Bilingualism - An Asset to Future Language Acquisition?

Ida Nordlund
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Aim</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Material and Method</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 BILINGUALISM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 What is bilingualism and who is bilingual?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Language Development</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 The Different Stages</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Second Language Acquisition</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The critical Age Hypothesis</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 FIELD STUDY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Background information</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Presentation of the students</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 The National tests; an overview</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Explanation of the different grades in the Swedish school system</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Part B1 Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Part B2 Listening Comprehension</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Part C Written Production</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 Conclusion of analysis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 An experienced teacher’s thoughts about bilingualism</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 FACTORS AFFECTING LANGUAGE LEARNING</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 HOW LANGUAGE PROGRAMS AFFECT STUDENTS’ PERFORMANCE IN ALL SUBJECTS AT SCHOOL</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

We all know that language is a source of communication. Whether this language refers to Russian, English, Swedish or Sign Language is irrelevant, the importance is that we have some sort of source for human interaction. Knowing many different languages provides us with enormous possibilities in our contact and understanding of other people living in other parts of the world. We may actually draw a conclusion already that knowing many languages is an asset for communication.

This brings us to an important topic namely, bilingualism which will be studied on closer examination in this essay. There are and has always been a great interest among linguists and psychologists to study bilingualism and how it affects people. There are plenty of theories about bilinguals, and children’s psychologists have not always drawn the right conclusions due to results from early studies on bilingualism.

Results from early studies show that children were negatively affected by bilingualism. It was among other things, claimed that it confused the child (Fromkin et al 2003:375). Nowadays, the majority of children’s psychologists are in favour of bilingualism and see it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

This essay will examine whether being bilingual may help a person in their future language acquisition; it is also interesting to examine what mistakes bilinguals make when comparing their mistakes to those of monolinguals. Is it true that bilinguals have a better conscious awareness about language and the use of language, or does their bilingualism interfere with their language learning in school and if so, are the teachers trained to handle such situations?
1.2 Aim
The purpose of this essay is to investigate whether bilinguals more easily acquire second languages than monolinguals do. The aim is also to see possible differences in the mistakes they make and determine whether bilinguals have a better metalinguistic awareness, that is, a better conscious awareness about language and the use of language. Does their bilingualism interfere in their learning process?

1.3 Material and Method
In order to analyze whether there are differences between bilinguals and monolinguals in acquiring a second language, we must first understand the development of language, what the critical age hypothesis is and how we acquire second languages. Several different secondary sources, such as *An introduction to language* by Fromkin *et al* and Romaine’s *Bilingualism* have been used to support the claims that will be provided in the first three chapters. This will be followed by primary sources in form of a field study to establish the different mistakes bilinguals make compared to those made by monolinguals. The field study has been done through the comparison of National Tests between bilingual and monolingual students. This is followed by an interview with Hilding Hjertström, a teacher at a high school in Luleå, who has many years of experience from work with bilingual students. This essay will also provide an explanation of the factors that may affect how well a person acquires languages. Chapter 6, contains a study of how language programs affect students’ performance overall in school. This part has simply been added in order to clarify how bilingualism may affect a person’s future language learning due to the amount of input he or she receives in his or her mother tongues.

Before we go deeper into the purpose of this essay, I find it relevant to provide a definition of bilingualism. Several books and articles have been used in order to make the data as reliable as possible.

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1 High school/ Högstadiet in Sweden is obligatory and accepts students between the ages of 13 – 16 years.
2. BILINGUALISM

2.1 What is bilingualism and who is bilingual?

Bilingualism is a difficult concept to define, since many theories vary with respect to how much exposure a person needs to become native in a language. There is no general agreement among child language researchers about the ‘normal’ course of development among monolingual, nor among bilingual children. It is not possible to define the concept of complete acquisition, since it is difficult to define a person’s control over a language (Romaine 1995:11).

Bilingualism is often described in broad terms as “the ability to use two languages for communication” (CLAD 2003). Kandolf who also has an open view on bilingualism shares this view (1995:1). She claims that a bilingual is someone who uses two languages on a regular basis. All bilinguals are more dominant in one of their two languages. In her view, the importance is that bilinguals are exposed to both languages regularly. The Oxford English Dictionary agrees with this claim and refers to bilingualism as “the ability to speak two languages; the habitual use of two languages colloquially”. None of the above descriptions of bilingualism separate second language acquisition from bilingual language acquisition. To know two languages, that other language might as well be a second language, instead of claiming that a person is bilingual. Therefore, to be more specific, Bloomfield describes a bilingual as a person who has native-like competence in two languages (Romaine 1995:11). Furthermore, bilingual language acquisition refers to “the simultaneous intake of two languages beginning in infancy or before the age of three” (Fromkin et al 2003:374).

