

Effect of Bilingualism on English Dictation Performance of Male and Female Primary Level Students

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Abstract

The concept of linguistics is not limited to a special language or community; nowadays, the world is growing rapidly and the idea of bilingualism can be traced in various countries and even small cities. In most of the countries the formal and educational language is different from the learners' mother tongue; this difference can create positive or negative influences on the academic achievement of the students. On the other hand, the popularity of English language is growing rapidly in Iran and people attempt to learn this language. The present study which is a comparative survey attempts to investigate the effect of bilingualism on dictation score of elementary students in second grade who are learning English in ILI. The participants are 30 bilingual students in Tabriz city and 30 monolingual students in Tehran. The participants are both male and female. Before starting the main research Raven intelligence test was used in order to ensure the consistency of students' educational level. The obtained scores were analyzed by ANOVA method. Later, a test of dictation composed of 40 words was given to student and the scores were analyzed by independent t-test. This dictation was designed and validated by consulting 4 elementary school teachers. The final results revealed that there is no significant relationship between bilingualism and dictation score and also there is no significant relationship between gender and dictation score.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, bilingualism, dictation, gender

INTRODUCTION

Like other Asian countries, Iran is regarded as an EFL country. The Iranians communicate with each other by using Persian (an official language). Sociologists believe that economic and business factors played important roles in spreading English in Iran because Iran plays a leading role in supporting the world economy through its contribution to international organizations. Today in multilingual contexts, many parents prefer to rear their children in the dominant language and even a foreign language rather than in their mother tongue. This phenomenon is widespread among

native speakers of Turkish language in the multilingual context of Iran, too. Being such a widespread issue, bilinguality has attracted increasing research interest and, accordingly, some studies have evidenced its effects on learning an additional language while some others have provided counterevidence in this regard. Bilingualism is the ability to use two languages. However, defining bilingualism is problematic since individuals with varying bilingual characteristics may be classified as bilingual. Definitions of bilingualism range from a minimal proficiency in two languages, to an advanced level of proficiency which allows the speaker to function and appear as a native-like speaker of two languages. A person may describe himself as bilingual but may mean only the ability to converse and communicate orally. Others may be proficient in reading in two or more languages.

Generally, to be bilingual means different things to different people, especially in Iranian contexts. Bilingualism encompasses a range of proficiencies and contexts. A young child entering school may be called bilingual but it may be that she uses her first or home language for domestic and familial purposes and that Persian is her preferred language for communication and learning in school and occasionally outside of school. Or she may be largely monolingual in her first language only when she starts school. However, there is a general tendency among Iranian parents toward learning English as the main foreign language; they believe that learning English from early years in childhood can facilitate children's future academic and professional lives. That is only one of the reasons for growing interest in learning English in Iran. These children mostly begin to learn English at the same time that they start school; however, there are some children who learn English even before entering academic world. According to Cummins (2000) the motivation of parents who send their children to foreign language classes is presumably similar in different parts of the world in the case that they want their children to have advantages of knowing two or more languages.

The problem arises frequently among children who are bilingual originally. These children are born with a mother tongue language different from the formal language of the country. In this way they have to struggle learning Persian and nearly simultaneously the foreign language of English; these conditions mostly create confusion among children. In the present study the dictation achievement of Turkish students (who are considered to be bilingual) learning English is compared with their peers who are monolingual and they are able to speak the single language of Persian.

Scholars believed that bilingualism is a complex psychological and socio-cultural linguistic behavior and has multi-dimensional features. Mackey (2000) claimed that bilingualism is the ability to produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language. Bloomfield (1933, as cited in Sobhani, et. al, 2015) believed bilinguals could be defined as individuals who have native like control of two languages. Briefly, bilingualism is the ability to use two languages. Although, defining bilingualism is complex since people with different bilingual features could be classified as bilingual.

A lot of bilinguals had learned two languages at the same time, most of time in early childhood and as a result of the parents or friends bilingualism. These individuals are

called *simultaneous bilinguals* and bilingual who had learned a language after than the other for example as the result of living in a foreign country or academically learning a second language at a school or university are usually called *consecutive bilinguals*. Normally, simultaneous bilinguals have a more native like accent in two languages, although older learners may have useful knowledge about language, which could help them in the language learning. Bilingualism can be observed everywhere in the world. It is said that "more than half of the world's population is bilingual and two thirds of the world's children grow up in a bilingual environment" (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004).

