

IS MULTILINGUALISM A PROBLEM?

THE EFFECTS OF MULTILINGUALISM AT THE SOCIETAL LEVEL.

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims at illuminating some of the effects that multilingualism and linguistic diversity might have at the societal level with regard to various attributes of social life. In doing so, a thematic review of previous research on the effects of multilingualism is carried out. Particular focus was paid here to a number of areas in which multilingualism can have specific and major effects on social life, e.g. education, economy, as well as employment and language policy. Following attempts to problematize the notion of multilingualism, the article concludes that language-related problems evident in multilingual societies appear to be largely attributable to (language and language education) policies implemented by governments concerned.

Introduction

“Language has no existence apart from the social reality of its users. Although language is a precondition for social life, it does not exist on its own and does not simply reflect some pre-existing reality” (Romaine, 1994: 221).

When considering the enormous number of different living languages spoken around the world (approximately 6,500 languages¹) (see Table 1 below), one can definitely presume that interacting between individuals from different linguistic backgrounds is a common, if not

¹ Please see Ethnologue for further details on the world's linguistic diversity at: http://www.ethnologue.com/country_index.asp. [Accessed: May 20, 2012].

inescapable, occurrence. Accordingly, an end result of the interaction between these many linguistic communities would be, at the very least, the occurrence of the widespread phenomenon of multilingualism which, I argue, characterises the lives of many people living in multilingual societies (Hudson, 1980; Edwards, 1995; Blackledge & Creese, 2010).

Content	Languages	
	Count	Percent
Africa	2,092	30.1
Americas	1,002	14.5
Asia	2,269	32.8
Europe	239	3.5
Pacific	1,310	19.0
Total	6,912	100.0

Table 1. Distribution of languages by area of origin (www.ethnologue.com).

Multilingualism has long been an issue of growing social and academic importance as various living languages are threatened in their continued existence (cf. Crystal, 2000; Fishman, 2001). Needless to say, then, not only that linguistic diversity has become a powerful fact of modern life around us today, but also the changes in the vitality of particular languages as this would indeed have important implications for both individuals and societies at large.

Research into multilingualism over the last twenty years has yielded a considerable amount of facts and opened possible new ways (theoretical approaches) for its description (Cummins, 2000). Yet, Edwards (2004) notes that most of those studies have been concerned with the notion of multilingualism from applied linguistics and sociology perspectives. Recently, however, it has received much more attention by sociolinguists (e.g. Ennaji, 2005; Gal, 2007; Li, 2007; Roberts, 2007; Jamaï, 2008).

Nonetheless, as Blackledge and Creese (2010) argue, although it can be studied from different perspectives, it is still quite imperative that multilingualism in today's world should undergo an intensive study and debate. Thus, in line with this, the aim of this paper is to investigate the societal linguistic diversity (multilingualism) in terms of how it is manifested and how it can be explained. By this, the researcher would endeavour to further illuminate the notion of

multilingualism in connection with the challenges it presents to societal harmony and with attempts to: (1) provide a detailed discussion of wide-ranged aspects of multilingualism in our day-to-day life, e.g. education; (2) to argue for the usefulness of multilingualism as an effective tool within the domain of the sociology of language. Following this, a conclusion that would summarise the essay's aim and main argument is drawn up.

Literature Review

Debatably, as the study of multilingualism borrows heavily from a variety of disciplines (e.g. sociology, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics); an agreement on its definition is yet to be reached. Nonetheless, the current paper would follow Hoffman (1991) who defines multilingualism, in its most general sense, as a multitude of situations where two or more languages are in contact with each other either individually, socially or across nations. Importantly, however, it is worth noting that although it is widely assumed, multilingualism (opposed to monolingualism) does not necessarily refer to ‘an absolute linguistic knowledge’ of more than one language (cf. Baker, 1993; Cummins, 2000; Gal, 2007).