With respect to age, researchers claim that when learning a second language, “the younger a person is when exposed to this language, the more likely that person is to achieve native-like competence in it” (Fromkin et al 2003:379-381).

However, to describe bilingualism, it is important that we go further into details. Bilingualism is referred to in terms of categories and scales, such as ideal vs. partial bilingual; coordinate vs. compound bilingual, which are related to factors like function and proficiency (Romaine 1995:11-12). A ‘balanced’ bilingual or ‘ideal’ bilingual is a definition used as a synonym for ‘complete’ bilingualism. This definition is often used to measure other kinds of bilingualism to and they have been referred to as inadequate or underdeveloped, compared to ‘balanced bilingualism’. There are people who have no productive control over a language, but are able to understand utterances in it, in such cases linguists use expressions like ‘passive’ or ‘receptive’ bilingualism. There is no answer to how much exposure a person
needs to become a ‘balanced bilingual’, but the rule of thumb says that a child should receive about the same amount of input in each language to achieve native-like proficiency in both (Fromkin et al 2003:379-381). It is obvious that if a child hears one of the two languages more often, the child will most definitely develop that language faster and more completely.

In order to sum up this first chapter, bilingualism can be referred to as two languages which are received colloquially before the age of three. Bilingualism is referred to in terms of degree of bilingualism. There are certain expressions used, such as ‘passive’ or ‘receptive’ bilingual; a person who has no productive control over a language, but who is able to understand utterances in it. Furthermore, a so-called ‘balanced’ bilingual is a person who is being exposed to approximately the same amount of two languages beginning in early childhood.
3. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

3.1 Language Development

Whether they speak early or late, are learning one language or more, are learning to talk along typical lines or having trouble, the language acquisition of all children occurs gradually through interaction with people and the environment (Bowen 1998:2).

Language acquisition is a creative process and children are not given information about the rules of grammar, which means that they have an ability to extract rules of grammar from the language they hear around them (Fromkin et al 2003:343). Evidence of this can be seen in observations of children acquiring different languages under different cultural and social circumstances. The evidence reveals that the developmental stages are similar, possibly universal for all individuals acquiring language. These claims can also be proven through studies on deaf children of deaf signing parents. They go through stages in their acquisition of sign languages that parallel those of children acquiring spoken languages. A combination of these factors lead many linguists to believe that “children are equipped with an innate template or blueprint for language, known as the Universal Grammar, and this blueprint aids the child in the task of constructing a grammar for his or her language”. This assumption is referred to as The Innateness Hypothesis (Fromkin et al 2003:343-344). The innateness hypothesis strongly relies its theory on the fact that we end up knowing more about language than is exemplified in the language we hear around us. Although we speak a more ‘grammatical language’ (a language with fewer errors and mistakes) around children, they are exposed to adult-to-adult speech which includes slips of the tongue and ungrammatical and incomplete sentences. This proves that despite of all this, children have their knowledge of language built in from infancy (Fromkin et al 2003:348-350).

3.2 The Different Stages in Children’s Language Acquisition

Children go through stages in their development of language and each of these stages is equally important for them to achieve native-like proficiency in that or those languages, which they are exposed to. In order to describe this process in a simple way, a figure picturing a pyramid will be presented below. This pyramid shows the different ages, from infancy until the age of four, which is the top of the pyramid. When children are around the age of four, their speech is close to adult speech (Fromkin et al 2003:351-370).
Figure 1, Children’s Stages in Language Development

**INFANT:** Studies show that newborns respond to phonetic contrasts.

**6 MONTHS:** The babbling stage means that children produce utterances with no clear meaning. At this stage, children babble and use 95% of the consonants in all languages of the world before they start using the sounds and sound combinations in their target language.

**1 YEAR:** First words; children know that sounds are related to meaning.

**12-18 MONTHS:** The holophrastic stage; children have a more complex representation than their language allows them to express.

**18-24 MONTHS:** The telegraphic stage; two-word phrases with the use of syntactic rules. Their vocabulary is now between 50 and 100 words.

