between a native and an immigrant who settled in the target country for socio-cultural reasons.

In addition, the learning of the L2 continued in a formal tutored way, being instructed by a teacher in a classroom environment, with a certain method similar to the Lexical Approach and Grammar-Translation Method, although including some communicative skills belonging to more communicative methodologies such as the Direct Method; and having a limited exposure to the language since in this type of learning environment, just as Spolsky (1989: 171) pointed out, usually the teacher is the only participant who is fluent in the language.

According to that which Lightbown and Spada (1999) pointed out “...*Second language learners, like first language learners, pass through sequences of development. Furthermore, in a given language, many of these developmental sequences are similar for first and second language learners.*” (Lightbown and Spada 76) Accordingly, I was taught the same skills in both languages in the same sequence but at different timings since I was taught reading and writing skills in Spanish earlier than in English. Moreover, the institutions (pre-school, primary school, secondary school and university) where I was instructed were predominantly Spanish-language environments.

5.3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECOND LANGUAGE

Following Grosjean's (1982) theory on what factors influence a bilingual person, in the interest of describing this second language acquisition process I need to recall the psychological aspects such as attitude. During this period of learning of the English language, my motivation varied. When the formal instruction started I already had some notions of the language, unlike most of my classmates. Nevertheless, and regardless of this fact, I was taught in a course of their level which meant that sometimes the learning seemed boring to me since some skills, listening and reading comprehension for example, were far from a challenge for me. This was so to the point of passing through a long period where I experimented the so-called Plateau phenomenon, meaning: "*Plateau implicates that one comes to another period of little or no further progress in study after making rapid progress initially*" (Canadian Center of Science and Education 2009). Furthermore, the social pressure originating from being born into a bilingual family and the expectations that implied for me, had always provoked some negative feelings in me towards this language. Since I had those feelings and together with the fact that I had no necessity to communicate in English with anyone (considering that, at home, I could communicate in Spanish and be perfectly well understood), I stopped being motivated to continue practising the language beyond the situations where it was absolutely necessary, such as fulfilling school obligations and communicating with native-speakers who had no knowledge of my L1.

Although I still received some input in class, at home, and also from the media (on account of English having a global influence, as mentioned in the second section of this paper) allowing me to keep developing three of the four skills: listening, reading and writing; this period entailed a loss of fluency when speaking in the L2.

This attitude continued for many years until I entered University. It was during this period that the negative connotations disappeared, and I could exploit my knowledge of English. Still, I had the feeling of needing to properly acquire the paternal language so as to

excel in every communicative and cultural skill like a literate native. It was for this reason that I decided to study for one year abroad in an English-speaking country, so I could keep studying the language formally but also pick it up in a naturalistic way. Bearing this in mind, the bilingualism that I acquired was not only due to a generational inheritance by intermarriage as mentioned above, but also for educational and cultural causes, including a temporary migration to the target country.

5.4. END-STATE

Nowadays, I consider that my L2 learning is still ongoing and that the degree of competence I have achieved so far is quite advanced but I believe is not yet of a native-like competence. Although I can read, write, and understand what people are saying and I am also able to speak so others understand me, I personally do not consider myself as a balanced bilingual (according to John Edwards' classification) since my fluency in all these linguistic aspects is not at the same level as the fluency a native speaker has. Besides, although I know the culture of my second language country partially as a result of the influence I have received from my father, I am not entirely culturally integrated because I have never been immersed in a naturalistic environment (i.e., living in the host country being surrounded by natives all or most of the time) enough time to acquire a high cultural knowledge and get involved with the native community, despite having been living in the host country for a year. As mentioned previously in section 3.1 however, some linguists would consider my personal situation as a bilingual one, there being no necessity to have a homogeneous competence and would consider the intercultural competence I have to be sufficient. There exists a hypothesis called CPH (Critical Period Hypothesis) and outlined by Lenneberg (1967) that states that "*there is a limited developmental period during which it is possible to acquire a language, be it L1 or L2, to normal, native like levels.*" (Birdsong

1) implying that after that period it is not possible to acquire a native-like level of proficiency when learning an L2. What is more, “*Automatic acquisition from mere exposure to a given language seems to disappear [after puberty], and foreign languages have to be taught and learned through a conscious and labored effort.*” (Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson qtd. in Lenneberg 176). Taking this into account, my learning process might not be the one expected for someone born and raised within a bilingual context as, although I have been receiving input from the L2 since birth, I have not acquired a native-like level of proficiency. Nevertheless, I do not agree with these ‘age limit’ theories since I believe that acquiring a language to a native-like level does not always depend on age but other factors which have to be taken into account, and concerning bilingualism, I personally support those theories like the one the Council of Europe (section 3.1) forwarded which states that a bilingual person does not have to be necessarily homogeneous in all skills and that it rather depends on personal experience.