According to Gumperz (1982: 184), the greatest amount of linguistic diversity can be found “at the level of local, tribal and peasant populations”. An example of this linguistic diversity would be the United States of America where more than 30 languages are ‘concurrently’ spoken (Macias, 2001). Similarly, but extremely more, about 800 languages and 2000 dialects are spoken in India (Edwards, 2004). In addition, Myers-Scotton (2006) points out that most European countries are also well-known for their bilingual and polyglot communities. For instance, in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, in addition to English; Irish, Gaelic and Welsh are spoken. In its broadest sense, however, this linguistic diversity can be attributed to the “global mobility, transcendence of territorial, physical and social boundaries, and the shift towards a fluid social topology” (Robertson, 2001: 90).

In a nutshell, as research has shown, the spread of multilingualism involves not only an enormous variety of languages, but also “a vast diversity of populations and a myriad of language repertoire configurations and patterns of language use” (Meyerhoff, 2006: 32). Hence,

as it would be difficult to find a country that is completely monolingual², one may argue that multilingualism is increasingly becoming the ‘norm’ not the ‘exception’. To be more specific, we would put this in Edward's (1994: 1) words:

To be bilingual or multilingual is not the aberration supposed by many, particularly perhaps by people in Europe and North America who speak a ‘big’ language³; it is rather a normal and unremarkable necessity for the majority in the world today.

To conclude, then, this implies that multilingualism is not only a reflection of linguistic behaviour of individuals; but also a linguistic behaviour of many speech communities and societies around the world.

Essay Rationale

“Language is the most explosive issue universally and over time. This mainly because language alone, unlike all other concerns associated with nationalism and ethnocentrism, is so closely tied to the individual self. Fear of being deprived of communicating skills seems to rise political passion to fever pitch” (Appel & Muysken, 1987:9).

As found by a number of studies on multilingualism, although it may involve various positive qualities, societal multilingualism can sometimes be fraught with various concerns. That is, within multilingual communities, it has been witnessed (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Saib, 2001) that different languages are valued differently⁴, i.e. according to the ‘political, cultural, and economic’ power of the group that speaks each language (Grosjean, 1982; cited in Edwards, 1995: 120). More specifically, then, problems are expected to be encountered by the linguistic ‘minorities’⁵ living within multilingual communities as they will have to attain a high standard of

² It is worth noting that this is in terms of individuals' monolingual competence, not countries' monolingual policies.

³ We assume that Edwards refers here to the English language.

⁴ Please (section 4) for further details on multilingualism effects.

⁵ The terms ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ is used in the current paper to manifest power positions, not only statistical data.

proficiency in more than one language. That is, not only will they be speaking the language of their ethnic background, but they will also have to learn the language of the country they are living in (Gal, 2007).

Noteworthy, however, how each linguistic group views the language of others reflects not so much the actual qualities of that language, but the qualities associated with the language group who speaks it. That is, as several researchers (e.g. Kress, 1989; Schiffman, 1996; Schmid, 2001) have shown that, as a result of getting bilinguals to read out the same messages in different languages, listeners will rate the speaker's intelligence and other factors (e.g. background, level of education), differently according to which language he or she uses.

Hence, this would influence how we approach this essay in two ways. Firstly, it suggests that the problems associated with multilingualism are connected to the problems associated with both ethnic and cultural diversities. Secondly, it suggests that linguistic diversity does not so much cause problems, but rather provide a way in which problems can be created. That is, as Spolsky (2004: 6) says: "Black illiteracy was not the cause of Black/White relations and exploitation, [rather] it was the result of it". In the pages that follow, with regard to a number of areas, a discussion that aims at getting a fuller snapshot of the effects that multilingualism may cause/have caused at the societal level, is presented.

Multilingualism Effects

As a matter of fact, when talking about the problems caused by multilingualism, sociolinguists are often talking about problems caused by political attitudes⁶ taken to multilingualism and minority languages – attitudes taken to deliberately create inequalities (Romaine, 2009). However, in order to shed further light on the problems multilingualism might have at the societal level, we will discuss a range of overlapping, yet important areas: education, employment, economy, language policy, multiculturalism and diglossia.

⁶ Noteworthy, I entirely agree with this attribution.

