

Investigation of the Impact of Bilingualism on the Identity of a sample of Bilingual English learners

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how learners of English at ALbaydha University and ALYemeni Institute perceive themselves as being bilinguals and how being bilinguals can affect their core identity. Also it investigates whether they understand being bilingual, based on how well they use and speak the English language and how often it is used or influenced by the factors of English culture which make them use it instead of their local language culture, inside and outside college, to gain prestige without taking into consideration that the change will affect their core identity. This paper is qualitative in nature based on a questionnaire administered at ALbaydha University and ALYemeni Institute students as non-native English learners who study English to obtain Bachelor Degree or Diploma in English language. The most unexpected findings that emerged show that despite studying English and having some skills in using the language none of the participants perceived him/herself as being bilingual, there is no evidence of language shift, and the core identity takes first status in most situations. Additionally, English choices do not dominate most of bilingual conversations but the local language is the dominator. All participants are proud of their identity and do not accept to replace it by another. They do not believe that being bilingual will affect their core identity. It is also noted that all participants behave carefully during their use of the English language and avoid any direct contact with English culture or adopting any of its norms of life though they prove to be equally competent in both local languages

Key words: *bilingualism and bilinguals, identity, code switching, identity in language education.*

1.0. Introduction

In bilingual societies, the choice is not always of first language or mother tongue in life processes. The term bilingualism has not determined or permanent interpretation depending on the context and environment. the interpretation of bilingualism has been studied in this paper in relation to the sociolinguistic point of view that is related to the context rather than language or society. This context is chosen by language learners because of their desire to add another language to their mother tongue. In this framework, bilingualism has strict borders in which acquiring another language does not mean adapting and absorbing everything related to that language, it is to say that , the core identity must be conserved and not substituted by a second one. Whatever the need is , the core identity must not be changed since this change has deep social, historical and cultural effect not only on the individual. This paper tried to answer the following questions: Does switching from one language to another mean switching from one identity to another?; what is the direct impact of acquiring another language on identity?

1.1. Statement of the problem

The relationship between identity and bilingualism seems to be the interest of many. It is observed that language learning has a direct and an indirect relationship with identity and mother tongue all over contexts where another language is being taught or learned. Identity seems to be in a critical condition and this could be related to the culture associated to that language which imposes new customs, traditions and beliefs. In addition to replacing mother tongue vocabulary with new terms from the target language without taking into consideration the danger that threatens mother tongue terms, the target language has a prestigious status among modern life and social

media. Most bilinguals lack the awareness about the norms, values and standards that they have to take in to their consideration while acquiring/learning another language. To examine this point of view the issue needs to be investigated and analyzed in a scientific way.

1.2. Objectives of the study

This study aims to:

- 1- Investigate and analyze the effect of bilingualism on the identity of a sample of Yemeni English learners.
- 2- Examine whether bilingualism has a direct or an indirect effect on the core identity of those learners or whether the effect depends on the context itself.
- 3- Investigate how being bilingual can have direct effect out of the circle and environment of learning and exceed all those social, religious and cultural beliefs.

1.3. Questions of the study

The following questions are addressed in this study:

- 1- What effect does the acquisition of another language have on the core identity of the Yemeni learners?
- 2- Are the Yemeni English learners' beliefs about their mother tongue affected by being bilinguals?
- 3- Does bilingualism have close relationship with identity or depend on the context?

1.4. Hypotheses of the study

It is hypothesized that:

- 1-The acquisition/learning of another language has a direct effect on the core identity of the Yemeni English learners.
- 2- Yemeni English learners' beliefs about their mother tongue are affected by being bilinguals.
- 3- Bilingualism has no close relationship with identity and this depends on the context.

1.5. Significance of the study

Conserving the core identity seems to be the interest of many of those who have awareness about the real danger that lurks in identity when it meets with another language. This study serves in exploring whether the feeling toward identity can be affected easily by being bilingual, or this fair can be found in rare cases where the feeling of belonging to one identity is so poor. In addition, it raises the awareness of the merits and demerits of being bilingual.

1.6. definitions of terms

1.6.1. Identity

Identity refers to the qualities and attitudes of a person or a group of people that make them different from others and shape their personalities. Identity consider apart that cannot be parted from the field of sociolinguistic. According to Norton (1997), some authors framed identity in different terms. These terms are gathered from a wide range of articles ,such as "social identity ", "sociocultural identity ", and " ethnic identity " (cited in Vasilach, 2018).

1.6.2. Language and identity

Llamas and Watt (2010:1) claim that the connection between language and identity is fundamental to our experience of being human. They propose that language reflects who we are and in some sense, is who we are, and its use defines us indirectly and directly (cited in Yalnko,2017).

