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BILINGUALISM IN THE MODERN WORLD: HISTORY OF THE ISSUE AND CURRENT TRENDS

Abstract

The article considers bilingualism as a multidimensional social and cognitive phenomenon that is formed in the historical and cultural environment in modern states. The authors analyse the evolution of bilingualism, stressing the change of motivations in the conditions of globalisation. Special attention is paid to cognitive, sociocultural and neuropsychological aspects of bilingualism, its impact on memory, attention and executive functions.

The paper reviews both classical studies (G. Paul, E. Peal, W.E. Lambert) and modern empirical evidence (I.N. Katanova, E. Bialystok, A. Costa, F. Grojean, K. Baker and others) that confirm the positive impact of bilingual experiences on cognitive development and intercultural adaptation. These studies confirm that bilingualism improves executive function and attention, especially in children, and emphasise the importance of educational initiatives to support bilingualism. The paper summarises the significance of bilingualism in the modern world, its impact on cognitive abilities and social identity, and the prospects for further research in this area. The necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of bilingualism, taking into account both linguistic and social-psychological factors, is substantiated.

Keywords:

bilingualism, cognitive functions, sociocultural factors, language contact, identity, bilingual education, historical context.

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Introduction

The historical and cultural situation of contact between two or more languages within the framework of the socio-communicative systems of a state formed as a result of the collapse of colonial systems gives rise to the phenomenon of bilingualism. On the one hand, bilingualism serves as a tool for activity and a means of overcoming communicative difficulties in a multicultural and multiethnic environment. On the other hand, it generates a range of socio-cultural problems related to overcoming the language barrier, as well as the selection of communicative strategies, tactics, and techniques. The sociological aspect of bilingualism provides an opportunity

for analyzing bilingual communicative difficulties determined by the socio-cultural conditions of the formation and functioning of socio-communicative systems.

Bilingualism as a social phenomenon existed as far back as antiquity. In his grammar, Ludolf noted that "at the end of the 17th century in Moscow, the Russian language was used in everyday communication, while books were written in Church Slavonic, which led to difficulties for ordinary people in understanding literary speech" [quoted in Kostomarov, 1975]. This is an example of functional bilingualism. It is well known that interstate wars often led to conquerors attempting to displace local languages and cultures by imposing their own. As a result, bilingualism was formed, where the language of the metropolis dominated, while local languages and cultures were subjected to oppression and assimilation. This one-sided linguistic situation had a negative impact on the development of local cultures, limiting their expressive potential and the ability to pass traditions and knowledge on to future generations.

In the modern world, bilingualism takes on new characteristics that differ from the historical understanding of this phenomenon. Unlike the past, when bilingualism was often the result of geographical proximity or political dominance, today it is increasingly associated with individual choice and a person's interest in learning a foreign language. Furthermore, the spread of global communications, international education, access to digital resources, and mass culture stimulate interest in learning foreign languages. Young people are increasingly choosing bilingualism as a way to broaden their horizons. In this context, knowledge of a second language is no longer a forced measure but has become an important component of personal and professional development.

Modern bilinguals actively use both languages in everyday life, adapting them to specific communicative situations. This flexibility and pragmatism in language use reflect globalization and the increased mobility of populations, leading to the necessity of effective communication in different cultural and linguistic environments. The concept of bilingualism in contemporary linguistics is the subject of active debates and ambiguous interpretations. The lack of a universally accepted definition is due to the complexity and multifaceted nature of this phenomenon.

Researchers propose different approaches to defining bilingualism, considering factors such as proficiency in both languages, the frequency of their use, the age at which language acquisition occurs, and the social contexts in which the languages are used.

This conceptual uncertainty reflects the dynamic nature of bilingualism and the recognition of its individual and contextual aspects. Intensive study of bilingualism began in the late 19th century, marking a turning point in the understanding of this phenomenon.

Materials and Research Methods

Bilingualism is not only the ability to speak two languages but also a complex cognitive phenomenon closely connected to memory, attention, perception, and thinking. The application of the historical-linguistic approach, which emerged in science at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, demonstrated that language contact and bilingualism play a key role in the development and differentiation of languages.

