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A PROCEDURE ESTABLISHING PERFECT MULTILINGUALISM IN A COMMUNITY
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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide a procedure establishing perfect multilingualism. Apart from the two items related to gender and age, the author uses ten items based on socio-psycholinguistic parameters, namely the speaker's emotional expression languages and easier languages. An illustrative study consisting of a survey and a semi-structured interview show how the procedure is implemented. The results reveal that the twenty respondents of the Department of English, Business and Computer Science of the university of Kinshasa have French and Lingala as perfect mother tongues and most of them speak Kinshasa Lingala native like.

Keywords : *equal competence, emotional expression, easier languages, perfect multilingualism, multilingual and language, individual multilingualism, societal multilingualism*

Résumé

Cet article propose un procédé à suivre pour l'établissement du multilinguisme parfait autrement dit les langues parlées à compétence égale, tenant compte de quatre compétences linguistiques, notamment le parler, l'écrit, la lecture et la compréhension. Hormis les questions sur le sexe et l'âge, l'auteur propose dix questions basées sur deux paramètres socio- psycholinguistiques, notamment les langues d'expression émotionnelle du locuteur et les langues les plus faciles du locuteur. Les résultats de l'étude illustrative mixte, contenant deux phases : quantitative et qualitative, révèlent que les vingt étudiants qui ont servi d'échantillon sont des parfaits multilingues en Français et Lingala. La plupart d'eux ont un accent natif en Lingala de Kinshasa.

Mots-clés : *compétence égale, expression émotionnelle, les langues les plus faciles, multilinguisme parfait, multilingue et langue, multilinguisme individuel, multilinguisme sociétal*

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have established that there are monolinguals in a multilingual community. One may wonder how a person living in a multilingual community may be qualified as monolingual. Many scholars such as Larissa and Baker's definitions of a multilingual person take into account both the number of languages spoken and competence at which the person uses those languages. This may justify the presence of monolinguals in a multilingual community in the sense that a person may be competent in one language and not in others. A good example of monolinguals is the one of illiterate people born in Kinshasa. They are stuck to Lingala and incompetent in French. The current paper provides an illustrative study specifying the different skills a multilingual person excels. Evidently, competence of individuals can be measured thanks to language skills. The paper focuses on the aspect of the definition of multilingualism which takes into account the skills at which a multilingual person uses those languages. This leads to talk of perfect multilingualism which implies a set of languages used competently by a multilingual person basing on the different language skills, namely speaking, reading, writing and listening. A procedure for establishing perfect multilingualism is displayed thanks to an illustrative investigation in this paper. Twenty students of the University of Kinshasa, mainly those of the English, Business and Computer Science Department were involved in. They were randomly selected. They all responded to the survey questionnaire copies and five of them also participated in the semi-structured interview.

It was hypothesized that the respondents were perfect multilinguals in both French and Lingala. The author observed that some students of the university of Kinshasa use both French and Lingala inside and outside the classrooms. The goal of this study is to provide a model illustrating the way perfect multilingualism is established in a community. Two objectives are targeted: First, to display a procedure on how to establish perfect multilingualism. Second, to implement the displayed procedure to an illustrative study for the sake of clarification.

I.   ON MULTILINGUALISM

Cenoz[1] mentions that multilingualism is a complex phenomenon that can be studied from different perspectives in disciplines such as linguistics, psycholinguistics, education and sociolinguistics. The latter is the perspective focused on in this paper. There are aspects can be mentioned while dealing with the definition of the term multilingualism such as the number of languages spoken by the multilingual speaker as depicted in the following three definitions from Larissa, A[2], The European Commission[3], and Concise Dictionary of Linguistics[4]

Multingualism is the use of three or more languages. It is the ability to communicate in multiple languages Larissa[5]

According to the European Commission[6], the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on regular basis, with more than one language in their day to day lives.

a multilingual person is the one speaking more than one language Concise Dictionary of Linguistics[7]

Observing the above three definitions, it is clear that the stress is put on the number of languages. Explicitly, to be qualified as multilingual, a person is supposed to speak more than one language. Larissa, A[8] talks of multiple languages where the number of languages is not specified.

The aspect adding competence dimension to the definition of multilingualism is mentioned by Baker C[9]. He defines a multilingual person as *the one speaking more than two languages competently.*

This aspect is interesting as it requires competence in the languages spoken. If it is so a person speaking French competently and another language not competently is a French monolingual speaker. As it is very difficult to measure the competences of individuals in multilingual community, the aspect focusing on the number of languages spoken by individuals has priority. Another thing to raise is the way Baker specifies the number of languages as (more *than two languages)* which extends the number of languages from two to more of them. However, The definition from Li[10] seems to extend from one language to more of them. Whatever the expressions used by the two scholars, they both mean not a single language.

