

Paradigm Of Bilingualism In New Normal: The Effect Of Bilinguality On Students' Vocabulary Achievement

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A. Introduction

The ability to speak two languages is often seen as something of a significant achievement, particularly in the English-speaking countries. Since 70% of the earth's population is thought to be bilingual or multilingual (Trask, 2007), there is good reason to believe that bilingualism is the norm for the majority of people in the world.

With regard to the advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism or multilingualism, different views have been expressed by researchers in the field. Most of the earlier studies suggested that bilingualism was associated with negative consequences (Keshavarz and Astaneh; 2004). These studies supported the idea that bilingual children suffered from academic retardation, had a lower IQ and were socially maladjusted as compared with monolingual children. Contrary to these claims, according to Keshavarz and Astaneh (2004) some research studies in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated that bilingualism positively influences the child's cognitive and social development. These studies indicated that bilinguals have a more enhanced awareness of the arbitrary relationship between words and their referents and superior metalinguistic skills. Viewing bilinguality in the

framework of metalinguistic awareness, Segalowitz (1977) suggests that the internalization of two languages rather than one will result in a more complex, better equipped mental calculus enabling the child to alternate between two systems of rules in the manipulation of symbols. Further, Bialystock (1986) hypothesized that bilingual children have an advantage over monolinguals in their control of the linguistic processing needed for metalinguistic problems. Many researchers have also found that bilingualism has a positive effect on foreign language achievement. Eisenstein (1980), for instance, found that childhood bilinguality had a positive effect on adult aptitude for learning a foreign language. That is, those who learned a second language during childhood would have a greater success in learning foreign languages as adults. Thomas (1988) also compared the acquisition of college French by English monolinguals and English-Spanish bilinguals. Her study yielded striking differences between the two groups, with the bilinguals outperforming the monolinguals. She concluded:

Bilinguals learning a third language seem to have developed a sensitivity to language as a system which helps them perform better on those activities usually associated with formal language learning than monolinguals learning a foreign language for the first time. (Thomas, 1988)

Mixing results of studies on the consequences of bilinguality caused some scholars to conduct experiments with more controlled variables. The findings of some of these studies led to a neutral attitude toward bilingualism. In their studies, Barik and Swain (1978) and Lambert and Tucker (1972) examined the performance of larger samples controlled for sex and age, and found no significant difference between monolinguals and bilinguals in terms of their intelligence, mental

development and school achievements. More recently, Nayak *et al.* (1990), comparing the acquisition of an artificial grammar by monolingual, bilingual and multilingual students, reported that although the multilinguals showed superior performance under certain conditions, they generally showed 'no clear evidence that they were superior in language learning abilities' (1990). Magiste (1984) reported an investigation by Balke-Aurell and Lindbad (1982) on the differences between monolingual and bilingual immigrants of varied L1s with Swedish as L2 in learning English as a foreign language. The results showed no difference between the bilinguals and monolinguals in standardized tests of English comprehension and grammar performance.

One of the most fundamental assumptions underlying the efficiency of bilingual instruction is that *skills and knowledge learned in L1 transfer to L2* (Goldman *et al.*, 1984; Malakoff, 1988). Thus, a child learning about velocity in Spanish, for example, should be able to transfer this knowledge to English without having to relearn the concepts, as long as the relevant vocabulary (in *The Impact of Bilinguality on the Learning of EFL* 297 L2) is available. Having the content knowledge already available in L1 seems to greatly facilitate the learning of the appropriate vocabulary items in L2.

The notion of transfer of skills is supported by research in cognitive science where attempts are made to look for representational schemas for complex narratives in two languages. For example, Goldman *et al.* (1984) showed that bilingual children employ similar comprehension strategies when listening to Aesop's fables in two languages, providing indirect evidence that higher-order cognitive processes manifest themselves regardless of the specific language. Malakoff (1988) also found similarity in performance on analogical reasoning in French-English

bilingual children in Switzerland. Additionally, research on adult bilingual memory for lists of words suggests that the particular language of presentation of specific words can be remembered under some conditions, but that in general, the content transcends language (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). In essence, in the act of learning concepts and skills, people form a schema that is independent of the specific language of presentation, even though the act of learning can involve active recruitment of the language to regulate thinking.

Given that skills do transfer across languages, it is possible to think about transfer as occurring on a specific, skill-by-skill componential basis, or, more globally, where the entire structure of skills in a domain transfers as a whole.

With regard to vocabulary learning, most words in both first and second languages are probably learned incidentally, through extensive reading and listening (Nagy *et al.*, 1985). Several recent studies have confirmed that supplementary L2 vocabulary learning through reading does occur (Chun & Plass, 1996; Day *et al.*, 1991; Hulstijn *et al.*, 1996; Knight, 1994; Zimmerman, 1997).

