



International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching

ISSN: 2198 - 4999

April 2016, Volume 4, Issue 1, p. 171-179

"ALL IN ALL, I AM BILINGUAL" A STUDY OF BILINGUALISM

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to investigate whether EFL instructors in a university preparatory school consider themselves bilingual, or not; and the reasons for the EFL instructors to consider themselves bilingual or not. For the purpose of the study, a qualitative research was carried out. Thirty EFL instructors participated in this study. The data were collected via an open-ended questionnaire. Analyzing the results indicated that most of the participants considered themselves bilingual. The results of the study emphasized the importance of awareness of being bilingual in order to empower EFL instructors, encourage them to use more L2 in the classroom, and raise their self-esteem as non-native speakers of English. The findings help instructors to make them less concerned about the grammar and focus more on communication, and explain their students that they would be bilingual too. This study might be pedagogical help and significance to teachers interested in bilingualism in EFL context.

Key Words: Bilingualism, bilingual, EFL teachers.

Introduction

Turkey is a multilingual country where several languages co-exist. Turkish is official language and the dominant language of culture and literature. However, other languages of ethnic minority groups include Kurdish, Arabic, Zazaki, Tatar and Laz, all spoken in different regions of Turkey. Beside these various languages, people face with English as a foreign language at both state and private schools in Turkey. Therefore, the issue of bilingualism becomes a trendy phenomenon in Turkey.

It is crucial to demonstrate the importance of awareness of being bilingual in order to empower EFL instructors, encouraging them to use more L2 in the classroom, and raising their self-esteem as non native speakers of English. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate whether EFL instructors at a university preparatory school consider themselves bilingual, or not; and the reasons for the EFL instructors to consider themselves bilingual or not. The significance of this study is to extend the research on bilingualism and to consider its

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impact in the Turkish context. The findings may help instructors to make them less concerned about the grammar and focus more on communication, and explain their students that they would be bilingual too.

The study aimed to address the following research questions:

Q.1: Do EFL instructors at KSU preparatory school consider themselves bilingual?

Q.2: What are the reasons for EFL instructors to consider themselves bilingual or not?

Literature Review

The recent studies have investigated bilingualism psychological correlates including verbal abilities in low and highly proficient bilinguals (Andreou & Karapetsas, 2004), cognitive control in different age groups (Bialystok, Craik, Klein, & Viswanathan, 2004), and contrasting quality of bilinguals and monolinguals' lives (Thumboo, Cheung, Machin, et. al., 2005).

The benefits of bilingualism have been examined. For instance, Bialystok (2011) stated that bilingual individuals consistently outperform their monolingual counterparts on tasks involving executive control. Her paper reviews a number of the evidence for this conclusion and relates the findings to the effect of bilingualism on cognitive organization and to conceptual issues in the structure of executive control. Evidence for the protective effect of bilingualism against Alzheimer's disease is presented with some speculation about the reason for that protection.

The issue of bilingualism has also been searched in terms of gender. When it is clear that in many cases minority and immigrant women are demoralized, it seems easy to conclude that men as a group will always be more bilingual in language contact situations. In contexts where gender relations are hierarchical, the more privileged group, typically men, may appropriate the language practices of value, such as becoming bilingual (Harvey, 1994; Holmes, 1993). When the gender relations are equal, then it is possible to say that valued language practices may be taken up by both of them (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1994).

It is also possible that language practices may have a different value for different language groups; this difference may also result in gendered bilingualism, whereby one group chooses to shift to the second language and the other to remain more or less monolingual (Herbert, 1992; McDonald, 1994). Accordingly, the key to understanding and explaining gendered patterns in differential bilingualism lies, above all, in the meanings assigned to particular linguistic practices, changing from generation to generation.

In another study, Verhoeven and Vermeer (2002) explored personality characteristics and communicative competence with 144 monolingual and 46 bilingual children in the Netherlands by using a new scale based on the NEO Personality model.

All in all, multifarious aspects of bilingualism have been studied. However, no published data have been identified concerning the personal definitions of bilingualism, as the first and fundamental step before studying on the other aspects of bilingualism.