- Multilingualism and Education

Needless to say, education is one of the most important areas of public life where languages, either taught or as the medium of communication, have an obvious impact. In multilingual societies, the policy taken to language use in schools tends to be that the language of the majority is used for teaching (Romaine; 1994, 1995).

An example that illustrates such a policy would be the submersion (language immersion) programmes⁷, which (broadly) aim to help the minority children assimilate into the dominant culture⁸, i.e. that of the majority. However, such programmes are more likely to be disruptive as teaching in the majority language might reduce the minority-language speaker's ability in his/her native language (Ennaji, 2005). Besides, Bialystok (2001) argues that such learners tend to be 'semi-lingualists': meaning that they do not become completely proficient in neither the majority nor the minority languages, and hence their overall ability to communicate would be negatively affected. Going further, Wright (2008) claims that learners' 'general cognitive development' might be slower, as he/she needs to learn but fails to learn "threshold level" (a certain level of competence) in his/her mother tongue. Therefore, such learners might not gain a 'positive self-image' as having a sense of cultural identity requires valuing one's own language (Cummins, 1978). Besides, the 'shock' that comes from switching between not only school and home languages, but cultures can affect the learner's psychological development (Javier, 2007: 61).

Hence, it is quite apparent that there is a greater likelihood that minority linguistic group children enrolled in the submersion programmes would do less well at school than children from the majority language group. Cummins (1984: 8) finds that Hispanic children in the United States of America had fallen over three years behind average academic attainment by year 12. So, "in addition to the language gap, there is an age gap as well" (Hoffman, 1991: 311). Comparable to these results, Romaine (1994: 192) reports that 25% of the majority children do not attend school in West Germany, and more than 50 % do not even obtain any kind of leaving certificates.

⁷ In such programmes, the target language (i.e. that of the majority group) is the means of instruction.

⁸ Today's immersion programmes can be seen in countries like; Canada and the United States of America. For further details, please see Freeman *et al* (2005) and Potowski (2007).

This can largely be attributed, we argue, to the fact that children need to have a good education in their mother language in order to successfully learn the second (majority) language. Hence, it could be claimed that such programmes cause minority children to have a lifetime of underachievement. Therefore, as Schmid (2001: 307) argues, the minority children should enjoy the same educational opportunities as children from host country.

However, it should be noted that ‘monolingual’ programmes⁹ for the minority language group (e.g. segregation programmes¹⁰) might also make learners have the same weak position, perhaps like their parents and might, therefore, make them unable to demand their civil rights (Ricento, 2006). However, although both submersion and segregation programmes seem to have a negative effect on minority language students, many researchers (e.g. Cummins, 1984; Edwards, 1985; Kress, 1989) are of the theory, that has widely been discussed in much of the early literature (1950s), ‘the Deficit Theory’ (Romaine, 1994: 193). This theory argues that some languages, typically those spoken by the powerful majority groups, are more linguistically complex or even “elaborate” than minority languages “restricted codes”, and so could communicate messages more effectively (*ibid*), and hence implies an advocacy for the submersion programmes.

In addition, research has shown that languages are considered the most important cause of school failure among minority children as usually schools around the world measure students' success in terms of their proficiency of the language of the society (Saib, 2001). In Britain, for example, there has long been a hierarchy of educational success and failure: “indigenous middle-class children do best, while children of West Indian origin do worst” (Romaine, 1994: 192). Similarly, Robertson (2001) says that “in the past, many schools in Europe have pursued strict anti-minority policies, even to the extent of punishing or ridiculing children who use the minority language at school” (p. 86).

In sum, however, we would argue that although students joining them might have a “positive socio-economic future” (Freeman *et al*, 2005: 63), submersion programmes still need to further consider minority language group students. Grosjean (1999), cited in Javier (2007: 16), claims

⁹ As a way of overcoming drawbacks of submersion programmes.

¹⁰ Such programmes have been seen in the past in places like; Brussels and Québec (please see Swing, 1980).

that part of the problem is due to the fact that the educational system in such communities is ‘ill-prepared’ to address the demands of a bilingual educational programme. In a similar vein, Potowski (2007: 173) argues that there are numerous reasons responsible for the poor achievement of minority groups' children; some of which are the lack of exposure to the school language, linguistic/cultural mismatch between home and school and students' socio-economic status.