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[1] Cenoz j. (2013). Defining Multingualism in Annual Review of Applied Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[2] Larissa, A. (2022). An Advanced Guide to multilingualism. Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Press

[3] European Commission 2007. Final Report: High level group on multilingualism. Luxembourg: European communities Retrieved from htttp///ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/doc/ multireport pdf.

[4] Matthew, P. (1995). Concise Dictionary of Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press

[5] Larissa, A. Idem

[6] European Commission. Idem

[7] Matthew, P.. Idem

[8] Larissa, A. ibidem

[9] Baker, C. (2006) Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism. New York: 4ed. Multilingual Matters.

[10] Li, W. (2008) Research perspective on bilingualism and multilingualism. In W, Li and M. Moyer (Eds). The Blackwell handbook of research methods on bilingualism and multilingualism. oxford, uk , Blackwell.

> *a multilingual individual as anyone who can communicate in more than one language,*
> *be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)*

Apart from the extension from one language to more of them, the definition also takes into account the skills at which a multilingual speaker is competent among the four skills, namely (speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing) either actively or passively. The author agrees with the definition integrating all the mentioned aspects focusing on the language skills. (Emphasis mine)

It is worth mentioning the two types of multilingualism, namely individual and societal one. The former refers to the ability of an individual to use languages in a society. It is also referred to as plurilingualism which the website of the Council of Europe[11] considers as the repertoire of varieties of languages used by many individuals. Among those individuals, some are monolinguals and others are plurilinguals. The societal multingualism refers to a society where its citizens speak many languages. A good example is the Democratic Republic of Congo which is a multilingual country.

The author believes that perfect multilingualism is related to the easier languages of the speakers through which they express their emotions. This view is similar to Woolston[12] who defines a perfect multilingual person basing on the following three criteria:

First, the concerned person is supposed to have learned those languages in his or her childhood. Second, he or she is supposed to speak them competently basing on the four language skills. Last, his or her accent in those languages are supposed to be native like. As the interview was semi-structured, the interviewer added some follow up questions basing of these three criteria.

The criteria also presuppose the easier and emotional languages of the speakers which constitute the two parameters used in the procedure.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCEDURE

As the procedure aims at establishing perfect multilingualism of a community by involving the two socio-psycholinguistic parameters, namely languages of emotional expression and easier languages of the speakers. These languages are supposed to be tools through which the speakers express their emotions and they also use them competently. The two parameters led to formulate the ten items below which are related to specific skills as presented in the table1 below.

In the table, it is observed that the ten items are both related the four language skills and the two socio-psycholinguistic parameters which are presented vertically. The ten items are presented horizontally. These items are presented in the way that they correspond to the specific skills and parameters. For example, the items 2, 4 and 5 are related to speaking skill and the parameter of languages of emotional expression of the speaker. The remaining items 1,3,6,7,8,9 and 10 are related the four specific skills and the parameter of easier languages of the speaker. There is a possibility of extending the number of items in a study.

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[11] Council of Europe (n.d). Policies for Pluralingualism. Council of Europe, education and language, language policy (Website) retrieved from htpp://www.coe.int/dg4/linguistic/division-en asp.
[12] Woolston, C.(2015). Scientists offer advice on how best to respond to reviewers. Research Bloggging org. https: being multilingual. Consulted on June 2023, 5:00 pm.

PARAMETRES	RELATED SKILLS	ITEMS
LANGUAGES EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION, OF THE SPEAKER	SPEAKING	4. Suppose you were in a difficult situation in Kinshasa and help were needed, which language (s) would you address people for help? 5. Which language (s) do you address your partner while dealing with intimacy? 2. Suppose you quarreled with a partner, which languages would you address him or her?
EASIER LANGUAGES OF THE SPEAKER	SPEAKING	1. Which language(s), would you like the judge may let you express in a court to defend yourself as not as not being guilty? 3. In which language (s), while communicating, you feel ideas come out smoothly?
	READING	6. In which language(s), do you read smoothly and fast?
	WRITING	10. In which language(s) do you write in with confidence?
	LISTENING	7. In which language(s) would you like to be taught while learning on a complex topic? 8. In which language (s) is/are your screen dreams? 9. In which language (s) is/are your favorite TV programs or movies?

