

Bilingualism and Cultural Identity Development: Case Studies for an Interactive Perspective

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In recent years, there has been much research in the rapidly expanding field of bilingualism. The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of the relationship which exists between bilingualism and cultural identity development in adolescents. In an ever-shrinking world, it is becoming increasingly common for individuals from distinctly different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds to coexist in a single mixed society. As adolescence is a period of drastic formation and transformation, it is critical to understand the impact of existence as a member of multiple linguistic groups on the development of the understanding of one's own position within a culture. Based upon an integrative analysis of case studies conducted in a variety of distinct cultural environments throughout the world, conclusions are drawn as to the interplay between language and identity, and potential positive and negative factors affecting the development of a healthy, stable bicultural/bilingual identity are identified and examined.

Introduction

In the modern world of fading borders and cultural amalgamation, there remain few monolingual societies. Therefore, it is particularly relevant to examine the processes which affect all those who find themselves uprooted, and transplanted into an unfamiliar linguistic or cultural environment. Though some modern researchers contend that there is no salient link between language and cultural identity, as did John Edwards in his work *Language, Society and Identity* (1985), many scholars, perhaps most notably Joshua Fishman, offer differing opinions. In his 1977 study *Language and Ethnicity*, Fishman argues that, since language is always used within a cultural context, it is, in fact, inseparable from cultural identity. Without question, language plays a significant role in adolescent development. It is the lens, through which adolescents interpret their world, and the medium, through which they voice their opinions. Those individuals positioned between two distinct cultural or linguistic traditions occupy a unique place in society, and are presented with the challenge of integrating their own heritage with that of their adopted culture. What results is a distinctive cultural identity development process which merits further study.

Given the individual nature of development, it is inherently difficult to make any concrete determination as to what precisely constitutes cultural identity. The measurement of such a construct is still more challenging. Nevertheless, many researchers have accepted this challenge, and devised varied means of assessing perceptions of cultural identity. In order to draw

conclusions which are more broadly applicable, it is prudent to examine studies conducted in a variety of cultural settings. Three such studies are presented, each assessing distinct, but inter-related constructs, with participants from a variety of backgrounds. Taken as a whole, these studies provide insight into the dynamic relationship between language and cultural identity.

The Attitude towards Japan and the West Questionnaire (AJWQ)

In Simon Downes' study, *Sense of Japanese Cultural Identity within an English Partial Immersion Programme: Should Parents Worry?* (2001), he examines the effects of an English-language program at Katoh School in Tokyo, Japan, on its students' perceptions of their own cultural identity. A number of parents at the school expressed concerns that the immersion experience could adversely affect their children; that their prolonged exposure to foreign language and culture would somehow render them "less Japanese" (Downes 2001, 168). 105 immersion students at Katoh School in grades five through seven were compared with a control group of 237 non-immersion students from grades five and six at Takana-wadai Elementary School and Mikko Elementary School, and 167 students from grade seven at Takamatsu Junior High School. In total, 509 students were tested. All samples were matched for socioeconomic status, gender balance, location, and age.

To assess the students' perceptions of themselves and their "adopted" culture, the Attitude Towards Japan and the West Question-

<i>Positive Attitude towards English (AJWQ2)</i>						
I am able to express my thoughts better in English than in Japanese	0.04	0.84	-0.08	0.01	0.08	0.77
My real self comes out more when I speak in English than when I speak in Japanese	0.18	0.81	-0.01	0.10	0.06	0.71
I like the English language better than I like the Japanese language	0.36	0.57	-0.19	-0.18	0.20	0.58
I have no intention of ever living outside of Japan	-0.22	-0.41	0.00	0.13	-0.37	0.45
<i>Identity with Japan (AJWQ3)</i>						
I regret that I was born a Japanese	0.11	0.20	-0.75	-0.09	0.13	0.72
I am glad I was born a Japanese	0.01	-0.98	0.75	0.20	-0.06	0.65
If there was a war against the West, I would naturally side with Japan	-0.23	0.13	0.67	0.04	-0.11	0.61
I think Japanese people are better than Western people	-0.13	-0.10	0.50	0.07	0.20	0.48
<i>Awareness of Japanese Culture (AJWQ4)</i>						
I like the study of Japanese (Kokugo)	-0.19	0.06	0.04	0.75	0.02	0.64
I am proud of Japanese culture and traditions	-0.09	0.04	0.18	0.75	0.02	0.64
I have a clear image of the character of a Japanese	0.26	-0.17	0.20	0.50	-0.02	0.46
<i>Attraction towards Westerners (AJWQ5)</i>						
When I grow up I would like to marry a Westerner	-0.19	0.06	0.04	0.75	0.02	0.64
If I was to be reborn I would like to be reborn a Westerner	-0.09	0.04	0.18	0.72	-0.07	0.66
I think differently than Japanese people	0.26	-0.17	0.20	0.50	-0.02	0.46