Research into bilingualism effect on individuals had been addressed in literature, world widely. Studies on the effects of bilingualism on cognitive issues began with the using of IQ tests and most of those studies shown negative effects of bilingualism on children's intellectual development. Adler (2001, as cited in Sobhani, et.al, 2015) noted that an interest in the way bilingual students learn vocabularies and solve mathematical problems has drawn on variety of theoretical frameworks. Romanie (1995, as cited in Sobhani, et.al, 2015) claimed most of the studies done before the 1960s indicated that monolingual kids were better than bilingual ones in different skills related to verbal and non-verbal abilities. Kaushanskaya and Marian (2009) suggested that monolinguals' ability to learn new words depends on whether they learn new words silently or out loud.

Conversely, bilinguals' performance does not depend on any particular learning strategy, and they can acquire new words efficiently under any learning conditions. Paradis (2009) argued that bilingual kids produced more right-headed compounds than monolinguals. Bialystok (2001) showed that bilinguals did indeed show enhanced executive control, a quality that has been linked, among other things, to better academic performance. Grosjean (2008) said bilingual person is an integrated/ unique language user, and must not be thought of as a double monolingual.

Keshavarz and Astaneh (2004) conducted a research in which they studied the effect of bilingualism on third language vocabulary learning of three groups of bilingual and monolingual female students including Turkish-Persian bilinguals, American- Persian Bilinguals and Persian monolinguals in two regions of the country. They concluded that the subjects' bilingualism has a positive effect on third language vocabulary learning.

The Benefits of Being Bilingual on kids

Knowing more than one language is generally considered as an advantage. Baker and Jones (1998, as cited in Sobhani, et.al, 2015) considered communicative, cultural, economic, and cognitive advantages as some of the major advantages associated with being bilingual. With regard to the communicative advantage of bilinguality, they stated that bilinguals, living in a world of regular language monitoring, often show greater sensitivity to the communicative needs of others.

Being bilingual helps kids in many cases of interaction, such as interaction with family, community and culture. Bilingual kids are also able to make new friends and create

great relationships in their second language. Latest research had also found that children who are raised in bilingual condition shown better self-control and confidence which is an important factor of school success. Some bilingual teachers say bilingual kids are more advanced than monolingual ones in solving problems requiring the inhibition of misleading information.

Bilingualism and learning another language

Some researchers have focused on the effect of bilingualism on learning an additional language. Perhaps, Ringbom and Thomas (1988, as cited in Ringbom, 2007) are the first pioneers in this regard. They compared monolingual English college students with two English-Spanish bilingual groups who were learning English. The first bilingual group received no formal training whereas the second bilingual group received a minimum of two years' formal training in Spanish. The results indicated that the bilinguals with the formal training outperformed the other two groups in learning grammar; moreover, the two bilingual groups outperformed their monolingual counterparts in learning vocabulary though there was no significant difference between the bilingual groups.

In another study, Sanz (2000) compared 124 Catalan-Spanish bilinguals with 77 Spanish monolinguals who were learning English and attempted to control variables such as socioeconomic background, motivation, attitudes, general intelligence and exposure to English. The general English proficiency of the participants was measured using grammar and vocabulary tests. The results showed that bilingual participants scored higher on the tests than their monolingual peers.

Finally, Munoz (2000) compared third language (English) acquisition of bilinguals knowing Catalan and Castilian with their monolingual counterparts. The researcher tested three groups (aged 9, 12 and 17) on different English proficiency tests: dictation, cloze, multiple-choice grammar and listening comprehension. The results showed that highly proficient bilinguals, those who had good competence in Catalan and Castilian, scored higher than the monolinguals on all the tests.

