BENEFITS OF MULTILINGUALISM IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL GRAMMAR STRATEGIES

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Abstract

In 21th century world in which the borders fade away, multilingualism and meeting multilingual individuals is quite a common phenomenon. This study aims to reveal any difference between multilingual and bilingual learners in constructing grammar strategies while learning English as L2 for bilinguals and L3 for multilinguals. It is hypothesized that multilinguals have superior grammar strategies when compared with bilinguals as they have linguistic knowledge for one more language. In this study, 3 groups of bilinguals (2 coordinate- additive bilingual groups and 1 balanced bilingual group) are compared with a group of multilinguals. Linguistic inventory for all bilingual groups include English and Turkish while it is French, Turkish and English for multilingual group. Current study is a quantitative one that includes a 33 item likert type questionnaire on grammar strategies by Kemp (2007). Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the study was calculated as .814 which indicated a high level of reliability. Data obtained from multilingual and bilingual groups were compared through Mann Whitney U Test and correlations are presented to reveal any difference. In the conclusion part, recommendations are given for instructors of multilingual and bilingual classes.

Keywords: Multilingualism, foreign language learning, grammar strategies

1. Introduction

1.1. Bilingualism and Multilingualism: Definitions and Variations

Today, bilingualism and multilingualism are quite trendy and important terms for language learning. Reasons for bilingualism and multilingualism range from political factors to natural disasters. Also education, culture, economy and religion are some other defining factors of multilingualism. Due to the changes by such factors, meeting individuals having 2 or more languages are quite natural and common today. This study focuses on these 2; bilingual and multilingual learners.

1.1.1 Bilingualism: definitions and varieties

The term 'bilingual' is common yet complex filled with varying uses in the general media, education, and politics (Sia and Dewaele, 2006). Researchers in second language acquisition, language teaching pedagogy, sociolinguistics, or psycholinguistics, may all be applying different definitions to the concept. As being defined differently by various SLA authorities, bilingualism can be defined as the ability to speak 2 languages or the habitual use of two languages colloquially and bilinguals are the individuals who have that ability in general (Fabbro 1999, Ellis 1994). Likewise, Oksaar (1983) defines bilingualism as the ability of a person to use here and now two or more languages as a means of communication in most situations and to switch from one language to the other if necessary. Similarly, Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) allows for more than two languages to be present in the person she defines as bilingual. The extent of this ability is the native like proficiency for some authorities while

some others see practicality enough. Weinrich (1966) indicates a purposefully open ended general definition by stating that bilingualism is the practice of using two languages. On the other hand, Bloomfield (1933) defines it as the native like control of two languages. In addition, according to Haugen (1953) bilingualism is the ability to produce meaningful utterances in two languages while Diebold (1964) underlines that passive knowledge of L2 is enough for being a bilingual.

Having a vast number of varieties, bilingualism is also an umbrella term for many related terms. As a type of bilingualism, coordinate bilingualism refers to a person's learning of two languages in separate environments. A French learning English at school is a good example for this type. As the learning contexts are different, the mental references for items in each language will be different. As a sub type of coordinate bilingualism, sub coordinate bilingualism is the acquisition of L2 with the help of L1. In contrast to these, compound bilingualism is the learning of two languages in the same environment. A French child who acquired English and French at home simultaneously is a good example for this type of bilingualism. As the learning contexts are the same, items in two languages which have same meanings are coded as one image in brain. More variations of bilingualism are listed by Wei (2000):

