

The language advantage: how multilingualism shapes our minds

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Abstract: This article gives information about multilingualism – the use of several languages within a certain social unit, how to become one of multilingual people and the benefits of learning and using two or more languages for the personal and professional development. It also explains a profound contribution of multilingualism to cognition, to the brain, to success and wellbeing across the entire lifespan.

Keywords: Language experience, multilingualism, cognitive aging, bilingual minds, education.

Introduction: Multilingualism is defined as the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives. It means being able to speak in multiple languages without any difficulty [1].

According to the recent research results, the number of multilingual people is significantly increasing year by year, meaning more and more people have already come to a level in which they can understand and use several languages, in other words, the most of the world has already become multilingual. The reason why people learn many languages today is the progress achieved in the development of science, as well as the need of people of different nationalities to communicate with each other due to interest in learning other cultures. The most studied languages are English, French, Spanish, Chinese (the fastest-growing language), Russian, German and Arabic, the most of multilingual people know at least two of these languages. In fact, people learn more than one language for two different reasons: the first is out of necessity, that is, some people learn a language for migration, work, travel, education and the second is just out of interest. All of these reasons are important for human being to live, to develop and to feel the certain part of society.

Any given country or society is generally considered as a multilingual one if its members or citizens are multilingual. The multilingual citizens on many

occasions tend to show identifiable full range of communicative competence in several languages in place. However, there is a rare perfect multilingualism in practice. The rare perfect practice occurs because even if we acquire both or several languages in place, there is always a notable tendency that one language will always dominate over the others which are considered subordinates. Multilingualism practice tends to create the development and general acquisition of crosscultural communication skills. In this regard people tend to learn different skills of the languages in place especially speaking, reading and even writing. These cross-cultural communication skills enable one to gain both the communicative and discourse competencies. Besides the linguistic consequences, there is also a political consequence that relies on the economic and political order of the society This in the long run creates the majority and minority languages. Some of the majority languages become more powerful than others [8].

METHODOLOGY

There are too many methods and research findings that are supposed to improve the process of learning new languages. Firstly, it should be taught from very young age. For example, research suggests that children have a “critical period” for language acquisition that young babies are not confused by hearing two or more languages but develop the ability to discriminate among the languages they hear; they are more open to new language learning than their monolingually

exposed counterparts. Adult learners who are well past early childhood have been shown to be able to acquire sensitive to the grammar of a second language despite their age [4]. Aneto Pavlenko who is a Ukrainian scientist says that there is a strong relationship between emotions and multilingualism. It will be easier to learn new languages when they are felt, for instance, by reading books and watching movies which are the best sources full of emotions; or another way is communicating with people more and making friends from the country of which language is learnt [3]. Cenoz and Gorter propose the "Focus on Multilingualism" approach which connects the natural multilingual practices of pupils to language education. By natural practices, the scientists want to mean native speakers, if it is possible, learning the language with native teachers will fasten to absorb it. In addition, they also mention learning one language makes learning another easier, the more language experience you have, the more unchallenging this process becomes [2].

Being bilingual gives one an understanding of other cultures and experiences; as a result, a multilingual person becomes multicultural. Languages don't function in a vacuum, hence culture and civilization are essential to their survival. The reason for this is that language is a sociolinguistic, ethnolinguistic, and psycholinguistic problem. Language is therefore dependent on society, culture, and the psyche. In this sense, being multilingual improves one's innate comprehension and admiration of the civilizations' cultural values as expressed in the relevant languages. Language learning experiences inherently have the power to alter people's attitudes, abilities, and beliefs as well as to broaden their perspective on the world. Both formally and informally, in everyday conversations outside of the classroom, these qualities are taught.

RESULTS

Being multilingual is supposed to bring many benefits not only for the academic lives of people but also for their wellbeing. Studies show that multilingual individuals have better memory and attention skills, due to their brains being trained to learn different language systems. National Institute of Health emphasizes that there is an important relationship between multilingualism and cognitive aging, however, this connection is usually ignored by most of people who will likely to have changes in 40-50 age not only in their memories but also in decision making, judgement, processing speed and learning abilities. As language function consists of an array of abilities, including understanding and producing speech, reading, writing and naming, language processing is a critical element of cognitive tasks (e.g., the ability to understand written

and spoken instructions). Many people nowadays complain about their memory as they age, multilingualism is the solution to this problem, the more languages they learn, the more benefit their brain because switching between languages improves brain plasticity and build cognitive reserve, which may postpone the onset of age-related cognitive decline [5].

The ability to think in multiple languages also gives social and cultural benefits. Firstly, it opens doors to interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, fostering empathy and understanding across cultures, which prevents several conflicts among nations. Secondly, bilingual minds can unlock travel adventures, have career opportunities abroad being a valuable asset in a globalized job market and act as a cultural bridges whose cross-linguistic comprehension and communication promotes increased collaboration and understanding amongst people.

