

THE CONCEPT OF SEMILINGUALISM

Christopher Stroud

Introduction

Hansegård (1968) presents a hypothesis that in particular bilingual language learning situations, some individuals will fail to attain a necessary minimal linguistic competence and that this state has adverse consequences for their total intellectual and emotional development. A new term coined for this state is semilingualism.

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate a number of points, the understanding of which is a necessary prerequisite for any deeper discussion of Hansegård's hypothesis. The points under discussion concern the concept of semilingualism, the theoretical presuppositions of the concept, argumentative technique, and scientific method used to establish the concept.

There are a number of reasons for carrying out a theoretical study of this type, rather than trying to find empirical evidence that substantiate or refute the hypothesis. One reason is that there is very little examination of the theoretical assumptions underlying the concept of semilingualism in the literature. As we shall see, it is a very complex concept that can be researched on several different levels, and it is obviously desirable to keep these complexities in mind when using it. The concept of semilingualism is also interesting from the point of view of bilingual research as such. In this context it can be seen as a logical extension of the research paradigm as such, in that it depends upon the conceptual framework and methods of reasoning of traditional bilingual research to solve one of its classical problems - that of the relationship of bilingualism to cognition. Another reason for a theoretical study of semilingualism is the widespread applicability the concept has had, with consequences both in the fields of immigrant language problems and second language learning in general.

Naturally, I cannot go into any one of these subjects in very great depth in an essay of such limited scope as this. It is best to view this essay as a programme for a larger project of research, rather than an answer to any of the questions it poses.

Points of critique

Various types and degrees of criticism can be levelled against the present concept of semilingualism. From a scientific point of view it may be illuminating to consider the following points:

- a) Clarity of the concept, i.e. what is involved in the concept? Is it one concept or many?
- b) Questions pertaining to the theoretical presuppositions of the concept. By theoretical presuppositions I have in mind the relationship between language and thought, the conception of the language learner and the language learning task, and the general research paradigm within which it is possible to formulate such a concept.
The strongest type of criticism would be to show that the theoretical presuppositions are wrong. A weaker type of criticism that is compatible with both the correctness and incorrectness of the hypothesis would be to show that there is only a limited amount of evidence or none at all for the presuppositions. This more modest goal is the aim of this essay.
- c) Assuming the truth of the theoretical presuppositions we can further analyse the argumentation technique involved and question the legitimacy of Hansegård's reasoning.
- d) Lastly, we could examine the scientific method used, i.e. the selection of facts that are deemed relevant to the hypothesis and the criteria used to delimit the concept of semilingualism.

In this essay, the main emphasis falls on points a) and b).

All of the above points address themselves to the degree of validity of results, measured against some implicit norm of research or scientific standard. Another type of criticism has to do with considerations that have often been thought to be external to scientific standards and thus - under such a conception of the philosophy of science - do not directly have to do with validity, but more with moral justification.¹ It could be interesting to place Hansegård's research in a larger socio-economic and political perspective and with this framework examine

- a) the formulation of problems, types of questions asked, empirical material used and the solutions obtained
- b) the criteria of applicability for scientific results
- c) the formulation and dissemination of results.

To the extent that the scientific criticism of semilingual research is justified, the socio-economic points above do have a certain interest.

What is semilingualism?

Hansegård (1977, p. 42) defines semilingualism as the unfavourable linguistic (and psychological) consequences of an early deprivation of the native language. These unfavourable consequences are listed in six points, where the first three are said to relate to the particular linguistic system in question and the last three to relate to the linguistic ability of the speaker.² These six points constitute criteria for knowing a language for Hansegård and are:

- 1) the size of the store of words that can be understood or used actively
- 2) degree of automaticity, i.e. the extent to which the understanding of the language and the production of speech proceed without delay, hindrance or conscious planning
- 3) correctness (or 'system adherence'), i.e. the ability of the speaker to correctly and in accordance with the rules of the language understand and produce the linguistic elements of the language
- 4) the ability to create and innovate in the language
- 5) the control of the intellectual, emotional and directive functions in the language
- 6) the richness vs. pooriness of individual meanings in the language³ (Hansegård 1968, p. 97, my translation).

In Hansegård's view, a supposedly bilingual speaker is semilingual if he shows deficiencies on the above points when compared with a monolingual speaker of the relevant language. Also attributable to Hansegård is the statement that deficiencies on point 5 are a direct consequence of deficiencies on point 6.⁴

The criteria that Hansegård uses to specify semilingualism are both linguistic and psycholinguistic as should be apparent from the list. They rest upon a pretheoretical idea of language mastery. Each of the above points needs to be developed in much greater detail to be of any practical use.