1.6.3. Biligualisim and bilinguals

Bilingualism seems to be a flexible term in which many interpretations are said by many language experts. According to Webster Online Dictionary (2012), bilingualism is defined as " the ability to speak two languages or the frequent use (as by a community) of two languages. Grosjean (2010, p. 20) states that bilinguals are often perceived as having acquired their languages as children and not having an accent on them. These bilinguals are called "real", "the pure ", "the balanced"

bilinguals (cited in Yanko,2017). An alternative to this definition is entitled in the term "incipient bilingualism", which includes people with minimal competence in a second language (Diebold ,(1994), cited in Yalnko ,2017).

1.6.4. Identity in language education

Norton (1997) proposes, "The relationship between language and identity is not only abstract and theoretical, but also has an important consequences for positive and productive language teaching and learning ", when interacting with various people using their L2, learners are engaged in identity and affecting their perception of themselves, other people and the world (cited in Akiko, 2013).

1.6.5. Code switching

Code switching means that the speaker switches from one language to the other in certain situations. It follows certain rules and is defined by social function (Saban, 2016).

1.7 Literature review

There are many studies that cast a light on this topic from different directions. A study was conducted by Yalnok (2017) with the purpose of exploring the identities of family members in two bilingual families. The aim of the study was to gather an in-depth perspective on how family members experience and view the languages role in their own lives. The data for the study was gathered by performing five semi structured and thematic interviews which allow the kind of exchange between researcher and participants that is needed when discussing concept as complex as identity. The participants of the study are two bilingual families; both families were selected through similar criteria in order to be able to make comparisons and to gain a better understanding of bilingual identity in families. The data was analyzed using qualitative and thematic analysis. According to the result, one difference between generations in family 2, although the mother was raised bilingually with Finish and English, similarly to

her own children, her identification with English linguistically, culturally and emotionally was much stronger than her children. However, the mother grew up in Canada and her children in Finland, which goes to show how great an impact the environment and the mainstream language and culture on language learner's identities.

In the cases related to bilingualism and bilinguals, or as questioned by Wei (2000), "should bilingualism be measured by how fluent people in to languages", a study conducted by Bina Bangsa (2017), aimed mainly at investigating and analyzing the concept of bilingualism and bilinguals based on seven Baker's (2010) dimensions of bilingualism :ability ,culture ,context, age ,use, elective bilingualism, and balanced of two languages ,however. There were two participants involved in the study: two Australians, the first was able to speak two languages equally, English and as the mother tongue and Indonesian as the second language. The second was able to speak three languages equally; Farsi, English and Urdu. The data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews using both closed and open question methods. The method applied in the study was a qualitative method, which also used theoretical approach as the basis of the study. The findings indicated that it was arduous to specify to what extent the concept of bilingualism and bilinguals were. .

Regarding the issue, whether the identity is affected by language, a study prepared by Asada (2013), to investigate the effect of bilingualism on identity of a sample of BE teachers and how the experience of being bilingual has affected their identity as Be teachers. The participants of the study were six BE teachers who enrolled in an MA TESOL in the UK; two Japanese a, two Chines, one Mexican and one Cypriot. Quantitative and qualitative research were the major approaches

used in the study. Interviews were chosen to as the most efficient research instrument of the study, a semi-structured style for the first two, then a structured style for the final followed by interview guide. Qualitative data analysis was used in the study, the analysis also applied to narrative analysis. The findings, which revealed the ambiguity of the concept of bilingualism and the participants' definition of being bilingual, were similar to the widely held belief of balanced bilingualism. The participants seem confident in their teaching, most of them, however, did not perceive themselves as being bilingual and show the contradiction of the belief of the critical period for SLA. All participants exhibited that "sequential acquisition (Baker, 2010) of bilingualism could achieve an advanced level of English although their hesitance of the knowledge of being bilingual might interrelate the concept of balanced bilingualism.

2.0. Methodology

2.1. Study design

Qualitative approach was used in this study. It is an exploratory study to investigate the issue of identity, and how it can be affected by being bilingual.

2.2. Population and sample of the study

The population of study included all learners at Rada'a Faculty of Education and ALYemeni Institute for English Language. The sample of the study consisted of 40 male and female students out of which 20 students were selected randomly from third and fourth levels, English Departments at Faculty of Education and Science and the other 20 from the ninth and tenth levels at ALYemeni Institute.

2.3. Instrument of the study

Questioner consisted of 10 statements including the extent that bilingualism can affect the identity of language learners was the used as an instrument in this study.

