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SUBTRACTIVE BILINGUALISM: CAN IT BE REVERSED?

Subtractive Bilingualism: Can it be reversed?

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Abstract

After Proposition 227 passed in 1998, schools in California dismantled their bilingual education. As a result, minority children were forced into English-only instruction classrooms. Today, the shortage of bilingual education in schools, causes bilingual children to keep their native language and knowledge at home and unseen by teachers. In order to understand bilingual language development, this report answers the following questions: What is subtractive bilingualism? What are the factors of subtractive bilingualism? Does subtractive bilingualism affect students' identity? In a review of the literature on bilingual language development, the research shows that bilingual children in English-only classrooms ultimately prefer the use of the majority language, English. I chose to do a qualitative autoethnographic case study design where on the one hand I am reflecting on my own bilingual development, and on the other, I am reflecting on my younger brother's bilingual development. My findings indicate that my younger brother developed a bilingual ability known as *receptive bilingual ability*.

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Background

I grew up in a Hispanic household where my parents primarily spoke Spanish. I have two brothers who are older than me and speak Spanish. When the oldest brothers entered school, they had the opportunity to attend bilingual schools. This appears to have been beneficial to them because one of them is a fifth-grade teacher and the other is a diesel mechanic; both of these jobs require bilingual abilities for their jobs, which they have been successful in. When I entered school, I did not have the benefit of bilingual education but I still maintained my Spanish language by watching Mexican soap operas with my mother, communicating with family in Mexico, and listening to Spanish music. When communicating with our parents we all tend to speak Spanish to each other. However, I have noticed that my youngest brother, who is fifteen years old, seems to not understand much of the family communication in Spanish, so I decided to investigate this topic for my capstone project. What are the factors of subtractive bilingualism? How might students experiencing language loss be supported to regain and develop their heritage language? This capstone paper will investigate language loss and the ways in which heritage language may be revitalized.

Literature Review

What is bilingualism?

Bilingualism is the phenomenon of speaking more than one language. Bilingualism is having the ability to use two or more languages to communicate (Liddicoat, 1991). It involves being able to write and speak in two or more languages. Bilingualism is a controversial term. The reason this is a controversial term is because many researchers have different ways of defining

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bilingualism. Haugen & Weinreich (1953, as cited in Garcia, 2009) define it as average proficiency in two languages is considered bilingualism. Those acquiring some competence in another language are defined as bilingual. Being a bilingual person can be defined differently by different people.

There are two different ways one becomes bilingual, that is simultaneous and sequential bilingualism. A person may become a simultaneous bilingual by acquiring the two languages at or around the same time at home. Another way a person may become bilingual is by acquiring the second language at a later time after their first which is called sequential bilingualism (Garcia, 2019). Many children grow up in a household where more than one language is spoken. At a very young age, children are exposed to two or more languages. Children have the natural ability to switch between languages. On the other hand, sequential bilingualism usually occurs once a child enters school. The majority, if not all of the schools in California require teachers to instruct in English, causing the students who do not know the English language to develop a second language when they enter the classroom.

Bilingualism is the norm in the world. According to Liddicoat (1991), bilingualism is prevalent in most countries around the world in all classes of society, and all age groups. However, many individuals believe that a country is linked with one single language (Garcia, 2009). Liddicoat points out that bilingualism is not widely recognized in the world, particularly in countries that view themselves as monolingual. For instance, it is generally thought that English is spoken in the United States and Spanish in Spain. While this is partially true, countries like these also have linguistic diversity and a lot of individuals are bilingual and multilingual. Garcia (2009, as cited in Cummins, 2017) argues that heteroglossia is the norm in the world.

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Frank and Rosa (2015, as cited in Cummins, 2017) point out that heteroglossia ideologies view multilingualism as the norm and languages as interacting in a complicated and evolving way with multilingual people's linguistic practices and social relations. This can also be seen in California.