The first point I want to treat is whether they delimit one and the same concept of semilingualism. A second point that I will touch on concerns their validity or justification in their present context of use.

The concept

I believe it is possible to find three different senses of semilingualism that differ as to the relation between language and thought that they assume and thus differ in their range of potential application.

Semilingualism 1 (SL1). This is the most superficial sense of semilingualism. It refers solely to the linguistic system competence of the speaker as is delimited by the first three points above: A speaker may have a small store of words, speak haltingly and deviate from the standard. He is then semilingual if these deficiencies can be found in one language and doubly semilingual if the deficiencies are found in both languages.

As SL1 is not of direct relevance for the wider concepts of semilingualism I will only mention a few points that concern the criteria and refer to Loman (1974) for a more extensive discussion.

a) The relevant situation is a bilingual one. It is therefore highly questionable of what value a comparison of the size of the lexicon with a monolingual speaker will be. What aspects of the vocabulary should we compare? How do we deal with situational and contextual appropriacy? And what is meant by the notion "size of the store of words"? In any measure of the lexicon we need to include more than just a simple word count. How are we to treat the various lexical extensions that are possible? Is this point covered by 4) and does it conflict with Hansegård's ideas on point 3)? How do we handle area and degree of coverage of lexical items?

b) The norms that underlie the criterium of system adherence are specified on the system of the monolingual-monocultural speaker.⁵ In general, they assume the relevancy of the compound-coordinate distinction as a goal for bilingual learning (see below p. 166 f.).

c) It is not obvious what the relation between linguistic competence and fluency of speech is. At present there is no satisfactory linguistic processing model that can be used as a theoretical framework for such criteria.

Apart from these facts, these criteria are unsatisfactory in their total disregard of sociocultural context.

Semilingualism 2 (SL2). This sense of semilingualism refers to the observation that a speaker may experience difficulty in expressing himself intellectually and emotionally in a language. As language can be taken to

facilitate interaction with a certain type of linguistic environment, this may hinder the intellectual development of the child.

This second sense of semilingualism is independent of, though not incompatible with, the linguistic system-competence sense of semilingualism. It is possible (Hansegård 1968, p. 98 ff.) for a speaker to have a mastery of the system in the first three points but still be classed as semilingual in our second sense. Also the opposite case is possible. A speaker may have a small store of words e.g. but express himself well in the language. We have then the following possibilities:

SL1	SL2
yes	no
yes	yes
no	yes
no	no

The expressive difficulties may be in one or both the bilingual's languages; they may concern all functions in both languages or some functions in each language. The criteria for SL2 are basically (subjective assessments of) the existence of deficiencies on points 4-6 above. Recent Canadian research (Cummins 1976) have used various psychometric measures. The reduction of function that is assumed to account for the low results on verbal IQ and low scholastic achievement is explained in this context as due to the balance effect (Macnamara 1966), i.e. the learner is said to pay for his increasing competence in L2 with a reduction in L1 competence. Reduced function is thus a consequence of reduced competence in L1 and L2.

I think that the same criticism of disregard for socio-cultural context is applicable here (see p. 166 f.) as in the case of SL1.⁶

Semilingualism 3 (SL3). This is the strongest interpretation of the three. Here language development is taken to play an integral role in cognitive development, not just a facilitating role. Without language, no cognition. The criteria for this sense is the same as for SL2, and SL3 stands in the same relation to SL1 as does SL2. The criteria themselves, as well as the methods for determining the criteria can be criticized on the same grounds as those for SL2.

It should be obvious that SL2 and SL3 are incompatible (at least as they are presented here - see below p. 165 for further discussion) - we either have the one or the other.

An interesting practical-pedagogical point is that people working with immigrant children often take the first set of criteria - those that delimit linguistic competence - as indicators of the third sense of semilingualism. This is a justifiable reaction as these are the easiest observable criteria. People that have talked about semilingualism have neglected to tell people how to diagnose it, from which a very 'safe' practice has grown up that treats all immigrants as 'potential' semilinguals until proven otherwise.

So far then, we have seen that there are three possible senses of the concept of semilingualism depending upon the relation of thought to language that we assume. In delimiting these three senses we have assumed that the criteria themselves - although not scientifically articulated - are at least coherent. As we saw when discussing the lexicon in the context of SL 1, this principle may contradict or overlap with other criteria. Obviously, if we can show that the criteria themselves are internally contradictory we should be able to find many more senses of semilingualism.