**2 – 5 YEARS:** Children learn new words every day, make many grammatical errors, but understand language very well.

**3 YEARS:** Children produce full sentences with very few errors. They know about 1000 words at this stage.

**4 YEARS:** Children’s speech is now very close to adult speech.

3.3 Second Language Acquisition

With the exception of a few remarkable individuals, adult second-language learners seldom achieve native-like competence in their second language, especially with respect to phonology. They generally have a noticeable accent and they may make syntactic or morphological errors that are unlike those made by children acquiring their first language. Many factors such as age, motivation etc. play a role when we acquire our second language. Equally important is whether you are in the country where the language is spoken or sitting in a classroom with no contact with native speakers (Fromkin et al 2003:379-381).

Therefore, many linguists believe that second language (L2) acquisition is different from first language (L1) acquisition. This hypothesis is referred to as the fundamental difference hypothesis of L2 acquisition. Like L1ers (first language learners), L2ers (second language learners) go through various stages, although these stages are somewhat different. And like L1ers, L2ers attempt to uncover the grammar of the target language, but unlike them L2ers often do not fully reach the target (Fromkin et al 2003:379-381).

3.4 The Critical Age Hypothesis

The foundation of the critical period hypothesis rests on neurological research, which suggests that brain functions become lateralized after puberty. As we know, language function appears mainly controlled by the left side of the brain. It is believed that before puberty, these functions are not completely assigned to either portion of the brain. The brain is viewed as elastic and the specific assignment or lateralization of the brain functions is believed to be complete and set sometime during or just after puberty (Moore 1999:2).

If we look at some of the examples of children growing up in isolation, this theory supports the evidence that was found in these children (Fromkin et al 2003:52). Instances of children growing up in environments of extreme isolation have been used for testing the critical age hypothesis. One girl, often mentioned in scientific reports, is Gene. She had been confined to a small room under conditions of physical restraint, and had only minimal human contact from the age of eighteen months until nearly fourteen years of age. She and other children in similar situations were not able to understand or knew any language at the time of reintroduction to society. This shows that exposure to language must trigger the innate neurological ability of the human brain to acquire language. Gene, like similar cases,
was unable to acquire language after exposure, even with deliberate linguistic teaching. She began to acquire language, but even though she was able to learn a large vocabulary, her syntax and morphology never developed properly. Gene’s language was lateralized to the right hemisphere even though the left hemisphere is normally predisposed for language use (Fromkin et al 2003:51). This story proves that language acquisition devices like other biological functions works successfully only when it is stimulated at the right time in life (Moore 1999:1).

Studies show that the younger a person is when exposed to a second language, the more likely he or she is to achieve native-like competence in that language. Evaluations made on immigrant children arriving to America between the ages of three and eight show that these children did as well as the American native speakers in tests on language skills. Those who arrived between the ages of eight and fifteen did not perform like native speakers. After this, every year made a difference for this group of people. Although age is an important factor in achieving native-like L2 competence, it is certainly possible to learn. The sensitive period for phonology is the shortest. To achieve native-like pronunciation for L2ers it generally requires exposure during childhood, but this does not mean that it is impossible to learn a second language after a certain age. We may acquire very good knowledge of a language and some may even pass for being natives, but in order to become native or close to native in a language, we must have been in contact with the language in early childhood (Fromkin et al 2003:383).
4. FIELD STUDY

4.1 Background information

In order to see differences between bilinguals and monolinguals in their acquisition of an additional language, National Tests in English have been used for comparison. Five bilingual students and five monolingual students have been selected in order to find an answer to what is aimed for in this essay. Do bilinguals acquire a second language more easily? Do they have a better metalinguistic awareness than monolinguals or does their bilingualism interfere in their acquisition of an additional language? The bilinguals in this field study have been selected according to fluency in Swedish whereas the monolingual students have not been selected according to either sex or skills in English.

According to the teachers of the bilingual students, they all speak Swedish fluently (all students have at least ‘G’ in Swedish – for an explanation of the Swedish grade system see 4.4) and have another mother tongue, in which they have very good knowledge. There is, however, a lot of information that we do not have about these students, for instance when they started learning Swedish, if they socialize with people speaking Swedish or if they speak another language when they are outside of school. If these students started to learn Swedish by the time they started school, this might have interfered with their acquisition of an additional language, that is, English. These aspects are important to take into consideration when looking at the analysis and when determining the students’ degree of bilingualism. There are many factors that may determine how ‘good’ someone becomes in a language; and these factors will be presented after the analysis in chapter 5.