Education in California

California has not always practiced English only as a means of instruction in classrooms. During the eighteenth century, students learned English while maintaining their minority language in many parts of the U.S.. Moreover, following Title VII of the Elementary Secondary Education Act, it was determined that children had a right to learn in a language they understood and many viewed the use of the first language as an asset in school. In fact, in the early 1990s, there were elementary schools in California that provided bilingual instruction (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015). To be more specific, in Soledad, a small town in Monterey County, there was an Elementary school that taught their academic content in English and Spanish. Many of the students in Soledad benefited from bilingual education because they learned how to speak, read, write, and think in English and Spanish. However, in 1998, a law passed in California took apart bilingual programs in public schools and replaced them with programs emphasizing English only (Bali, 2001). Ron Unz, the man that proposed Proposition 227, believed that if students are to succeed, they need to be taught only in the English language (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi (2008). Evans and Hornberger (2005), point out that California's educational policies shifted from viewing *language diversity as a resource to language diversity as a problem.*

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A few years later after the State Proposition 227, Federal legislation passed that eliminated Bilingual Education Title VII and instead emphasized English only under Title I, which addresses the needs of underserved students. This was President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB mandates that all students by 2014 to achieve a level of "proficiency" in evaluation systems (Garcia et al., 2008). The goal of NCLB was to make schools responsible for the success of children. Schools were put under pressure; they needed to ensure that all their students were performing at a proficient level. Garcia et al. (2008) state that children who had difficulties in reading, speaking, and writing or understanding the English language prevented students from meeting the state's proficiency level. Instead of providing students with appropriate resources to become successful, they were more interested in meeting the educational proficiency level. Garcia et al. (2008) points out that there definitely has been a shift in education: it went from proposing equal educational opportunities in developing bilingual abilities to closing the achievement gap through standardized tests and English immersion. Educational policies have shifted, and it is evident that schools only care about meeting state standards.

What does this mean for language development?

Many children enter school only knowing their native language. When they enter an English only school they are required to learn the English language and begin learning the subject matter content. When children acquire a second language, it is likely that they will develop additive bilingualism when both languages are encouraged or subtractive bilingualism when only one language is encouraged. When developing a second language, it can lead to

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positive or negative consequences. Lambert (1974 as cited in Cummins, 2017) points out that there is a distinction between the two types of bilingualism. that they emerge under different societal and education conditions.

Baker and Prys Jones (1998 as cited in Cummins, 2017) define additive bilingualism as:

Additive Bilingualism: A situation where a second language is learnt by an individual or group without detracting from the maintenance and development of the first language. A situation where a second language adds to, rather than replaces the first language. (p. 698)

Some researchers have said that additive bilingualism is isolating languages, because it fosters the racialization of language. However, I am following Cummins's definition of additive bilingualism, which defines additive bilingualism as "the form of bilingualism that results when students add a second language to their intellectual tool-kit while continuing to develop conceptually and academically in their first language" Cummins (2001 as cited in Cummins, 2017). I take Cummins' position because I view bilingualism as an integrated linguistic system rather than as two separate languages.

When children go to school only knowing their first language, in many U.S. school settings, students are expected to learn English and only use their first language outside of school. In school settings, the use of the first language has generally not been encouraged by teachers or school staff. According to Filmore (1991), subtractive bilingualism mostly occurs in the United States and Canada where linguistic diversity is not valued. This approach can lead to subtractive bilingualism. Baker and Prys Jones (1998 as cited in Cummins, 2017) defined subtractive bilingualism as:

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Subtractive Bilingualism: A situation in which a second language is learnt at the expense of the first language, and gradually replaces the first language (e.g. in-migrants to a country or minority language pupils in submersion education). (p. 706)

Students who come into the classroom knowing another language or multiple languages must learn the English language if they want to succeed in school and out of the classroom. Students quickly realize that in order to gain access to the world, one must learn English (Fillmore, 1991). Bilingual children who attend English-only schools are at risk of losing their first language.