- Multilingualism and Employment

Indeed, one might argue that countries usually governed by the majority language group choose to merely educate in the majority language in order to reduce the social mobility of minority language groups and hence, maintain a source of cheap labour (Cooper, 1989; Herriman & Burnaby, 1996; Cummins, 2000). That is, after leaving school and even before having any kind of formal certificates, minority group members would have to compete with the indigenous in the job market. Clearly, then, minority group members are more likely to end up “perpetuating the uncertain, low-status position their parents occupy within the economic and social system in the host country” (Hoffman, 1991: 312). For instance, Romaine (1994: 213) says that when unemployment rates had risen in Europe during the 1970s, many people argued that those guest-workers must be forced to go home¹¹ because they are preventing nationals from getting jobs.

Accordingly, this suggests that multilingualism itself does not cause inequality, but that inequality is created through the policies of certain governments who chose to underestimate (by whatever means) the value of the inclusion of the minority languages through some ‘transitional’ and ‘pluralistic’ policies (Schiffman, 1996; Baker & Prys Jones, 1998). However, even with giving them their rights, Romaine (2009: 135) warns us that monolingual policies may negatively affect the minority language speakers as they would still feel ‘isolated’. In sum, given that language planning cannot be understood apart from its ‘social context’, we would follow

¹¹ In other words, the implementation of Labour Deportation Programmes.

Cooper (1989: 61) who affirms that language planners and educators should interfere in a way¹² that would ensure equal rights for minority-groups students (future employees).

- **Multilingualism and Economy**

A number of scholars (e.g. Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Edwards, 2004; Ennaji, 2005; Blackledge & Creese, 2010) have pointed out the ‘intimate’ relationship between the vitality of a nation's economy and the vitality of its national language(s)¹³. Therefore, it is important not to view educational and policies as the only underlying cause of social problems associated with multilingualism. Paultson and Tucker (2003: 6) clarify this point as follows:

Bilingual education is not in itself a causal factor...[...]... schools and schooling can facilitate existing trends, but they cannot be successful counters to social and economic forces.

In his influential monograph, Edwards (2004) points out to various examples manifesting the relationship between language and economy. Of the instructive examples he mentioned, is that following China's rapid economic growth, Mandarin Chinese would be learnt by over 100 million people over the few coming years (*ibid*: 73). From a pedagogical perspective, Ennaji (2005) gives us an example that teachers, particularly but by no means exclusively, in primary schools often bring negative stereotypes about minority language speakers. Hence, this would surely reveal the wider context of inequality and prejudice that surrounds the issue of multilingualism. A study from Canada (Li, 2007) showed that despites their numerical strength, French Québécois have, for a long time, suffered from the inability to play an active role in national decisions concerning them.

¹² Even if in an implicit way.

¹³ As is well-known, for instance, the emergence of English as a lingua franca, which Crystal (2006) argues, is largely due to the economic strengths of English-speaking countries, e.g. the Unites States of America.

Additionally, it has been witnessed that the effects of the way in which different language groups are valued limits the achievements of adults from the minority language groups throughout their lives. Lambert's (1964) study, cited in Romaine (1994), illustrates that not only the majority language groups think negatively about the languages of minorities, but that the minority language speakers themselves adopt these negative attitudes, and thus devalue their own language more than the majority group. This means that, for example, in mixed groups the minority language speakers would usually (and automatically) use the majority-group language, even if they make up most of the talkers and the majority language speakers are bilingual. To further illustrate this, Grosjean (1982), cited in Myers-Scotton (2006: 125), gives the example of an Austrian village on the Austrian-Yugoslav borders where both Slovene and German are spoken; but Slovene is never spoken when German speakers are present in the speaking group, even if they are from the same village. Arguably, those minority speakers think that their language does not have "all the linguistic resources needed for successful communication in a modern and industrially advanced world" (Hoffman, 1991: 240).

