

What is Bilingualism anyway?: A Review of Methods and Approaches and How These Meet or Miss the Needs of the Learner.

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Definition

Bilingualism is often loosely defined as ‘the ability to speak two languages.’ For the purpose of this study, bilingualism is the ability to not only listen, speak, read and write two languages, but also to be able to culturally function in the other culture to the extent of reaching structural assimilation. Less than this leads to ‘diglossia’: the presence of two or more languages which instead of coexisting, one seeks prevalence and superiority. Such condition promotes language deletion (subtraction) rather than addition (Cummins).

Research Questions:

- How does one or why does one become bilingual?

What goes on in the brain when you acquire L1 v L2 or L3? Should this be a different process?

Do all people acquire L1 and/or L2, L3 in the same manner?

Are there differences in the cognitive processes used?

Are all humans going to acquire a language in a similar way?

If this is so, then ALL humans have the capability to acquire language in a particular manner?

Does this rule out the ability of animals to acquire language?

- What is literacy in L1 v. in L2?

What is the role of culture in this process of literacy?

How does one gain L2 literacy?

How about L1 literacy?

Which one implies a more complex process?

What is critical literacy?

- Does literacy play a role in assessment?

Does bilingualism play a role in assessment?

Is being bilingual better academically?

Brainstorm...PISA Test Results 2009/2010

Summary of Claims:

Claim #1:

"Bilingualism (Multilingualism) based on functional literacy (in both [all] languages) may lead to a delay in the presence of Alzheimers. It can also be claimed that Alzheimers may be eradicated in a brain that has acquired two or more languages at the literacy level, and which uses them constantly. The genetic condition to acquire the disease may be either removed and/or the processed slowed down.

Claim #2:

Bilingualism (or multilingualism) in America may be geared at 'maintaining the status quo of monolingualism' rather than at opening better opportunities for those who come with one or more languages.

Claim #3:

Linguistic superiority (or diglossia) happens in America and is also promoted in the school system. However, there are increasing attempts to establish a more efficient system of second language instruction. Review of the Dual Language Immersion Programs.

Claim #4:

Language acquisition involves a different cognitive process from being able to understand and function in math, science, and social studies. Therefore, language instruction leading to language acquisition MUST NOT be graded as if it were another content area like MATH, SCIENCE, SOCIAL STUDIES, LANGUAGE ARTS.

Claim #5:

There are 'linguistic hidden treasures' in America that need to be discovered in order to promote a healthier, more efficient system of language instruction. Xenophobia, 'English-centeredness', and 'phobias' and 'myths' need to be eradicated from the system

Conclusion

There is a vast body of research and data that brings valuable insight into these claims. Bilingualism has been underrated in America and there is every need to change the course and implement a more efficient bilingual education system.