Impact on Culture, Identity, and Education

Parents of students who are starting to show signs of subtractive bilingualism or have fully developed subtractive bilingualism have different views on subtractive bilingualism. Unfortunately, According to Lightbown & Spada (2013) report that, the “solution” teachers may recommend to parents is that they quit talking their native language at home and instead focus on speaking the school language with their children.. Some parents are OK with their child shifting to English only and others are worried that their child will develop a new identity. According to Fillmore (1991), parents are concerned and do not want their child to develop subtractive bilingualism because there will be no communication with the family, and the child may lose their cultural identity. When parents are unable to communicate with their children, they are unable to communicate efficiently their core values, beliefs, or knowledge to their children (Fillmore, 2000).

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Subtractive bilingualism affects students' educational experience. When teachers do not support students' first language, it makes it harder for the students to succeed in school. Students often may feel disempowered and as a result may drop out before they finish high school (Roberts, 1995). Students are often labeled by their teachers, which can be harmful. Nguyen & Hamid (2017) have suggested that this could explain why young indigenous students have low academic achievement and a high dropout rate. In other words, lacking a bilingual education could cause students to fall behind in their academic learning.

Subtractive bilingualism may impact students in various ways. Not only can it impact their language ability but also their cultural identity. According to Nguyen & Hamid (2017, p. 148), because of the language and cultural differences that are set by the school, language minority students have no choice but to develop a new identity. As a result of this, language minority children tend to associate less with their original cultural identity. For this reason, subtractive bilingualism can be detrimental to students' identity. English-only schooling and the belittling of the minority language stifle language minority students to lose their native language and culture (Mercuri, 2012). Culture is not set. As one continues to grow up, culture influences that once shaped one's development and worldview continue to change. It is developmental and fluid; therefore, these contexts stifle home culture while imposing the school culture on students. De la Sablonnière et al. (2016) found "when one integrates a new identity that is viewed to have a higher and more legitimate relative status than one's original identity, the pattern between identification levels is subtractive, which means that one's original cultural identity's identification becomes lower" (p.441). A problem they may face at school is hanging on to their original cultural identity.

In summary, this review of the literature explored what is subtractive bilingualism and how does subtractive bilingualism affect students' identity. In demonstrating how the literature suggests that subtractive bilingualism may impact the development of identity, I now turn to a case study of my own family's language use to investigate language loss.

Methods

In order to answer my research questions, I chose to do an autoethnographic case study design, following Chang's (2008) methods for qualitative autoethnography, in which one collects data by writing memos, vignettes, personal journals, etc. I began by reflecting on the language experiences of family and the development of my siblings and my own language.

My Mexican parents immigrated to the United States 32 years ago. Although they moved to a country where the dominant language is English, they did not learn the language. They did not have the necessity and time to learn English. The reason they did not have the necessity to learn English was because they lived in a Spanish speaking community. Friends spoke Spanish and they worked in the fields where English was not required. Therefore, at home the primary language spoken has been Spanish. When my parents had their first child, Jose, the language that was spoken to the child was Spanish. When Jose was a baby, my parents read to him in Spanish. He also grew up watching cartoons in Spanish. This occurred with all four of their children. When Jose (firstborn) and Miguel (second-born) entered school in the mid-1990s, they were enrolled in a bilingual education program that their school offered. I entered school after California Proposition 227 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Despite the fact that these educational policies did not encourage the use of my native language, I did things that helped me

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encourage my Spanish language such as, watching Mexican novelas, listening to Spanish music, communicating with my extended family that speaks Spanish, etc. As I have discussed in the review of my literature, during this period my brothers were attending school when there were bilingual programs in schools. After doing a quick interview, I learned that my older brothers still use Spanish. They use their Spanish to communicate with their Spanish speaking co-workers and customers at work. Although I do not have specific evidence, they have seemed to benefit from bilingual programs given their continued use and development in English and Spanish. Conversely, my younger brother entered school a few years after California Proposition 227 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, time where English only instruction was emphasized in schools. In my study, I am looking at what his situation is in regards to language development.