4.2 Presentation of the students

The Bilingual Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Spoken languages</th>
<th>Grade in Swedish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Spanish/Swedish</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Spanish/Swedish-</td>
<td>G-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Farsi/Swedish</td>
<td>G-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Farsi/Swedish</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Farsi/Swedish</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above, the bilingual students’ grades in Swedish are provided to give an idea of their degree of bilingualism. These students are all average students in Swedish, two of them less than
average.

The Monolingual Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Spoken languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 The National Tests

The National Tests are divided into three parts; Part A tests oral interaction and production; Part B, tests the students’ receptive skills, that is reading and listening comprehension; and Part C tests their skills in written productions. Since these students are unknown to me, it is not possible to analyze their skills in oral interaction and production, therefore Part A is excluded from this analysis. In order to compare bilinguals and monolinguals more closely, one would have to compare students that are on equal footing; that is, for the best result the number of male and female students’ should have been equally represented in the analysis.

4.4 Explanation of the different grades in the Swedish School System

There are three different grades in the Swedish school system; if the student has failed, no grade is given. The grades given in the National tests show that the student can be on the top, middle or bottom of each grade according to performance.

IG – the student has failed
G - the student has passed (average level)
VG – the student has passed with more than average
MVG – the student has passed with distinction

4.5 Part B1: Reading Comprehension

B1: Monolingual students

All of the monolingual students performed very well in this part of the test. In general, the monolinguals showed difficulties with prepositions, finding the right word to a suitable context and filling in missing words in sentences. Words like out, to etc. were hard for them to fill in. Their biggest problem in the first part of the test was to explain English words by
means of using other words. These words had already occurred in texts inside the test and the task for the student was to explain them in their own way. Four out of five of the monolingual students had also problems explaining certain expressions taken out from a text. They were, however good at spelling and had a large vocabulary.

The grades of the monolingual students in Part B1:

(F) VG
(G) VG
(H) VG
(I) VG
(J) G

**B1: The Bilingual Students**

The bilingual students did not perform as well as the monolingual students. Their biggest problems occurred in the part where they had to fill in a missing word that had been left out. Comparing them to the monolingual students, there was no general pattern in what kinds of mistakes they made. They showed great difficulties with spelling and this made them lose many points in the test, even though they knew which words to use. The words could be understood even though they were not spelled correctly. It can be discussed how important spelling is in language education when today’s modern society offers computers with spelling programs. It is easier to correct students’ spelling mistakes than word ordering or ‘Swenglish’ constructions, especially if the teacher is Swedish too. Four out of five of the bilingual students did extremely well in the part where a word was taken out from a context and the students were asked to explain this word by means of using another word. This shows that bilinguals have another understanding of words in context and seem to have a deeper understanding of the construction of the English language.

The bilingual students’ grades in Part B1:

(A) G
(B) G-
(C) G-
(D) VG
(E) G+
4.6 Part B2: Listening Comprehension

Overall, the monolingual students performed much better than the bilinguals did in this part of the test. The monolinguals showed a very good ability of understanding spoken English, whereas the bilingual students had more problems in this part of the test. Some questions provided different alternatives and the students were supposed to fill in one of the options. Other parts required that the student should answer questions about dialogues they had heard on a tape using their own words. No typical pattern could be seen in this part, other than the fact that the monolingual students outperformed the bilingual students.

The monolingual students’ grades in Part B2:

(F) VG
(G) VG-
(H) G
(I) VG
(J) In between G and VG

The bilingual students’ grades in Part B2:

(A) G
(B) G
(C) G-
(D) G+
(E) G

4.7 Part C: Written Production

The Monolingual Students

The monolingual students made similar errors in this part of the test, for example word ordering, prepositions and the use of ‘Swenglish’ in their written productions. The use of ‘Swenglish’ showed that the monolingual students translated a sentence directly without any consideration of the rules of the English language. They showed that they had a large vocabulary and they did well in this part of the test. They were able to express themselves better than the bilingual students. It should be noted that many teachers, who are Swedish themselves, do not always pay attention to ‘Swenglish’ constructions. Here, the monolingual students may have an advantage over the bilingual students, who make other kinds of mistakes all depending on their mother tongues.
The monolingual students’ grades in Part C:
(F) VG+
(G) VG-
(H) G+
(I) VG-
(J) G+

