


Chapter 2

Navigating Linguistic Dualities: Language Development and Acquisition in Bilingual and Bilectal Communities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the cognitive, linguistic, and social dimensions of language development in bidialectal and bilectal individuals, with a particular focus on children. It analyses how exposure to multiple languages or dialects shapes executive function, language acquisition pathways, and identity formation. The chapter discusses the sociolinguistic dynamics of communities such as Cyprus, where Standard Modern Greek and Cypriot Greek coexist, and highlights the implications of diglossia, code-switching, and societal language attitudes. Emphasis is placed on both typical and atypical populations, including neurodiverse children, showing that dual language exposure can support cognitive flexibility and linguistic competence. Educational policies and inclusive teaching strategies are examined as means to foster equitable language development in multilingual settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Language and the ability to comprehend and communicate with others are key to social interaction (Snijders, Bogicevic, Verhoeven, & van Baar, 2020). Learning a language is one of humanity's most spectacular and fascinating human accomplishments and understanding how vocabulary develops can provide insights into broader processes of linguistic and cognitive growth (Frank, Braginsky, Yurovsky, & Marchman, 2017). Over the last 25 years, bilingual development has received increased attention, with studies examining various dimensions, including lexical and phonological growth, as well as the impact of bilingualism on cognitive functions (Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008; Pearson & Fernández, 1994). Researchers have been examining similarities and differences in lexical and morphosyntactic development in bilingual populations. Besides monolingual and bilingual, attention is also shifting towards bilectal populations, referring to speakers within linguistic communities typically identified as diglossic (Rowe & Grohmann, 2013) where multiple varieties of the same language coexist. Cyprus serves as such an example where the local dialect, Cypriot Greek (CG), coexists with the standard variety, Standard Modern Greek (SMG). This framework may also apply to other nations with distinct dialects alongside a prevailing standard, including Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Norway and Switzerland (Taxitari et al, 2017).

This chapter examines the intricacies of language acquisition and development among bilingual and bidialectal people, investigating the cognitive, linguistic and social aspects that characterise these groups. The aim is to present and analyse pivotal research and theoretical models to elucidate the influence of bilingualism and bilectalism on human language development, emphasising both normal and atypical situations across varied sociolinguistic contexts. It focuses on the cognitive, linguistic and social dimension, across both typical and atypical populations in diverse sociolinguistic settings.

SECTION 1: DEFINITIONS AND THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF LINGUISTIC DUALITY

The process by which people learn to perceive, create and employ language for communication is known as language acquisition. Complex connections between cognitive, social and environmental elements are involved in this process, which starts in infancy (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). Language acquisition may take place in bilingual and bilectal situations under particular circumstances, such as frequent

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