Table 1. *A variety of Bilinguals*

Type of Bilingual	Definition
Additive Bilingual	An individual whose two languages combine in a complementary and enriching fashion.
Ascendant Bilingual	An individual whose ability to function in a second language is developing due to increased use.
Balanced Bilingual (equilingual) (symmetrical bilingual) (ambilingual)	An individual whose mastery of two languages is roughly equivalent.
Compound Bilingual	An individual whose two languages are learnt at the same time, often in the same context.
Co-ordinate Bilingual	An individual whose two languages are learnt in distinctively separate contexts.
Covert Bilingual	An individual who conceals his or her knowledge of a given language due to an attitudinal disposition.
Diagonal Bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in a non-standard language or a dialect in an unrelated standard language.
Dominant Bilingual	An individual with greater proficiency in one of his or her languages and uses it significantly more than the other language(s).
Dormant Bilingual	An individual who has emigrated to a foreign country for a considerable period of time and has little opportunity to keep the first language actively in use.
Early Bilingual (Ascribed Bilingual)	An individual who has acquired two languages early in childhood
Functional Bilingual	An individual who can operate in two languages with or without full fluency for the task in hand.
Horizontal bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in two distinct languages which have a similar or equal status.
Incipient Bilingual	An individual at the early stages of bilingualism where one language is not fully developed.
Late Bilingual (achieved bilingual)	An individual who has become a bilingual later than childhood.
Maximal Bilingual	An individual with near native control of two or more languages.
Minimal Bilingual	An individual with only a few words and phrases in a second language.
Natural Bilingual (primary bilingual)	An individual who has not undergone any specific training and who is often not in position to translate or interpret with facility between two languages.
Productive Bilingual	An individual who not only understands but also speaks and possibly writes in two or more languages.
Receptive Bilingual (semibilingual) (asymmetrical bilingual) (passive bilingual)	An individual who understands a second language, in either its spoken or written form, or both, but does not necessarily speak or write it.

Recessive Bilingual	An individual who begins to feel some difficulty in either understanding or expressing him or herself with ease, due to lack of use.
Secondary Bilingual	An individual whose second language has been added to a first language via instruction.
Semilingual	An individual with insufficient knowledge of either language.
Simultaneous bilingual	An individual whose two languages are present from the onset of speech.
Subordinate bilingual	An individual who exhibits interference in his or her language usage by reducing the patterns of the second language to those of the first.
Subtractive bilingual	An individual whose second language is acquired at the expense of the aptitudes already acquired in the first language.
Successive bilingual (consecutive bilingual)	An individual whose second language is added at some stage after the first has begun to develop.
Vertical bilingual	An individual who is bilingual in a standard language and a distinct but related language or dialect.

1.1.2. Multilingualism: definitions and varieties

Because of its complex nature and researchers' different background, ideology and purposes, definition for the term multilingualism has been a divergent one. Francheschini (2009) defines it as the capacity of societies, groups, institutions and individuals to operate in more than one language.According to McArthur (1992) multilingualism is the use three of more languages either separately of in various degrees of code mixing. Multilinguals may use a number of languages on account of many different social, cultural, and economic reasons. Different languages are used for different purposes and competency for each one varies. On the other hand, Kemp (2009) avoids giving exact language count by defining multilingualism as using a number of languages on account of many different social, cultural, and economic reasons. According to Common European Framework of Reference (2007) multilingualism refers exclusively to the presence of several languages in a given space, independently of those who use them. Hoffmann (2001) and Barnes (2006) conceptualize multilinguals in 5 categories:

1. Multilingual children who are brought up with two home languages which are different from the one spoken in the wider community;
2. Children who grow up in a bilingual community and whose home language (either that of one or both parents) is different from the community languages;
3. Third language learners, that is, bilinguals who acquire a third language in the school context;
4. Bilinguals who have become multilingual through immigration,
5. Members of multilingual communities.

As the categorization asserts, motivational and attitudinal factors may play a more predictable role in the case of groups 3 and 4, while psychological and personality- related factors carry greater importance in the first two groups.

