

UDC 81'23

**BILINGUALISM AND CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY
OF LANGUAGE AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Hristo S. Kyuchukov

**Dr. in Pedagogy, Professor, Academician of the International Academy
of Sciences of Pedagogical Education,**

Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences, Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal,
2 Breitscheid Str., Magdeburg, Germany, 39114

hkyuchukov@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. *The paper presents evidences in support to the theory of early bilingualism. Bilingualism with different contact languages as L1 and L2 are discussed: Turkish-Bulgarian, Romani-Slovak and Russian-German. Referring to classical ideas W. Leopold and L.S. Vygotsky on early bilingualism and multilingualism the author providing evidences from his observations rebuts the ideas of N. Alexandrova about the use of late bilingualism.*

Key words: *child bilingualism, cognitive development, cross-cultural study*

Introduction

Bilingualism and speech communities. The bilingual children grow up with two languages: they learn their mother tongue as L1, but they learn also the official language of the country as L2. Speaking their L1 or L2 the bilingual children are totally different persons because together with the languages they learn also the two cultures.

The paper will present some observations and generalizations about different types of bilingualism in different speech communities: Turkish-Bulgarian, Romani-Slovak and Russian-German bilingualism.

The bilinguals are members of different speech communities. According to D. Hymes (1986: 56) «a speech community is defined as a community sharing for the conduct and interpretation of speech and rules for interpretation of at least one linguistic variety».

According to F. Grosjean (1994: 1656) «bilinguals acquire and use their language for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. It is precisely because the needs and uses of the languages are usually quite different than the bilinguals really develop equal fluency in their languages. The level of fluency attained in a language (more precisely, in language skill) will depend on the need for that language and will be domain specific. It is thus perfectly normal to find bilinguals who can only read and write one of their languages, who have reduced speaking fluency in a language they only use with a limited number of people, or who can only speak about a particular subject in one of their languages».

Nowadays the research on bilingualism is not so much focused to prove that the bilinguals are a sum of two monolinguals, but rather that they are competent speaker-hearer who has developed a communicate competence equal to the monolinguals. The most interesting aspect of bilingualism is the fact that the bilingual person has two and more languages which are in contact in one person (Grosjean, 1994).

Several research show that the bilingual children develop better sense to the language, than monolinguals. The bilingual children develop earlier the metalanguage – the ability to separate the sound of the word from its semantics. The parents play an important role in this process, but the parents should not expect that their children will be perfect bilinguals. The perfect bilingualism does not exist in the sense that a person speaks the both languages equally well in every situation (Pearson, 2007).

N. Alexandrova (2006) develops the idea that the bilingual children have to start learning the second language when they are 6–7 years, which matches with the beginning of the primary school. Even more, the author thinks that the age between 9–11 years is the best to start learning the second language because, till this age the children have mastered the grammar of their mother tongue. However, research with different type of bilingualism and different L1 and L2 already in 1990-s (A. de Groot and C. Barry, 1992; de Bot, 1992) showed that the successful bilinguals are the ones who started to learn the two languages in their early childhood. In a study with Turkish, Moroccan and Spanish children learning Dutch as L2, de Bot (1992) and another study with Spanish L1 and English L2, Arabic and Hebrew as L1 and English as L2 (de Groot and Barry, 1992) show that the children who started the two languages earlier by the age of 12 they have fluent performance and almost the same amount of vocabulary in both languages.

From other side Grosjean (1994) writes that the bilingual children have the abilities to switch not only between the languages but also between the cultures. They are bicultural as well. To be able to have correct cultural behavior in both cultures, the person need to start learning the language as early as possible.

Actually W. Leopold (1954) was one of the first linguists who saw the positive effect of bilingualism on children's development. His observations on his own daughter's bilingualism showed that the bilingual children develop from very early age sense towards the language. The child showed ability immediately to translate words and narratives form one language to the other. The child showed interest to use the new acquired words in both languages: L1 in L2.

L.S. Vygotsky (1935) in the 20s and 30s of the XXth c. did a lot of work on the connection between the language development and the development of the psychology of children. In article which he published in 1928 and later it was republished in collection of articles he discusses the children's multilingualism. The research on the connection between the word and its meaning in multilingual children, which Vygotsky developed later was used by researchers for research on cognitive development of the children. The separation of the sound system of the word from its semantic meaning helps the children to develop their cognitive abilities and to understand the language of the others.