In the following section I will discuss only concepts 2 and 3 and will start by sketching a research background from which they can be seen to be logical consequences.

Bilingualism and cognition

Some of the central conceptual ingredients of this paradigm are - from the linguistic side - those pertaining to two pure languages in contact, the measurement of the amount of interference between them, the phenomenon of code switching and the construction of models for co-existent systems. On the psychological side we have research on dominance vs. subordination, the balance effect of two systems and the problem of bilingualism and cognition.

The relationship between bilingualism and cognition is of special interest for our purposes. When discussing the effect of two languages on cognition, I think we can take cognition to cover any one of the following points:

a) Language learning structures and processes: How does having to cope with two languages influence language learning ability, e.g. types and amount of interference, readiness to reorganize the phonological, syntactical and lexical levels, rate of acquisition etc.? How can we relate these questions to the prevailing conception of LAD (Language Acquisition Device)?

b) Cognitive operations: How does bilingualism influence intellectual functions such as dealing with arithmetical tasks, various types of concrete and formal operations in Piaget's sense? (See below on intelligence.)

c) Language and culture specific coding: Here we can interest ourselves in Whorfian subtleties, problems of translation, cultural empathy etc.

d) General cognitive development: This point subsumes most of the above points but treats them from a developmental perspective. Here we find questions pertaining to the general scholastic, intellectual and emotional advantages and disadvantages of a bilingual learning situation. In most studies this point has been treated in conjunction with (e).

) Intelligence: Most studies on bilingualism and cognition have reformulated this question in psychometric terms as whether or not bilingualism affects IQ. To quote Macnamara on this point (1970, p. 34):

'In that form it [the question] is almost trivial. A large number of factors influence IQ without having any direct bearing on what we intuitively recognize as intelligence'

A large number of factors have somewhat confused the issue as to whether bilingualism has positive or negative effects on intelligence as measured on tests of this type, among which the most important for our purposes are:

- 1) Bilingual sampling techniques: Subjects are not representative of the population but are e.g. chosen on the basis of their surnames.
- 2) Nature of monolingual control groups: The bilingual and monolingual groups have not been matched for variables such as SES (Socio-Economic Status), sex or age.
- 3) Test type: Verbal tests on bilinguals' L2 standardized on monolingual speakers of L2 etc.⁷
- 4) Nature of problem choice; evaluation and interpretation of results: What do the tests actually measure? What are the norms and values against which the tests are interpreted? What explanation is given for the results obtained.⁸

Prior to the Peal and Lambert study (1962), the effects of bilingualism on cognitive functioning as measured by tests of verbal intelligence were found to be unfavourable. Peal and Lambert hypothesised that these unfavourable results were a consequence of methodological defects in the test

design, more specifically in the sampling techniques and control of the relevant variables (points 1 and 2). They therefore used a balance measure⁹ to sample bilinguals and controlled for SES, sex and age. The result was a higher score on tests of verbal intelligence for the bilingual group than for the monolingual control group. Other studies following the Peal and Lambert lead have obtained similar results. Bilingual groups matched on the above variables and on non-verbal intelligence have scored better than monolinguals on tests of divergent thinking, i.e. verbal originality (Cummins and Gulustan 1974), cognitive flexibility (Balkan 1970), which involved a restructuring of a perceptual situation,¹⁰ and syntactic reorganisation of verbal material (Ben Zeev 1977).

There are two innovations in test design that differentiate the more recent studies from the earlier ones. The most obvious difference is the use of a balance measure. It has been suggested by Macnamara (1966) that this measure biases the test results by selecting only subjects who are proficient in language learning to the exclusion of the others. This accusation has been met by Lambert and Anisfeld (1969) who point out that the measures also allow children who have a low level of competence in the two languages to enter the sample - the only requirement being that they are balanced. Cummins (1976) has also examined the extent to which the exclusion of non-balanced (i.e. more dominant in one language) individuals biases the results. He examined the verbal and non-verbal intelligence of the non-balanced subjects and found their score to be insignificantly lower on these measures (which means that the balanced bilinguals' scores were insignificantly higher). Cummins also points out that the balance criteria are very lenient, allowing a ratio of 5:3. The only conclusion we seem to be able to draw here is that the balance measures do not bias the results.