Making dictionaries and publishing of grammar and story books in any language are the fastest ways of spurring language growth and preservation. There is also need to do the same using the other native languages. In order to enhance multilingualism in education, foreign languages should be introduced as common courses and or medium of instruction for teaching specialised disciplines. It is worth noting that Western University College of Science and Technology currently referred to as Masinde Muliro in Kenya has realized the importance of involving other foreign languages in its proposed good programmes. The programmes include for example the study of Japanese language for engineers, French for business studies and German for tourism This can be replicated as a viable step in enhancing official multilingualism in education [9]. Besides, acquiring knowledge and skills in these programmes, learners will be able to gain proficiency in these languages. Developing and training both foreign and indigenous language teachers are very instrumental steps to help in the achievement of multilingualism practices in education. This can be achieved by training more teachers both indigenous and foreign languages in the training institutions. There should also be an establishment of translation bodies with linguistic experts to help in the translation of both indigenous and foreign languages. This can also be used to encourage the establishment of bodies like institute of language research and language councils to enhance multilingualism practices in education [8].

DISCUSSION

Within the context of language learning and multilingualism for a better world, language and culture cannot be separated. In addition to the traditional emphasis on proficiency, foreign language

learning also includes learning about the culture with the goal of increasing intercultural competence. Therefore, language learning needs to include intercultural competence, and language teachers need to become “teachers of language and culture”, which means globalization and multilingualism are inextricably linked [6]. Globalization is the process by which available goods and services, or social and cultural influences gradually become similar in all parts of the world, impacting on the decline of many existing languages and cultures. The desire or requirement of being multilingual can directly affect a disappear of several languages, especially, of which native population, educational resources or many other factors are not enough. On top of that, since most of parents today try to teach their children not their mother tongue, but other popular ones, such as English, Russian and speak them only in those languages at a young age, the number of speakers of some languages is decreasing dramatically.

For another, regarding costs, bilinguals typically have lower formal language proficiency than monolinguals do; for example, they have smaller vocabularies and weaker access to lexical items. As for language application, all of the interviewees said that they have encountered the occasion where they mix two or more languages when applying them. For example, after learning Italian, the second interviewee gradually realized that her spoken English became worse, since she was influenced by Italian way of speaking English. Also, the third interviewee said that he sometimes spoke French words in English classes. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn that being multilingual can cause some difficulties in language application, especially in pronunciation.

The integration of language education communication skills, a crucial instrument for the growth of learners' speaking and writing abilities, is required by multilingualism in education. Multilingualism in education can be achieved through the use of communicative language teaching that emphasizes linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, socio-cultural, social, and strategic competencies as well as theater. Continuous use of these competencies in the classroom can make them a reality. Additionally, in a multilingual setting, the following methods can be used to teach languages: reading, grammar translation, the direct method (teaching using the target language), the use of audiolingual, and audiovisual approaches. Multilingualism is improved by promoting the use of indigenous languages in addition to the official and national languages in the classroom. This fact has been clearly stated in the UNESCO report of 1953 that education is somewhat most effective through mother

tongue instructions This is happening because speech communities already have the communicative competence and also assigned appropriately various lexemes to the objects in their physical and cultural milieu. Thus, learning a different language may not be difficult but will always be supported by the knowledge gained from the first language [10].

CONCLUSION

Multilingualism is an inherent human trait. It denotes both the ability of humans to use three and more languages, and social situations where such capacity is utilized. However, it's important to acknowledge and deal with problems like social isolation, cultural identity, linguistic dominance, skill, and code-switching. Despite these drawbacks, multilingual individuals benefit linguistic diversity, cross-cultural communication, international cooperation, and intercultural comprehension. Thus, encouraging and promoting multilingualism through education, legislation, and cultural events could contribute to the development of a more unified and peaceful community

If we can develop a language policy to foster and encourage language learning and use, ensure that all our children have the opportunity to learn one or more additional languages, and incorporate intercultural understanding and appreciation into foreign language learning and the use of languages other than English, our children will have the linguistic skills and cultural knowledge needed to engage effectively with the world community as global citizens and play a role in global solutions and in making the world a better place [7]. When foreign and indigenous languages are included in the multilingualism practices in education, then we should always try to avoid imposing these languages to the people. A keen measure and clear framework should be taken into account because imposing languages to people is dangerous and may cause tensions amongst different ethnic and or speech communities Furthermore, as you impose a lingua franca and or foreign languages to people without developing also the indigenous languages then this may lead to language death. There are more than 3,000 languages spoken in the world today that are at the point of dying and some are already extinct Causes of language death may include among others the following factors: imposition of languages on the others, language colonialism, foreign language dictatorship and assimilation of languages. The revival of these dying languages can be done by the incorporation of multilingualism practices in education and the production of both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries [8].

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