

5. How 'diglossic' are classroom situations in which children who come to school speaking only a regional or social variety of English well removed from the standard variety are taught the standard variety and its various uses, particularly its use in writing?

Bilingualism and Multilingualism

Monolingualism, that is, the ability to use only one language, is such a widely accepted norm in so many parts of the Western world that it is often assumed to be a world-wide phenomenon, to the extent that bilingual and multilingual individuals may appear to be 'unusual.' Indeed, we often have mixed feelings when we discover that someone we meet is fluent in several languages: perhaps a mixture of admiration and envy but also, occasionally, a feeling of superiority in that many such people are not 'native' to the culture in which we function. Such people are likely to be immigrants, visitors, or children of 'mixed' marriages and in that respect 'marked' in some way, and such marking is not always regarded favorably.

However, in many parts of the world an ability to speak more than one language is not at all remarkable. In fact, a monolingual individual would be regarded as a misfit, lacking an important skill in society, the skill of being able to interact freely with the speakers of other languages with whom regular contact is made in the ordinary business of living. In many parts of the world it is just a normal requirement of daily living that people speak several languages: perhaps one or more at home, another in the village, still another for purposes of trade, and yet another for contact with the outside world of wider social or political organization. These various languages are usually acquired naturally and unselfconsciously, and the shifts from one to another are made without hesitation.

People who are bilingual or multilingual do not necessarily have exactly the same abilities in the languages (or varieties); in fact, that kind of parity may be exceptional. As Sridhar (1996, p. 50) says, 'multilingualism involving balanced, nativelylike command of all the languages in the repertoire is rather uncommon. Typically, multilinguals have varying degrees of command of the different repertoires. The differences in competence in the various languages might range from command of a few lexical items, formulaic expressions such as greetings, and rudimentary conversational skills all the way to excellent command of the grammar and vocabulary and specialized register and styles.' Sridhar adds: 'Multilinguals develop competence in each of the codes to the extent that they need it and for the contexts in which each of the languages is used.' Context determines language choice. In a society in which more than one language (or variety) is used you must find out who uses what, when, and for what purpose if you are to be socially competent. Your language choices are part of the social identity you claim for yourself.

In the previous paragraph I have referred to varieties as well as languages in discussing the issues that concern us. This is a consequence of the difficulties of

trying to distinguish languages from dialects and among dialects themselves. Consequently, attempts to distinguish people who are *bilingual* from those who are *bidialectal* may fail. There may be some doubt that very many people are actually bi- or even multi-dialectal. They may speak varieties which are distinctly different, but whether each separate variety is genuinely a dialect depends on how one defines *dialect*, which, as we saw in chapter 2, is not at all an easy matter to decide. So it sometimes is too with deciding who is or who is not bilingual. Is someone who speaks both Hindi and Urdu bilingual, who speaks both Serbian and Croatian, Nynorsk and Bokmål, or Russian and Ukrainian? Such speakers may well tell you they are. But, on the other hand, a Chinese who speaks both Mandarin and Cantonese will almost certainly insist that he or she speaks only two dialects of Chinese, just as an Arab who knows both a colloquial variety and the classical, literary variety of Arabic will insist that they are only different varieties of the same language. In some cases, then, the bilingual-bidialectal distinction that speakers make reflects social, cultural, and political aspirations or realities rather than any linguistic reality. What we will concern ourselves with, then, are unequivocal cases in which there can be no doubt that the two languages, or codes, are mutually unintelligible.

An interesting example of multilingualism exists among the Tukano of the northwest Amazon, on the border between Colombia and Brazil (Sorensen, 1971). The Tukano are a multilingual people because men must marry outside their language group; that is, no man may have a wife who speaks his language, for that kind of marriage relationship is not permitted and would be viewed as a kind of incest. Men choose the women they marry from various neighboring tribes who speak other languages. Furthermore, on marriage, women move into the men's households or longhouses. Consequently, in any village several languages are used: the language of the men; the various languages spoken by women who originate from different neighboring tribes; and a widespread regional 'trade' language. Children are born into this multilingual environment: the child's father speaks one language, the child's mother another, and other women with whom the child has daily contact perhaps still others. However, everyone in the community is interested in language learning so most people can speak most of the languages. Multilingualism is taken for granted, and moving from one language to another in the course of a single conversation is very common. In fact, multilingualism is so usual that the Tukano are hardly conscious that they do speak different languages as they shift easily from one to another. They cannot readily tell an outsider how many languages they speak, and must be suitably prompted to enumerate which languages they speak and to describe how well they speak each one.