5.5. CLASSIFICATION

Although classifying oneself may not be as objective as if some external party did it, I will try to follow the theoretical line we have been discussing so as to avoid subjectivity as far as possible.

First of all, I would classify myself as a bilingual and not as a multilingual or plurilingual because, despite having knowledge of some other languages, I could only consider myself skilful in just two languages, both linguistically and culturally. In addition, mine is an individual bilingualism instead of a collective one.

The origin of my bilingual situation, as already mentioned, is initially due to a social-cultural factor as a consequence of intermarriage between an immigrant and a native, but it

also has to do with educational factors since my bilingual situation evolved through formal instruction.

According to John Edwards' (in Bathia and Ritchie 2006) categorization, I would not tag myself as a balanced bilingual because I do not think I am equally skilful in both languages. Among the passive and active bilinguals I would belong to the active or productive bilinguals group because I can understand both spoken and written language in my mother tongue and in my second language, and I am able to produce in both languages too. Presumably, I belong to the subtractive bilingualism group rather than to additive bilingualism because, throughout my life, my mother tongue has been far more dominant than my second language, albeit lately the second language has been gaining ground but there is still a significant difference in the amount of input I receive as well as the output I produce. Finally, I should be considered both primary and secondary bilingual because I apprehended the two languages in a naturalistic way initially, but then I also received formal instruction in both.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this paper we have seen that, although currently being in great demand for the world of business and highly valued by society, bilingualism has in fact always existed and indeed has always been considered a capacity bestowing a certain amount of prestige.

There are many factors that give rise to bilingualism, both at an individual and collective level. Some of these causes are voluntary such as educational and cultural factors and others are involuntary on account of an imposition, as occurs in nationalisms and some

conquests; or as a secondary effect of a situation such as intermarriage or proximity to frontiers.

There is no consensus on defining the field. While some linguists classify individuals into bilinguals or non-bilinguals for their capacity to produce in a language, other professionals prefer to classify bilingualism itself and not individuals in different sorts and levels so as to mold the diversity of particular cases instead of creating just one big group. Moreover, some theoreticians consider bilingualism as a matter of fluency; the most radical theories only consider bilingualism as being equally skilful and fluent in both languages, whereas the opposite radicalism states that being able to produce correctly in some linguistic competence is enough in order to be tagged as bilingual; and the most flexible approaches consider bilingualism as a combination of different and varied factors. Throughout the study of a particular case (in section 5) we have proved that there are many determinants involved, not only from within the person in question's environment, but also psychological, biological, etc. The possibility of acquiring a language or at least trying to learn it, at whatever level, depends more so on an individual's personal experiences and possibilities. Not only that but, with the theories we have seen, it is clear that we would be wrong to think that being bilingual or multilingual is merely the ability to speak two or more languages with a certain degree of fluency.

Being bilingual is also a matter of intercultural competence, or in other words, understanding more than one culture. Knowing a culture is not simply having basic notions about it but knowing it sufficiently to be able to understand such complex things as idioms, sayings, puns, etc. Regardless, I would not go as far to say that, in order to be bilingual, it is necessary to be fully integrated into the culture pertaining to each language to the point of passing for somebody totally native to each culture (since, by definition, such a thing is not wholly possible, as a result of receiving so many influences), but instead at least sufficiently so as to be able to cope with ease in the countries or milieu in question. It is also true that, if we adopt a modern perspective, more adapted to current times, we could not consider as bilingual only those who speak two languages equally to perfection. It

would surely be more appropriate to recognize that different degrees and types of bilingualism exist.

Although it is popularly believed that bilingualism is a phenomenon more typical of those who belong to a bilingual or multilingual country or region, or those who have been born within a multilingual family, and not so much of those who acquire a language through formal instruction, we have to keep in mind that, in fact, there are many more factors that bear an influence on bilingualism. As proved in section 5, being born into such an environment does not fully guarantee acquisition of a language up to a native level. Similarly, receiving a formal education does not mean that it is not possible to reach a level similar to that of a native. Education and more precisely, language teaching has had and still has an important role in bilingualism. Within the methodological approaches we have seen that some techniques do not cover all the necessary skills and are centered on a specific linguistic competence such as reading or writing, whilst others just focus on communicative skills. But, overall, every method helps learners to develop in a certain language, and it also depends on the needs that the individual has or what exactly s/he wants to improve within the language.

Finally, I believe that for the great majority, and not exclusively for the elite, having the possibility to access bilingualism through formal instruction when it is not possible to apprehend a language in a naturalistic way, is a significant step forward. The methodology employed in such formal instruction, however, and the conditions in which it is carried out, seem somewhat questionable to me.

To conclude, in my opinion and speaking from my own experience, being bilingual is indeed of great use (as a means of attaining or sharing something) but above all enriching, particularly at a personal level. One gains culture and doors are opened to different, unique experiences worthy of being enjoyed without any linguistic impediments.

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