The other important innovation in the later studies (besides matching for SES) is that the more recent groups were of high SES whereas earlier studies had used bilinguals from low SES. High SES bilinguals often have the socially dominant language as their first language, whereas low SES bilingual speakers tend to have the socially subordinate language as theirs - as is the case for immigrants and guest workers. As we shall see later this fact can be related to points 2, 3 and 4 above in a natural way.

Now, I think that there are basically two ways of explaining away the contradictory results found in a comparison of earlier and later studies. These are what I will henceforth call the bilingual paradigm explanation

and the sociolinguistic explanation respectively. I don't know which is the correct or better solution, but I believe that they are both worth working with. I will start by sketching the bilingual paradigm explanation. The sociolinguistic explanation can be found on p. 166 ff.

The bilingual paradigm explanation

This is the pigeon hole in which we can put Hansegård, Cummins and presumably also Lambert.

Their explanation is in all relevant respects a psycholinguistic explanation. Due to the early deprivation of the native language (Hansegård) or alternatively due to the subtractive social conditions¹¹ in which speakers of a subordinate L1 have to learn L2, these individuals will fail to attain a minimal linguistic competence, or alternatively, a native-like competence in any of their languages. This explanation is given with the background assumption that learning to cope with one language is difficult enough for low SES speakers,¹² so that the difficulties involved in coping with two languages (whatever they may be) is well nigh impossible for the cognitive apparatus of the child to surmount, unless the optimal environmental and instructional conditions are present. Under these latter conditions even children with learning difficulties may succeed in becoming bilingual.¹³ Otherwise, adverse cognitive consequences follow from not attaining this necessary level of linguistic competence. To quote Cummins (1976) on these points:

" . . . in bilingual learning situations where the child fails to overcome difficulties in coping with two languages the research evidence suggests that the bilingual learning experiences might have a negative effect on his cognitive functioning, at least insofar as this functioning involves language" (my emphasis) (p. 23)

The functioning that involves language are described as follows

" . . . difficulties in coping with two languages are likely to adversely affect a bilingual child's expression of his intelligence and consequently his interaction with an increasingly symbolic environment"

This is mainly because

"an inadequate grasp of the language of instruction may be less intellectually satisfying and consequently may not promote intellectual curiosity"

Although we are told that a child may experience difficulties with a language over a "prolonged period of time", we are not told what these difficulties are. Great emphasis is placed on social influence and the language instruction environment for coping with two languages, while the estimation of the child's own cognitive coping mechanisms is low. It also appears as though Cummins identifies adverse cognitive consequences within the context of formal schooling and requisite level of linguistic competence in relation to the norms of the school: One gets the impression that it is only within the confines of formal education that intellectual stimulation is possible. It is interesting to note that Cummins ignores many other plausible explanations for the school difficulties of low SES bilingual children in favour of a language solution.

Another point that should be clear by now is that Cummins assumes a relatively strong relationship between language and thought as a mediating factor between low SES and intellectual difficulties.

Note that if we replace all mention of bilingual speakers with monolingual low SES restricted code speakers, we get a lucid summary of Bernstein's central points. If we follow out this analogy we can find many interesting parallels in the observations made with respect to restricted code speakers and low SES bilinguals. For example, restricted speakers manage relatively well in the earlier stages at school - as they are in possession of socialisation patterns that orientate them towards concrete operations. This is not the case when formal operations are reached as they lack the necessary elaborated code. (For extensive criticism of Bernstein, see Dittmar 1976).

I have treated Cummins in greater detail than Hansegård here because his views are explicit and easy to work with. This is not the case with Hansegård. I believe, however, that most of what I have said with regard to Cummins is also valid for Hansegård.

To conclude this section I will sketch some relevant aspects of the language and thought controversy and examine some questions of interest for the language learning conception presupposed by Cummins and others.

The statement of the strongest view on the relationship between language and thought can be found in Vygotsky's (1962) work. This is the view that Hansegård has adopted. Hansegård's criteria of semilingualism are essentially derived from Vygotsky's theory, as is his view of general linguistic development and the important role played by language in concept formation.

For Vygotsky, the disappearance of egocentric speech is in fact the internalization of speech to become verbal thought. The word is the unit upon which the child builds and develops his primitive concepts - a process that involves many stages and that is completed first at puberty. Not only verbal thought, however, but all aspects of the child's character and personality development are intimately tied up with speech. A closer study of Vygotsky will show that Hansegård's concept of semilingualism is a logical consequence of this view of language and cognition. As language under this conception is an integral part of all kinds of psychological functions - or the source of psychological functions - it is obvious that should language disappear, so should everything that depends upon language. This is semilingualism in its third sense.