In his works, Herman Paul examines language changes, including bilingualism, from the perspective of historical-comparative analysis. His approach is based on the philosophy of language and describes bilingualism as a phenomenon arising from language contact, which influences the evolution of languages. As a result, Paul laid the foundations for understanding bilingualism as a factor in historical language change. Furthermore, H. Paul introduced the concept of the psychological aspects of language, such as perception, memory, and habit, which are essential for language changes. According to Paul, language is part of culture, and the history of language is inseparable from the history of culture: "The most important feature of culture should be the participation of mental factors" [Paul, 1960: 29]. According to the scholar, attention to psychological processes in the study of language and language ability is a characteristic feature of the modern cognitive approach to the study of language.

These principles also formed the foundation for modern laboratory research on bilingualism, which today is based on controlled experiments that allow for the identification of cause-and-effect relationships between language practice and cognitive functions.

One of the first empirical studies to disprove the stereotype of the negative impact of bilingualism was the classic study *The relation of bilingualism to intelligence* [Peal E., Lambert, 1962]. This study compared bilingual and monolingual children across a wide range of cognitive tests. The children were carefully selected by age, education level, socio-economic, and cultural characteristics to exclude external distorting factors.

As a result of the study, bilingual children demonstrated higher scores on several non-verbal tests, as well as greater cognitive flexibility, the ability to switch between tasks, and abstract thinking. This research marked a turning point, proving that bilingualism is not a hindrance but a factor of cognitive enrichment. It laid the foundation for further cognitive-psychological research.

Results and Discussion

The term "bilingualism" was first introduced into scientific discourse in 1939 by researcher U. Leopold, who focused primarily on the communicative aspect of this phenomenon—that is, the ability to use two languages in various spheres of everyday life [Leopold, 1939]. The scholar considered bilingualism as a socially conditioned phenomenon linked to the practical necessity of communication in two languages, rather than simply as knowledge of two linguistic systems.

Interest in bilingualism began to form in the context of multinational states, such as the USA and Canada, where mass immigration presented the society and government with the task of adapting new citizens to the linguistic and cultural environment of the host country. This issue was particularly pressing in the educational system, which faced the dilemma of how to teach children for whom the language of instruction was not their native language.

A significant step toward the institutionalization of the issue was made in 1929, when the International Bureau of Education organized the first conference on bilingual education in Luxembourg [Kovaleva, 2007]. This event became an important milestone as it marked the beginning of public discussion of bilingualism as an educational and cultural problem. However, at this stage, the scientific and pedagogical community was largely skeptical: many participants expressed concerns that bilingual education could negatively affect a child's psychological development, cause "personality splitting," lead to a loss of cultural identity, and provoke other undesirable consequences.

At that time, the field of bilingualism was still in its infancy: terminology was unstable, and scientific works on the subject were virtually nonexistent. Many terms were borrowed from other disciplines; for example, the expression "language crossing" came from the biological lexicon. However, the situation began to change after World War II, when interest in bilingualism was revived on a new scientific foundation.

By the 1950s, linguists and psychologists began to actively engage in research on child bilingualism, marking an important step in the development of an interdisciplinary approach to studying this phenomenon. Significant contributions to the development of the scientific foundation were made by researchers such as U. Weinreich and E. Haugen, who focused their efforts on systematizing the conceptual apparatus and terminology of bilingualism [Haugen, 1953; Weinreich, 1953].

By the 1990s, the number of publications on various aspects of bilingualism exceeded 20,000, reflecting a significant growth in academic interest on the topic. Research began to expand beyond the confines of pedagogy or psychology, encompassing fields such as sociolinguistics, ethnocultural studies, psycholinguistics, and others. In Kazakhstan, a whole research direction emerged focusing on bilingual language situations, with scholarly works by A.E. Karlinsky, M.M. Kopylenko, B.I. Rakisheva, E.D. Suleimenova, N.Zh. Shaimerdenova, B.Kh. Khasanov, and others. As a result, bilingualism came to be viewed not only as a linguistic or pedagogical issue but as a multifaceted cultural, cognitive, and social phenomenon.

Throughout the history of the development of this field, the focus on the communicative function of bilingualism remained central, as practical proficiency in two languages in various contexts (household, educational, professional) remained the key criterion in defining and researching the phenomenon.

In recent decades, bilingualism has become a subject of active study in the field of cognitive psychology. Moving away from the previous view of bilingualism as a potential "obstacle" to cognitive development, modern research now focuses on the potential advantages of bilingual experience.

