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Immigration, Multilingualism, Multiculturalism, Multiliteracy

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INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism and bilingualism are linguistic contexts involved with situations where languages come in contact. Bilingualism demonstrates a sociolinguistic situation where an individual or community speaks two languages or multilingualism, where an individual or nation/ community use more than two languages. These two sociolinguistic situations are usually associated with immigration



There is a misconception that the nations of the West are monolingual and that the countries of the Third World (Asia, Latin America, Africa) are the ones riddled with multiple languages and dialects, thereby rendering them multilingual. Nothing could be far from the truth. The United States of America is only monolingual at the Federal level. It is multilingual at the State and local levels, English and Spanish in California, New Mexico, and so on. In Britain, there exist regional dialects that are not inter-intelligible. Before the arrival of migrants and refugees in the second half of the 20th century in Britain, Britain was already multilingual. It was only metaphorically monolingual like France, Germany, US, and many more, as they claim.

Britain in the mediaeval period used English, French and Latin. A big geographical expanse in South East England whose inhabitants speak Cockney and Standard English can hardly be labelled monolingual and homogenous society! The same can be said about Normandy and Midi (de la France) in France which use regional dialects alongside French; Bavaria, Hamburg with regional dialects with German in Germany. Despite their multilingual population, US, UK, France and Germany, for example, continue to have a monolingual bias, thinking that the standard international languages: English, French and German they use respectively, are the few languages they use.

It became even more unacceptable in the globalized world of today where communities across the globe have moved around as a result of economic necessities, political upheavals, persecutions and discrimination. Look at Germany that received and lived with more than one million Syrian refugees in one year. That is a colossal population movement! Can Germany in such a situation be labelled monolingual and homogeneous?



Language contact as a result of migration, conquest, transplantation, slavery and mass refugee movements have created a sociolinguistic environment in which individuals and communities have been exposed to one or two languages besides their mother tongue vernacular. Such language contact situations have often sometime resulted in pidgin and creole languages which are taken as the amalgam of linguistic elements of two or more languages with an identity of their own. They usually develop a multilingual repertoire for communicative purposes. It is hardly conceivable to think of a monolingual community, which does not have even dialect diversity. Dialect diversity with no intelligibility along a standard language is a good example of a kind of multilingualism.

Another paradox exists in the manner of the West which claims that it is monolingual; I mean to say China claims it is a monolingual homogeneous society. That is a far-fetch reality. Chinese language is dialectically diverse. The various Chinese dialects are so diverse that there is no mutual intelligibility across the varieties of spoken Chinese. Every Chinese who has an ambition to become something under the sun is expected to acquire competence in Mandarin which is the standard language of education and literacy, through schooling. Mandarin is the standard Chinese dialect which unites and integrates the Chinese with one another.

Another form of multilingualism is developing in the commercial and political cities in the world. Mobility due to economic migration or exodus has resulted in transforming the metropolitan capital of Douala, Yaoundé, Lagos, Abidjan, Dakar, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Mumbai, New Delhi etc. into truly multilingual communities where the marketplace teems with



business activities. Colonization and globalization have added English, French and other languages with linguistic load to the speech of the privileged few elite cited above.

Sydney the populous cosmopolitan city in Australia has speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Filipino, Hindi, Korean, clustered together. The official languages of Singapore are Chinese, Malay, Tamil and English. Educated Indians use Hindi, Panjabi and English to transact with.

Latin American and African countries have a variety of indigenous languages alongside the languages of the colonizers: Spanish, Portuguese, English, French and Arabic.

All these case studies examined above aim to illustrate that multilingualism as a sociolinguistic feature is a norm and that monolingualism whether in Western concept or in the Chinese dialect diversity with no mutual intelligibility can only be considered an exception to the rule. These communities/societies are not monolingual since there is no inter-intelligibility across those languages or dialects.

In multilingual settings the shared knowledge of languages motivates the participants to code-switch as a natural strategy for the purpose of negotiating personal relationships and signalling social group membership and solidarity. In Mauritius some interlocutors find it quite natural to code-switch between, French, Hindi, Creole and English. In Cameroon how do we code-switch? Because of government policy of bilingualism it is not uncommon to find government officials in Cameroon code-switch between French and English when they are addressing the people in public. When friends talk to each other, they code-switch between Pidgin, English, French and some standard indigenous language.