2. Multilingual Superiority in Language Learning

The cognitive aspect of the number of acquired languages is a powerful determiner of language learning. It is a common saying that the more languages one knows, the easier it becomes to acquire an additional language. That is to say, multilinguals have already had the access to at least 2 linguistic systems with their lexicons, syntax, phonetics and syntax. Many studies on the effect of multilingualism showed that they are superior to monolinguals and bilinguals in language learning depending on three ways:

1. Multilinguals showed greater flexibility in switching strategies

2. They were more apt to modify new strategies and omit useless ones
3. They are more effective in using implicit learning technologies (Cenoz, 2009)

2.1. Cognitive Superiorities

Multilingual mind have surely cognitive superiorities. Especially, schema theory is quite explanatory in understanding multilingual cognition. As a constructivist theory, schema theory strives to explain how knowledge is created and used by learners. According to schema theory, people organize everything they know into schemas or knowledge structures. People have schemas for everything in their lives including people, places, things, language, and skills. (Tracey&Morrow, 2006). It is important that schemas may develop regarding the characteristics of individuals, such as cook's having a larger schema on cooking. So multilinguals are expected to have larger schemas in their repertoires and this expands the horizons of their cognition. Cognitive superiorities can be listed as:

- parcel up and categorize meanings in different ways in new language;
- be more capable of separating meaning from form;
- have a better ear for listening and sharper memories
- be better language learners in institutionalized learning contexts because of more developed language-learning capacities owing to the more complex linguistic knowledge and higher language awareness;
- learn further languages more quickly and efficiently than their hitherto monolingual peers;
- have increased ability to apply more reading strategies effectively due to their greater experience in language learning and reading in two—or more—different languages;
- display generally greater cognitive flexibility, better problem solving and higher-order thinking skills;
- have improved critical thinking abilities;
- have a keener awareness and sharper perception of language.
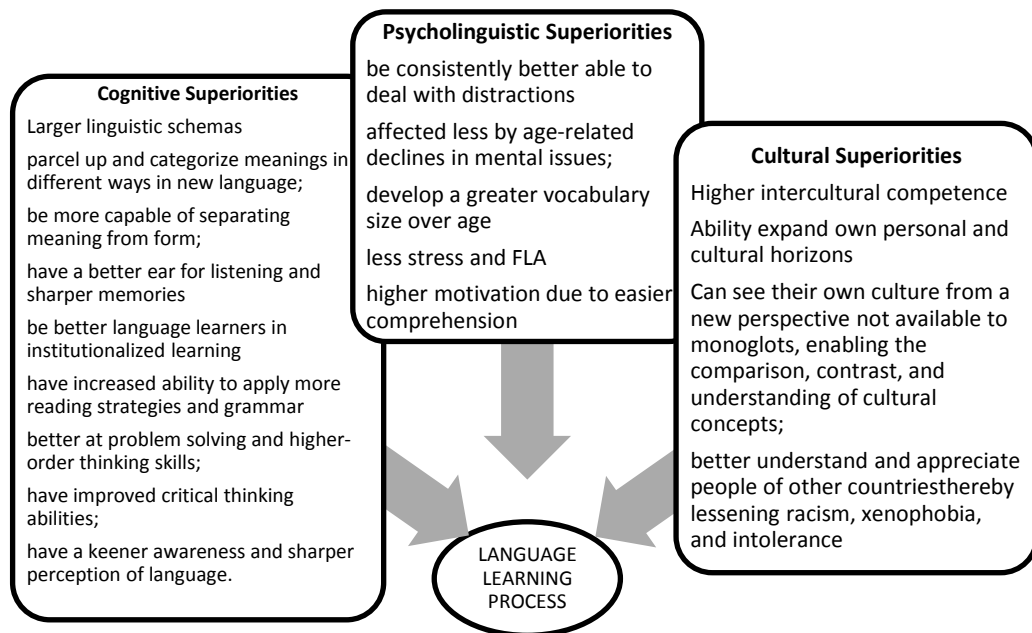
2.2. Psycholinguistic Superiorities
- be consistently better able to deal with distractions, which may help offset age-related declines in mental issues;
- develop a greater vocabulary size over age
- less stress and FLA (Dewaele et al. (2008)

2.3. Cultural Superiorities

Multilinguals are also multicultural individuals who can adapt different cultures more easily. This is closely related with intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is the ability for successful communication with people of other cultures. This ability can be existing already at a young age, or be developed and improved thanks to willpower and competence. (Fantini, 2001). High level of intercultural competence in multilinguals enables multilingual individuals to acquire the target culture easier that bilinguals or monolinguals do.