Bilingualism and Gender

Recently, several researchers pointed to the ever-growing gap between the study of bilingualism and the study of language and gender. While the body of empirical research, conducted at the intersection of the two fields, is slowly growing, to date little attempt has been made to theorize the relationship between bilingualism and gender and to point out how both fields can benefit from bridging the gap. Although interest in the issues of language and gender goes back at least a hundred years (West, Lazar, & Kramarae, 1997), it was not until the 1970s that language and gender emerged as a separate field of inquiry. The controversy sparked by Lakoff's (1975) book *Language and Woman's Place* and by Thorne and Henley's (1975) anthology *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance* stimulated unparalleled interest on the part of sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists in relationships between gender and linguistic practices. Most of the studies conducted between 1975 and the early 1990s focused on differences

between women's and men's language and attempted to explain them through a generalized feature of gender identities or relations: *deficit*, *difference*, or *dominance*. All three frameworks found reflection in the studies that attempted to investigate the relationship between gender and multilingual practices (Pavlenko, 2001).

As for the relationship between gender and choice of language, in many language contexts, the dominant language which is usually perceived as the power code is associated with masculinity, and the minority language with femininity and domestic values (Pavlenko, 2001). This implies that gender and language interact in ways that make bilingualism have different meanings to different groups. For example, in some communities, women may be given less access to a second prestigious language, restricting their bilingualism; however, the opposite can also occur (Baker, 2006).

On the other hand, investigations into the relationship between gender and bilingualism have reported superiority of female learners. For instance, Bowey's (1995) study of 500 Chinese university students studying English in Hong Kong supported female superiority in general language proficiency. Likewise, Jorgensen (2003) conducted two large scale studies to investigate gender differences in bilingualism with Swedish children learning English and immigrant children learning Swedish. He noticed that girls showed higher levels of proficiency in both cases. He explained the differences based on cognitive variables, brain function, and cultural differences. Nonetheless, Ellis (2008) has pointed out that female superiority in bilingualism is disputable because the motivation and incentive for being bilingual may differ in women and men depending on the types of opportunities that a second language creates and makes available to them. Accordingly, it seems that the question whether differences in second/additional language learning may be due to language status (being monolingual vs. bilingual), socioeconomic status or gender still confronts SLA researchers.

The role of teachers in bilingual education

Teachers will vary in their understandings of bilingualism and the processes of second/foreign language acquisition. Some teachers will be bilingual or plurilingual themselves and have a wealth of personal experience to draw on. Others may be very familiar with multilingual school environments. Some may have had no contact with bilingual learners.

Franson (2011) mentioned some aspects of bilingualism and the development of first and additional languages which can inform teachers' approaches to bilingual and multilingual learners. Teachers should be aware that:

- The learner's first or home language plays a significant role in the learning of the additional language in terms of cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural influences.
- Learning a foreign language will not necessarily proceed in an orderly and systematic fashion. Learners will use prior linguistic, learned and world knowledge. They will learn when there is a need to communicate and to learn.

- Learning a language and becoming bilingual is also about learning and living in different societies and cultures. It is not just about acquiring a new language, but also about understanding another culture and developing another identity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Based on previously discussed ideas and in order to investigate the effect of bilingualism on English dictation performance of elementary students, the present study deals with the following research questions and hypotheses. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- Q1. What is the effect of bilingualism on the English dictation performance of second elementary students?
- Q2. What is the effect of bilingualism on the English dictation performance of male second elementary students?
- Q3. What is the effect of bilingualism on the English dictation performance of female second elementary students?
- Q4. What is the effect of bilingualism on the English dictation performance of female second elementary students comparing with male students?

Based on the aforementioned research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated.

- H1. Bilingualism affects the English dictation performance of second elementary students in Tabriz and Tehran city.
- H2. Bilingualism affects the English dictation performance of male second elementary students.
- H3. Bilingualism affects the English dictation performance of female second elementary students.
- H4. Bilingualism affects the English dictation performance of female students more than male students.

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study include male and female second elementary students in Tehran and Tabriz cities who are learning English in Iran Language Institute (ILI) which were selected randomly as the sample group of this study. Raven's Progressive Matrices was used for the purpose of homogeneity among students and accordingly 15 monolingual male students, 15 monolingual female students from Tehran city and 15 bilingual male students and 15 bilingual female students from Tabriz city were selected. All of these students are learning English in ILI. It is worth noting that people of Tehran are initially monolingual speaking only Persian language which is the official and academic language in Iran, however, people living in Tabriz are originally Turkish and they are considered to be bilingual speaking both Persian and Azeri languages.