The acquisition of multilingualism is incredibly necessary in this contemporary world. A global society that is more connected than ever before needs multilingualism to march towards further greatness and prosperity. In fact the acquisition of multiple languages can help with the process of learning a new language. This is because languages reinforce one another and provide tools to strengthen phonological, morphological and syntactic skills.

The distribution of functions in bilingual/multilingual societies can produce a linguistic situation of diglossia which is the allocation and distribution of languages across various domains, like pouring libation, preaching, chit-chatting, discussing an academic topic, and many others. This creates a diglossic, triglossic or polyglossic society (Fishman 1967, Gumperz 1964, Fasold 1984).

In multilingual societies language movements are sometimes symbol of nationalism and struggle for nationhood (cf Ambazonia claiming nationhood with English). The restoration or revival of Welsh as the national language of Wales to uphold its devolutionary status has become very strong. This is the case of language revival of Welsh that used to be neglected but now very important. The Irish abandonment of Gaelic in favour of English which has advantages of offering economic incentives and educational opportunities is a glaring example of language shift. Rwanda that has reinforced English to the detriment of French is another instance of language shift. Multilingualism is a natural product of language spread and development wherein instances of language shift. The phenomenon of language shift seems to be gradually taking place in Koza in the Far North Region of Cameroon (Tasah 2022) where some Nigerians who migrated to



Koza fleeing from the Boko Haram insurgency have settled there peacefully. They are socializing and integrating the host community socioeconomically and sociolinguistically. Some of the children of the migrant parents are shifting progressively from their minority languages to the dominant languages spoken in Koza. Tasah (2022) notes that the children of Nigerian refugees in Koza seem to be under pressure to use the dominant languages of the host community which are taking over their means of communication and socialization.

Multilingualism is a natural product of language spread and development wherein instances of language shift, renaissance and restoration take place purposefully.

Multilingualism and Language Pedagogy

The learning of a language other than one's mother tongue will increase cognitive flexibility which helps the learner understand the universals of language (Cummins 1998, Lambert 1990). Research suggests the positive aspect of multilingual acquisition and pedagogy in terms of additive bi/multi-lingualism (Cook, 1992). The curriculum responses to multilingualism have been varied; e.g. immersion programme in Canada, Biliteracy programme in India, PROPECA trilingual programme (Tadadjeu) in Cameroon, PEEB ((Hornberger and Lopez) language bilingual programme in Peru. These are mother tongue-based pedagogic multilingual programmes. The key to the preservation of multilingualism has been the first language of the child which he/she brings to the classroom. While coming in contact with the other secondary languages, a multilingual person not only has an edge in social exchange, he/she also has better knowledge on the experiences, history and society of foreign lands, thereby attaining



a more comprehensive, multicultural outlook. Mandela once declared “if you talk to him in the language he understands, that goes to his head; if you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart”

You can imagine the magic wand that will occur if the talks and negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians were conducted in the opponent’s mothertongue and vice versa. Are we surprised that the Anglophones complain bitterly that no President of the Republic has ever addressed the Nation in English! The Anglophones want the President to touch their heart by speaking to them in English, so that they should feel that they too belong to the fatherland.

Emergencies and Crises Relief

Effective communication in addition to skills is crucial in ensuring the dissemination and delivery of humanitarian aid in moments of national and global crises. Garamone (2010) cites how disaster workers mastered the Haitian Creole very well and conversed with the native Haitians during the earthquake disaster that took away thousands of souls.

In 1995, it was proposed that EU citizens should be proficient in three European languages including the speaker’s own. This was to be a characteristic feature of EU identity including the EU passport. Multiple languages spoken by EU citizens enhance different perspectives which make them feel solidary and show empathy to each other. Multilingualism not only for individual development but ensures that society continues to grow and flourish as well as stay united and patriotic.



Political Significance and Security

Multilingualism is a necessity in several countries for political reasons. This is especially evident in the case of Nigeria (2003) deciding to use a form of multilingualism of 50 Nigerian languages in administration and education policies in order to reach this diverse population of 165 million inhabitants in the local council areas.