Multilingualism is a norm in this community. It results from the pattern of marriage and the living arrangements consequent to marriage. Communities are multilingual and no effort is made to suppress the variety of languages that are spoken. It is actually seen as a source of strength, for it enables the speakers of the various linguistic communities to maintain contact with one another and provides a source for suitable marriage partners for those who seek them. A man cannot marry one of his 'sisters,' i.e., women whose mother tongue is the same as his. People are not 'strangers' to one another by reason of the fact that

they cannot communicate when away from home. When men from one village visit another village, they are likely to find speakers of their native language. There will almost certainly be some women from the 'home' village who have married into the village being visited, possibly even a sister. The children of these women, too, will be fluent in their mothers' tongue. Many others also will have learned some of it because it is considered proper to learn to use the languages of those who live with you.

Somewhat similar attitudes toward multilingualism have been reported from other parts of the world. For example, Salisbury (1962) reports that among the Siane of New Guinea it is quite normal for people to know a number of languages. They choose the most appropriate one for the particular circumstances in which they find themselves. Moreover, they prize language learning, so that, when someone who speaks a language they do not know enters a community, people in the community will try to learn as much as they can about the language and to find occasions to use their learning. Salisbury specifically mentions the interest taken in pidgin English when a group of laborers returned from service on the coast; almost immediately a school was established so that the rest of the village males could learn the pidgin.

We have no reason to assume that such situations as these are abnormal in any way. In many parts of the world people speak a number of languages and individuals may not be aware of how many different languages they speak. They speak them because they need to do so in order to live their lives: their knowledge is instrumental and pragmatic. In such situations language learning comes naturally and is quite unforced. Bilingualism or multilingualism is not at all remarkable. To be a proper Tukano or Siane you must be multilingual and a skilled user of the languages you know; that is an essential part of your Tukano or Siane identity.

A different kind of bilingual situation exists in Paraguay (see Rubin, 1968). Because of its long isolation from Spain and the paucity of its Spanish-speaking population, an American Indian language, Guaraní, has flourished in Paraguay to the extent that today it is the mother tongue of about 90 percent of the population and a second language of several additional percent. Guaraní is recognized as a national language. On the other hand, Spanish, which is the sole language of less than 7 percent of the population, is the official language of government and the medium of education, although in recent years some use has been made of Guaraní in primary education. In the 1951 census just over half the population were bilingual in Guaraní and Spanish. These figures indicate that the lesser-known language in Paraguay is Spanish. The capital city, Asunción, is almost entirely bilingual, but the further one goes into the countryside away from cities and towns the more monolingually Guaraní-speaking the population becomes.

Spanish and Guaraní exist in a relationship that Fishman (1980) calls 'extended diglossic' in which Spanish is the H variety and Guaraní the L variety. Spanish is the language used on formal occasions; it is always used in government business, in conversation with strangers who are well dressed, with foreigners, and in most business transactions. People use Guaraní, however, with friends, servants, and strangers who are poorly dressed, in the confessional, when they tell jokes or make love, and on most casual occasions. Spanish is the preferred language

of the cities, but Guaraní is preferred in the countryside, and the lower classes almost always use it for just about every purpose in rural areas.

Parents may attempt to help their children improve their knowledge of Spanish by using Spanish in their presence, for, after all, Spanish is the language of educational opportunity and is socially preferred. But between themselves and with their children absent they will almost certainly switch to Guaraní. In the upper classes males may well use Guaraní with one another as a sign of friendship; upper-class females prefer Spanish in such circumstances. Outside Paraguay, Paraguayans may deliberately choose to converse in Guaraní to show their solidarity, particularly when among other South American Spanish-speaking people. Males may drink in Guaraní but use more and more Spanish as they feel the influence of alcohol, for Spanish is the language of power. Spanish may also be the language they choose to use when addressing superiors, and there may be some conflict in choosing between Spanish and Guaraní in addressing parents or grandparents. In such situations solidarity tends to win over power and Guaraní is often the choice. Courtship may begin in Spanish but, if it goes anywhere, it will proceed in Guaraní. Men tell jokes and talk about women and sports in Guaraní, but they discuss business affairs in Spanish.