Part C: The bilingual students
The bilingual students’ biggest problem was spelling. All words could easily be understood but many of them were spelled incorrectly. In addition to this, their language use was good and they used expressions suitable for the right situation. Their lexicon was not as good as that of the monolingual students even though they all managed to express themselves well. They generally made fewer word order mistakes and they never used ‘Swenglish’ in their written productions. The fact that they used suitable expressions for the right situation and managed word ordering without problems prove that they have a great understanding of language use, a deeper understanding than the monolingual students have. They lost many points because of their spelling mistakes, which is the main reason why they did not perform as well as the monolingual students in this part.
The bilingual students’ grades in Part C:
(A) G
(B) G
(C) G-
(D) VG-
(E) G+

4.8 Conclusion of analysis
Generally, the monolingual students performed better in the National Tests than the bilingual students. The monolingual students had a larger vocabulary and understood spoken and written English better than the bilingual students. The monolingual students were also able to express themselves better compared to the bilingual students. We can also see that the females performed better than the males among the monolingual students in the test. This was not the case among the bilingual students, where the one female performed worse than the three male students on throughout the test. It can be noticed that the monolingual students consists of
three female students and two male students, whereas the bilingual students consist of four male students and only one female student. Commonly girls perform better than boys do in language learning (Väisänen 2004:1, my translation).

The bilingual students did better in certain parts of the test, for example, when a word was taken out from a larger context and the students were asked to explain it by means of using other words. In this part, the bilingual students outperformed the monolingual students. This proves that even though the bilingual students had more problems understanding spoken and written English, they understood words in context better and were able to explain them properly. They did not have problems with word ordering or using the suitable expressions in the right context. Their greatest difficulty was spelling, but it can be argued how important this aspect is considering today’s modern society with computers containing spelling programs.

By analysing these tests, it is not possible to draw the conclusion that bilinguals acquire second languages more easily, but it is obvious that they have a deeper understanding of the use of language, which makes it possible to draw the conclusion that bilinguals do have a better metalinguistic awareness. The students’ skills in English may depend on several different factors. One aspect to consider concerning language learning is whether the community they live in is bilingual or not. In order to shed more light on this issue an interview with a teacher who has extensive knowledge of work with bilingual students follows.

4.9 An experienced teacher’s thoughts about bilingualism

Hilding Hjertström has worked as a teacher at high school level for 30-35 years and has taught both English and German. For many years, he worked at a high school in Pajala where he came into contact with many bilingual students. In this particular school nearly half of the students were bilingual and had Swedish and Finnish as their mother tongues. These students spoke Finnish at home and were taught in Swedish at school. It should be mentioned that this community is partly bilingual because of a mixed population with both Swedish and Finnish inhabitants. When comparing the results of National Tests in English, it was found that the majority of the bilingual students had much better results than the monolingual students. During the years he worked at this school, he found that bilingual students had both advantages and disadvantages when acquiring a third language.

The advantages in language acquisition he saw among the bilingual students were the
- They performed better in grammar-tests. Hjerström claims that their syntax was much better than that of the monolingual students.
- They were generally better than the monolingual students were at spelling.
- The bilinguals outperformed the monolingual students in reading comprehension tests.
- They had a larger vocabulary
- The bilingual students seemed to be more motivated to learn language. They also seemed to have a deeper understanding of how language works and how to use it.

He also noticed a few disadvantages in language learning among the bilingual students:
- Listening comprehension was more difficult for the bilingual students than the monolinguals. Hjerström is convinced that they understood spoken English but that they needed more time than the monolingual students did. They had difficulties in quickly finding the correct words, which according to Hjerström is not a sign of them actually being worse, only that they need more time. The reason for this might depend on the fact that bilinguals sometimes mix their two languages and perhaps searching for words in Swedish takes a longer time because they cannot quickly make up their minds about what language to translate into.
- The oral skills of the bilinguals are also an interesting aspect. He claims that these students preferred not to speak English if they could avoid it. He believes that this has to do with them feeling pressure on their performance, since they are already fluent in two languages. Learning how to speak an additional language could make them feel more nervous because of the fact that they already speak two languages since childhood.
- The bilingual students had more problems with prepositions than the monolinguals, which might be related to the fact there are no prepositions at all in the Finnish language.
- Translation takes a longer time for the bilinguals, even though their skills are generally good. Hjerström saw this problem as a matter of interference. In large classes with many students, it is hard to give the students extra time if that is what they need. Even though teachers try to fulfill all the needs that the students might have, it is not possible in large classes. Because of the bilingual students not receiving the extra time that they need in translation it can make a huge impact on their future interest in language learning. When comparing the results of the field study and Hjerström’s thoughts about bilingualism, similarities but also some differences are discernable. For instance, the bilingual students had a deeper understanding of language and how to use language in appropriate situations. The
students in Pajala who have Swedish and Finnish as their mother tongues performed better in all areas compared to the monolingual students. This might be related to many different factors. The community of Pajala is bilingual because of a mixed population with both Finnish and Swedish inhabitants. These students probably receive equal input, which means that they are so called ‘balanced bilinguals’. The bilingual students presented in the field study, on the other hand, have not started to learn their two mother tongues at the same time and they can therefore not be referred to as ‘balanced bilinguals’. It can be assumed that none of these students have received an equal amount of input in their mother tongues from early childhood. Farsi and Spanish seem to be the languages that are more dominant compared to their skills in Swedish. It is therefore possible to say that the students in Pajala have a better knowledge of Swedish than the students presented in the field study. An important factor to consider in this context is how related the third language is with the student’s mother tongue. Swedish is closely related to English and if the students in Pajala have better knowledge of Swedish, they have an advantage compared to the bilingual students in the field study. It is also relevant, whether the teacher speaks the same languages as the student’s do, if so, they can relate more easily to how the students think and why they make the mistakes that they do. This may give the bilingual students with other languages than those that the teacher speaks a great disadvantage in their acquisition of a third language. There are more factors than those mentioned above that might affect how well a person learns an additional language, some of them will be provided in the following chapter.