3.0 Findings and discussion

To answer the questions and examine the hypothesise of the study, each statement was analyzed separately as follows:

3.1. The first statement of the questionnaire

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	1	2.5
Often	15	37.5
Rarely	16	40
Never	8	20

Having analyzed the responses of the participants as shown in the above table, the highest ratio with the average of 40% state that bilingual learners rarely prefer English language more than their mother tongue, while 37.5% mention that they often prefer it more than their first mother tongue; 20% of the participants state that they never prefer it more than their mother tongue and only 2.5% of them stated that they always prefer it more than their mother tongue. Through these responses, it is noted that most of the participants or 'what can be called

The responses to the statement "As bilingual learner, I prefer English language more than my mother tongue" are as follows:

bilinguals', set their English in a second status and prefer their mother tongue as a symbol of their core identity. This emphasizes that code switching to second language only happens with the intention of learning another language to enlarge their knowledge about another culture and nations. This intention keeps the mother tongue and core identity away from the probability of substituting with another.

3.2. The second statement of the questionnaire

The responses to the statement " I use English only during classes", are as follows:

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	10	25
Often	20	50
Rarely	5	12.5
Never	5	12.5

The participant's responses to this statement emphasize the accuracy of the first statement responses. The previous studies related to similar issue show that this type of bilinguals is called 'elective bilingual', those who choose to be bilinguals and who acquire a second language through a course of study. This appears clearly, when 50% of the participants'

responses indicate that they often use English as only during classes; 25% always use English during classes, while 12.5% rarely use English. Also only 12.5% of them response that they rarely use English only during classes out of the field of learning.

3.3. The third statement of the questionnaire

The responses to the statement, "I use English to express prestige", are as follows:

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	3	7.5
Often	5	12.5
Rarely	18	45
Never	14	35

The responses to this statement seem to have some relationship with both the first and second statements. The highest number of respondents (45%), state that they rarely use English for the purpose of showing off . This emphasizes that mother tongue has a high status among its speakers and it is used as a prestigious language with a sense of pride whenever and whatever the situation is; 35% state that they rarely use English to express prestige; 12.5% declare that they often use English to express prestige; only 7.5% participants state that they always use English to express prestige. These The responses to the statement, "I feel proud when speaking English outside college or institute" are as follows:

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	21	52.5
Often	5	12.5
Rarely	7	17.5
Never	7	17.5

As shown in the table, 52.5% of the participants declare that they always feel proud when speaking English outside college or institute; 7% of them state that they rarely feel proud when speaking English outside college or institute; the same percentage state that they never feel proud when speaking English outside college or institute. Barely 5% of the participants state that they often feel proud when speaking English outside college or institute. This indicates that in

The responses to the statement, "my society encourages me when speaking English in social gathering" are as follows:

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	0	0
Often	5	12.5
Rarely	10	25
Never	25	62.5

As the table shows 62.5% of the participants state that the society does not encourage them when speaking English in social gathering; 25% of them respond that their society rarely

rare responses ascribe to the rare cases where English has prestigious status upon mother tongue. It could be observed that, in the context of this study, the social customs and traditions consider those who express themselves using English language as "intruders", and the society looks at them with some abhorrence. Only in rare positions, where someone can use English freely outside the environment of learning with families coming from abroad, or with those who have some experience in English and interested in it instead of the mother tongue.

3.4. The fourth statement of the questionnaire

modern societies and with the wide spread of social media; English language seems to have a big status among those who live in an environment where English language is demanded. So this feeling of pride is generated because the ability to use English outside college or institute is considered as a passport to enter this modern world. However, it contradicts the third statement.

3.5. The fifth statement of the questionnaire

encourages them when speaking English in social gathering; and 12.5% state that they often receive an encouragement from the society when speaking English in social gathering. No

one states that the society always provides encouragement when speaking English in social gathering. This may have some relationship with the second statement, "I use English only during classes", since in societies with strong feeling of identity, and strong feeling of belonging to the mother tongue and core culture, it is not easy to accept the core language to be replaced by

The responses to the statement, "I feel shy when using Arabic in high class social gathering" are presented below.

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	1	2.5
Often	10	25
Rarely	4	10
Never	52	62.5

The table shows that 62.5% of the participants state that they never feel shy when using Arabic as their mother tongue in high-class social gathering; 25% declare that they often feel shy when using their mother tongue in high-class social gathering; 10% of them state that they rarely feel shy when using their mother tongue in high-class social gathering; and 2.5% of the participants' responses show that they always feel shy when speaking their mother tongue in high- class social gathering. In the

The responses to the statement, "being bilingual affect my core identity" are presented as follows:

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	1	2.5
Often	13	32.5
Rarely	10	25
Never	16	40

It is clear that 40% of the participants state that their identity is never affected by being bilinguals; 32.5% of them declare that their identity is often affected by being bilinguals; 25% of the participants assure that their identity is rarely affected by being bilinguals; and 2.5% of them state that their identity is always affected by being bilingual. To discuss the responses there is a need to clarify that the relationship between being bilingual and the

another language except in rare cases, in families who used to travel a lot and who consider code switching a kind of urbanizing. Society accepts individuals to be English learners but not to replace their mother tongue or their core identity with another one.