The works of Leopold and Vygotsky were used by different specialist for research on connection of language consciousness and bilingualism, their ability to separate the form from the meaning of the word, and to realize the communication act. The communicative function of the language according to R.V. Pazuhin (1979) is one of the most important function. The symbolic function as well as the representative function are defined as sub functions of the language. Actually the communicative function of the language is the most important one for the cognitive development of bilingual children.

In this article I will show how the communicative function of the language is playing a role in the cognitive development of bilingual children and in this way I would like to show that the hypotheses of Alexandrova about the later acquisition of the second language are wrong and are against the natural development of bilingual children.

Observation on bilingualism and cognitive development of children

My observations on bilingualism come from different countries and different type of languages in contact. Last approximately 30 years I did observe and did research with different types of bilingualism: Romani-Bulgarian, Romani-Swedish, Romani-Dutch, Romani-Slovak, Romani-Macedonian, Romani-Serbian, Romani-Croatian, Romani-Czech, Turkish-Bulgarian, Turkish-German Turkish-Dutch, Bulgarian-Hungarian, Spanish-English and Russian-German. However, here I will discuss only thee type of bilingualism: Turkish-Bulgarian, Romani-Slovak and Russian-German. All these languages are very different from each other and they belong to different languages families. They have different status and different prestige in the societies and all these issues will be discussed in details.

The bilingual children follow the stages of development of any monolingual children. The communication between the parents and the child, immediately after the birth, and the «dialog» between the parents and the children defined by C. Snow (1977) as a «protodialog» have the functions of adaptation to the human voice According to R. Brown (1973) the children develop their own regulations how to use the surrounded language input from their everyday life and how to acquire the simple language structures and to go to more complex ones. The children's ability to use creatively the acquired language structures in different activities actually is the bases for learning the

language from the adults. However, the language of the adults towards the children plays an important role and it helps the child to adapt to different stages of the language.

In different cultures the parents use different approaches to teach the language to their children: reading books, playing with toys, doing different activities together. Usually the children learn the language through different activities typical for that particular culture. In some cultures are used book reading activities, computer games, or rich environment with toys. Other cultures have more oral traditions and they use the rich oral culture to teach the language to their children.

Roma children in Slovakia and in Europe learn their mother tongue through the rich Roma oral tradition. Romani is learned through the communication with the parents and the relatives. In most of the cases there are no children books, but just sessions of telling fairy tales, singing songs, teasing and oral games. In most of the countries there is no instructions in Romani language as mother tongue in preschool institutions. Only Sweden provides mother tongue instructions in kindergartens with Roma children.

Turkish in Bulgaria has the status of a minority language, however the kindergartens do not provide lessons in Turkish as mother tongue. Turkish is taught only in primary and secondary schools – 4 lessons per week. Turkish minority has a higher status in Bulgaria, but the Turkish language is not well received in the society. The negative attitudes towards Turks and Turkish language is very high, although that politically they are represented in the government. Turkish is learned in home environment within the nuclear family where the communication with the child is mainly done by the father and mother. Turkish is learned through book playing with toys, telling stories and book reading sessions. There are no activities in Turkish in kindergartens.

Russian language in Germany has very high status. In Berlin there are number of kindergartens and primary schools where the Russian children get bilingual education. There are children books in Russian, internet games, sport and musical clubs for Russian speaking children. In most of the cases the Russian is learned in the home environment from the parents but it is supported by the bilingual kindergartens with trained teachers.

Evidences against late bilingualism

Roma children everywhere in Europe grow up in multilingual environment and together with their mother tongue they also learn two or three more languages. The extended Roma families communicate with the children intensively and the children from early age get used to different registers. The emotional nature of Roma also influence the communication with the children. The children learn the language playing, singing, and taking different roles. Many of the children learn the second and third language from the neighbors. For example the Macedonian Roma children learn at home Romani and Turkish, but from the neighbors learn Albanian, and when they attend kindergarten they learn also Macedonian. In most of the cases this is a spontaneous bilingualism, it is not planned and not organized, there is no any supportive process that all languages to be developed on the same level. By the age of 10–12 years the children are good in all 4 languages and can switch from one to another language.

The Turkish children in Bulgaria attend kindergartens, where the Bulgarian is introduced to the children. The parents do not have any textbooks or printed materials in Turkish in order to maintain the development of Turkish. In most of the cases the satellite TV channels from Turkey are watched and that help the children to develop their mother tongue. In this case the children by the age of 10–12 years old are also good in both languages and they can freely switch from one to another language and the both grammars are well acquired.