At first sight, the definition of bilingualism seems to be non-problematical. In Webster's dictionary (1961), bilingual is explained as 'having or using two languages especially as spoken with the fluency characteristic of a native speaker; a person using two languages especially habitually and with control like that of a native speaker' and bilingualism as 'the constant oral use of two languages'. In Hamers and Blanc's (2000) book "Bilinguality and Bilingualism", the definition and the process of bilingualism is stated:

Many people view being bilingual is equal to being able to speak two languages perfectly which is similar to the approach of Bloomfield (1935, p.56), who defines bilingualism as 'the native-like control of two languages'. Contrary to this definition, which includes 'perfect bilinguals' Macnamara (1967a) asserts that a bilingual is a person who has "a minimal competence in only one of the four language skills, listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing, in a language other than his mother tongue. (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, p.6.)

Grosjean (1989) points that a bilingual 'is not two monolinguals in one person', however some bilinguals use a 'monolingual mode' (Grosjean, 2001). A bilingual person is more than two persons. However, people generally hesitate to accept themselves bilingual. For this case, Grosjean (2013) exemplified it as Noam Chomsky said: "I'm about as monolingual as you come, but nevertheless I have a variety of different languages at my command, different styles, different ways of talking, which do involve different parameter settings." Most of people describe bilingualism as 'to speak two languages fluently and acquire both of them simultaneously'. Thus, they may restrict their understanding of bilingualism. To thwart it and reshape the meaning of bilingualism, there is a need to learn the psychological dimensions of bilinguality as related to following ones:

- 1) Relative competence;
- 2) Cognitive organization;
- 3) Age of acquisition;
- 4) Exogeneity;
- 5) Social cultural status; and
- 6) Cultural identity. (detailed in Appendix B).

Kalaycı (2012) takes the attention to the recent studies about bilingualism because she maintains that studies about bilingualism are few and somehow outdated, and they usually focus on different perspectives of bilingualism. There are not so available current studies about the bilingual EFL teachers and benefits of being bilingual teacher, so it may be concluded that there is a need for future studies to be aware of what the bilingualism means and what reasons people have while describing bilingualism to be able to give the required importance to this issue, to encourage EFL instructors to use more L2 in the classroom, and

raise their self-esteem as non native speakers of English. The findings of the study may put a brick on the studies of bilingualism. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate whether EFL instructors in a university preparatory school consider themselves bilingual, or not; and the reasons for the EFL instructors to consider themselves bilingual or not.

Methodology

Procedure

The study employed qualitative research methods by using questionnaire. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p. 2). The results of the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Participants

A sample of 32 instructors participated in the study. The participants are 21 male and 11 female EFL teachers. Their ages range from 26 to 52. Their years of experiences are between 4 and 30 years. 5 of them had Bachelor Degree, 17 of them got their M.A degree and 3 of them graduated from PhD programs. 7 of them have been still attending their PhD programs. 8 EFL teachers haven't been abroad, but 24 of them went abroad at least one time.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Participant Teachers

Participants/Gender	Age	Experience (years)	International Experience
21 Male - 11 Female	26-52	4-30	24 of them ☑

Instruments

EFL teachers were given a short background information questionnaire consisted of 10 questions including two open-ended questions about bilingualism to address the responses to research questions.

Results

All teachers expressed themselves in English. 1st Research Question: Do EFL instructors in KSU preparatory school consider themselves bilingual?

8 ELT teachers expressed that they did not consider themselves bilingual. 6 of them are female and 2 of them are male teachers. None of them have been abroad yet. 5 of them have B.A degree, and 3 of them have recently graduated from M.A program in a different field instead of ELT, e.g. sociology.

24 ELT teachers replied this question as 'yes'. 5 of them are female, and 19 of them are male teachers. All of them have been abroad at least one time in their life. There are some teachers among them who noted that they go abroad every year for conferences in the field. 14 of them have M.A degree, 3 of them graduated from PhD programs in foreign languages, and 7 of them are still PhD students.

Table 2. Results of the first research question

Participants	Do you consider yourself bilingual?
8 ELT Teachers (6 female, 2 male	No
24 ELT Teachers (5 female, 19 male)	Yes

2nd Research Question: What are the reasons for EFL instructors to consider themselves bilingual or not?

24 ELT teachers considered themselves bilingual and most of them explained less or more why they thought so. One of them, a male ELT teacher (46) stated:

I think I am bilingual. I have grammatical intuition, vocabulary knowledge, pragmatics etc. of a native Turkish speaker. However, in some areas of English, e.g. terminology of ELT, my English might even more advanced than my Turkish. If you accept bilingualism as the ability to communicate successfully in topics/ situations beyond very basic/ familiar domains, then I am bilingual.