In another context (quoted in Cummins 1976), Vygotsky deals with the effects of multilingualism in children. Here, he states that two languages may have adverse cognitive consequences due to interference and conceptual confusion between the two languages. This appears related to the compound-coordinate distinctions found in discussions of bilingual systems organization.

A weaker relationship between language and thought can be found in the school of thought that takes Piaget as its point of departure. Here the development of language is considered to be an extension of earlier established cognitive structures, or sensori-motor schema. Cognitive development proceeds essentially independently of language through three universal stages - the pre-operational, the concrete-operational and the formal-operational. Language is thought to be neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for the development of thought.

Bloom (1970), in her study of child language, hypothesizes that children form new concepts and develop cognitively, before they can express this development in the appropriate linguistic form, often using old categories to express new functions. (She also found, however, that in some cases linguistic development preceded cognitive development resulting in what Piaget calls pseudostructures. What the actual function of these structures is is unclear, although it has been hypothesized that they may function algorithmically and facilitate cognitive development.)

Furth and Youniss (1975) in their study of the cognitive development of deaf children found that they follow exactly the same developmental stages as hearing children, although their performance at the higher lev-

els is slightly lower. They attribute this to lack of social interaction due to lack of language and not to lack of language as such.¹⁴

Cummins (1976) cites Vygotsky, Piaget and Furth as theoretical support for his view that bilingualism may have both positive and negative consequences, and that the negative consequences are a result of retarded linguistic development (i.e. lack of native-like competence). As we have seen above, there is an essential difference between Piaget and Vygotsky, in that Piaget's conception of language as a facilitating instrument for thought is not incompatible with the standpoint that cognitive development can proceed without language. However, Cummins attempts to minimize the differences between the two by pointing to various facts that would seem to make Piaget's conception compatible with Vygotsky's. At the present stage of research, however, it is just as legitimate to maximize the differences between the two in the hope of finding crucial cases in which they differ. At present, any choice of theory cannot be made on anything but an arbitrary basis. To attempt to derive support for the view that retarded linguistic development leads to retarded cognitive development by citing studies conducted on deaf children and applying the results to immigrant children is begging the question. It is to assume from the outset that language is bound to have certain effects on cognition: i.e. we assume that immigrant children's problems depend on lack of native-like competence.

The statement by Vygotsky on the effects of multilingualism on children cannot as it stands be taken as evidence for Cummins's view either. Vygotsky doesn't treat lack of native competence but confusion of two systems. Of course, there is a certain ambiguity in the use of the phrase 'lack of native competence'. It can be taken to mean a 'quantitative lack' (as in Cummins) or a 'qualitative lack' (as in the compound-coordinate sense).¹⁵

What are the assumptions of the language learner and the language learning task that underlie this hypothesized lack of linguistic competence, whether it be in the qualitative sense or the quantitative sense? This point is not very often treated in discussions of this type.

The assumption that the language learner should have difficulties in coping with two languages simultaneously under certain societal conditions implies a certain standpoint on what language learning strategies and procedures the learner has available, the limits of these strategies and procedures and their context-dependence, i.e. their dependence on cer-

tain conditions for their satisfactory functioning. It also implies a certain conception of the mechanics of the language learner; i.e. what information he can use and cannot use to arrive at his grammar, what constitutes minimal information to build a grammar etc. Lastly, it implies the establishment of two completely separate homogeneous systems with minimal interference as the only acceptable criterion of language learning success in a bilingual situation.

Some questions that need to be asked and answered concerning the strategies are:

1) How does the learner acquire the strategies?

This involves the nature of the strategies; whether they are specific to the domain of language learning or whether they can be reduced to general perceptual or cognitive strategies. It also involves the question to what extent they are a gift from above or develop from within.

2) How are the strategies modified by already having one language or simultaneously acquiring two?

The child is in the process of reorganizing his system on all levels during a very long period of time. It is plausible to hypothesize that the processing of each level may provide relevant information to the processing of another level, i.e. lexical information may influence phonological processing. The same thing may happen between two languages that are being learnt simultaneously (see Lambert 1970).

