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Where Languages Meet: Bilingual Lives and Cultural Belonging

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Abstract

The aim or objective of this article is to highlight the complex and important relationship between language, bilingualism and identity through an examination of three important works: Maya Khemlani David's Analyzing Cultural Norms through Literary Texts: A Pedagogical Approach (2008), Ika Kana Trisnawati's Maintaining the Identity of Bilingual Individuals in Multicultural/Multilingual Settings (2017), and Judit Navracscics' Living with Two Languages and Cultures: The Complexity of Self-Definition for Bilingual Individuals (2016). This article tends to analyze the complex relationship between language, bilingualism and identity. The relationship between language, bilingualism and identity is complicated because this relationship is complex and it is not easy to analyze and understand it. Conjointly, the study of these works highlights the linguistic and social effects of bilingualism on teaching and learning, culture, and individual identity. Conjointly, the work of these three scholars shows that bilingualism is a tool, it is a mean of awareness of diverse cultures, their adaptability, and its recognition in a world that is becoming more connected day by day, rather than a source of disorder and confusion.

According to Navracscics (2016), bilingual identity is a agreement between demos, or local and social contribution in the society at large, and ethnos, or the emotional and cultural roots of one's lineage. She argues strongly that bilinguals create rich emotional, insightful and cognitive adoptability while constantly managing between these two fields, frequently suffering identity tension. By indicating the sociocultural aspects of bilingualism and explaining the important roles that family, community, and institutions play in protecting heritage

and languages of ancestors, Trisnawati (2017) adds in her conversation that adopting a language of dominant may result in the loss of cultural identity, hence she warns against "subtractive bilingualism." Both studies explain how bilinguals' identities are not constant instead their identities are dynamic, situational, and context-dependent, constantly being formed through social interaction and negotiation.

David (2008) takes an informative and instructive position when dealing with the issue of identity. She suggests that classrooms and learning environment can act as secure or protected forums for cross-cultural dialogue, allowing students to analyze the role of power and cultural diversity present in language inherently and students can analyze it by reading literary texts. The idea of Trisnawati is similar to Bhabha's (1994) ideas of the "third space," where people create hybrid identities by managing between various cultural systems. David's pedagogy changes bilingual education into a tool for encouraging social inclusion, empathy, and cross-cultural communication by fostering critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992).

A most important and repeated theme and idea in these studies is that questions of power, globalization, and cultural politics are deeply linked or connected to language and identity. Navracics emphasizes and strongly argues in favor of how language preference affects civil or local participation, David reveals how schooling can either support or oppose language inequalities and disparities while Trisnawati talks about how social stratification affect identity maintenance. Conjointly, they demand that bilingualism be redefined as a cultural and cognitive asset rather than as a language issue.

The amalgamation or blend of these three perspectives or ideas focuses on process of bilingualism as ongoing process, these three scholars by using evidence based approach show that bilingualism is a continuous and ongoing process of personal growth and development that connects or links disparate or unequal worlds rather than just the ability to speak two languages. The writings of these scholars promote tolerance, acceptability, create environment where everyone feels valued and respected and acknowledgement for linguistic diversity in both theory and practice in real life situation. Communities or societies can improve tolerance, social harmony, understanding, acceptability of various cultures, and can achieve fairness and equality in education by accepting bilingual and bicultural identities. To conclude, bilingualism is an essential and important asset of humanity, it is a means of communication, creativity, and living together in a multilingual world.

Introduction

Language works as both a communication tool and a important identity identifier in the time of globalization, human mobility, and cross-cultural interaction. That's why in applied linguistics, education, and cultural studies, the negotiation of selfhood across linguistic and cultural barriers has grown in importance (Adendorff, 2012). Judit Navracics living with two languages and cultures: The complexity of self-determination for bilingual individuals, Ika Kana maintaining the identity of bilingual individuals in multicultural multilingual settings and analyzing cultural norms through literary texts, and A Pedagogical Approach (2008) are three important and essential works in the field of academics that address this issue from supporting perspectives. Collectively these are the most important works that aims to investigate the ways in which cultural diversity and bilingualism affect social affiliation, teaching and learning practice, and personal identity (Zentella, 2014). Their combined and collective knowledge shows that bilingualism is a dynamic, changeable, social and cognitive

process that has profound roots in power, society, and human experience rather than just a linguistic phenomenon (Cavalcanti, & Maher, 2013).