5. FACTORS AFFECTING LANGUAGE LEARNING

Several factors may effect our language acquisition:

Language family
It makes a considerable difference whether languages are related to each other in a person’s language acquisition. Languages like Swedish and English, Farsi and Spanish belong to the same language family, The Indo-European language family. The difference is, however, that the English and the Swedish languages are much more closely related, which will be shown in figure 2 below (Wikipedia 2004:1).
Figure 2, Map of the different branches of the Indo-European families

Because of the close relationship between the English and the Swedish languages, Swedes have a clear advantage in their acquisition of the English language, compared to those with Farsi or Spanish as their mother tongues. Even though the students presented earlier are bilingual, there is a difference between ‘balanced bilingualism’ and other degrees of bilingualism, which has to be taken into consideration when analyzing the result of the field study (Wikipedia 2004:1).

Gender

Generally, girls perform better in language learning than boys do. This has been shown in National Tests where girls performed better in all three parts of the test (Väisänen 2004:1). In this study, gender might have influenced the results because of the fact that there is not an equal number of female and male students represented in it. The monolingual students consisted of three female and two male students, whereas the bilingual students consisted of one female and four male students.
Intelligence
Over the years, many studies of IQ tests and different methods of assessing language learning have found that intelligence is a good means of predicting how successful a learner will be at acquiring a language. A study in Canada found that intelligence was related to the development of reading, grammar, and vocabulary, but it was unrelated to oral skills (Lightbown et al 1993:37). Since the students in the field study are unknown to us, it is not possible to know how intelligent they are. Intelligence certainly affects language acquisition, but in this particular study, it can only be kept in mind.

Aptitude
Research shows that some individuals have an exceptional ‘aptitude’ for language; it is easier for some individuals to learn languages. Some are better in language learning and some are better in mathematics or science etc. (Lightbown et al 1993:37-38). There are probably some students in this field study that acquire languages more easily than others. This, of course, is nothing that can be measured, only something that can be taken into consideration.

Personality
A number of personal traits have been proposed as likely to affect second language learning. For example, it has been argued that an extroverted person is more suited for language learning. Even though it is not certain to what extent, many researchers believe that personality has an important influence on success in language learning (Lightbown et al 1993:37-39). It is not surprising that a more talkative person acquire language more easily, since learning languages mainly requires interaction with other people.

Motivation and attitude
Research cannot show exactly how motivation affects learning, that is, we are not certain whether it is the motivation that produces successful learning or successful learning that enhances motivation. If the speaker’s only reason for learning a second language is external pressure, the motivation may be minimal and the attitudes towards learning may be negative (Lightbown et al 1993:39-40). Even though these factors affect language learning to a great extent, it is not possible to know how motivated these particular students were to learn English.
Age of acquisition
Age is easier to define and measure than personality, aptitude or motivation. It has been widely observed that children from immigrant families eventually speak the language of their community with native-like fluency. Their parents rarely achieve such high skills in mastering the new language (Lightbown et al 1993:42). This factor makes a huge impact, since if the bilingual students presented in the analysis started to learn Swedish and English at approximately the same time, the acquisition of these the two languages may have interfered with each other.