While supplementary learning of vocabulary may eventually account for a good majority of advanced learners' vocabulary, intentional learning through instruction also significantly contributes to vocabulary development (Nation, 2005; Wesche & Paribakht, 1994; Zimmerman, 1997). Explicit instruction is particularly essential for beginning students whose lack of vocabulary limits their reading ability.

Knowing approximately 3000 high frequency and general academic words is significant because this amount covers a high percentage of the words on an average page. The 2000 high frequency words in West's (1953) General

Service List cover 87% of an average non-academic text and 80% of an average academic text (Nation, 2005). For second language learners entering university, Laufer (1992) found that knowing a minimum of about 3000 words was required for effective reading at the university level, whereas knowing 5000 words indicated likely academic success. One way to estimate vocabulary size is to use Nation's (2005) Vocabulary Levels Test or a checklist test which requires learners to mark the words on a list that they believe they know (Meara, 1992, 1996; Read, 1988).

In the present study, the relationship between bilinguality of second language learners and their vocabulary achievement in the target language will be investigated. Therefore, the following null hypothesis is formulated:

Null Hypothesis: The bilinguality of the subjects has no impact on their performance in English vocabulary.

Most previous bilingual studies (see the references above) have concentrated on European languages. Thus, the significance of the present study lies in the fact that it involves two non-European languages namely Indonesian and Mandarin and investigates the effect of these languages on the learning of English as a foreign language. Therefore, it is hoped to be of interest to researchers in the field.

This study aimed at comparing the performance of two bilingual groups of EFL students with that of a monolingual student on a controlled productive ability vocabulary test. Altogether 1 Netherland-Indonesian bilingual student, 1 Singaporean-Indonesian bilingual student, and 1 Indonesian monolingual student participated in the study. The subjects in all three groups were homogeneous in terms of age (14–15 years old), sex (they were all female) and their level of instruction

(intermediate). The nationality of these three students are different, 2 students are from Indonesian and 1 student is from Netherland.

B. Discussion

Before discussing the result, the participants and the instrumentation used in this study are discussed below:

1. Participants

Three female students at the same school participated in this study: student A (Netherland-Indonesian bilingual) is studying both languages (English and Indonesian) academically in SMP Harapan Nusantara Denpasar; Student B (Singaporean-Indonesian bilingual) who is also studying both languages (English and Indonesia) academically in the same school; and Student C (Indonesian) who is also studying both languages (English and Indonesian) academically in the same school.

The subjects are in the same bilingual class of grade nine. Student A is mix-marriage child from her mother who comes from Netherland and her father who is Balinese. Student A mostly uses Indonesian in her daily conversation at school and at home, and sometime her father and mother ask her to have a conversation in Balinese and Dutch language. Student B is mix-marriage child from her father who is Singaporean and her mother is Javanese. Different with student A, Student B mostly uses Indonesia at school, but least in her house, because mostly her daily conversation at her home uses Mandarin and English, and she never uses Javanese language in daily conversation to her mother who in fact is able to speak Javanese. Student C in the other hand, only uses Indonesian in her Daily conversation at school and at home. This is happened because Student C is not a mix-marriage child.

2. Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study to measure the vocabulary achievement of the subjects was a Controlled Productive Ability Test at 2000 and 3000 word levels called CPAT. This test format was used previously in an examination of lexical richness in writing (Laufer & Nation, 1999). The main idea behind the Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 2005) is that it is useful to view the vocabulary of English (and indeed any language) as consisting of a series of levels based on frequency of occurrence, and productive vocabulary implies degrees of knowledge.

Thirty-six controlled productive items of 2000 and 3000 words level (18 items for each level), which had already been administered by Laufer and Nation (1999), were used in the present study. For each item, a meaningful sentence context was presented and the first letters of the target item were provided (see the Appendix). The first letters prevent the test-takers from filling in another word which would be semantically appropriate in the given context, but which comes from a different frequency level. The number of letters for each word was decided on by the elimination of possible alternatives to the tested word. The scoring system for the vocabulary test was in terms of correct / incorrect for each item. Minor spelling mistakes were not marked as incorrect.

3. Finding and discussion

In order to test the hypothesis, a valid test of 2000 and 3000 word levels with 36 items (18 for each level) was selected. The test was administered to the 2 EFL subjects. The results were, then, submitted to statistical analysis to find out whether the learners' bilinguality has an impact on their vocabulary achievement in the target language.

The comparison of the means of the three groups was done through multiple *t*-tests. As Table 1 shows, the Singaporean-Indonesian bilingual student and the Netherland-Indonesian did significantly better than the Indonesian student. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that the bilinguality of the subjects has no impact on their performance in English vocabulary can be safely rejected.