Literature Review

Collectively, the examined studies Navracsics (2016), Trisnawati (2017), and David (2008) examine how bilingualism affects teaching and learning process, social belonging, and personal identity in a globalized society. They strongly argue that bilingualism is a complex social and connected process linked to identity, culture, and power rather than only being linguistically proficient. By using *ethnos* (ancestry and emotion) and *demos* (civil and social involvement) to explain bilingual identity, Navracsics (2016) demonstrates that bilinguals usually face internal conflict or issue when balancing both fields. According to Trisnawati (2017), multilingual identity is flexible and shaped by society, maintaining it requires institutional, domestic, and communal support. Bilinguals run the risk of assimilating and losing their heritage identity in the absence of such reinforcement. According to David (2008), who focusses on the process of teaching and learning, according to her classrooms can be a safe and protected place where people can settle their identities. She encourages students to consider and focus on how language reflects power dynamics through literary works and Critical Language Awareness (Fairclough, 1992), transforming bilingualism into a way of empowerment and personal growth rather than a conflict. In general, these studies explain the emotional difficulties as well as the psychological advantages of bilingualism. They explain how identity and power are redefined by globalization and dominant language policies. One of the most important way of promoting different languages and understanding of different cultures is education (Palmer, & Martínez, 2013). To cut short, bilingualism is cultural and personal human resource that promotes inclusiveness, empathy, and flexibility in different cultures.

Intersections of Language and Identity

The belief that language and culture are essential for the formation of human identity is shared by all three authors. Navracsics (2016) uses the two dimensions of *ethnos* and *demos* to conceptualise bilingual identity: the public field of social mobility and engagement of locals, and the private field of legacy, emotion, and domestic relationships. These fields usually overlap for peoples who speaks one language but bilinguals must continuously direct between them, frequently facing internal issues and uncertainty while defining their identities. In a similar way, Trisnawati (2017) places identification within social and cultural contexts, contending that bilinguals in multicultural settings need to balance the dominant linguistic and cultural norms of their host societies with their ancestral history. Both scholars present identity as *ruuny*, situational, and relational constantly reconstructed in interaction with others. This concept is extended into teaching by David (2008), who suggests that language classes might function as forums for identity discussion. She argues that through literary texts, students come into contact with a variety of cultural norms and acquire Critical Language Awareness (Fairclough, 1992), understanding how language and power interact when students move between their forefathers and target cultures. Therefore, David provides a pedagogical approach for promoting intercultural understanding through language instruction, while Navracsics and Trisnawati examine identity as living experience.

The Dual Nature of Bilingualism

Bilingualism comes or appear as both a benefit and a challenge in all three works. Navracsics (2016) challenges prior misconceptions, assumptions and myths that bilingualism blocks cognitive or psychological growth, and instead she presents updated and modern research showing its social, psychological, and cognitive advantages. She explains that bilingual individuals often show stronger metalinguistic awareness and better issues resolving techniques. Similarly she notes that bilinguals can face and resolve identity-related problems when shifting between languages that contain different cultural or emotional background. By studying how outside factors influence multilingual identity, Trisnawati (2017) offers a sociological viewpoint relies significantly on colleague's networks, familial transmission, and social context that respect language diversity. Without this kind of aid, bilinguals run the risk of losing their cultural identity in favour of assimilation into dominant groups. David (2008) examines these conflicts from an educational perspective. English serves as a reminder of colonial power structures as well as a worldwide language of possibility in many postcolonial cultures. She promotes critical thinking as opposed to passive assimilation by training students to examine cultural norms that are present in books.

1. Theoretical Foundations of Identity in Bilingual Contexts

1.1 Social Identity Theory and Bilingualism

An important and helpful idea for understanding multilingual identity is provided by Tajfel's Social Identity Theory. This perspective holds that people classify themselves into social groups according to characteristics they have in common, including language or ethnicity. Bilinguals frequently have numerous group affiliations at the same time, creating identities that are adaptable and situation-specific (Myers-Scotton, 2013). This approach is consistent with Navracsics' concept of *ethnos* and *demos*: bilinguals may socially navigate institutions that are dominated by a different language while linguistically identifying with their ethnic heritage.