Learning styles
There are several different ways of learning; some are ‘visual’ learners and some are ‘aural’ learners, some learners need to memorize and will practice and practice until they feel comfortable and have a grasp of it. Clearly, some ways are better than others. Evidence shows that when learners use the learning style they like best, it leads to the best results (Lighbown et al 1993:40-41). It can be assumed the students part of this field study have their own preferable way of learning and that the learning styles used in school is not the one that works best for all of them.

Obviously, there are many factors that affect how well a person learns a language. It is of particular interest to see what type of language learning that works best for bilinguals in order to regard their bilingualism as an asset.

Below, a study of how different language programs affect students’ performances in all subjects at school follows. This study is simply added in this essay in order to let the reader understand that there is evidence that bilingualism may have both an adding or subtracting effect for students due to how much they use their languages in school.

6. HOW LANGUAGE PROGRAMS AFFECT STUDENTS’ PERFORMANCE IN ALL SUBJECTS AT SCHOOL

Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier presented a longitudinal study of bilingual students’ performance at school in the US, in 1997. Between 1982 and 1996, researchers followed five school districts concerning 42,317 students with another mother tongue than English from preschool until 12th grade in different educational programs (see table below). The study emphasized the students’ successes in school in all subjects and not only how they succeeded
Program 1: Two-way developmental bilingual education. In these programs, half of the children have English as their first language and half of them have another first language, for example Spanish. The children are taught half of the time in English and the other half in Spanish, which means that all children get the opportunity to receive knowledge in both their mother tongues and in a second language. At the same time, the children become integrated socially in the class (Axelsson 2001:15, my translation).

Program 2: One-way developmental bilingual education in English as a second language. In this program, the minority group of the students are taught half of the day in their mother tongues and the other half in English. The difference between the two types is the social integration factor. The children in one-way programs integrate only half of the day with the students with English as their first language and they do not learn a second language (Axelsson 2001:15, my translation).

Program 3: Transitional bilingual education and English as a second language with a concentration on the subject. The children are taught in two languages during a transitional period, after that it stops (Axelsson 2001:15, my translation).

Program 4: Transitional bilingual education and English as a second language (both taught traditionally). Here, the students are also taught in two languages during a transitional period before they settle with one language (Axelsson 2001:15, my translation).

Program 5: English as a second language, concentrated on the subject (ESL; English as a second language). These students are only taught in English (Axelsson 2001:16, my translation).

Program 6: English as a second language, (outside class). English as a second language, Pullout – taught traditionally). All the teaching is in English (Axelsson 2001:16, my translation).

There are two types of programs discussed above: Programs 1-2 are enriching programs and programs 3-6 are support programs. Researchers claim that it is only in programs 1-2 that the intake of necessary knowledge is possible (Axelsson 2001:15, my translation).
In the statistic comparison in the figure above, 50 is the average level (NCE) and at this level, the majority of the students in the US end their school years. Concerning second language learners of English, the study shows that only students that have entered two-way programs (1) or bilingual one-way programs (2) can reach above the average level. Students in other types of programs (3-6) all end up below the average level by the end of their school years. The figure also shows that the students’ results start taking different directions after the first three school years, that is, when the education becomes more cognitively demanding. In the enriching programs, the bilingual students, throughout all of their school years, are able to develop their cognitive capability and receive intake of knowledge in both languages (Axelsson 2001:16-17, my translation).

Let us turn to another theory, namely the threshold hypothesis, see figure 3.1 below. According to this hypothesis, there are one or more critical phases which can be compared to one or more thresholds, by which knowledge in the two languages accumulate with each other. The threshold-knowledge is presented according to minimum demands of what may be assumed to be relevant language ability according to age. For the individual who has not reached threshold knowledge in any of their two languages, being bilingual is subtracting and is followed by negative effects. The individual has not achieved average level in any of their two languages and may therefore have difficulties using the language as a tool.
for thinking and as a base for future learning. The next stage occurs when the individual has reached threshold knowledge in at least one of his or her two languages. Therefore, the knowledge in a language is relevant to the individual’s age. For a person’s bilingualism to have positive cognitive effect, it requires that both languages be mastered on a level ‘relevant to the person’s age’. In order to see the effects of different types of acquiring two languages, researchers must have an opportunity to follow the development in both languages (Börestam et al 2001:59, my translation).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of competence</th>
<th>Two-language type</th>
<th>Cognitive effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above the threshold (In both languages)</td>
<td>Adding</td>
<td>Positive strengthening, which can lead to further language development and the base for further language learning is good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above the threshold (In one of the two languages)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral effect; neither positive nor negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below the threshold (In both languages)</td>
<td>Subtracting</td>
<td>Negative strengthening which can lead to a negative future language development and an unstable base for further language learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.1 Schedule of different language levels and how students perform according to language competence* (Börestam et al 2001:59, my translation).