According to Ervinn-Tripp (1970, p. 316) the relative ease with which an adult learns vocabulary in a second language may be a function of the recency of lexical processing. The adult is continually reorganizing his vocabulary in the native language and has these strategies relatively available. A child is working with a much more differentiated array of strategies from the adult. From this we can conclude that this would minimize his difficulties with language.¹⁶

Concerning the mechanics of the language learner, we need to research the question of necessary information in greater detail. We know e.g. that the language learner does not have access to negative information - he does not know a priori what constitutes a non-sentence of a language. In a bilingual language environment, need we assume that he must have access to information relevant to the separation of two language systems to succeed in doing it? This last point seems pertinent to discussions of compound and coordinate bilingualism. These terms refer to the semantic or-

organisation of two systems – an organisation that can be traced back to either the situation in which they were learnt or the age at which they were learnt. The compound system implies a fused system with negative cognitive consequences due to conceptual confusion. That this is a linguistic abstraction that need not have any psychological validity is an often stated fact, but that the abstraction is often assumed correct in principle is apparent from much work (Hansegård 1968 is a typical example of this assumption). These concepts are questionable, however, since the development of a research paradigm that allows a more insightful treatment of heterogeneity. The static and homogeneous system concept implicit in the compound-coordinate distinction is at present a subject of discussion (see Labov 1971, Bailey 1973). It is thus difficult to apply linguistic concepts to the psychological organisation of systems and psychological criteria of language learning.

To get a complete picture of the language learning process we also need to study the acquisition of sociolinguistic or communicative competence. These studies are still in a very initial phase. They are, however, very relevant for the sociolinguistic explanation.

The sociolinguistic explanation

Now, to return to our second presumptive explanation of the research results cited on p.161. What I have termed the sociolinguistic explanation examines the background assumptions in formal tests and other means of evaluation that attempt to reduce questions of cognitive inequality within a given social framework to questions of language (see point 4 p.159). We can ask whether our evaluations and measures give us what we intend them to – the effects of linguality on cognition – or whether there is a bias somewhere that gives us evaluations of something quite different. Although I claim no expertise on these matters, I want to argue that the formal tests measure the extent to which the bilingual children conform to the value norms implicit in standard language use, which is the language of school and academic and social advancement, and that they measure a sociolinguistic concept rather than a cognitive concept. While this is not an original thought, it bears repetition, especially in the context of bilingual research.

We can of course discuss the validity and reliability of tests from a psychometric viewpoint. What I will do here, however, is look at them

from a sociolinguistic viewpoint. More specifically, we can study tests of verbal intelligence, non-verbal intelligence and linguistic competence on three points, which, following Wolfram 1976, we can call

- 1) testing as a social occasion
- 2) task bias
- 3) linguistic items.

Testing as a social occasion

This point involves two main aspects a) The tests operate basically on the output of socialisation patterns to test date, b) Taking the test involves a social interaction between the test administrator and the testee.

It would be interesting to examine the extent and type of socialisation patterns that prepare children for test situations to various degrees by simulating the types of activities that are needed in a test situation. Wolfram cites the method of word definition carried out by parents as a case in point. A 'middle-class' word definition may be more in accord with the requirements of a future test task, providing more relevant information and relating it to a relevant frame of reference for the child than a 'lower-class word definition'.

When constructing the test, the test administrator assumes that the testee can enter the test frame and carry out the test tasks according to the implicit rules of the game. The test frame has in turn been constructed from a model of the subjects' action alternatives and the reactions expected from specified situational influences. It is obvious that these models may not be valid for subjects from different social and cultural groups.

Task bias

In constructing test tasks the assumption is that the testees will interpret the tasks and respond to the tasks in a uniform manner - there is one correct interpretation and one correct answer that accords with the symbolic environment of the standard speaker.

To interpret the task the testee needs to share the comprehension of sentence meaning, presuppositions and implications of the modal group. These points may not be shared.

Also the responses may differ in various ways. If asked to repeat a

question verbatim, the child may answer the question or paraphrase the question. Related to this aspect is the general method for obtaining the answer. According to Meier (1972):

"Middle class children, because of their familiarity with certain key phrases and styles (conditional responses) short cut the process and succeed in producing right answers even though they do not carry out the 'logical thought' implied by the question. They get it right for the wrong reason. The bright lower class child, who cannot fall back on a lifetime of familiarity with certain language, picture or word association patterns is dependent on the real ingenuity to make the logical connections"

Linguistic items

The areas of bias in linguistic test items can involve a number of discrepancies between the linguistic system of the testee and the language of the test. In language development tests and tests of verbal intelligence there are a number of items that deal with articulatory development, auditory discrimination, grammatical development and vocabulary acquisition.