In response to second research question, another male ELT teacher (30) expressed that he found himself bilingual and tried to support this claim, as followed:

To some my colleagues, I would not be considered 'bilingual,' as I can never master in the L2 as much as I can do in my L1. However, I would of course be considered bilingual since we are all teachers of English and proficient enough in mastering all the language skills, but lacking of awareness of the linguistic features of language when attempting access it though there is no problem in applying it to a new context or for conveying it verbally to someone else. As I learned English later my L1, there will always be development in my interlanguage competence that I can take it further by finding more and more opportunities of performing L2. All in all, I am bilingual.

As above, there seems to be some similarities in the answers of the second research question among the teachers who have similar high education level. They tend to expand their thought by giving methodological knowledge of the area. Therefore, another male ELT teacher (38) responded to this question as followed:

Although there are many definitions of bilingualism types, I don't think everyone learning a foreign language at school should be labeled as a compound bilingual. Not all English teachers are simultaneous bilinguals, right?

A female ELT teacher (27) also emphasized her feeling about being bilingual by giving examples from her own daily life as:

I have to talk to foreign people, students or colleagues at my work and somewhere outside, so I use my English and Turkish every day. As a result of this busy schedule, I sometimes alternate the words Turkish and English, which shows the code switching.

Almost all participants who say 'yes' claimed that if someone can communicate in both Turkish and English and have four skills of these languages, it means he/she is bilingual. They maintained that bilingual people can speak fluently and it is also enough to have literacy in that language.

8 ELT teachers did not consider themselves bilingual and most of them explained their thought by explaining their education experiences. One of them, a female ELT teacher (27) stated:

I do not consider myself as a bilingual person because I have learnt English after I learnt Turkish as my mother tongue. I wasn't brought up learning two languages from birth.

Another female ELT teacher (27) gave response to this question as followed:

I haven't lived enough in a country where the target language is spoken.

Only two male teachers (30, 31) answered this question as 'no' and they similarly stated that they feel more comfortable when they speak in Turkish and the main reason not to consider themselves as bilingual is that they learned English after their primary school education.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate whether EFL instructors at a university preparatory school consider themselves bilingual, or not; and the reasons for the EFL instructors to consider themselves bilingual or not. In order to find out this aim, these two research questions inquired:

Q.1: Do EFL instructors in KSU preparatory school consider themselves bilingual?

Q.2: What are the reasons for EFL instructors to consider themselves bilingual or not?

The responses of the study confirm that most of the EFL teachers considered themselves bilingual. For example, 66 % of them responded as yes to the first research question and explained why they found themselves as bilinguals.

The results revealed that the higher education level of the participants have, the more acceptance of being bilingual number raise. ELT teachers, who graduated from M.A or PhD program related to the field, immediately expressed themselves as bilinguals because of their mastering in the area.

As in stated in literature review, the number of teachers who said they didn't consider bilingual is higher among female teachers than male ones because 55% of the female ELT

teachers hesitated to express themselves as bilingual while just 9% of the male ELT teachers did not accept themselves as bilingual.

Taking age aspects into consideration, young ELT teachers eschewed to consider themselves as bilingual, it may be derived from little job experience, or it is because of lacking real life experience in foreign countries.

As a note on limitations of this study, the subjects in the survey were restricted to 32 EFL teachers working in the School of Foreign Languages at Kahramanmaraş Sutcu Imam University, Turkey. Therefore, the further studies should be conducted with larger number of teachers in different contexts.

This study has also another limitation while attempting to seek answer to the research questions. It doesn't have triangulation to collect much more fruitful data. Interviews with teachers to sustain their responds and thoughts may be more beneficial.

The researcher recommends that further studies might be conducted with semi- structured interviews. Future research could address different samples obtained from different schools of Foreign Languages at universities. This could provide a wider understanding of bilingualism.

The dimension of bilingualism is itself a complex area of study (Baker, 2001) that deserves more careful definition among its all dimensions. Furthermore, EFL teachers as related to the field are crucial elements while studying bilingualism. The EFL teachers as bilingual have the onus of being a good model while teaching second language. This study may help EFL teachers to improve their understanding of bilingualism and encourage them to use L2 more effectively and consciously in their teaching environments, and raise their self-esteem as non native speakers of English. The study may also help instructors to make them less concerned about the grammar and focus more on communication, and explain their students that they would be bilingual too.

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