Instruments

The instruments of this study include Raven's Progressive Matrices and a dictation text. The Raven test was administered to estimate the IQ level of students for ensuring the homogeneity of the participants. The test, which was built in 1938 by Penn day and Raven has 60 questions multiple choice and consist of five series (E, D, C, B, A) each including 12 questions, listed in order of difficulty. It is a nonverbal group test typically used in educational settings. It is the most common and popular test administered to groups ranging from 5-year-olds to the elderly. The results were scored after 40 minutes.

The main instrument of this research is an English dictation text consisting of 40 words based on the students' academic level. These words were selected and gathered by consulting four teachers in Tehran and Tabriz teaching English in ILI. The validity of this text is content validity which was ensured by the ideas and comments of experienced teachers.

Data Analysis

The present study attempts to examine the effect of bilingualism on English dictation achievement of 60 male and female students in elementary proficiency level; these students were selected randomly from two centers of ILI in Tabriz (bilingual) and Tehran (monolingual) cities. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to ensure normal distribution of the participants and Raven test was used to examine the homogeneity of the learners in terms of their IQ levels, the obtained scores were analyzed through ANOVA test. Later bilingual and monolingual learners took a dictation test which contained 40 English words. Finally, independent t-test was administered to examine the research hypotheses and answer the research questions to find out the effect of bilingualism on dictation performance of male and female elementary level EFL learners in bilingual and monolingual contexts.

RESULTS

In order to estimate the effect of bilingualism on dictation achievement of students, their scores of dictation in two groups of bilingual and monolingual were compared and the gender of students was considered, as well. Therefore, independent t-test was administered to analyze the data. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the homogeneity of the participants was estimated by Raven test and the scores obtained from this test related to four groups of male and female bilingual and monolingual students were analyzed by ANOVA test. In order to compare intelligence scores of students ANOVA test was administered and as illustrated in Table 2, $p > 0.05$ and $F = 0.41$; thus, there is no significant difference between the groups and they are considered to be homogeneous. Table 1 shows the scores obtained from Raven test among the participants and Table 2 demonstrates the results from ANOVA test.

Table 1. IQ scores

	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Bilingual female	15	101.733	2.15362	0.55606
Monolingual female	15	102.2667	8.09291	2.08958
Monolingual male	15	102.3333	1.88718	0.48469
Bilingual male	15	100.667	3.49830	0.90326
Total	60	101.7500	4.56451	0.58928

Table 2. Results of ANOVA test

	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	26.717	3	8.906	0.415	0.743
Within Groups	1202.533	56	21.474		
Total	1229.250	59			

Frequency distribution of dictation scores of students revealed that the mean score of monolingual male students' dictation score is 32.4 with standard deviation of 3.81 and skewedness of -0.35; the minimum score is 25 and the maximum is 38. The mean score of bilingual male students' dictation score is 31.93 with standard deviation of 4.83 and skewedness of -0.47; the minimum score is 23 and the maximum is 38. The mean score of monolingual female students' dictation score is 30.46 with standard deviation of 4.92 and skewedness of -1.7; the minimum score is 17 and the maximum is 36. The mean score of bilingual female students' dictation score is 31.46 with standard deviation of 7.66 and skewedness of -2.56; the minimum score is 7 and the maximum is 38.

Table 3. Mean score of students' dictation scores

Students	Language	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewedness	Minimum	Maximum	Variation range
Male	Monolingual	15	32.4	3.81	-0.35	25	38	13
	Bilingual	15	31.93	4.83	-0.47	23	38	15
Female	Monolingual	15	30.46	4.92	-1.7	17	36	19
	Bilingual	15	31.46	7.66	-2.56	7	38	31

In addition, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used for detecting normal distribution of variables; this test was used to estimate and ensure the normal distribution of variables and accordingly, the significance level of students' scores on dictation is more than 0.05 which is considered to be normally distributed; therefore, it can be argued that parametric test is appropriate for this research.