As noticed, there can be either a positive or a negative outcome of bilingualism depending on the level of competence in the two languages. If the students part of the present field study had received an equal amount of input in their two mother tongues the results would most probably have looked different. In order for these students to perform better overall in school as a result of their bilingualism, it requires that they receive the same number of subjects taught in their two mother tongues.
7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Language is a source of communication and therefore language is an asset to everyone. In this essay, it has been shown that bilingualism should be referred to in terms of how much exposure an individual receives in two languages. A ‘balanced’ bilingual is a person who receives approximately the same amount of intake in his or her two languages beginning before the age of three. In addition to this, a ‘receptive’ bilingual may understand only utterances in one of the languages without being able to produce any sentences. Children go through different stages in their acquisition of language and each of these stages is important to an individual in order to achieve native-like proficiency. Second language acquisition is different from first language acquisition, since it is almost impossible to achieve native-like proficiency in a second language. If we are not exposed to a language from infancy to puberty, we will not fully develop language.

The purpose of this essay was to find out whether bilingual students acquire an additional language more easily compared to monolingual students. In order to find evidence of this a field study was carried out focusing on the result of bilingual and monolingual students in National tests in English. The bilingual students in the study spoke Farsi/ Swedish and Spanish/ Swedish and the monolinguals spoke only Swedish. The field study indicates that the monolingual students generally performed better in all parts of the test. The reason for this is mainly because of the fact that the bilingual students’ greatest difficulty was spelling. The bilinguals did however outperform the monolingual students in one part of the test which was to explain words in context by means of using other words. They also managed word ordering better compared to the monolingual students and they never used ‘Swenglish’ constructions in their written productions.

Students’ skills in English or language in general may depend on several different factors and one aspect to consider is whether the community in which these students live is bilingual or not. Therefore, an interview with a teacher with extensive knowledge of work with bilingual students (Finnish and Swedish) living in the bilingual community of Pajala, was performed. The result of this interview indicates that the bilingual students outperformed the monolingual students in language tests in general. Because of the fact that the students in Pajala started to learn both Swedish and Finnish in early childhood they could be referred to as ‘balanced bilinguals’. Most likely, the bilingual students part of the present study cannot be regarded as ‘balanced bilinguals’, although they have good knowledge of two languages. We may therefore assume that the students in Pajala have a better knowledge of
Swedish than the students’ part of the field study since the latter probably started to learn Swedish later. Swedish is more closely related to English compared to Farsi and Spanish and this gives the bilinguals in the field study a great disadvantage compared to the monolingual students who have all received input of Swedish since infancy. Gender also affects the result in this particular analysis, since the majority (three out of five) of the monolingual students are females compared to the bilinguals (one out of five) and commonly they perform better in language learning than male students. Other factors discussed are intelligence, aptitude, personality, motivation, attitude, and learning styles. Concerning the students in the field study, many of these factors are unknown to us, but they are significant to a person’s acquisition of a language and are therefore important to take into consideration. It has been shown to be of significance whether a person lives in a bilingual community and also whether the subjects in school are being taught in their two mother tongues.

This essay also contains a study performed in the US, which aimed to see how students perform overall in school due to what languages were used during class. It was found out that students who had attended programs where they were taught half of the time in their mother tongues and half of time in English worked most successfully. This proves that in order to achieve an adding affect from bilingualism, the individual must have received input of the two languages colloquially and on a regular basis, either from school or the community he or she lives in. This was the case among the students in Pajala and therefore they had a great advantage compared to the students’ part of the field study.

The present material was limited due to several different reasons, but it would have been very interesting to see the outcome of a larger study with many more students’ participating. It was, however possible to draw a few conclusions. Living in a bilingual community obviously provides bilingual students with great advantages in their future language acquisition.

However, in order to find answers to the aim of this essay, it is not possible to draw the conclusion that bilinguals acquire an additional language more easily compared to monolinguals. When analysing the results of the field study as well as the results of the interview, it has been shown that the bilingual students had a deeper understanding of the construction of language. They also had a better understanding and ability to explain words in a context which proves that they have a better metalinguistic awareness, that is, a deeper understanding of language and the use of language.
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