We can see, therefore, that the choice between Spanish and Guaraní depends on a variety of factors: location (city or country), formality, gender, status, intimacy, seriousness, and type of activity. The choice of one code rather than the other is obviously related to situation. Paraguay identity requires you to be attuned to the uses of Spanish and Guaraní, to be aware that they 'mean' different things, and that it is not only what you say that is important but which language you choose to say it in.

In Papua New Guinea there are many languages and an increasingly used lingua franca, Tok Pisin. Many people are plurilingual. The Yimas of Papua New Guinea use their own language in traditional pursuits and Tok Pisin for topics from the encroaching outside world. Domestic matters and local food provision, largely the province of females, call for Yimas just as do mortuary feasts, the province of males. But matters to do with government, trade, and travel require Tok Pisin. Language choice among the Yimas is dependent on occasion: Yimas to perform traditional practices and Tok Pisin to establish identity within a wider community.

What I have tried to stress in this section is that bilingualism and multilingualism are normal in many parts of the world and that people in those parts would view any other situation as strange and limiting. There is a long history in certain Western societies of people actually 'looking down' on those who are bilingual. We give prestige to only a certain few classical languages (e.g., Greek and Latin) or modern languages of high culture (e.g., English, French, Italian, and German). You generally get little credit for speaking Swahili and, until recently at least, not much more for speaking Russian, Japanese, Arabic, or Chinese. Bilingualism is actually sometimes regarded as a problem in that many bilingual individuals tend to occupy rather low positions in society and knowledge of another language becomes associated with 'inferiority.' Bilingualism is sometimes seen as a personal and social problem, not something that has strong positive connotations. One unfortunate consequence is that some Western societies

go to great lengths to downgrade, even eradicate, the languages that immigrants bring with them while at the same time trying to teach foreign languages in schools. What is more, they have had much more success in doing the former than the latter. I will return to this issue in chapter 15, specifically in connection with certain recent developments in the United States.

A bilingual, or multilingual, situation can produce still other effects on one or more of the languages involved. As we have just seen, it can lead to loss, e.g., language loss among immigrants. But sometimes it leads to diffusion; that is, certain features spread from one language to the other (or others) as a result of the contact situation, particularly certain kinds of syntactic features. This phenomenon has been observed in such areas as the Balkans, the south of India, and Sri Lanka. Gumperz and Wilson (1971) report that in Kupwar, a small village of about 3,000 inhabitants in Maharashtra, India, four languages are spoken: Marathi and Urdu (both of which are Indo-European) and Kannada (a non-Indo-European language). A few people also speak Telugu (also a non-Indo-European language). The languages are distributed mainly by caste. The highest caste, the Jains, speak Kannada and the lowest caste, the untouchables, speak Marathi. People in different castes must speak to one another and to the Telugu-speaking rope-makers. The Urdu-speaking Muslims must also be fitted in. Bilingualism or even trilingualism is normal, particularly among the men, but it is Marathi which dominates inter-group communication. One linguistic consequence, however, is that there has been some convergence of the languages that are spoken in the village so far as syntax is concerned, but vocabulary differences have been maintained (McMahon, 1994, pp. 214–16). It is vocabulary rather than syntax which now serves to distinguish the groups, and the variety of multilingualism that has resulted is a special local variety which has developed in response to local needs.

Discussion

1. A distinction is sometimes made between communities in which there is *stable bilingualism* and those in which there is *unstable bilingualism*; Switzerland, Canada, and Haiti are cited as examples of the former, and the linguistic situations found in cities like New York or among many immigrant peoples as examples of the latter. Why are the terms *stable* and *unstable* useful in such circumstances?
2. The term *bilingual* is used in describing countries such as Canada, Belgium, and Switzerland (also *multilingual* in this case). What kind of bilingualism (or multilingualism) is this?
3. A speaker of English who wants to learn another language, particularly an 'exotic' one, may find the task difficult. Speakers of that other language may insist on using what little English they know rather than their own language, and there may also be compelling social reasons that prevent the would-be learner from achieving any but a most rudimentary knowledge of the target language. What factors contribute to this kind of situation? How might you seek to avoid it?