Table I. Illustration of items related to different skills.

III.   ILLUSTRATIVE STUDY

3.1.   The instruments used

The instruments had two parts. The first one contained two identification variables, namely gender and age. For the gender the informants selected either of the two choices: male and female. For age, there were three choices, ether being less than 18 years old, or 18 years old or again more than 18 years old.

The research interest variables contained ten items that are displayed in the above (table n01). All of them are asked to establish perfect multilingualism basing on the two parameters, namely easier languages of the speaker and emotional expression languages of the speaker. These two parameters are related to the four language skills since competence is generally measured thanks to the skills of the speaker. As mentioned above, the speaking skill has five items, the listening skill has three items and the remaining two skills ie reading and writing have respectively one item. It was easier to formulate items for assessing both speaking and listening than the other two skills. This shows the primacy of speech in

language and listening is generally related to speaking. The questions used in both survey and semi-structured interview were asked in French. They are attached as appendix. They follow up questions in the semi-structured interview are in italics.

3.2.   Results

Different responses provided by informants concerning the ten items were analyzed thanks to SPSS. They mentioned different languages depending on the questions asked to them. Nine language strings can be mentioned. The following table provides a synthesis of the frequencies of languages selected by the respondents in the survey questionnaire.

It can be noticed that French, Lingala, Kikongo and Kiswahili are mentioned in associations in the following four language strings:

- Lingala+French
- Kiswahili+French
- Kikongo+French
- Lingala+Kikongo+French

Table II. Frequencies the respondents selected different languages

N°	Languages mentioned	Frequencies
1	French	110
2	Lingala	36
3	French+ Lingala	15
4	French +Kiswahili	14
5	Kikongo	7
6	Ciluba	3
7	Kiswahili	1
8	Kikongo + French	1
9	Lingala+Kikongo+French	1

In the light of the results provided in the above table, French and Lingala come at the top. They are regarded as the perfect mother tongues of the respondents The following (table 3) also provides a synthesis of the results explicitly in terms of questions and proportions of languages by specifying the different variables, the related skills and socio-psycholinguistic parameters.

SOCIO-PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PARAMETERS	RELATED SKILLS	VARIABLES	LANGUAGES AND PROPORTIONS PROVIDED								
			FRENCH	FRENCH AND LINGALA	LINGALA	KIKONGO	KISWAHILI	FRENCH AND KISWAHILI	CILUBA	LIANGALA, KIKONGO AND FRENCH	KIKONGO AND FRENCH
LANGUAGES OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION OF THE SPEAKER	SPEAKING	Lges expressed in a quarrel (Var2)	50	5	35	5		5			
		Lges expressed in trouble (Var4)	25	10	45	5		5	10		
		Lges of intimacy expression (Var5)	75	5	5	5	5	5		5	
EASIER LANGUAGES OF THE SPEAKER	SPEAKING	Lges expressed in a court (Var1)	60		30			10			
		Lges of smooth expression (Var3)	10	5	20	5		5			5
	READI	Lges of fast and smooth reading (Var6)	80	5	10			5			
	WRITING	Lges confided in writing (Var10)	60	5	5	5		5			
	LISTENING	Lges of easy understanding (Var7)	70	10	10	5		10			
		Lges of dreams (Var8)	55	10	20			10	5		
		Lges of mass (var9)	65	20		5		10			
Total			550	75	180	35	5	70	15	5	5

3.3. Interpretation

Basing on the results of the study, mainly the ones of the survey questionnaire, the proportions inserted into different boxes correspond horizontally to the results of the ten items. These proportions equal the number of respondents who selected the respective languages. The total proportions for each language are presented vertically. French has the highest proportions for the questions related to languages of fast and smooth reading and languages of easy understanding as it has vertically 80 and 70. Lingala has a considerable proportion for the questions related to languages expressed in trouble and languages expressed in quarrel. Both French and Lingala express emotions of the respondents. French, apart from its single string, it is in association with three other strings. Lingala is in association with two strings. This evidently attests the strength of French and Lingala playing the role of perfect mother tongues.

An examination of pluralingualism of the respondents reveals that the number of the spoken languages is restricted to two languages. It generally consists of French + local languages (among them, either Lingala, Kiswahili or Kikongo is mentioned). This is

corroborated by Baker's definition of a multilingual person, mentioned early, as the one speaking more than two languages competently. Only one respondent is trilingual of Lingala, Kikongo and French. There are not monolinguals French and Lingala since the respondents mentioned those languages in associations with other language. None of the respondents mentioned exclusively French or Lingala.