The Russian children in Germany have the support of bilingual kindergarten where usually the children are exposed to native German and native Russian teachers and the children develop the ability from very early age to speak one language to one teacher and the other language to the other teacher. The rich technical environment helps the teachers to teach both languages successfully. The children grow up as balanced bilinguals where the two languages function equally well.

Conclusions

All three cases, although very different from each other, support strongly the Leopold and Vygotsky's ideas on early language development of both languages in bilingual children. All the processes of transfer of knowledge from one language to another, comparing the language phenomenon in both languages, help the children to improve their knowledge on the languages earlier than monolingual children.

The metalanguage abilities of bilinguals, the ability earlier to develop sensitivity to languages, help bilinguals from early age to develop their cognitive abilities.

References:

- Brown, R. (1973) *A First Language. The Early Stages*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- De Bot, K. (1992) Self-Assessment of Minority Language Proficiency. In: L. Vehoeven and J. H.A.L. de Jong (eds.) *The construct of Language Proficiency*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- De Groot, A. B.M. and Barry, C. (1992) The Manual Community: Introduction. *European Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 4, (4) 241–252.
- Grosjean, F. (1994) Individual bilingualism. In: *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics. Vol. 3*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, pp. 1656–1660.
- Hymes, D. (1986) Models of Interaction of Language and Social life. In: J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (Eds.) *Directions in sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Leopold, W. (1954) Speech development of a bilingual child: a linguist's record. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Pearson, B.Z. (2007) Social factors in childhood bilingualism in the United States. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 28, 399–410.
- Snow, C. (1977) Mother's speech research: From Input to interaction. In Snow, C. and Ferguson, Ch. (eds) *Talking to Children. Language Input and Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aleksandrova, N.Sh. (2006) Rodnoy yazyk, inostrannyiy yazyk i yazykovyie fenomenyiu katoryih net nazvaniya [Native language, foreign language and linguistic phenomena which have not titles]. *Voprosyi yazykoznaninya – Questions of linguistics*, 3, 88–100. [in Russian].
- Vyigotskiy, L.S. (1935). *Umstvennoe razvitie detey v protsesse obucheniya [Mental development of children in the process of teaching]*. Moskva/Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatelstvo. 135 s. [in Russian].
- Pazuhin, R.V. (1979) Yazyk, funktsiya, kommunikatsiya [Language, function, communication]. *Voprosyi yazykoznaninya – Questions of linguistics*, 6. [in Russian].
-

БІЛІНГВІЗМ, КРОС-КУЛЬТУРНЕ ВИВЧЕННЯ МОВИ ТА КОГНІТИВНИЙ РОЗВИТОК

Христо Кючуков

**доктор педагогічних наук, професор,
академік Міжнародної академії наук педагогічної освіти,**

Магдебург-Стендальський Університет прикладних наук,
вул. Брайтшиїд 2, Магдебург, Німеччина, 39114

hkyuchukov@gmail.com

АНОТАЦІЯ. У статті представлено докази на підтримку теорії раннього білінгвізму. Обговорюється білінгвізм з рівнями L1 і L2, зокрема: турецько-болгарський, словацько-румунський і російсько-німецький. Що стосується класичних ідей В. Леопольд і Л. Виготського про ранню двомовність і багатомовність, то автор представляє аргументи, базовані на власних спостереженнях, спростовує ідеї Н. Александрової про пізній білінгвізм.

Ключові слова: дитячий білінгвізм, когнітивний розвиток, кросс-культурні дослідження.

БИЛИНГВИЗМ, КРОСС-КУЛЬТУРНОЕ ИЗУЧЕНИЕ ЯЗЫКА И КОГНИТИВНОЕ РАЗВИТИЕ

Христо Кючук

доктор педагогических наук, профессор, академик Международной академии наук педагогического образования,

Магдебург-Стендальский университет прикладных наук,
ул. Брайтшиид 2, Магдебург, Германия, 39114

hkyuchukov@gmail.com

АННОТАЦИЯ. В статье представлены доказательства в поддержку теории раннего билингвизма. Обсуждается двуязычие с уровнями L1 и L2, в частности: турецко-болгарское, словацко-румынское и российско-немецкое. Что касается классических идей В. Леопольд и Л. Выготского о раннем двуязычии и многоязычии, то автор предоставляет свидетельства, основанные на собственных наблюдениях, опровергает идеи Н. Александровой о позднем билингвизме.

Ключевые слова: детский билингвизм, когнитивное развитие, кросс-культурные исследования.

Подано до редакції 07.09.2016; Прийнято до друку 08.09.2016