- develop a markedly better language proficiency in, sensitivity to, and understanding of their mother tongue;
- multilinguals can expand their personal horizons and—being simultaneously insiders and outsiders—see their own culture from a new perspective not available to monoglots, enabling the comparison, contrast, and understanding of cultural concepts;

- better understand and appreciate people of other countries, thereby lessening racism, xenophobia, and intolerance, as the learning of a new language usually brings with it a revelation of a new culture.

Cognitive Superiorities

Larger linguistic schemas

parcel up and categorize meanings in different ways in new language;

be more capable of separating meaning from form;

have a better ear for listening and sharper memories

be better language learners in institutionalized learning

have increased ability to apply more reading strategies and grammar

better at problem solving and higher-order thinking skills;

have improved critical thinking abilities;

have a keener awareness and sharper perception of language.

Psycholinguistic Superiorities

be consistently better able to deal with distractions

affected less by age-related declines in mental issues;

develop a greater vocabulary size over age

less stress and FLA

higher motivation due to easier comprehension

Cultural Superiorities

Higher intercultural competence

Ability expand own personal and cultural horizons

Can see their own culture from a new perspective not available to monoglots, enabling the comparison, contrast, and understanding of cultural concepts;

better understand and appreciate people of other countriesthereby lessening racism, xenophobia, and intolerance

LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

2.4. Previous Research

According to Lambert (1979) multilingualism fosters third language acquisition as students who have added a second language to their linguistic repertoire have been reported to be better language learners..Likewise, Bild and Swain (1989) also claim that literacy in two or more languages has a positive effect on language learning. Similarly, a study by McLaughlin (1990) asserts that multilinguals use more learning strategies throughout the learning process than bilinguals or monolinguals do. Likewise, Thomas (1992) and Missler (1999) both concluded that the number of languages known defines the frequency of learning strategy usage. Ender (2007) found similar results in terms of learning strategies in his study in France. Moreover, in his study with 144 subjects who know 2-12 languages in Scotland, Kemp (2009) concluded that multilingual individuals showed greater success in grammar as they have more experience of different grammatical systems. This experience enabled multilinguals to apply more learning strategies than bilinguals do. Also Nayak, et al. (1990) studied a group of monolingual and multilingual subjects and concluded that multilingual subjects performed better than monolingual subjects in learning the rules for syntax when instructed that such rules existed, as well as in syntax tasks. Multilingual subjects were also more capable of structuring their strategies to the task, and used a wider variety of different strategies. They concluded that multilinguals have superior flexibility in switching strategies.

3. Method

3.1. Research Questions

A. Is there a relationship between number of languages known and grammar learning strategy usage?
B. Is there a relationship between proficiency levels in bilingualism and multilingualism in terms of building grammar strategies?

3.2. Participants

In this study, 99 subjects from ELT and FLT departments participated. Ages of the participants vary between 18- 28. Bilingual participants took English grammar courses in their first year for 2 semesters. On the other hand multilingual subjects took English grammar courses in their 3rd year and are still taking. Grammar courses of both groups can be categorized under pedagogical grammar. Numerical details are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. *Participants*

SUBJECTS	TOTAL N	FEMALES	MALES	LINGUISTIC VARIETY
ELT FRESHMEN (TUR- ENG)	40	33	7	ADDITIVE COORDINATE BILINGUAL
ELT SENIORS (TUR- ENG)	31	26	5	ADDITIVE COORDINATE BILINGUAL
ELT MA (TUR- ENG)	8	5	3	BALANCED BILINGUAL
FLT SOPHOMORES (TUR- FR- ENG)	20	16	4	MULTILINGUAL
TOTAL N	99	80	19	

3.3. Instruments

The 40 item scale designed by Kemp (2007) to measure grammar strategy construction among bilinguals and multilinguals was adapted by the researcher (see Appendix 1). 40th item of the questionnaire was excluded by the researcher as it was not understood clearly by the participants in piloting procedures. Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the current study is found as .814 which means that the study is highly reliable. Participants were asked to choose a number from five point Likert scale for each item as follows:

