

# LINGUISTIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES AMONG UNIVERSITY BILINGUAL STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Today almost all people and students can speak more than one language. In addition to the mother language, we can see that many children learn foreign languages even from childhood. From a linguistic perspective, there are differences between spoken and written language and some of the emphasis problems students encounter while studying in a foreign language. The person differs when speaking a foreign language, but there is a lot of difference between speaking a foreign language and studying in a foreign language. Speaking a foreign language can cause stress and social anxiety for students to express themselves in exams or presentations. It finds it difficult to express and to understand academic literature and style, which causes insecurity and affects their academic performance. In order to see how our students at the International Balkan University (IBU-SKOPJE) deal with language difficulties, we have provided an online survey that shows that our students are not facing significant psychological difficulties and linguistic barriers and difficulties as well.

**Keywords:** Language, Bilingualism, Linguistic issues, Psychological Issues

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today the number of people speaking more than one language is growing rapidly. Theorists have shown very different views and approaches to bilingualism. The fact that definitions and attitudes are very different from bilingualism has made this phenomenon problematic. Communication between people has increased with the development of education, communication, travel, migration, economics and many other areas.

In other words, if we consider this concept as a "social home institution", it brings together individual, cultural, educational and psychological elements under its roof. In this context, we can argue that individuals who can speak two or more languages are one step ahead of community respect and job demand.

Regarding the differences between speaking a foreign language in everyday communication and studying in a foreign language, as Kalat (2011) says, when we speak, we usually do not clarify every detail, and we often use words with ambiguous meanings, and when we compare languages, we become even more aware of the importance of context. Thus, using a foreign language in social communication, friendship, or with other purposes differs in using and being able to comprehend and study in a foreign language. Because in the last case peoples do not just understand what they are speaking, reading or writing but they are able to reproduce and comprehend what they learned in that language and what is more important they can perform well.

## 2. WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

Before we speak for bilingualism firstly, let's define the concept of language. From a linguistic perspective, as Ergin (2013) states, language is a natural means of negotiating between people, a living entity that has its own laws and developed only within these laws, a system of secret agreements thrown at times of unknown origin, interconnected institution of voices.

From a psychological perspective, language includes the ability to understand both spoken and written words and to communicate in real-time while talking or writing. Most languages are produced by speaking (Lally & French, 2018).

## 3. UNDERTSANDING AND DEFINING BILINGUALISM

The concepts of bilingualism or multilingualism (multilingualism) mean speaking, processing in two or more languages. In other words, these concepts are adapted to meet both bilingualism and multilingualism. On the other hand, it is an inclusive concept that includes dialects of the same language. The "change" that results from the technology created by the globalized world and the influence of modernism also affects linguistics.

As Franson (2011) states definitions of bilingualism range from a minimal proficiency in two languages, to an advanced level of proficiency which allows the speaker to function and appear as native-like speaker of two languages. A person may describe themselves as bilingual but may mean only the ability to converse and communicate orally. Others may be proficient in reading in two or more languages (or bi-literate). A person may be bilingual by virtue of having grown up learning and using two languages simultaneously (simultaneous bilingualism) or they may become bilingual by learning a second language sometime after their first language. This is known as sequential bilingualism. To "be bilingual" means different things to different peoples (pg. 1).

In the opinion of Khalbous and Radhouan (2013), regarding the bilingualism of individuals, there are many approaches that study this phenomenon, it's a wide concept studied from linguist, psychologist, psycholinguist, sociologist, socio-linguist and recent market disciplines, etc. and that's for there are many and varied definitions about the concept of bilingualism. Thus, Gottardo & Grant (2014), states that the definition of bilingualism is complex, and is influenced by multiple factors such as the age of acquisition of the second language, continued exposure to the first language (L1), relative skill in each language and the circumstances under which each language is learned (pg. 1). As they state the definition of bilingualism is more complex than a simplistic "yes/ no" categorization. Definitions of bilingualism must include the degree of proficiency in each language and circumstances under which each language is learned (pg.7).

The term bilingualism, the English equivalent of which is "bilingualism", was created by combining the Latin words "bi" meaning "two" and "lingua" meaning "language". This term is defined in W. Field's book "Key Concepts in Bilingualism" as "having two languages in general, speaking bilingual or being bilingual" (Field, 2011: 22; Bican, 2017).

The concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism are generally related to the studies of understanding, processing and producing of two or more languages. The use of the concept of bilingualism in the literature is such that it meets both bilingualism and multilingualism. As Grosjen (2010), states although the word bilingualism suggests a quantitatively limited meaning, it has been common practice to use this term for both multilingualism and dialects of the same language since the beginning of the field, and this is common (pg. 4). In short, the term bilingualism is used as an umbrella concept to cover both bilingualism and multilingualism.

As Yazıcı and Temel (2011), referring to Baker (2007), report that those who use more than one language are the majority in the world. More than one language is spoken in almost every country, so bilingual and multilingual people are often found all over the world. As they report, according to a European Commission report, 54% of Europe's population knows enough to speak at least one foreign language.

There has been vast research in order to see the differences between bilingual and monolingual children and how bilingualism affects their development in linguistic cognitive, social environmental level.

Thus, according to Watson (1995), the only difference between the process of acquiring the language of bilingual children and the language of one language is that they are exposed to two different language inputs due to their environment or social living space.

Acquiring bilingualism takes place in two different ways in children growing up in an environment where two different languages are spoken. The first is the simultaneous acquisition of languages, and the second is the subsequent acquisition of languages (Conboy & Debra, 2006).

Which language a child uses most effectively can vary depending on the regular use of incoming languages from the social environment. Stimulating language inputs that allow children to have language experience in early childhood affect a child's perspective on life.

The term bilingualism has been studied since the 80s through psychological literature. Hakuta & Ferdman & Diaz (1987) define bilingualism as a mental concept on an individual level - a feature of individuals who have or use two language systems. At the same time, as they report, the social-psychological concept is still seen as a feature of individuals, but as individuals who organize the social world in terms of different groups and social situations associated with the two languages they interact with. Accordingly, bilingualism is also used as a social structure to describe interactions between social groups and social institutions, and between groups where group and institutional boundaries correspond to linguistic boundaries.

Today, we have a lot of research on the relationship between bilingualism and psychological states and social anxiety disorders. James (2014) investigated a possible link between bilingualism and SAD in his study. The results of the study are the results of conflict with past research as there is no relationship between bilingualism and the physiological and cognitive aspects of self-reported social anxiety.

#### **4. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the research is to see the linguistic and psychological difficulties among bilingual students. That is, to see the level of acquiring of four main language aspects (reading, writing, speaking, understanding) in English language as a foreign language. And on the other side, to see if there are any psychological difficulties such as frustration, anxiety, insecurity affecting their academic success and performance.

#### **5. METHOD AND PROCEDURE**

For our study purpose, we conducted an online survey, consisting of 17 questions including general data of our participant and using the same as measuring instruments for the research phenomenon. The survey was online and opens to all students thus making random sample and the survey period was one week from 10. 02. 2020 - 17. 02. 2020.

##### **5.1. Participants**

Our sample includes IBU students where the official language of study is English, and consists of 101 students including students from all study years starting from the preparation level. Regarding the gender factor, the largest number of them, respectively 70.3% belong to the female gender and 29.7% to the male

gender. Their age varies from 19 to over 30 years, where in the largest percentage respectively 86.1% we have the category of 19-24, and in the smallest percentage 12.9% we have students aged 25-29, and a very small percentage of belongs to the third category, respectively over 30 years. From the distribution of data we have that the largest number of the total are students of the fourth year of studies with 34.7%, while we have approximately the same distribution or number of students from other years. Thus, 17.8% of our sample is first-year students, followed by second-year students with a percentage of 16.8%, and in third place we have students in preparation level prepared with a percentage of 15.8%. With a slightly lower percentage, we have students in the third year of studies, respectively 14.9% of the total number.

Since IBU is an international university and includes students from different nationalities, our results show a multinational reflection. Thus, the largest percentage of our research population belongs to the Albanian nationality, 54.5%. In second place we have students of Turkish nationality with 30.7%, and with a percentage of 5.9% respectively we have students of Macedonian and Bosnian nationality and a very low percentage of Serbs and Kurds.