It seems obvious that without a comprehensive description of the phonological alternatives available to the group or individual being evaluated, it is hardly possible to judge their performance realistically in comparison with the norms of the standard on which the tests are based, at least as far as auditory discrimination and articulatory development is concerned. With regard to vocabulary items, it is clear that they can be directly biased against non-standard speakers in a number of ways. This items may be culture-specific (in the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 26 % of the vocabulary items were found to be culture-specific (Roberts 1970)), or they may be familiar to the testee although not recognized as such due to the pronunciation of the examiner or because the items referred to are known under other names in the variety the testee speaks.

In other words, it is necessary to undertake an examination of the sociolinguistic and sociocultural biases in tests of this type (or in any evaluation situation) before they are administered to non-standard speakers and before we can be sure that the bilingual paradigm explanation is a fruitful line of research. (For further remarks on evaluation problems see Brière 1973 and Teitelbaum 1977.)

Summary

In this paper I have attempted to sketch the framework of research in which semilingualism can be placed and tried to put the concept into perspective by pointing to the lack of evidence for the theoretical presuppositions it rests on. Many interesting questions remain for research.

I have also outlined an alternative explanation as a basis for a more detailed exploration.

Notes

- 1 For an opposite point of view, see Karl Mannheim (1936).
- 2 Hansegård uses de Saussure's terms langue and langage where I have used linguistic system and linguistic ability respectively. His use of langage is not quite in accord with the way Saussure uses it in Cours. Hansegård seems to mean general linguistic ability or gift of language (språkgåva) which is a literary quality.
- 3 Individual meanings are characterized on p. 37-40 (Hansegård 1968) as emotional non-criterial (connotational) definitional characteristics of words/concepts. Individual meanings are determined by the total experience of an individual, i.e. situations where he has heard the word, ending or syntactic construction. One of the losses a child deprived of his native language suffers is depth of individual meanings. This results in superficial and unnuanced emotional experiences in later life. Obviously, emotional overtones tend to change or fade away even for a monolingual speaker. We also gain emotional overtones in later life, both in our native language and a second language. (For the origin of the concept of individual meaning in this sense, see Vygotsky 1962.)
- 4 See Vygotsky 1962 and Hansegård 1977.
- 5 Hansegård gives two examples of non-standard lexical items that he considers deviant a) smygbjörnar (bears that hide in forests), b) småblandningar (small children in a class-room).
- 6 For a more extensive coverage of concepts related to my SL1 and SL2 - although emphasizing slightly different aspects, see Skutnabb-Kangas 1975.
- 7 For further discussion, see Skutnabb-Kangas 1975.
- 8 For similar criticism in the context of Bernstein's theory, see Dittmar 1976.
- 9 The balance measure used by Peal and Lambert was made up of
 - a) a word association test in each language (used to calculate a ratio)
 - b) a word detection test in English and French
 - c) the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test
 - d) a subjective self-rating measure
 For further discussion of tests of bilingual competence and some of the difficulties, see Teitelbaum (1977).
- 10 See Cummins (1976) for a further presentation of these investigations.

- 11 Subtractive conditions refer to the societal conditions that force a child to acquire his L2 competence through a reduction in his L1 competence - Macnamara's (1966) balance effect. These are the conditions where a low SES subordinate language speaker has to acquire the dominant high SES language with low teacher expectations, low self-confidence, identity conflicts and 'rootlessness'. He is subjected to compensatory programmes in L2 while L1 is ignored. His development in L2 is compared with monolingual speakers of L2. The opposite conditions on all the above points are termed additive conditions (see Lambert 1975).
- 12 To quote Cummins (1976:18) "Although it is not difficult to appreciate that the addition of a second language might well exacerbate the problems which lower SES speakers are reported to experience in coping with just one language . . ." (my emphasis). However, Cummins doesn't believe that low SES is the only cause.
- 13 Reported in Lambert et al. (1970).
- 14 To quote Furth and Youniss (1975:174) ". . . one can gather that regarding formal operations, deaf people are again in a position not unlike hearing people from an impoverished social environment. If culture and life habits do not generally foster attitudes of curiosity and intelligent initiative, formal thinking is not as likely to occur as in a more favourable environment" (p. 175) "In conclusion, it seems that not-withstanding the tremendous importance of the linguistic medium . . . its absence in developing individual does not in itself lead to serious intellectual shortcomings". . . "it powerfully illustrates the subordinate role of all symbol in the developing structures of thinking".
- 15 In actual fact, these two senses of 'lack of linguistic competence' are not necessarily distinct.
- 16 The hypothesis of chronological development is relevant to the discussion of when a child best learns a second language. Ervinn-Tripp points out that it depends on what aspect of the language we are most interested in. For example, an idiomatic phonology is best acquired first when a certain level of cognitive maturity has been reached. Ervinn-Tripp is talking about formal learning contexts. A number of other factors are relevant for a nuanced discussion of this question.