However, we assume that if a particular language is used by minority members for daily communication, then both the minority group and the majority group will think about it more positively. Yet, the expectation that the majority language is the normal way of communicating disadvantages the minority language speaker in a range of situations. It is not surprising, therefore, that minority language speakers are, as Jamai (2008: 192) says (and probably overstates this), more likely to be unemployed, have social problems, become imprisoned – as indeed they are overrepresented in "almost every category that can be used to measure failure". To sum this up, we would argue that through maintaining a good level of economic success, minority groups may keep their 'ethno-linguistic' and cultural heritage (Li, 2007).

- Multilingualism and Language Policy

Another way in which sociolinguists can analyze the effects of linguistic diversity on social unity, is by looking at the effects of multilingualism at the language policy-making level, with particular regard to the conflict between different linguistic groups within a multilingual community. Here, we would discuss one problem of ethnic diversity in multilingual societies in terms of ethnic nationalism which, according to Wardhaugh (1987: 26), is "the efforts of

minority groups within nation states to gain political independence”. Yet, it is worth stating here¹⁴, that language policies are wider than this, as they are normally associated with nationalist ideologies and linguistically homogeneous societies (Schmid, 2001: 164). That is to say, the linguistic consequences of this are manifested in establishing the dominant ethnic group’s native language as the national language of a country (Spolsky, 2004).

Hence, since differentiating according to language is ‘unavoidable in multilingual societies’ (Cummins, 2000: 186), many countries around the world suffer from the problem of ethnic diversity as language sometimes “serves to include the group members and to exclude those who are not” (Hoffman, 1991: 238). Obviously, therefore, language is one of the most powerful tools that play a role in separatist movements. So, what role, one might ask, does language contact play in creating or even increasing the ethnic minority group’s sense of separateness from the multilingual state?

According to Blackledge and Creese (2010), language gives the minority group the “ammunition in its fight for independence or at least some form of autonomy” (p. 202). An example that illustrates this would come from Catalans who gained independence on the basis of their language *Catalan*. Besides, researchers (e.g. Hoffman, 1991; Robertson, 2001) argue that the link between language and nationalism, particularly in Europe, comes from the decline of Latin as a ‘pan-European’ language after the Reformation¹⁵. Moreover, while other factors such as economic status effects an ethnic group’s sense of identity and how it relates to other groups in a multilingual society; language difference may lead to nationalism in two ways. By this, Fishman (1972, 2001, 2003) proposes the term ‘contrastive self-identification’ through which nationalism is reached in two ways. Firstly, that multilingualism connects minority language speakers to each other; secondly and more importantly, that it sets the group apart from others and thus gives them a sense of their past. By and large, though, whether the ‘contrastive self-identification’ produced by language differences leads to separatism and/or ethno-nationalism, it would,

¹⁴ Before I carry on with my discussion.

¹⁵ This refers to the English Reformation (i.e. a series of events in 16th-century England).

however, depend on the language policy undertaken by the nation where multilingual communities live.

Hence, there are four approaches to language planning and policy, as identified by Cobarrubius (1983), cited in Ricento (2006: 49),: linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism, vernacularization, and internationalism. Yet, Juan Cobarrubius note that many countries have often adopted the policy of 'linguistic assimilation', under which minority language groups are expected to speak the majority language, because of the argument¹⁶ that this would create a sense of national unity and hence protects the nation's identity.

Looking at the relationship between Britain and Wales in the nineteenth century, Hoffmann (1991: 200) argues that the "systematic suppression of Welsh in Wales led not only to a decline of the language, but also to a weakening of national sentiments." She concludes that languages play a vital role in constructing groups' sense of identity and separatism. Hence, if the suppression of the Welsh language in the nineteenth century achieved the British Government's aim of stopping the Welsh nationalism (Schmid, 2001), the reappearance of nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s that had eventually led to the creation of a Welsh government back in 1999, was, arguably, then driven by other socio-economic factors. Yet, the state of the Welsh language remained a minor issue: a situation that supports Wardhaugh's (1987: 27) argument as he claims that "in some cases, language is not as a strong factor as it might be in the struggle for independence or at least some form of [societal] autonomy".