Regarding the native language they speak, our results show that for 54.5% their mother language is Albanian, 31.7% Turkish, 7.9% Bosnian, and Macedonian. As for our question about which foreign language they speak, the results are as follows. Most of them, respectively, 38% of the total number know or speaks more than three foreign languages, 32% three foreign languages, 24% only two and 6% of them know only one foreign language

Since at the beginning we say that today we have many people who speak more than one foreign language and this phenomenon is increasing and that now we have many children who from an early age know and speak foreign languages in our research interest was to see and the time from when our samples began to learn foreign languages. Thus, based on the obtained results, we say that the largest number of them, respectively 43.6%, have started learning foreign languages since primary education, and 40.6% since early childhood. In a smaller percentage, we have those who have learned foreign languages later, in high school 10.9% and 5% during the study period or at the University.

## 6. RESULTS

As mentioned above our purpose of the research was to see the linguistic and psychological issues among bilingual University students. Our initial interest was to see the level of foreign language acquisition in speaking, writing, reading and understanding among bilingual students who study in a foreign language (English). Seeing this linguistic aspect and level of acquisition our goal was also to see how much this depends or affects their academic performance and how much this causes them problems or psychological difficulties in their attempt to express or not all that they know in a foreign language.

In our question about how they evaluate their level of proficiency in using English as a foreign language, most of them respectively 55.4% considers that their level is very good, 23.8% excellent, 17.8% satisfactory and only a small percentage of them considers that their level in the use of English as a foreign language is not satisfactory.

Approximately the same results we obtained for the level of acquisition in translating and speaking in English in everyday communication. Thus, in our question about how they evaluate their level of proficiency in translating foreign sentences in their native language and conversely, the largest number from the overall respectively 49% of them considers that their level is very good, meanwhile 24% are in a satisfactory level, 20% excellent and just 7% not satisfactory level.

When it comes to their evaluation of the level of proficiency in speaking English as a foreign language in everyday communication the results are as follows. With a percentage of 40.6% assumes that they have a

very good level, followed by 27.7% of those who assume that they have an excellent level, 26.7% satisfied and only 5% of our population assumes that their level in the use of English as a foreign language in daily communication is not satisfactory.

As for the ability to read and write in English as a foreign language, we asked them how they evaluate their level of proficiency in writing in English as a foreign language. From the given alternatives such as not satisfactory, satisfactory, very good and excellent, most of them, that is 40.6%, were determined with a very good level, 35.6% with excellent level, 16.8% satisfactory and 6.9% not satisfactory.

In our question of how they evaluate their level of proficiency in reading in English as a foreign language, we got the following results. We got approximately the same distribution for two categories, very good (43.6%) and excellent (42.6%). The rest of the distribution was for the other two categories satisfactory (10.9%) and not satisfactory.

In our interest was also the level of proficiency in listening in English as a foreign language and our question, the obtained results were almost similar to previous questions on linguistic aspects. Thus, most of them, that is 41.6%, assumes that they have a very good level of listening, 33.7% excellent, 22.8% satisfactory, and the rest with not satisfactory level.

As we already said earlier, another purpose of our study was to see whether our population encounters any psychological difficulties while studying and performing in English as a foreign language. Therefore, we asked them some questions regarding this aspect.

Thus, in our question about their opinion on whether they can express all professional knowledge in English as a foreign language (Diagram 1), our results show that most of them, that is 65.3%, say that they try their best to; 24.8% say that they can do it without a problem and just 4% say that they found it difficult. As the least represented option we have “it is very hard for me”, represented with the percentage remaining very low.

In terms of potential psychological difficulties, including insecurity, incompetence, unconfident, frustration, anxiety from our obtained results, we can see that most of them, that is 44.9%, do not have any of those problems. The most pressing problem with our sample is frustration, and this is the case for 24.5% of respondents. In the second place, it is anxiety with 12% of respondents followed by unconfident with 10.2%; meanwhile, 6.1% of our respondents feel incompetent in expressing all their professional knowledge and to perform in English as foreign study language.

A very important variable for us was the academic performance in English language, and therefore we asked them about their opinion regarding their level of English language affecting their academic performance and success. From the results we saw that we had the same distribution (24.8%) of respondents for two categories affects a little bit and the other category Yes it affects. The other remaining options are represented as follows: 20.8% say that they are good enough in English; 19.8% say they can handle it and just 9.9% say that the level of acquiring English language affects a lot their academic performance and success.