Table 1: Attitude toward Japan and the West Questionnaire (AJWQ)

naire (AJWQ) was devised, with 5 subscales, each designed to measure a distinct construct:

The Attraction towards Western Culture subscale asked, essentially, if the students preferred Western things to Japanese things. The Positive attitude towards English subscale sought to determine whether the students preferred speaking English or Japanese. The purpose of the Identity with Japan subscale was to determine whether the students were content with their existence as Japanese. The Awareness of Japanese Culture subscale assessed the students' pride of and engagement in Japanese culture. Finally, the Attraction towards Westerners subscale asked a fundamentally important question: whether the students would prefer to have been born a Westerner. Homeroom teachers administered the questionnaire at both the immersion school and the public control schools. Responses

were obtained on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4). After internal consistency reliability calculation, the number of test items was reduced from 30 to 21, in order to improve the alpha-coefficient.

A two-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was carried out on each subscale of the AJWQ, both by school and by grade. The results of this comparison indicated that the immersion students had a stronger attraction towards Western culture, a more positive attitude towards English, a stronger identity with Japan, and more awareness of Japanese culture. These results would seem to indicate that the students' parents were incorrect in foreseeing detrimental repercussions of the immersion experience, and that those students exposed to the foreign culture not only achieved a better appreciation for it, but also reported an increased sense of *Japanese*

identity. While it is extremely difficult to provide a single, concise definition of cultural identity development, a practical explanation would be the process of learning to differentiate between one's own culture and that of others. Rather than detract from their sense of self, the exposure to foreign culture which the students at Katoh School received seemed to further confirm who they were, ultimately resulting in more flexible and comfortable bilingual and bicultural identities.

Reading Identity: The Case for Minority Literature

Susan Jones, in her study "*Shaping identities: the reading of young bilinguals*" (2004), sought to examine the effects of the availability of minority-language reading material on cultural identity. She argued that those bilingual children who already suffer under enormous pressure as members of a society in which the majority language is not their mother tongue suffer further when they can find no representations of individuals in similar situations in the reading materials to which they are exposed in their public schools. Furthermore, she sought to determine whether these children would be forced to turn to English-language materials in order to find individuals to whom they could relate. Specifically, she evaluated the availability of culturally relevant reading materials for bilingual students in a school in inner-city Derby, Wales, and examined the extent to which this availability affected the students' self-perceived cultural identity.

This study was conducted on 100 bilingual secondary school students, ages 11-17, from primarily south Asian ethnic backgrounds (33% Pakistani, 13% Indian, 11% other ethnic minority groups) Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire. Questions were asked pertaining to the students' opinions toward speaking, writing, reading, television and film, as well as details about their home situation. A small number of informal interviews were carried out with culturally knowledgeable school administrators to provide greater insight into the responses of some of the students.

Despite the fact that the majority of the student subjects had a generally positive perception of reading, more than 50% reported that they found it difficult to locate reading materials in Wales which were relevant, in terms of their minority culture and language, or which featured young bilinguals as protagonists (Jones 2004, 43). As these children experienced the trials and

tribulations which accompany adolescence in any culture, their disorientation was compounded by the fact that they were largely unable to find any relevant reference points. Many bilingual children must play numerous distinct roles throughout their day, acting one way in school and another at home, and if these children are unable to access enjoyable reading materials in their minority language which reflect their unique existence as individuals on the border between two cultures, there is the potential that they may fail to identify with this aspect of themselves. If these children are unable to see themselves through the lens of their own language, then they may indeed be forced to examine themselves through English-language texts, or else become anomic.