Procedures

To gather information for my study, I spent a lot of time with my younger brother. I helped him with his Spanish homework every other day for 25-30 minutes for a few months. We watched movies together in Spanish. I also kept a journal where I wrote down the things I was observing during and outside of the sessions, questions I asked my younger brother, language usage, important data, activities we did together, etc. At the beginning of our session, I was mainly helping him with his Spanish homework. My younger brother was assigned short reading passages that required him to answer questions based on the reading passage. I would read the passages aloud to him and then discuss what he understood. To gain more insight into his Spanish comprehension, we watched a couple of movies in Spanish. The point of the activity

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was to understand his comprehension input. What I mean by this means is how much is he able to understand despite not understanding some or all the words and structures.

The interactions with my younger brother consisted of interchanging ideas and information in English. My younger brother was not comfortable with speaking Spanish, so all the interactions were in English. From my autoethnographic case study, I was able to analyze and understand what factors contributed that help me and my older brothers maintain our bilingual identity and language. It also provided insight into my younger brother's language development and whether or not he has developed subtractive bilingualism.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to better understand language loss and to determine if my younger brother lost his native language and how he might be encouraged to revitalize his language. At home, my younger brother was showing signs of subtractive bilingualism by only communicating in English. In order to understand his situation in regards to his language development, my paper answered the first and secondary questions; What is subtractive bilingualism? What are the factors of subtractive bilingualism? Does subtractive bilingualism affect students' identity?

The literature review demonstrates that subtractive bilingualism can affect children's culture, identity, and education (Filmore, 1991; Nguyen & Hamid, 2017; Roberts, 1995). In schools, children's native language is not encouraged by teachers. At home, children tend to use the dominant language that is spoken at school. When this occurs, it becomes harder for parents to build relationships with their children due to the language barrier (Filmore, 2000). Another

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factor that has influenced the language development of subtractive bilingualism are schools. In California, at one point schools had bilingual programs that encouraged the use of students' native language. A few years later, due to educational policies that passed, such as No Child Left Behind and Proposition 227 which eliminated bilingual programs, currently, in most schools, the use of students' first language is not encouraged or valued. Given that children spend 8 hours in school and their social world becomes centered on school and school friends, it is not surprising that they begin to value the school language and culture. The school context plays an important role in students' language development. Students can develop additive or subtractive bilingualism.

The questions that guided my case study were, how is it that my older brothers and I were able to maintain our bilingual identity and language? Is my younger brother truly losing his native language? Working with my younger brother I was able to understand more about his language development, use, and practices. One thing I noticed is that he is not comfortable speaking Spanish. While helping him with his Spanish homework, I expected to converse in Spanish but that did not happen. When communicating with other family members in the house, he would speak English. The only time he would try to use Spanish is when he would talk to his parents. The reason I say "try" is because he cannot hold a conversation with his parents in Spanish. He would respond by saying one of these words, such as, "No," "Si," or "Esta Bien." He would never respond in complete sentences, just a few words.

Another thing I noticed was that despite not speaking Spanish, he understands Spanish. A lot of the assignments that were assigned as homework were short Spanish reading passages. My younger brother was able to comprehend what he read. For example, one of the passages

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required him to put the story events in chronological order. Other passages required him to find the theme. In addition, when my parents speak to him in Spanish, he comprehends what is being said. There were various times where he needed my assistance understanding complex Spanish words, but for the most part he comprehends Spanish.

I found out that my younger brother tends to identify less with his original cultural identity. I asked him a couple of questions in order to understand his perspective. I asked him, “If you had the chance to study in Spain or Mexico, would you do it?” and “Do you prefer to speak English or your native language?” From this short interview, I learned that my younger brother chooses not to expose himself to the minority language. My younger brother does not like Spanish music, speaking Spanish and does not enjoy watching TV shows/movies in Spanish. The only exposure he gets is from listening to other family members speak Spanish.

Another thing I found out was that my older brothers and I were able to maintain our bilingual identity and language due to different factors nurturing our language development. For instance, before my younger brother was born, we would visit Mexico every two years. The frequent trips to Mexico helped build our first language. As I have mentioned before, my older brothers received a bilingual education, the school increased their exposure to the first language by providing them with Spanish books, music, games, conversation, etc. My younger brother’s elementary school did not provide him with bilingual education. Everything that he learned in school was taught in English. His native language was not encouraged in the classroom. It is evident that there was a lack of exposure to the first language. My older brothers had an increased amount of exposure to the first language while my younger brother did not.