Studying in a foreign language, in addition to the difficulties they may have, also offers better and more priority opportunities than studying in the native language and even more in time of globalization. Thus, as a final study question, we asked our respondents to give their opinion on the advantages of studying in a foreign language. Our results reflected a division into large 50/50 categories. Half of them and 50.5%, respectively, think that they will have better employment opportunities, while the rest is divided between the opinions that studying in a foreign language enables them to improve and master the English language, which is the case with 30.7% of respondents, and the remaining 18.8% do so for personal satisfaction.

## 7. DISCUSSION

Our results showed a different approach to the concept of "bilingualism" in Balkan geography. In this geography where many ethnic elements live (Turkish, Albanian, Macedonian, Serbian, and Bosnian), etc., this concept is known in the axis of mixed marriage and, therefore, mixed education. Children born of mixed marriages acquire a second or more linguistic acquisition from childhood of their parents belonging to two different ethnic nations or complete two or more language studies at a school in co-education. In addition to mother language education in schools, the country's official language is offered, as well as two compulsory and elective foreign language lessons. From a socio-cultural perspective, bilingual people start one step ahead of life compared to monolingual people.

According to the findings, most of the university students who received co-education have acquired a second language since elementary school (43.6%) meanwhile those who can speak more than three languages according to our results are 38%, which is the result of the influence of geography. If we consider English as the world language as a foreign language, 50% of students use English satisfactorily. They can speak, read, write, listen, and understand, to analyze and reverse a sentence in a foreign language at a very good level. Believing that they can transfer all their professional knowledge to foreign languages, the students believe that they will do their best and will continue to achieve their academic success with the confidence they have gained from bilingualism.

Our results have confirmed that there is no relationship between bilingual and psychological disorders or particularly social anxiety, as noted in several studies previously reported by James (2014). Our results show that our students do not face significant psychological difficulties even despite the reality of language barriers and this is the case with most of them (44%), while the rest are scattered to smaller percentages, who have some of the psychological difficulties, such as disappointment, insecurity, inability, frustration, anxiety, etc. Thus, our results proved that they did not face such difficulties. From the obtained results, we can see that our students have a higher priority in using English as a foreign language in education. In other words, 50% think that they will have better employment opportunities with this. We can say that our results are in line with a lot of research that has been conducted regarding these cognitive aspects.

According to Maria & Shook (2012), researchers have shown that the bilingual brain can have better attention and task-changing capabilities than the monolingual brain, thanks to its ability to develop one language while using another, so this means greater cognitive flexibility, better inhibitory control and enhance. Those cognitive benefits are advantages in terms of social intelligence as well. In addition, bilingualism has positive effects on both ends of the age spectrum: Bilingual children under seven months can better adapt to environmental changes, while bilingual older people may experience less cognitive decline (Maria & Shook, 2012; Javor, 2016).

As we can conclude from the results the distribution of data confirms that students at the same rate confirm that bilingualism is not an obstacle to academic achievement and success, and that they are unaware of language barriers. Nevertheless, they are confident and do their best to achieve their goals, and they have no problems with education in foreign languages.

### 7.1 Limitations and recommendations

We assume that this research is only a starting point for more detailed studies in this area. Although the total number of our sample was relatively high, we assume that we cannot generalize the results to the fact that the sample selection is random and open to every student. Our results did not allow us to view genders as the relevant variable, because we had a disproportionate number, most of which were females. And since

we used a survey, we aimed to see their views on current problems without requiring or using more specific statistical methods.

This article and these results will serve us for more detailed studies in the future and we believe we will rely on more study variables and methods than those used in current research. We can say that our predetermined goals and objectives are met with hope for further research in this nature.

## 8. CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the beginning, there are many differences between speaking a foreign language and studying a foreign language. Studying in a foreign language has difficulty for students to express themselves in exams or presentations, to convey academic literature and style, which causes distrust and affects their academic performance, but this is somewhat different in bilingual students, which was proved also by our results, where we saw that bilingual students don't have significant linguistic and psychological difficulties to express themselves in a foreign language, i.e. English.

Speaking a second language in everyday life, social communication, or university education, the students can use the four basic skills correctly in their homework and presentation. Of course, there is a connection between the language skills of elementary school time and the advanced reading they have done within the University, and as we saw from our results, this has a positive effect on the students in their academic life.

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