As bilingual-biculturals, these children never analyze situations from a single cultural perspective. There are instances, such as when speaking with elders in the minority culture, when they may defer to a particular cultural competency, but even then, the individual is still a kind of synergy of two cultures, what Jones describes as a "third culture" (Jones 2004, 42). This fused identity is the image with which children and adolescents need to be presented, in order to develop a positive view of their special position as bilingual, multicultural individuals. Few cultural experiences focus on this aspect of society, however. Children's literature is a way to offer bilingual children at least some representation of what life is really like for them. Through such works, they can begin to plant their feet firmly in the often-slippery slopes of the dominant culture. The desire for representation of the bilingual/bicultural condition is further illustrated by the fact that many of the subjects reported reading Asian music and film magazines in English, which is indicative of the cultural blending which many of these children have internalized.

One suggestion is to translate many of the books which are already published in English into other languages. Another possible solution to the lack of texts would be to simply write more fiction in minority languages. However, in this modern, progressive society which stresses integration, some argue that such a step may prove to be divisive, encouraging ethnic and linguistic minority groups to isolate themselves from mainstream culture. This assertion remains under debate, but what is clear is that those young readers who read stories about bilinguals in their own language often have much better outcomes than those who read them solely in their adopted language, and if this reading were continued through adoles-

cence and into adulthood, a generation of confident bilinguals could be created (Jones 2004, 45).

The Korean-American Cultural Identification Scale

While the previous studies have expounded upon the effect of language on cultural identity, Jin Sook Lee's study, *The Korean Language in America: The Role of Cultural Identity in Heritage Language Learning* (2002), approaches the relationship from a different perspective. This study was based upon a group of 40 Korean-Americans. The subjects were all students at American universities; 20 from a university on the east coast, and 20 from a university on the west coast. The subjects included individuals who were born in the US, immigrated between 0-5 years of age, and immigrated between 6-10 years of age. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed, consisting of 76 items falling into four distinct categories. 20 questions focused on the demographic characteristics of the participants. Korean language proficiency and language use was self-assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. 29 parallel statements about Korean and American culture were used to develop a cultural identity scale, with the American-related items intended to be indicative of acculturation, the Korean-related items indicative

of heritage culture adherence, and the combined results indicative of the degree of biculturalism. The fourth component consisted of open-ended questions intended to reveal the participants' attitudes toward their own cultural identities and the maintenance of their ethnic culture and language.

Scores on the cultural identity scale formed a continuous distribution over a relatively wide range. With the range of possible scores being 24 to 120, the sample scores fell from 37 to 85, illustrating just how individual a process identity development is. As illustrated below in Table 2, nearly 80% of respondents indicated that they see themselves as both Korean and American, and expressed a desire for others to recognize their dual cultures as well (Lee 2002, 124). This is not to say that these respondents all viewed themselves as equally Korean and American. As cultural identity is such an immensely personal trait, the relative preference for Korean or American culture, even among those who view themselves as Korean-Americans, varies greatly from individual to individual.

Regression analysis demonstrated a positive correlation between heritage language proficiency and bicultural identification. The stronger one's language proficiency, the more one identified with both the Korean *and* the American culture. As was demonstrated in Downes (2001), those individuals with greater amounts

Table 2: Distribution of Description of Cultural Identity

<i>Descriptions</i>	<i>Number of informants</i>
(1) I consider myself basically a Korean person even though I live in America; I still view myself as a Korean.	7 (17.5%)
(2) I consider myself Korean-American although deep down I always know I am a Korean	17 (42.5%)
(3) I consider myself Korean-American. I have both Korean and American characteristics and I view myself as a blend of both.	14 (35%)
(4) I consider myself Korean-American, although deep down I consider myself as an American first.	1 (2.5%)
(5) I consider myself basically as an American. Even though I have a Korean background and characteristics I still view myself as an American	1 (2.5%)

Table 3: Self-reported Cultural Identification by Gender and Birthplace (%)

<i>Description</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>US born</i>	<i>Non-US born</i>
Korean	12 (30%)	10 (25%)	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	8 (20%)
Korean-American	27 (67.5%)	14 (35%)	13 (33%)	17 (43%)	10 (25%)
American	1 (2.5%)	1 (3%)	0	1 (3%)	0

of language exposure typically rate themselves as also having a greater amount of biculturalism.

In order to awaken bilingual/bicultural individuals to the benefits of their unique position in society, it is imperative that the teaching of heritage languages also be promoted, as language and culture are nearly inextricably linked. Those with high language proficiency typically have high cultural knowledge, and those with a high degree of cultural awareness are also more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm in language learning, further demonstrating the interactive nature of these concepts (Lee 2002, 130).