In the Republic of Cameroon when the socio-political conflict erupted in 2016, government in 2018 decided to create a National Commission on bilingualism and multilingualism to look for ways and means to resolve the crisis whose root cause was essentially political: resolving the bi-cultural and bi-jural governance in the Republic of Cameroon.

For defense and security in the US, the Defense Department (Peterson, 2010), comments on how translators were needed to interpret enemies and allies of combat for national security. Forensic linguists were recruited and used to detect the nationalities of the combatants and during negotiations, foreign languages were used to ease communication between the parties.

Economic Potential

Communicating in various languages can give a multilingual applicant a clear advantage over a monolingual applicant in the job marketplace. US News and World Report comment that the international business community considers the ability to communicate in more than one language an “indispensable tool for relationship building and financial success”. Such financial success and resilience can be seen in the multilingual situation of Switzerland which is home to German, Italian, French and Romansch languages. She enjoys a robust export trade and a gross

national product as she carries out trade transactions with countries speaking these languages with her through these special relations which give Switzerland a unique standing in countries that speak these languages.

Senator Paul Simon wrote back in 1980 that over 200,000 jobs are lost each year by Americans due to their inability to speak foreign languages. Companies want globally competent employees. Multilingual competency enhances employability. English may be a global language, yes, but the knowledge of two or more languages is still important for business to flourish. Multilingualism is closely linked with profits and productivity, and should be acknowledged as a powerful tool for the economy. Immigrant language skills is an essential form of human capital given that language skill affects an individual's labour market performance, the immigrant's income and poverty level will be greatly influenced by their language proficiency. It has been shown that the immigrants experience a negative wage gap with respect to natives, this initial gap decreases gradually as immigrants learn the host language. This will ultimately affect their social and cultural integration to the host country.

Immigrants who possess strong language proficiency are more efficient in seeking and obtaining employment where their skills are most highly rewarded. Host language proficiency enhances productivity on the job by making the worker more efficient in performing particular tasks and or by reducing the cost of communication within the firm. Proficient workers are in a better position to obtain information about job opportunities and earnings, and to transmit information about their skills to employers in more effective ways. A recent report by EU commission (2009) on multilingualism concludes that thinking,



learning, problem solving and communicating show signs of enhancement through multilingualism.

You have more career prospects available to you because of multiple languages, as your value as employee increases exponentially with each new language that you learn. In San Francisco, for example, over 50% of families who are looking for a nanny (governess) want to hire someone who is fluent on a language other than their own. The idea is that when children are exposed to multiple languages from birth, then they learn two first languages simultaneously instead of a primary and then a secondary language in that sequence. Multilingualism can lead you find a job easily and can lead you to the path of pay increases.

Other Advantages of Multilingualism

Over 6500 languages are spoken over the world in 196 sovereign countries. Some people are born in situations where they must learn multiple languages in their youth because that is the only way to function successfully. People may write and read but cannot speak that language.

People can understand a language but cannot speak, write or read it. Cardinal Guiseppe Mezzofanti is cited speaking 39 different languages, Kenneth Hale is fluent in 45 languages, Ziad Fazah is the current world record holder of 58 languages he can speak at will. Exposing children early on to a new language, gives a head start in their future career, with one new language in your career you can earn 10%-15% more salary for the average position. Having access to multilingual education provides an opportunity to celebrate the diversity found in human cultures. When we take time to learn about different cultures and ethnicities, then the



diversity this education provides offers added strength and self-confidence to the individual.

Multilingual education works to improve the working memory of the individual learning multiple secondary languages. The learners score higher in memory test. This improvement provides for better information processing capabilities when there is exposure to new audio stimuli, ideas, concepts and real-life experiences. Individuals who pursue a multilingual educational opportunity experience lower level of fear and anxiety while being less likely to experience a mental health disorder, like Alzheimer's dementia. Each language is like another soul implanted in the speaker.

People who can speak multiple languages also tend to have many friends. Learning one new language makes it easier to learn more. Once a second language has been learnt and the learner can feel that he/she is bilingual, it becomes much easier for the person to learn a third language, and then a fourth, and so forth. Bilingual education opportunities encourage brain growth, trigger students to concentrate and be more focused. When you are trilingual or more, you can become a tremendous asset for a future employer or in the growth of your own business opportunity. Being multilingual can make you wiser because you are immersed in the experiences and cultures of the languages you acquire and seeing things through the lens of those languages. When an individual has access to different cultures and experiences (wisdom) when taking decisions, then they can better process the difference between right and wrong.