3.6. The sixth statement of the questionnaire

society of the study, the concept "high class " is usually related to those families and people with strong roots of identity, who are strict in their language choices, and those who consider themselves the first responsible of protecting the original heritage of culture and language as possible as they can. Only in rare cases there are some who are interested in code switching.

3.7. The seventh statement of the questionnaire

core identity depend on the mind of the bilinguals and the way that they come to contact with the target language. Those who are elective bilinguals are not affected since they choose to learn another language not for the purpose of replacing another identity. Rather they have the desire to add a new language along with the maintenance of their core identity and mother tongue as symbols of their core identity.

3.8. The eight statement of the questionnaire

The responses to the statement, "speaking English means adapting English culture and norms of life" are as follows:

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	1	2.5
Often	1	2.5
Rarely	11	27.5
Never	27	67.5

From the table, it is evident that 67.5% of the participant state that speaking English does not mean adapting the English culture and norms of life; 27.5% of them answered that speaking English rarely means adapting the English culture and norms of life; only 2.5%, declare that speaking English always means adapting the English culture and norms of life and the same rare number of the participants state that speaking English often means adapting the English culture and norms of life. The

cultural differences between the society of the study and the English language society make the issue of adapting English culture so difficult to be absorbed by language learners. In the context of the study, the strict and strong feeling of belonging to Islam and unique identity and culture makes the thinking of imitating any other strange culture a kind of disloyalty and coming out of the civilizational circle of society.

3.9. The ninth statement of the questionnaire

The responses to the statement "using English vocabulary is more prestigious than Arabic ones" are as follows:

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	3	7.5
Often	3	7.5
Rarely	7	17.5
Never	27	67.5

As it appears in the table, 67% of the participants state that using English vocabulary is never being more prestigious than Arabic ones; 7.5% of them respond that using English is always more prestigious than Arabic ones; the same number state that using English vocabulary is often being more prestigious than Arabic ones; 17.5% of the participants declare that using English vocabulary is rarely being more prestigious than Arabic ones. One of the concerns regarding being bilingual is the substitution of another language vocabulary instead of mother tongue which causes consequently the loss and death of the mother

tongue vocabulary. This substitution happens due to the continues repetition of a lot of English vocabulary in social media and TV programs which causes the vanishing of a lot of mother tongue vocabulary. According to the responses, this concern seems to be somewhat uncommon in the society of the study which emphasises the strong feeling of pride and the strong adherence to mother tongue vocabulary whenever it is used.

3.10. The tenth statement of the questionnaire

The responses to the statement "I speak English deliberately with those who don't understand it" are as follows:

Probabilities	Frequency	Percentage
Always	3	7.5
Often	3	7.5
Rarely	7	17.5
Never	27	67.5

As shown in the table, 67.5% of the participants declare that they never speak English deliberately with those who do not know it; 17.5 of them state that they rarely do that; 7.5% respond that they often do that; the same number of participants declare that they always do that. Using English language to show off usually becomes the intention of some learners due to the high status of this language among modern societies as the language of era. This pushed some speakers to show off the ability of speaking another language especially in front of uneducated people and may feel freer to speak with those who do not know the language. They feel confident that their mistakes will not be discovered. The participants assume the opposite by stating that their intention is not to show off in front of those who do not know what they are speaking about. This emphasizes the ethics of confident learners who speak in front of those who can understand them without any fear of committing mistakes. In addition, this issue may contribute to underestimating the status of mother tongue in front uneducated people who feel shy of being unable to use it like those bilinguals.

4.0 Recommendations

First, it is important to treat each English learner as an individual bilingual since each individual faces different circumstances and motives regarding the acquisition or learning another language.

Second, educators must explain to their learners that they are fortunate to learn another language and it is not a shame to learn and acquire another language to know another culture and world views.

Third, educators should raise the awareness of learners that getting another language doesn't mean losing the core identity and culture or paying less pride to mother tongue.

5.0. Suggestions

It is suggested to expand this study using various data collection instruments, and with greater number of participants and dividing participants into groups according to outside factors that affect their point of views, such as having native speaker friends or families, or parents who grow up in English society. Also making similar studies with those who have scholarships to English speaking societies.

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