**Lecture Five: Bilingualism**

1. **Defenition**

Bilingualism is a social phenomenon, a state where we can find two languages in use by either an individual or a group. It is the result of contact between speakers of different languages. Multilingualism or pluraligualism is the use of three or more languages. However, Monolingualism is the use of just one language in one society, for example England is a monolingual society.

People who are bilingual must have competence and communicate with both languages. They must master both languages; but, it is not specified how much they should master each. In other words, if we define bilingualism as the ability to use two languages ‘perfectly’, this definition excludes a large number of bilinguals. Hence, a more logical definition for bilingualism would be “the ability to use two or more languages sufficiently to carry on a limited casual conversation” (Myers-Scotton, C. ,2006, p. 44)

It is difficult to have the same competence in both languages because of many reasons mainly the exposure of the individual to one language than the other. For example, in the case of mixed marriage, if the child spends more time with his mother he will master her language better than that of his father and vice versa. Besides, the conditions under which they acquire or learn the languages differ, the context and the extent to which they use these languages affect their performance. Thus, all bilinguals find difficulties in one language, they mostly have not the freedom in choosing the language they use but it depends on the situation.

There are two types of bilingualism:

1. Compound Bilingualism: in which the two languages are acquired at the same time. The child acquires two languages in parallel as in the case of mixed marriage; the child acquires the language of the mother and that of the father at the same time.
2. Coordinate Bilingualism: when two systems are acquired but not at the same time; one language is acquired before the other as in the case of people who migrate.
3. **Diglossia**

It is a term used by linguists to refer to a special kind of bilingualism. It is when two varieties of a language exist side by side in a community and each one is used for different purposes. Usually, one is more standard called ‘high- variety’ and it is used in government , media, education and for religious services. The high-variety is often believed to be more beautiful and logical and thus more appropriate to be used in serious circumstances. The other one is usually a non-prestigious variety called ‘low-variety’ which is used with family members, friends, when shopping, etc.

Diglossia was brought be ‘C.A. Ferguson’ in 1959. She noticed that in the Arab world, Greece and Germany have a high-variety that is used in official situations while the low-variety is used in everyday life. She argued that the high-variety has been preserved and did not change a lot for religious reasons. She added that a lot of people who use different associated dialects do not understand the high-variety.

Hence, Diglossia, in its original sense, has three crucial features:

1. Two distinct varieties of the same language are used in the community, with one regarded as a high (or H) variety and the other a low (or L) variety.
2. Each variety is used for quite distinct functions; H and L complement each other.
3. No one uses the H variety in everyday conversation (Holmes, 2001 p. 27).

H and L varieties differ in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. The forms used in L variety are odd if used in writing, and those of H variety are weird if used in everyday interaction.

Diglossia is a characteristic of speech communities rather than individuals. In other words, individuals may be bilingual, but societies or communities are diglossic.

Recently the term Diglossia has been generalized to all situations where two languages are used for different functions in a speech community; one is used for H functions and the other for L functions.

1. **Bilingualism vs Biculturalism**

While bilingualism refers to the use of two different languages, biculturalism is the awareness of two cultures. Bilingualism does not mean always biculturalism. We can have a bilingual and a bicultural person at the same time, yet, we can also have a person who is bilingual but not bicultural such as translators ( although good translators must be both). In reality we can not disassociate the two.

**References**

Holmes, J. ( 2001). *An introduction to Sociolinguistics (2nd ed.).* Pearson Education Limted.

Myers-Scotton, C. (2006). *Multiple voices: An introduction to bilingualism.* Blackwell

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