A descriptive statistic was, then, employed to investigate the performance of the three students on the vocabulary sub-tests that is the 2000 and 3000 word levels. As Table 2 displays, all three groups performed better on the 2000 word-level vocabulary than on the 3000-word level. This may be attributed to the fact that words in the 3000-level are more difficult than those in the 2000-word level. As Table 2 shows, the two mix-marriage students did better than the non-mix-marriage student.

Table 1 Multiple *t*-tests for the performance of groups on the vocabulary test

Groups	Mean	SD	N	Comparison	t-obs	T-crit	D F
Netherland-Indonesian	16.61	2.38	1				
Singaporean-Indonesian	17.61	3.45	1				
Indonesian	14.25	3.89	1				
				Netherland-Indonesian vs Indonesian	2.8344	2.021	58
				Singaporean-Indonesian	3.5394	2.021	58

	Indonesian vs Indonesian			
	Netherland- Indonesian vs Singaporean- Indonesian	1.306 8	2.02 1	58

$P < 0.05$.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for the performance of groups on the vocabulary subtests

Group	Vocabulary	Mean	SD	Variance	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	N
Netherland-Indonesian	Voc. 2000	10.10	2.41	5.82	5.00	17.00	1
	Voc. 3000	6.07	2.24	5.03	3.00	12.00	1
Singaporean-Indonesian	Voc. 2000	10.77	3.51	12.32	5.00	18.00	1
	Voc. 3000	6.37	3.01	9.07	2.00	12.00	1
Indonesian	Voc. 2000	8.74	4.00	16.00	2.00	16.00	1
	Voc. 3000	5.13	3.08	9.50	1.00	14.00	1

The figure of the bilingual used by Singaporean-Indonesian mix marriage experienced a significant eminent compared to Indonesian which was the lowest

performance of using English vocabulary, while this mix marriage showed slightly higher than Netherland-Indonesian mix marriage. This may be due to the fact that Singaporean-Indonesian bilingual subject has learned her foreign language (English) both academically and orally, whereas, the Netherland-Indonesian bilingual subject has learned her foreign language (English) only academically at school. The tendency of English fluency influenced by mix marriage can also be seen in the previous study which elaborated mix marriage of Indonesian-American (Zein & Damanhuri, 2019).

Applying English and Indonesian formal or informal situation directly affect the users to practice using bilingual to interact with others. This means, the mix marriage between Indonesian-Netherland and Indonesian-American had influenced the family using English through daily activities. Different environment and social factors; home, friendship, and college or school for instance, affected the use of bilingual and these might influence the Netherland-Indonesian mix marriage children to use more than one language which then created students' the fluency in using English.

On the other hand, the least figure using English vocabulary found on the Indonesian marriage as this would impact to the ability of using foreign language. Furthermore, the use of mother tongue could influence the use of languages. There are many factors which prevent using foreign language for the Indonesian marriage students. Social and culture provide massive impact to be a barrier for the students and society using foreign language. For local communities and families, the tendency of applying mother tongue brings a prevention to strengthening the language.

In Indonesia, the foreign language utilisation incline used in the academic area. In terms of the culture, English used for the society as the foreign language which means Indonesian Language is still regularly used in meeting, forum, daily activities. These factors make the foreign language is difficult to be used and applied for Indonesian family.

C. Conclusion

Results of the data analyses showed that the mix-marriage subjects' bilinguality has a positive effect on third language vocabulary acquisition. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that bilinguality has no impact on the performance of the subjects in vocabulary was rejected. The result supports the finding of other bilingual studies which have demonstrated that bilingualism results in more efficient foreign language learning. However, Singaporean-Indonesian bilingual subject has learned her foreign language (English) both academically and orally were more successful than the Netherland-Indonesian bilingual subject has learned her foreign language (English) only academically at school. This finding is in line with Thomas's (1988) claim that those bilinguals who possess literacy skills in L1 and L2 perform better in the kind of tests that require manipulation of language. This study has theoretical and practical implications for the field of language teaching. It provides a basis for improving the quality of practices in the teaching of first, second, and third languages' vocabulary. In other words, the results showed that bilingualism has a more positive effect on third language's vocabulary achievement when the first two languages are taught formally, as in the case of Singaporean-Indonesian bilingual and Netherland-Indonesian bilingual.

There are some suggestions which are proposed by the writer, parents need to keep that consistency in order to the children make it as a habit in doing interaction with other people not only family. Parents also can direct the children in order to mostly using English in doing interaction with their family that indirectly help the family learn English. In this case parents take an important role to direct their children (Erawan, et al, 2018). Foreign language familiarity should be encouraged by the learners' which mostly using mother tongue for the first language. By familiarising the English for instance, the fluency will be similar or even outrace the mix marriage ability. The interaction through verbal or non-verbal can practice their ability using foreign language.

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