Being multilingual makes it a lot easier to travel around the world as you are able to know how to order things in a restaurant, asking for directions to specific destination. All these things are all



much easier when you can communicate well and effectively. Evidence shows that when you are multilingual, then it is not only your working memory that improves as you pursue each secondary language. Your overall attention span improves. There is a lower risk of experiencing a stroke if you can speak at least two languages.

Adults who speak multiple languages also experience less overall cognitive decline during their natural aging process. Multiple languages improve cognitive ability like recognizing new faces and remembering names.

Health benefits linked to being multilingual are enormous. There is growing body of evidence to suggest that multilingualism creates numerous positive impacts on the overall health of their brain.

- Even speaking one additional language can help you to reduce the onset of dementia. There are lower risks of experiencing Alzheimer's disease if you speak multiple languages delaying it for 4¹/₂ years.
- Multilingualism will also improve your stroke recovery time, reduce your overall stress levels, it can also reduce anxiety because you are naturally open to more ideas and to people and various relationships.
- People who are multilingual are more open-minded, more humorous, and more amenable.

Charlemagne once said that "to speak another language is to hold a second soul in your possession". Multilingualism makes you perceive the world in a different way. People who can speak more than one language are up to 10% more productive than the one who is monolingual. Multilingualism is a chance to learn from differences instead of being scared of them.

Multilingualism promotes multitasking which allows people to switch from task-to-task without delays. Each language you speak allows you to access a culture that has a different take on the issue that is bothering people.

Being multilingual, multiliterate and multicultural nowadays in the global society delays cognitive signs of aging, tries to enhance academic achievement, and provide ample opportunity for better job offers. An immigrant usually has a strong incentive to invest in foreign languages shortly after arrival to benefit from better language proficiency in the labour market and in consumption activities as soon as possible. Learning one new language makes it easier to learn more. Dustmann (1999) uses data to show that immigrants who intend to stay long have a higher chance and incentive of being proficient in the host language as he/she aspires to be part of the new society.

Language skills are important for an individual labour market performance.

These benefits may be summarised as follows:

Cognitive	Sociocultural	Educational	Economic
• Executive function like task switching and mental flexibility • Possible delay, the onset of age-related cognitive decline and the onset of illnesses,	• Understanding of other cultures, Increased empathy development • Enhances connection to traditional cultures, • Promotes global awareness, • Reduces discrimination, improves self-	• Comparable or higher academic achievement of students in dual language programmes as compared to students in English only programmes • Improves learning outcomes in various subjects • Bilingualism is associated with children of immigrants • Leads to increased rate of creativity	• Greater job opportunities in public and private sector. • Greater business opportunities for individ



such as Alzheimer's disease	esteem, and group relationship	- Promotes higher levels of abstract thought and reasoning - Engenders enhanced metalinguistic awareness to support the learning of languages in the future	uals and nations - Bilingualism raises occupational status and earning potential. - Bilingual skills are at higher demands at higher levels of government like federal government
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Conclusion

Nations like Britain, France, and Germany with regional dialects were already multilingual before the arrival of immigrants from all corners of the world. Immigrant occurrence only came to accentuate this phenomenon of multilingualism.

A country like Spain presents and develops regional co-official languages like Basque, Catalan and Galician to co-exist with Spanish as their international languages of business and diplomacy.



China has developed the main dialect Mandarin for international transactions and maintains the other regional dialects, though not mutually intelligible, for cultural, traditional values and citizenship camaraderie. All these countries are only giving a semblance of monolingualism; they are essentially multilingual or bilingual. The flourishing trade and businesses in a number of metropolitan cities in the world have served as pools of attraction to bring nations and speakers using languages like Portuguese, Spanish, Hindi, English, French, Chinese and many other world languages coming in contact for commercial purposes.

In certain cases these international languages come in contact with indigenous languages to develop contact languages like Creoles or Pidgins, especially along the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The preservation, protection and promotion of multiple languages instead of being disadvantageous to the world provides overwhelming benefits to the globalized world, be it in terms of health, economic, socio-cultural, socio-political and educational development. Multilingualism is with us, we have to live with it so that we can mutually develop each other, grow and flourish in it.

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