1.2 The Perspective of Postcolonialism

David's study is similar with postcolonial scholars that focus on how colonial languages can marginalize native linguistic identities, such as Fanon (1967) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986). According to the postcolonial viewpoint, bilingualism frequently results from past power inequalities. Although bilingualism can give people more social and economic power, it can also perpetuate inequality if minority languages are suppressed by the dominant language.

1.3 Hybrid Identity and the "Third Space"

According to Bhabha's (1994) theory of the "third space," The exchange of cultures produce hybrid identities that are neither entirely one nor the other. Being bilingual makes it easier for people to enter this area and allows them to creatively negotiate a sense of belonging. This theory is applied in David's classroom framework, which shows how teaching can foster hybrid identities.

2. Bilingual Identity-Formation across Life Stages

2.1 The Impact of Early Childhood and Family

For bilinguals, the first linguistic and cultural setting is their family. According to research, children's sense of identity is greatly influenced by their parents' behaviors about language. Children form closer emotional connection to their cultural heritage, for example, if heritage language use is promoted at home (Trisnawati, 2017).

2.2 Peer Influence and Adolescence

Peer groups gain power during adolescence. Juveniles who are bilingual may hide their native language or they do not talk in their ancestral language in order to save their self from prejudice and social marginalization (Gardner-Chloros, 2014). Some could find empowerment and self-development in embracing their bilingual identity. Therefore, during this time, the school environment is important in forming bilingual identity.

2.3 Professional Identity and Adulthood

Bilingualism frequently becomes beneficial as an adult in civic, academic, and professional settings. Adults who are bilingual may use their different language skills to negotiate a variety of employment environments. However, if workplace standards favor one language over another, identity conflict can continue.

3. Linguistic Hierarchies, Power, and Bilingualism

3.1 Minority versus Dominant Languages

Languages do not have equal status in almost all multilingual communities. The languages of minorities fights for their survival, while dominant languages frequently receive institutional backing. Trisnawati cautions against subtractive bilingualism, in which the heritage language is undermined by acquiring a dominant language. Social hierarchies that favor particular groups are strengthened by this process.

3.2 National Identity and Language Policies

Bilingual identity is greatly influenced by government language policies. For example, multilingual children's sense of association may be repressed or silenced by monolingual educational policies. However, inclusive policies like bilingual education initiatives can maintain cultural identity and improve academic performance.

3.3 Globalization and Linguistic Neoliberalism

The global spread of English has created new forms of linguistic inequality. While proficiency in English language gives economic opportunities but it may reduce the value of local languages. This linguistic neoliberalism commodifies language, framing it as a asset for global competition rather than a marker of cultural identity.

4. Pedagogy, Literature, and Identity Negotiation

4.1 Literary Works as Cultural Mirrors

According to David (2008), literary works assists the students to uncover role of power, cultural norms, traditions and values that are deeply rooted in language. Students think about their own identities and cultural beliefs through characters and stories present in the literary texts. Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory, which perceives reading as an active process of meaning making influenced by the reader's experiences, is similar to this concept.

4.2 Awareness of Critical Language (CLA)

Understanding how languages create social reality is promoted by critical language awareness, as it gives multilingual students the ability to recognize linguistic discrimination and question prevailing beliefs. This is particularly important in postcolonial contexts where English carries symbolic power.

4.3 The Classroom as a "Safe Space"

Classroom is a safe place for students because they can freely express their identities, as classroom is culturally sensitive because this provide respect for diverse cultures so multilingual students feel confidence and sense of belonging if their instructors show respect for linguistic diversity especially for their native language. Such safe environment where various identities can flourish are encouraged by David's instructional approach.

5. Bilingual Identity's Emotional Aspects

5.1 Words and Feelings

According to Navracscics (2016), bilinguals attach different feelings with various languages. Because heritage languages are acquired in local contexts, they can have important emotional meaning. On the other hand, dominant languages could be connected to public life or professionalism.

5.2 Code-switching and Identity Conflict

Code switching is a practice of switching between two or more languages in a single conversation, it is an expression of identity as well as a communication strategy. Person who is bilingual usually switch between languages to fit exact social and emotional situation. But monolingual speakers criticize it as they believe that using more than one language in a single conversation will result in identity insecurity.