Furthermore, assimilative policies towards minority languages tend not only to work, but also increase the sense of belonging to a minority language group within its members. In her interesting study, Macias (2001) has shown that Mexican-Americans who have learnt English extensively and achieved economic and social success in America, tend to choose to code-switch between English, Spanish and Mexican-American, in order to show their sense of belonging to the Mexican-American community, as an act of resistance to English-speaking cultural values.

¹⁶ Although might not necessarily be a valid argument.

Accordingly, the above discussion suggests that assimilative language policies do not ‘always’ lead to language groups feeling a sense of being connected to each other, but instead “people often experience a sense of depersonalisation, sometimes accompanied by a feeling of uprootedness, together with a very doubtful security” (Trudgill, 1992: 84). Hence, this would rather increase the social conflict that was initially supposed to be reduced. This has prompted, for example, Spain to gradually turn away from its ineffective assimilative policies towards Basque, changing from seeking to deny Basque’s sense of difference from Spain during Franco’s reign, to offering ‘regional support’ in the 1990s (cf. Cenoz & Valencia, 1994: 216).

A different situation elsewhere, is the Moroccan Government's recent decision by which, although it has long been denied particularly with the strong presence of Arabic and French as the two official languages in the country (Bentahila, 1983), Tamazight¹⁷ has been officially recognized. As a result of this dramatic change, Tamazight is now taught as an optional course at primary schools and is widely used in the media¹⁸ (Ennaji, 2005; Jamaï, 2008). In sum, hence, and despite some current language policies, we would assume that with ‘constant’ demands for their linguistic rights, minority groups may (if not can) have an impact on language policy and planning in the nations they live in.

- Multilingualism and Multiculturalism

“A common sense view of culture [that is] widely held on the shopfloor assumes that everyone belongs to one culture: which explains differences and problems” (Roberts, 2007: 409).

Hence, if the language policy of linguistic assimilation creates, to a large degree, the problems that are associated with ethno-nationalism; multilingualism might then be seen to provide a better way of promoting national cohesion. For instance, a number of states that are linguistically

¹⁷ This is the native language of a significantly large population (approximated to be 20 millions) of the indigenous living in North Africa across the Atlas Mountains and Sahara, called ‘Berbers’ (please see (Bentahila, 1983; Saib, 2001)).

¹⁸ A number of Moroccan TV channels are totally broadcasting in Tamazight.

pluralistic in nature, do now officially recognise three or more different languages, e.g. Switzerland and South Africa¹⁹ amongst others that officially follow a pluralist agenda. Cautiously, however, this does not necessarily mean that the principles of multiculturalism in those states would become widely accepted among the majority language group.

For instance, throughout the 1970s and 1980s Australia, where more than one million people speak a minority language on a day-to-day basis, tried to encourage multiculturalism. This has followed Galbally's (1979) report which proposes "an integrated package of measures for introduction over a period of three years, to enable the Commonwealth government to take further steps to encourage multiculturalism" (Wardburgh, 1987: 256). Accordingly, the Australian Government created a series of pluralistic and 'multiculturalist' measures: for example, making sure that all officials dealing with immigration cases are bilingual, and setting up the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs in 1979 (*ibid*: 257). Wardburgh reports, however, that since the setting up such policies, 'very little progress' has been made in terms of public attitude to multiculturalism, citing that 73% of Australians believe that not only migration has had a negative impact on their country, but even that English language and Anglo-Saxon culture are 'threatened'.

Hence, the social tensions that pluralist policies, and so the pressures of keeping a pluralistic society united, Edwards (2004: 107) writes, can cause "political coercion and economic interdependence". Therefore, the success of such policies, we argue, depends on the way in which they are implemented, not just how they have been formulated (though this remains crucial).

