

in *Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium on Bilingualism*.
Uppsala, June, 1984.

**BRIEF REMARKS ON THE STATE OF THE ART AND CURRENT NEEDS
IN RESEARCH ON BI- AND MULTILINGUALISM**

Jens Allwood

Dept of linguistics ,University of Gothenburg

My remarks are organized the following way: First, I say something about the general situation in research on multilingualism and the needs I see there. Then, I point out some areas that I personally think should be pursued and hope will become of general interest in the field. Finally, I have some remarks on ethical issues.

A. General situation

1. *Groups studied:* Most of the research on multilingualism concerns children. Some research has been done on adults but hardly any on elderly people. There is therefore a lack of research on the elderly and adults.
2. *Processes studied:* If we view multilingualism dynamically there are logically three main types of processes that can be distinguished: (i) learning a language, (ii) maintaining the language and (iii) forgetting the language. Most research so far has concerned learning. There is, thus, a clear need for more research on what happens in language-maintenance and language loss. Loss is here meant to include both long-term loss, perhaps permanent, as well as short term more temporary loss. For example, it seems to be possible for people to forget or loose language temporarily for periods such as a couple of days or weeks .
3. *Causal factors:* Much research, mostly done by linguists studying language acquisition, has been devoted to an investigation of the intralinguistic determining relationships that exist. Other research, mostly done by psychologists, sociologists or anthropologists, has dealt with biological, psychological, social or cultural factors associated with language acquisition. What, however, is lacking are attempts at detailed integration of observations of intralinguistic dependencies in acquisition, maintenance-or loss of language with observations on the biological, psychological, social and cultural conditions of these processes. For example, how do emotional states

affect a multilingual's acquisition, maintenance or forgetting of specific aspects of language?

B. Areas of interest

1. *Conceptual analyses*: I will start by making a plea for an increased conceptual analysis of the various key concepts in the field. Too often large amounts of data are gathered without sufficient clarification of the conceptual categories involved. A thorough conceptual analysis would, for example, be of value in the research concerned with such concepts as interference, code switching and language mixing. However, it would be even more valuable in dealing with concepts that have normative presuppositions, often in the service of national, class or group interests, e.g. identity, ethnicity or attitude to language and more flagrantly semilingualism or fossilization.
2. *Discourse, especially non-verbal components*: To what extent do multilinguals use different systems of turntaking or feedback in employing their languages? To what extent do they differentiate posture, manual and facial gestures between different languages? To what extent do they use different prosodic patterns? Is there a relationship between prosody and posture and gesture, so that the prosodic patterns of a language are easier to learn if your postures and gestures are of a certain type?
3. *Verbalization and Translation*: We need more thorough studies of the process of verbalization. In what sense can a multilingual person verbalize one and the same content in several languages? How does verbalizing your own chosen content in several languages compare with translating from one language to another? Perhaps some information can be gained by comparing multilinguals doing sequential and simultaneous translation.
4. *Polyglots*: More studies should be devoted to polyglots, i.e. people who know 5 languages or more. What strategies are used by such people to acquire and maintain a new language? Are the strategies different for polyglots who have acquired their languages guided by grammars and classroom instruction as compared with polyglots who have acquired their languages completely through interaction with speakers of the different languages?

C. Ethics

Finally, I would like to make a brief ethical comment. Research on multilingualism has often been motivated by concerns of a social and political character. A social and political interpretation has also often been

given to the results of the research. In my view, this involvement with political and social issues has had both good and bad aspects. It is good that researchers who are investigating social matters are forced to face the consequences of their theories in practice. This often helps to clarify their and other peoples understanding of the issues at hand. It is also good if results-can help an oppressed group to improve its situation. It is questionable, however, when results are used in order, to promote national, class or group interests. In the long run, such use of scientific theories is usually neither truthful nor desirable.

The ethical goals associated with research should be as general as possible. Personally, I think two such general goals, well suited for adoption by researchers in the field of bilingual and multilingual studies, are firstly, the promotion of a multilingual world with as many multilingual speakers as possible and secondly, the promotion of international cooperation and international understanding..