5.3 Emotional Resilience via Bilingualism

Recent research works shows that bilinguals are emotionally flexible due to their ability to discuss different cultural frameworks. This improves adaptation, empathy, and intercultural sensitivity as these qualities are important in multicultural communities.

6. Bilingualism in Various Cultural Settings

6.1 Communities of Immigrants

Identity related issues are usually more severe for immigrants, and they have to protect their native language for emotional and cultural continuity while learning the dominant language for integration and survival. Trisnawati emphasizes on the importance of community networks that play important role in maintenance of ancestral identities of immigrants.

6.2 Minority and local Populations

Minorities and local populations, such as native tribes, often face the pressures of linguistic colonization, a process through which dominant languages influence and marginalize native languages. This loss does not belong only with linguistics but it also belongs to culture, as native languages contain rare and special belief system, oral histories, spiritual knowledge, philosophies, ideologies and collective memories. When a language disappears, an entire way of understanding the world will be end with it.

Many native communities continue to resist this form of cultural deletion by arguing in favor of language preservation and revival. These efforts include writing or documenting endangered languages, creating community based language classes, developing language nests for young students, and producing digital learning resources.

One of the most efficient methods for inverting language decline is the introduction of bilingual academic programs. Such programs allow children to learn both their local language and the dominant national language. This not only empowers cultural identity but also increase academic performance, mental development, and transmission of language in various generations. In this way it is the best approach by which bilingual education becomes a tool for development, cultural heritage preservation, and resistance against linguistic domination.

6.3 Identities of the Transnational and Diaspora

In the current time international cross border travel is very high it is because of migration, study abroad, digital communication, tourism, and international labor practices permits people to move across borders more easily than before. When individuals cross again and again national boundaries, they no longer fit clearly into a single, fixed national identity. Instead, they develop transnational identities, meaning identities that stretch across more than one nation, culture, or social space. For people living in scattered communities, this process is even more pronounced. Scattered groups consist of people who have moved from their native's land and settled into foreign country. There are many individuals of these communities are bilingual as they use both their heritage language and the language of the country in which they are living, as language is deeply tied to culture, bilingual speakers often combine cultural practices, values, and ways of speaking from both contexts.

This blending leads to hybrid identities fluid, mixed identities that combine elements from both their native culture and their new environment. These identities are not simply in between the two cultures; instead, they are creative combinations that reflect the individual's rare experiences, social networks, and linguistic practices.

7. Bilingualism's Social and Cognitive Advantages

7.1 Flexibility in Thought

Bialystok (2007), states that bilingual speakers show a variety of cognitive and psychological benefits that occurs just because of their continuous use of more than one language. The most important benefit is superior mental flexibility that is the ability to accept new rules, switch attention between different projects, and reply efficiently to changing situations, as bilingual individuals often switch between languages depending on the social context, listener, or communicative goal, they regularly exercise this ability to shift mental frameworks. Over time, this consistent practice gives power and ability to think flexibly. Another important

advantage is improved executive control, a set of mental processes responsible for managing attention, blocking unnecessary or irrelevant information, and planning or regulating behavior. Bilingual speakers have to choose the most suitable and accurate language while repressing the other language that present in their brain. This process acts like daily cognitive training in which the brain is forced to restrict interruptions, emphasize on the correct linguistic system, and monitor speech output. As a result, their executive functioning becomes more efficient compared to speakers who speaks on language

Individuals who speak more than one language also show good metalinguistic awareness, which indicates their capacity to think intentionally about language as a system, its structures, rules, and functions. Because they work with two linguistic codes, bilinguals develop a deeper and profound understanding of how language works in real life situation. They notice grammatical differences more easily, can consider on how meaning changes across languages, and are better at identifying linguistic patterns. This information supports both language learning and general reasoning skills. Bialystok (2007) states that these cognitive benefits occurs because bilingual speakers must manage, handle, track, and switch between languages continuously. This constant and continuous engagement empowers key mental processes. Consequently, bilingualism does not simply offer communicative advantages but also meaningfully increases cognitive functioning across different fields.