For instance, experimental psychology ideas have been actively applied to the study of the neural basis of bilingualism. In her work, I. Katanova [Katanova, 1996] describes an experimental approach based on comparing cognitive functions in bilinguals and monolinguals. The central focus is on non-verbal memory as one of the key cognitive systems, which is not directly dependent on linguistic material. Psychological tests were used in the study to assess memory volume and stability, the ability to switch attention, and analytical thinking. As a result, bilinguals were found to often employ more flexible memory strategies, especially in multitasking situations.

Ellen Bialystok's study [Bialystok, 1999] explored bilingual children's attention control, particularly under cognitive load. In her experiment, Bialystok distinguished between analysis (representation) and control (selective attention) as components of language processing. The researcher demonstrated that control, one of these components, develops earlier in bilingual children than in their monolingual peers. Bilingual children performed better on tasks requiring suppression of automatic responses (e.g., the Stroop test [Leshchenko, 2022]), thanks to the more active use of executive functions in the brain.

In another study, Bialystok investigated the behavior of elderly bilinguals and monolinguals suffering from dementia [Bialystok, 2007]. The research showed that bilingualism can delay the clinical symptoms of dementia by 4–5 years, due to constant cognitive exercise related to language switching. Thus, Bialystok's work demonstrated that bilingualism affects not only children's development but also brain aging, preserving neuroplasticity.

The social and psychological aspects of bilingualism continue to be studied by contemporary scholars such as Colin Baker and Grosjean François. Their research explores topics such as language identity, language policy, and education in multilingual societies.

Colin Baker's book [Baker, 2001] is a foundational work in the field of bilingualism and bilingual education. In it, the author distinguishes between individual and social bilingualism, discusses language proficiency levels (such as balanced bilingualism), and critiques terms like "semi-lingualism." While discussing the measurement of bilingualism, the scholar analyzes methods for assessing language skills, including censuses, language tests, and self-assessment, emphasizing the importance of context and the limitations of traditional approaches. The work also addresses the development of bilingualism in children, including simultaneous and sequential language acquisition, as well as the role of family and society. Baker's research demonstrated that bilingualism has a positive impact on executive functions, attention, and memory, particularly in childhood.

These cognitive advantages correlate with the frequency of language use, with bilinguals who regularly use both languages showing more pronounced improvements. Baker's studies highlight the importance of education and language policy in supporting the development and maintenance of bilingualism, thereby revealing its beneficial impact on cognitive abilities.

In turn, François Grosjean's research uncovered that bilingualism not only affects linguistic abilities but also shapes identity and interpersonal relationships [Grosjean, 1982, 2012]. According to the scholar, people who speak two languages have more flexible views on language and culture, which fosters intercultural communication and understanding. Additionally, Grosjean emphasizes the influence of social and cultural factors on the perception of bilingualism, stressing the necessity of considering context when studying it.

Bilinguals often develop a multilingual identity, feeling they belong to multiple linguistic and cultural groups. They can switch between different languages and cultures depending on the

context, which allows them to adapt to various social situations. Furthermore, bilingualism can positively affect cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and executive functions. The scholar found that bilinguals possess unique neural mechanisms for processing and producing language, which may enhance cognitive control and flexibility [Grosjean, 1982, 2012].

Albert Costa, along with a team of researchers, approached the study of bilingualism from the perspective of neuropsychology and experimental cognitive science. In his work [Costa et al., 2008], an experiment demonstrated that bilinguals perform better in cognitive tasks that require ignoring distracting stimuli and focusing on relevant information. Costa used the Attention Network Test (ANT), one of the standard tools for assessing attention, in his study.

Thus, an overview of neuroimaging data showed that bilinguals exhibit structural changes in the brain regions responsible for attention and memory management, specifically an increased density of gray matter in the prefrontal cortex. Albert Costa confirmed that bilingualism is not just a skill but a transformative experience that alters the brain on a physiological level.

Conclusion

Bilingualism, as a social phenomenon, has deep historical roots and continues to evolve in the modern world. From ancient times, through the feudal era, and up to the present day, bilingualism has been shaped by various factors, including religious changes, wars, and cultural interactions. It is important to note that in the past, bilingualism was often the result of political domination and assimilation, which negatively affected local cultures and languages.