As argued by Spolsky (2004: 211-212), multiculturalism can be interpreted in two different ways: as allowing groups to become isolated from one another, or, as "something very North American: voluntary marginal differentiation among people who are equal participants in the society". However, while both "radical assimilative" and "pluralist" policies can cause social fragmentation and often lead to linguistic separatism; a modified (and more importantly,

¹⁹ Switzerland has 4 national languages (German, French, Italian and Romansh), while South Africa has 11 official languages (Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Swazi, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu) (Edwards, 2004).

balanced) versions of the two policies, such as “participant pluralism” seems more successful. According to such ‘participant or liberal pluralism’, some ethnic content might be lost or altered, allowing language groups to interact and hence would lead to a ‘melting pot’ situation where all language groups interact as equals, rather than the minority language group assimilating into the majority group (Edwards, 1995:107). For the most part, however, we would agree with Spolsky (2004: 215), who justifiably argued that pursuing a more liberal pluralism policy does raise the ethical question of respecting the rights of the individual, and of allowing the group identity to evolve over time.

- **Multilingualism and Diglossia**

Although widely used in bilingualism and bilingual research (Hoffman, 1991), we would come from a different angle and approach the notion of diglossia from a multilingual perspective and discuss its potential effect with regard to societal multilingualism.

As originally expressed by Ferguson²⁰ (1959), ‘Diglossia’ refers to the distinction between two forms of a particular, separating the ‘outer’ High form (H), e.g. Classical Arabic; and the ‘inner’ Low form (L), e.g. Egyptian Arabic). Yet, although still following Ferguson's (1959-1996) work, Myers-Scotton (2006) amongst other researchers, have redefined the role of diglossic language use to reflect “identity, power and transaction” (Romaine 1995: 166) where function, content or rhetoric roles explain the predominant uses of each of the diglossic languages (*ibid*). Therefore, it has since been held among many sociolinguists (e.g. Cummins, 2000; Ennaji, 2005) that the minority language (low form) is reserved for informal conversations, whereas the majority language (high form) is strictly used in formal, institutional and prestigious contexts.

Mostly using Ferguson's diglossia labels, a considerable amount of sociolinguistic research (e.g. Hoffmann, 1991; Fishman, 2001; Edwards, 2004; Gal, 2007) has shown that an expected consequence of multilingual language use would be, at the very least, the unequal valuing (and perhaps, use) of languages spoken by multilingual communities. To further illustrate this, we

²⁰ Ferguson is probably the most notable and influential figure with respect to describing and defining the concept of diglossia. However, Huebner (1996) cited in Jamaï (2008: 21), claims that Ferguson did not invent the term ‘Diglossia’; he borrowed it from the French Arabist W. Marcias.

would refer to the Moroccan diglossic situation, which is not definitely the exclusive situation for this phenomenon. Bentahila (1983: 4-5) points out that Moroccan Arabic (H) is not socially valued in the same way as French (L). In sum, then, this implies that, unlike other linguistic situations (e.g. code-switching), when alternating between two languages/varieties, we are in reality socio-cultural functions rather than just switching codes according, perhaps, to the context we are in. Therefore, it can be claimed that unlike other sociolinguistic aspects (e.g. language attitudes), diglossia seems to be more of a social phenomenon, rather than individual one.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that multilingualism has been seen as a problem, especially by unifiers and educators, through manifesting its effects in a number of areas. Yet, we have argued that the problems that exist in multilingual societies in areas like education, employment and multiculturalism, are created by the language policies adopted by governments concerned. This is in line with Schiffman (1996: 6) who states:

Language is almost never the causal factor, never the factor that gives rise to, brings about, and causes things to happen, but rather language mirrors social conditions, mirrors man's relationship to man.

Therefore, the social conditions that will best lead to successful relations within a multilingual community, we have argued, are created by recognising the value of multilingualism and multiculturalism rather than seeing them as problems: allowing for “dynamic interplay between minority and mainstream” (Edwards, 1985: 105). Interestingly, by and large, carrying out further sociolinguistic research in the area under investigation (i.e. multilingualism) can be quite ‘enjoyable’ in the sense that “sociolinguistic research within minority communities is a form of social relationship” (Garner *et al*, 2006: 61).

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