Discussion

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I found that learning a second language is different for people. As I've discussed, my siblings and I grew up in the same household but we all had different factors that contributed to our language development, which led us to develop additive or subtractive bilingualism. There were a couple of interesting findings. I found out that my younger brother still understands Spanish despite not speaking it. Another thing I found surprising was that my younger brother does not identify himself with the first cultural language.

My findings tie into the existing literature because my younger brother does not identify with his Mexican heritage. According to Nguyen & Hamid (2017), minority students prefer to define their identity through language by adhering to the language norms established by the school. My younger brother at a young age realized that the language norm set by the school is the language needed to succeed in and out of the classroom. It is evident that the school environment caused my younger brother to develop a new language and cultural identity. This has negatively impacted my younger brother because he does not like speaking his native language which could later on lead to serious consequences, such as language loss. I was surprised to find out how much my younger brother understands Spanish. Before doing this case study, I thought he had experienced language loss. After doing this, I found out that even though he does not practice speaking language, he is able to understand his parents and comprehend written and spoken language. Garcia (2009) defines the ability to understand, read or attend to, or interpret a language that is not spoken as *receptive bilingualism*. Garcia (2009) states that there are four instances that frequently result in *receptive or passive bilinguals*: "Children of immigrant, Indigenous, or autochthonous minority background, whose home languages are not promoted in the wider society and who are often able to understand their parents and elders, but

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are incapable of speaking the language themselves” (p. 61). This finding has led me to ask additional questions, such as, will my younger brother lose his native language if he stops surrounding himself with his Spanish speaking family? Will he no longer identify himself with his Mexican heritage?

To be bilingual means different things to different people. Although my younger brother does not speak Spanish, he understands the language, which makes him bilingual. My study was important because it demonstrates the effect some educational policies have done to students who speak more than one language. This study added to the literature because it supports what has been written about learning a second language and bilingualism.

Limitations

As a capstone student, this is my first project. My knowledge on how to conduct an investigation is limited. My collection of data is insufficient to answer my related or secondary questions because of the number of participants. Since my project was limited in participants, the study of one person cannot determine that the findings or results will be the same or generalizable for all.

Recommendations or Future directions

I have learned that schools play an important role in their students’ language development. My capstone project connects to two Liberal Studies major learning outcomes, MLO #1: Developing Educator and MLO #2: Social Justice Collaborator. As a future educator, I will apply appropriate and effective practices that will support my students' learning. Many of

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the education policies that have passed over the last few years, have not taken into consideration the benefits of bilingual education. As a future educator, who has learned a lot about language development, I will advocate for bilingual education.

The majority of the schools here in Monterey County have linguistic diversity. What most people do not know is that some of these schools meet the criteria to implement bilingual education. With the knowledge that I have gained, my goal is to advocate for the implementation of bilingual education programs. Another thing I will advocate for is equity and justice in public education. Students' home language should be encouraged and valued in and outside of the classroom.

Teachers should encourage students' home language in the classroom. I have noticed that some believe that the knowledge of the home language does not benefit the second language, when in reality, it does. Instead of encouraging students to speak the majority language, English, at home, teachers should take action so that these ethnic languages and cultures continue to live on in communities where the home language is not encouraged. I hope to make a positive change in my community by making a social change in the way students' are taught in Monterey County.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after California's Proposition 227 was passed in 1998, many school districts emphasized the importance of English only. As a result of this, bilingual students are only using English in and outside of school, which is a sign that the student will develop

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subtractive bilingualism if the student's first language is not supported at school. If children develop subtractive bilingualism, it can affect their culture, identity, and education.

The paper answered my research questions: What is subtractive bilingualism? What are the factors of subtractive bilingualism? Does subtractive bilingualism affect students' identity? How is it that my older brothers and I were able to maintain our bilingual identity and language? Is my younger brother truly losing his native language? My findings show that my younger brother knows more Spanish than I thought. Although he does not speak Spanish, he understands it. He developed a bilingual ability known as receptive bilingualism.

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