(1) I never do this   (4) I often do this

(2) I seldom do this   (5) I always do this

(3) I sometimes do this

The scale was translated to Turkish carefully to avoid misleading data as multilingual participants may have problems of comprehension. The scale was given to participants in class times and completed at one sitting.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through SPSS 20. 39 items are divided into 6 categories as was done in the original study. As data is not normally distributed, non-parametric tests have been applied. The categories for analysis are as follows:

  a) Memory for Grammar: Memorization techniques for new grammar
  b) Thinking of Grammar: Importance given to grammar while learning
  c) Analysis of Grammar : Ability to analyze and divide grammatical patterns
  d) Communicating using Grammar: Using grammar in all communicative activities
  e) Organizing Grammar Learning: Error correction
  f) Using Grammar with other people: New grammar in oral communication

4. Results and Discussion

In this part, answers to the research questions are given by referring to statistical data.

4.1. Is there a relationship between number of languages known and grammar strategy building?

It is hypothesized that there is a strong correlation between grammar strategies and number of languages known. As the languages known increase, efficiency in grammar strategies automatically increases. The correlation between these two is shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3. *Correlation between languages known and grammar learning str.*

		GS
	Spearman Rho Correlation Coefficient	,366[**]
languagesknown	Sig. (2-tailed)	**,000**
	N	99

According to Table 3, there is a strong correlation between languages known and usage of grammar strategies in general (Sig. (2-Tailed)< 0.05). So, statistics indicate that there is a positive correlation between number of languages known and frequency of grammar learning strategies. As the number of languages known increases, the frequency of grammar strategies usage increases. It can clearly be stated that multilingual learners use more grammar strategies more frequently than bilinguals do.

There are also meaningful statistical correlations of subcomponents of grammar learning strategies as presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4. *Correlation between languages known and grammar learning str. subcomponents*

	memory	thinkofgrammar	analysis	**communicate**	organising	usingwithothers
Spearman Correlation Coefficient	,122	,417[**]	,245[*]	-,065	,305[**]	,307[**]
Sig. (2-tailed)	**,230**	,000	,015	**,521**	,002	,002
N	99	99	99	99	99	99

Firstly, statistics show that as the number of known languages increase, grammar is practiced more through new combinations and becomes an automatic reflex in production and turns in to some kind of habit (Sig 2<0.05). Secondly, it is obvious that the ability to analyze and comprehend grammatical patterns develop with the increase in the number of languages known (Sig 2.<0.05). Thirdly, the ability to correct grammar mistakes develops and desire to be corrected throughout the communication gains significance as the number of languages known increase (Sig 2<0.05) Finally, individuals with less languages slightly gave less importance to grammar in mutual conversation and tend to focus more on general meaning rather than structures. On the other hand, multilinguals build up more grammatical awareness throughout oral communication (Sig 2<0.05).

On the other hand, communication and memory are 2 subcomponents that have negative correlation with the number of known languages. Firstly, memorization of grammar

structures through continuous reviews and visualization of them are not affected significantly by the number of acquired languages (Sig 2>0.05). Secondly, grammar throughout the communication process does not gain importance with the increasing number of languages acquired. Multilinguals and bilinguals showed similar tendencies in terms of grammar memorization and grammar inside communication.

To sum up, the number of languages known is a very significant determinant of an individual's view of grammar in general. It can be inferred that grammatical patterns gain importance and grammatical awareness rises as the variety of grammatical input increases.

4.2. Is there a relationship between proficiency levels in bilingualism and multilingualism in terms of building grammar strategies?