Interestingly, there was a noticeable difference between the patterns of cultural identification among the male and female participants, and the US born and non-US born subjects, as demonstrated in the table below:

On the surface, it would appear that the female subjects were highly inclined to report themselves as being Korean-Americans, while the male subjects were much less uniform in their responses. However, given the relatively small sample size, the exact extent of this measure's reliability is unknown. One clear result is that those individuals born in the United States were far more likely to identify themselves as biculturals than those born outside the US.

Most second-generation Korean-Americans develop some level of Korean proficiency, but the majority agrees that this is not sufficient. Upon arrival in the United States, parents typically wish for their children to attain a high level of English competency quickly, and to adapt to American culture in order to navigate the complicated process of integration, while at the same time, maintaining their own heritage language. Generally, however, fluency in the heritage language decreases as English proficiency increases. In nearly all ethnic groups, a gravitation toward English and substantial decrease in heritage language proficiency is evident in the children of the immigrants (Lee 2002, 121). The subjects state that a primary reason for their lack of motivation to maintain their heritage language is that American society attaches little importance to maintaining heritage languages. As in Jones (2004), a measure of *external* confirmation is necessary in order for an individual to feel validated as a bilingual/bicultural. Though a small number of participants identified themselves as primarily American, the majority of the subjects appear to have achieved a uniquely bicultural identity, comprised of both Korean and American qualities.

Lee (2002) posits that there are four

fundamental responses which a bilingual/bicultural may have when presented with an unfamiliar majority culture: He/she may reject the heritage language and culture altogether, though this is often nearly impossible among second-generation individuals, as participation in some degree of minority culture is often more or less compulsory in the home due to parental maintenance of that culture. He/she may also reject the language and culture of the majority society, as did one Korean-American student participant, who railed against "Anglo-conformity" and spoke out against assimilation (Lee 2002, 126). He or she may become anomic, with no affinity for either the heritage or adopted culture and language, though the number of instances of this is relatively small. Ideally, however, the bilingual will develop a balanced bicultural capability to adapt fluidly to either language or culture, as the majority of the individuals in the studies profiled succeeded in doing. As one student said, "I maintain the best of the two cultures" (Lee 2002, 128).

Potential Methodological Limitations

One possibly significant, yet unavoidable, weakness in each study is the fact that cultural identity is a construct which is particularly difficult to quantify, as Lee is more than willing to admit (Lee 2002, 119). While the experimental and control groups in Jones (2004) were matched for socio-economic status, location, gender, and grade-level, the requirements were not as strict for Lee's study. No attempts were made to account for socio-economic status, and 62.5% of the participants were males, which could certainly have skewed the data. In addition, there were only 40 subjects from 2 universities, both of which were coastal. While 40 participants may be a sufficient sample size, both Jones and Downes had sample sizes of 100 or greater. Not to be overlooked is the fact that each study used English as a reference-point. Given the cultural connotations of certain languages, the relationship between bilingualism and cultural identity could potentially vary significantly, depending upon the language in question. Another possible confounding variable is the fact that for two of the three studies presented, the questionnaires were distributed in a normal classroom setting, in which the subjects, as Jones and Downes mentioned, may have been inclined to provide what they perceived to be the "correct" answers, rather than choosing those which most

accurately reflected their own personal thoughts and feelings (Jones 2004, 45). The extent to which these factors may have impacted the outcomes and conclusions of each respective study is uncertain. However, given the data provided, it can be said that there exists an evident, consistent interactive relationship between bilingualism and cultural identity, which transcends international and intercultural bounds.

Conclusion

Language, as a cultural and social construct, is critical to an understanding of one's culture and of oneself. It is, therefore, altogether logical that an individual with increased linguistic capabilities should have the potential to actively and productively participate in multiple cultures simultaneously. However, in light of the examples provided by Jones and Lee, this biculturalism seems largely dependent upon whether or not an individual receives support from those institutions which play a principal roll in his/her development, whether they be the parents, as in Downes (2001), the literary community, as in Jones (2004), or America as a whole, as in Lee (2002). If the diverse experiences and perspectives of minority group children are not recognized in the cultural material to which they are exposed, there is the risk that they may come to feel alienated from their heritage language and culture, from the adopted mainstream, or both. In each study profiled, there have been individuals who successfully maintained stable bilingual and bicultural status, but, as Jones and Lee made clear, external forces can, and often do, exert a great deal of influence over whether or not such status is ultimately achieved.

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