Looking at the bottom of the table vertically, the languages with the highest total proportions are, namely French with (550) followed by Lingala with (180). These two languages constitute the perfect multilingualism of the respondents. They are the languages the respondents count in UNESCO[13].

The results of the semi-structured interview, which are not tabulated here, validated the two languages found in the survey. Responding verbally to the ten items, the five respondents mentioned French and Lingala, but French was at the first position. For the follow up questions, after observing the four respondents in Lingala speech, it was disclosed that they speak Kinshasa Lingala native like and one of them spoke French smoothly. They all learned French in their childhoods and have spoken Lingala since their births. The triangulation of the two results yields two languages: French and Lingala.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to illustrate a procedure for establishing perfect multilingualism in a community. The illustrative investigation consisted, first, of a survey questionnaire and semi-structured where twenty respondents provided answers. The results of the survey revealed that they are perfect multilinguals in both French and Lingala as presented in table2. The semi-structured interview involving five respondents from the sample revealed that the five respondents have spoken Lingala since their births. They learned French in their childhoods. Most of them spoke Kinshasa Lingala more native like than French.

The hypothesis stating that the respondents were perfect multilinguals in both French and Lingala is confirmed. The survey and semi-structured interview revealed two languages. French and Lingala can be regarded as perfect mother tongues of the studied informants. They are the languages informants count in UNESCO[14]. It is not a surprise to notice that English language was not mentioned by the respondents. Indeed, a foreign language such as English, Spanish, Italian and others may not play a role of a perfect mother tongue in the Congolese community. These perfect mother tongues are relevant in education. The knowledge of the perfect mother tongues of learners can help teachers apply translanguiging in a multilingual classroom.

APPENDIX

I. Questions used in the survey questionnaire (French)

1. Quelle (s) langue(s) aimeriez-vous qu'un juge vous demande de vous exprimer pour plaider non coupable au tribunal ?

2. Supposez que vous vous querellez, quelle (s) langue(s) utiliserez-vous pour que votre partenaire sente que vous êtes en colère ?

3. Dans quelle(s) langue (s) communiquez-vous avec plus d'aisance ?

4. Vous êtes à Kinshasa, quelle (s) langue(s) utiliseriez-vous dans une situation difficile pour demander de l'aide ?

5. Quelle(s) langue(s) utilisez-vous dans votre intimité ?

6. Dans quelle (s) langue(s) lisez-vous facilement et rapidement ?

7. Dans quelle (s) langue(s) aimeriez-vous être enseigné si le sujet est difficile ?

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[13] UNESCO (1953). Mother Tongue education, language policy (Website) retrieved from htpp://www.coe.int/dg4/linguistic.

[14] UNESCO. *idem*

8. Dans quelle (s) langue(s) rêvez-vous ?

9. Vos films favoris sont dans quelle (s) langue(s) ?

10. Dans quelle (s) langue(s) écrivez-vous avec assurance sans peur de commettre des erreurs ?

II. Questions used in the semi-structured interview (French)

1. Quelle (s) langue(s) aimeriez-vous qu'un juge vous demande de vous exprimer pour plaider non coupable au tribunal ? *Avez- vous appris cette(s) langue(s) depuis votre enfance ?*

2. Supposez que vous vous querellez, quelle (s) langue(s) utiliserez-vous pour que votre partenaire sente que vous êtes en colère ?

3. Dans quelle(s) langue (s) communiquez-vous avec plus d'aisance ? *Utilisez-vous cette(s) langue(s) en famille ?*

4. Vous êtes à Kinshasa, quelle (s) langue(s) utiliseriez-vous dans une situation difficile pour demander de l'aide ? *Et si vous ne connaissez pas les langues des personnes à qui vous alliez demander de l'aide.*

5. Quelle(s) langue(s) utilisez-vous dans votre intimité ?

6. Dans quelle (s) langue(s) lisez-vous facilement et rapidement ?

7. Dans quelle (s) langue(s) aimeriez-vous être enseigné si le sujet est difficile ?

8. Dans quelle (s) langue(s) rêvez-vous ? *Et si vous êtes chez vous ici à Kinshasa ou ailleurs, rêvez-vous toujours dans la/les même(s) langue(s) ?*

9. Vos films favoris sont dans quelle (s) langue(s) ? *Votre choix peut être justifié parce que vous comprenez mieux cett(es) langue(s) ou autre chose ?*

10. Dans quelle (s) langue(s) écrivez-vous avec assurance sans peur de commettre des erreurs ?