7.2 Innovation and Problem-Solving

The new study highlights that individuals who speak more than one language tend to execute effectively the duties needing creativity, innovation, and unconventional or modern thinking. Modern thinking involves producing many possible solutions to solve a problem rather than depending on one, fixed solution. Individuals who speak more than one language dominate in this area because using different languages enables them to think creatively, because each language contains its own meanings, cultural metaphors, expressions, and different ways of arranging thought. When bilinguals shift between these linguistic frameworks, they get to know different strategies to solve issues from more than one way that increases their ability to think unconventionally.

Individuals who view different cultures and environments their cultural imagination is better than others as they can understand societal norms, values, and worldviews in a better way. The diversity in culture encourages them to make more creative ideas and solutions, as they are not limited to one culture. Bilinguals also become skilled at viewpoint taking, which is the ability to understand another individual viewpoint, it is because of their interaction with speakers from various backgrounds and they make their communication according to the situation, they learn to mentally switch perspectives, a mental process that directly contributes to innovative thinking and complex problem-solving.

7.3 Social Flexibility

Bilinguals are also socially flexible, as they are able to adapt different social contexts and they can interact with different groups in a better way, Individuals who speak more than one language usually become familiar with different ways of communication, body language, social cues, and behavioral expectations as they operate within more than one culture. When bilinguals continuously discuss different cultures their confidence

and communication skills become better that make them more supportive, caring, socially aware, and sensitive to the needs of others. Bilinguals are basically bridge between people of different communities as they help in connecting individuals from various communities by making communication possible, by handling misunderstandings, and by promoting understanding. Bilinguals operate within more than one culture that empowers them interpret cultural ideas and navigate complicated social environments more effectively than monolinguals, because they can switch linguistic and cultural frameworks easily and they show greater acceptability in various cultures, workplaces, and social interactions.

8. Difficulties Faced by Bilinguals

8.1 Discrimination Based on Language

Bilinguals often face discrimination and prejudice just because of their accent, usually bilinguals can just speak language and they are unable to adopt the accent that failure of adopting accent result in mocking just because of their dialects, bilinguals are often corrected unnecessarily, their professionalism and intelligence is solely judged on the basis of their choice of language and accent and in workplace and schools they are treated as less valuable because of their accent.

8.2 Assimilation Pressure

Bilinguals usually use their native language and they are pressurized by dominant groups, agencies to give up their native language, Schools, workplaces and government usually promotes national language as prestigious language and put extra pressure on bilinguals to stop using their native language. Using prestige language by bilinguals will result in social mobility as they can get recognition and financial gain but it will result in loss of their cultural heritage and identity.

8.3 Conflicts of Internal Identity

Bilinguals usually grow up in navigating two languages and cultures because of this they do not fit in to any one culture, this create a sense of in between, they think that they are living on the boundary of two worlds and they are unable to fit into any one of the society, this is the one of the major difficulty faced by the bilinguals but it also empowers them to think about themselves, their role in society and make them aware of their role in society.

9. Techniques for Maintaining Cultural and Bilingual Identity

9.1 Strategies Based on Families

Bilingual identity can be maintained by using tactic of "One parent, one language" in this tactic one from parent should use one language with child and other should use other Language with the children, if such strategies adopted by family the child will be connected and will feel sense of association with both cultures.

9.2 Systems of Community Support

Heritage and native languages are maintained in multicultural settings through diaspora networks, bilinguals while living outside their homeland can preserve their ancestor's language by making a community where they use their native language to communicate, this strategy will help them to save and protect their ancestor's language.

9.3 Interventions in Education

Linguistic pride is strengthened and preserved through literary engagement, education in both languages, and culturally responsive teaching and learning style.

Conclusion

The works of Navracscics, Trisnawati, and David's collectively highlights that bilingualism is a dynamic and complicated phenomena that is linked with identity, culture, and power. The research shows that speakers of many languages constantly navigate social expectations, balance their emotional heritage with political engagement, and use language as a tool for survival and self-expression, there are many difficulties associated with bilingualism, such as identity conflict, social mobility pressures, prejudice, and discrimination, there are also major social, emotional, and cognitive advantages. Bilingualism should be welcomed as a bridge rather than a barrier in multicultural and multilingual cultures as bilinguals help to connect people from different communities and also helps in handling the misunderstanding.

At the end, this review confirms that bilingualism is far more than from ability of speaking of more than one language rather it is an essential and valuable human asset as it increase understanding of own as well as other culture and it also encourage creativity, understanding and empathy.

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