In contrast, modern bilingualism is increasingly linked to individual choice and interest in learning foreign languages. Bilinguals today actively use both languages in their everyday lives, adapting them to different communicative situations. This reflects globalization and population mobility, making effective communication in multilingual environments essential.

Contemporary studies of bilingualism have gradually expanded beyond purely linguistic approaches and have become interdisciplinary in nature. Especially notable is the active development in the field of cognitive psychology, where bilingualism is considered a factor influencing attention, memory, executive functions, and brain aging. Experimental studies have confirmed the positive impact of bilingualism on cognitive abilities, opening new horizons for understanding this phenomenon. While the concept of bilingualism remains multifaceted and complex, its study continues to evolve, taking into account individual and contextual aspects.

Thus, bilingualism not only enriches the personal experience of individuals but also promotes cultural exchange and mutual understanding in a globalized world. It is important to continue exploring this phenomenon to better understand its impact on cognitive development, social identity, and cultural interactions.

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ҚАЗІРГІ ӘЛЕМДЕГІ БИЛИНГВИЗМ: МӘСЕЛЕНІҢ ТАРИХЫ ЖӘНЕ ҚАЗІРГІ ТЕНДЕНЦИЯЛАР

Аннотация. Мақалада екі тілділік қазіргі мемлекеттердегі тарихи-мәдени ортада қалыптасатын көп қырлы әлеуметтік және когнитивті құбылыс ретінде қарастырылады. Авторлар жаһандану жағдайында мотивацияның өзгеруіне баса назар аудара отырып, билингвизм эволюциясын талдайды. Билингвизмнің когнитивті, әлеуметтік-мәдени және нейropsychологиялық аспектілеріне, оның есте сақтау, зейін және атқарушы функцияларға әсеріне ерекше назар аударылады. Жұмыста классикалық зерттеулер (Paul G., Peal E., Lambert W. E.) және заманауи эмпирикалық мәліметтер (Katanova I. N., E. Bialystok, A. Costa, F. Grojean, K. Baker), екі тілді тәжірибенің когнитивті дамуға және мәдениетаралық бейімделуге оң әсерін растайды. Бұл зерттеулер қос тілділік атқарушы функциялар мен зейінді жақсартуға ықпал ететінін растайды, әсіресе балаларда және екі тілділікті қолдау үшін білім беру бастамаларының маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Жұмыс қазіргі әлемдегі билингвизмнің маңыздылығы, оның когнитивтік қабілеттер мен әлеуметтік сәйкестілікке әсері, сондай-ақ осы саладағы әрі қарайғы зерттеулердің болашағы туралы қорытындылайды. Тілдік және әлеуметтік-психологиялық факторларды ескере отырып, билингвизмді зерттеуге пәнаралық көзқарастың қажеттілігі негізделеді.

Тірек сөздер: билингвизм, танымдық функциялар, әлеуметтік-мәдени факторлар, тілдік байланыс, сәйкестілік, екі тілде білім беру, тарихи контекст.

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БИЛИНГВИЗМ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ МИРЕ: ИСТОРИЯ ВОЗНИКНОВЕНИЯ И СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТРЕНДЫ

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается билингвизм как многоаспектное социальное и когнитивное явление, формирующееся в историко-культурной среде в современных государствах. Авторы анализируют эволюцию двуязычия, подчеркивая смену мотиваций в условиях глобализации. Особое внимание уделено когнитивным, социокультурным и нейропсихологическим аспектам билингвизма, его влиянию на память, внимание и исполнительные функции. В работе рассматриваются как классические исследования (Paul G., Peal E., Lambert W.E.), так и современные эмпирические данные (Katanova I.N., Bialystok E., Costa A., Grojean F., Baker K. и др.), подтверждающие позитивное влияние билингвального опыта на когнитивное развитие и межкультурную адаптацию. Эти исследования подтверждают, что билингвизм способствует улучшению исполнительных функций и внимания, особенно у детей, и подчеркивают важность образовательных инициатив для поддержки двуязычия. В статье подводятся итоги о значении билингвизма в современном мире, его влиянии на когнитивные способности и социальной идентичности, а также о перспективах дальнейших исследований в этой области. Обосновывается необходимость междисциплинарного подхода к изучению билингвизма, учитывающего как языковые, так и социально-психологические факторы.

Ключевые слова: билингвизм, когнитивные функции, социокультурные факторы, языковые контакты, идентичность, двуязычное образование, исторический контекст.

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