References

- Alatis, J.E. (ed.) (1970), Bilingualism and Language Contact. Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1970. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press
- Bailey, C.-J.N. (1973), Variation and Linguistic Theory. Arlington, Virginia: Center for Applied Linguistics
- Balkan, L. (1970), Les effets du bilinguisme français-anglais sur les aptitudes intellectuelles. Bruxelles: Aimav

- Ben-Zeev, S. (1977), The Effects of Bilingualism in Children from Spanish-English Low Economic Neighbourhoods on Cognitive Development and Cognitive Strategy. Working Papers on Bilingualism, 14, 83-122
- Bloom, L. (1970). Language Development: Form and Function in Emerging Grammars. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press
- Brière, E. (1973), Cross Cultural Biases in Language Testing. In: Oller, J.W. and Richards, J.C. (eds), Focus on the Learner: Pragmatic Perspectives for the Language Teacher. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers
- Cummins, J. (1976), The Influence of Bilingualism on Cognitive Growth: A Synthesis of Research Findings and Explanatory Hypotheses. Working Papers on Bilingualism, 9, 2-43
- Cummins, J. and Gulustan, M. (1974), Some Effects of Bilingualism on Cognitive Functioning. In: Carey, S. (ed.), Bilingualism, Biculturalism and Education. Proceedings from the Conference at College Universitaire Saint-Jean. The University of Alberta
- Dittmar, N. (1976), Sociolinguistics. A Critical Survey of Theory and Application. London: Edward Arnold Ltd.
- Ervin-Tripp, S. (1970), Structure and Process in Language Acquisition. In: Alatis (1970)
- Furth, H. and Youniss, J. (1975), Congenital Deafness and the Development of Thinking. In: Lenneberg, E.H. and Lenneberg, E., Foundations of Language Development. A Multidisciplinary Approach, vol. 2, Academic Press, N.Y. 1975
- Hansegård, N.-E. (1968), Tvåspråkighet eller halvspråkighet? Stockholm: Aldus/Bonniers
- Hansegård, N.-E. (1977), Loman och tvåspråkigheten. In: Scandinavian Migration and Ethnic Minority Review, 4, 36-51
- Labov, W. (1971), The Notion of 'System' in Creole Studies. In: Hymes, D. (ed.), Pidginization and Creolization of Languages. London: Cambridge University Press
- Lambert, W.E. (1975), Culture and Language as Factors in Learning and Education. In: Wolfgang, A. (ed.), Education of Immigrant Students. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

- Lambert, W.E. and Anisfeld, E. (1969), A Note on the Relation of Bilingualism and Intelligence. Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 1, 123-128
- Lambert, W.E., Just, M. and Segalowitz, N. (1970), Some Cognitive Consequences of Following the Curricula of the Early School Grades in a Foreign Language. In: Alatis (1970)
- Loman, B. (1974), Språk och samhälle 2. Lund: Gleerups
- Macnamara, J. (1966), Bilingualism and Primary Education. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Macnamara, J. (1970), Bilingualism and Thought. In: Alatis (1970)
- Mannheim, K. (1936), Ideology and Utopia. London
- Meier, D. (1973), Reading Failure and the Tests. New York: Workshop Center for Open Education
- Peal, E. and Lambert, W., The Relation of Bilingualism to Intelligence. Psychological Monographs, 76
- Roberts, E. (1970), A Valuation of Standardized Tests as Tools for the Measurement of Language Development. In: Language Research Report, 1, Cambridge: Language Research Foundation
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1975), Om tvåspråkighet och skolframgång. Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland nämnd för samhällsforskning. Forskningsrapporter, 20
- Teitelbaum, H. (1977), The Validity of Various Techniques Measuring Children's Bilingualism. Working Papers on Bilingualism, 13, 92-120
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1962), Thought and Language. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press
- Wolfram, W. (1976), Levels of Sociolinguistic Bias in Testing. In: Harrison, D.S. and Trabasso, T. (eds), Black English. A Seminar. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.