It is hypothesized that frequency of grammar strategy usage varies depending on the proficiency level of bilinguals. So a balanced bilingual can use as much grammar strategies as a multilingual can. To support this hypothesis, statistical data is presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5. *Relationship between GS frequency and proficiency levels*

	N	Mean Rank		
			Mann-Whitney U	188,500
FRENCH.	20	41.08	Wilcoxon W	1008,500
ELT FRE.	40	25,21	Z	-3,317
Total	60		Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	**,001**
			Mann-Whitney U	169,000
FRENCH	20	33,05	Wilcoxon W	665,000
ELT Soph.	31	21,45	Z	-2,720
Total	51		Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	**,007**
			Mann-Whitney U	46,000
FRENCH	20	16,20	Wilcoxon W	82,000
eltmaster	8	10,25	Z	-1,729
Total	28		Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	**,084**

As Mann Whitney U Test in Table 5 indicates, the relationship between proficiency level and grammar strategy usage is not in a linear fashion. While multilingual FLT sophomores use grammar strategies much more frequently when compared with ELT freshmen (Sig 2< 0.05), they cannot show the same superiority with the master class (Sig 2>0.05). So it can be inferred that the frequency of grammar strategy usage slowly increases as the level increases. That is, balanced bilinguals use nearly as much GM as multilinguals do. However, mean comparisons showed that even in its highest level, bilinguals cannot use more grammar strategies as multilinguals can. It derives again from multilinguals' having one more grammatical input and experience.

Tables clearly point out that;

    1. All 4 groups do not spend extra effort to memorize grammatical patterns

2. Multilingual group practices grammar more frequently and integrates grammar with other skills; reading, writing, and listening.
3. Multilingual group has better understanding of the grammatical mechanisms, they can understand a statement by dividing them into parts.
4. Multilingual learners and ELT master group are more obsessive to grammatical accuracy during oral communication while bilingual groups prefer to guess overall meanings.
5. ELT senior bilinguals do not correct their errors or let others to correct, they ignore them and focus on different ways to express themselves like gestures and body language. Unlike ELT senior bilinguals, multilingual learners have higher tendencies for self correction or being corrected.
6. Multilingual group organize better in grammar learning, especially in formal contexts
7. Bilingual groups never let grammatical problems to interfere with the conversation; they rarely spot grammatical errors of interlocutors and correct them. On the other hand, multilingual learners believe that grammatical problems inhibit oral speech and cognition.
8. Bilinguals became more aware of grammar as their level increases. On the other hand, multilingual learners can show higher grammatical awareness in lower levels.
9. All groups do not focus on grammatical patterns during their oral production.

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, this empirical research showed that there is a strong correlation between the number of languages known and the frequency of grammar learning strategy usage. Even one extra language contributes to the acquisition of new grammar. In addition, current study concludes that multilingual and bilingual individuals use grammar learning strategies in different frequencies. As multilingual learners have one more language in their linguistic storage, they tend to use more grammar strategies and apply them more frequently. Furthermore, proficiency level is also a strong determinant of grammar strategy usage when multilingual and bilingual learners are compared. As the level of bilinguals increase, they get closer to multilingual learners grammar strategy parameters. However it is clear that there is an absolute multilingual superiority in terms of grammar strategies in general. Some recommendations are listed below for teachers of foreign languages teaching bilingual and multilingual learners:

For bilingual learners, teachers should:

1. Apply contextualized memorization strategies in grammar courses, especially low level bilinguals are quite reluctant to memorize new structures
2. Put emphasis on more accurate grammar in oral communication as bilinguals ignore grammatical patterns while talking
3. Avoid teaching through writing structures all the time as bilinguals are unwilling to write down and memorize each grammar structure, instead contextual learning should take place
4. Encourage self and peer correction of grammar mistakes because bilinguals ignore grammatical correction especially throughout conversations
5. Follow learners grammatical progress frequently through portfolios or quizzes as bilinguals are less organized in grammar courses
For multilingual learners, teachers should:
1. Apply contextual memorization techniques for grammar, instead more creative strategies are required

2. Discourage too much obsession for grammatical patterns among multilinguals, cognitive and communicative uses of grammar should be emphasized more
3. Discredit being obsessive on error correction as multilinguals tend to correct their and others' errors all the time. It should be encouraged that too much error correction causes communicative breakdowns.

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