Table 4. Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Variables	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	No difference	Positive difference	Negative difference	Test	Significance level
Dictation scores	60	31.56	5.4	0.15	0.11	-0.15	1.22	0.09

The results obtained from testing research hypotheses revealed that there is no significant difference between the dictation scores of bilingual and monolingual

students and bilingualism does not have negative effect, Table 6 illustrates independent t-test; accordingly, the significance level is 0.85 which is more than 0.05 and $T=0.19$. In addition, Table 5 shows differences related to mean scores for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of students.

Table 5. Results of mean difference for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of students

Variable	Language	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Dictation status	Monolingual	30	31.43	4.43
	Bilingual	30	31.7	6.29

Table 6. Results of variances for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of students

Variable	Language	F	P	T	df	P
Dictation status	Monolingual	1.07	0.3	0.19	58	0.85
	Bilingual					

The dictation scores of male bilingual and monolingual students are not different significantly and bilingualism does not have negative effect, Table 8 illustrates independent t-test; accordingly, the significance level is 0.77 which is more than 0.05 and $T=0.29$. In addition, Table 7 shows differences related to mean scores for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of male students.

Table 7. Results of mean difference for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of male students

Variable	Language	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Male students' dictation status	Monolingual	15	32.4	3.81
	Bilingual	15	31.93	4.83

Table 8. Results of variances for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of male students

Variable	Language	F	P	T	df	P
Male students' dictation status	Monolingual	0.53	0.47	0.29	28	0.77
	Bilingual					

The dictation scores of female bilingual and monolingual students are not different significantly and bilingualism does not have negative effect, Table 10 illustrates independent t-test; accordingly, the significance level is 0.67 which is more than 0.05 and $T=0.42$. In addition, Table 9 shows differences related to mean scores for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of female students.

Table 9. Results of mean difference for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of female students

Variable	Language	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Female students' dictation status	Monolingual	15	30.46	4.92
	Bilingual	15	31.46	7.66

Table 10. Results of variances for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of female students

Variable	Language	F	P	T	df	P
Female students' dictation status	Monolingual	0.63	0.43	0.42	28	0.67
	Bilingual			0		

The dictation scores of female and male bilingual students are not different significantly, Table 12 illustrates independent t-test; accordingly, the significance level is 0.84 which is more than 0.05 and $T=0$. In addition, Table 11 shows differences related to mean scores for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of female students.

Table 11. Results of mean difference for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of female and male students

Variable	Gender	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Students' dictation status	Male	15	31.93	4.83
	Female	15	31.46	7.66

Table 12. Results of variances for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of female and male students

Variable	Gender	F	P	T	df	P
students' dictation status	Male	0.32	0.57	0.2	28	0.84
	Female					

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Most lay people often think that acquiring two languages is more difficult than acquiring one and that it will take children longer to acquire two languages. However, as Genesee (2012) maintained both bilingual and monolingual children follow the same procedure and acquire the same basic principles in language acquisition at about the same age. Contrary to the concerns often expressed by parents and even some educators and professionals with regard to raising children bilingually, the present study showed that bilingual learners do not outperformed their monolingual peers in learning an additional language (English). However, Kan (2008) believed that bilingual children's experience of learning a foreign language has a great influence on their overall language development.

Considering the results obtained from this study revealed that unlike the imagined and anticipated effect of bilingualism on academic achievement of students, in the present study bilingualism displayed no significant influence on students' dictation performance. That is to say, bilingualism does not have any significant effect on the dictation performance of monolingual and bilingual students and even the results showed that gender has no effect, either. These results are in disagreement with the results of the studies conducted by Bailystok (2001), Keshavarz and Astaneh (2004) and Clyne (1997) who found out that bilingualism has positive effect on academic performance. Ellis (2008) commented on the relationship between gender and superiority in language learning, one may conclude that individuals learn an additional

language due to a variety of reasons and because of different incentives and opportunities that the language may provide them with. Therefore, it seems that variables such as language status, gender or socioeconomic status per se may not be the only reasons for greater success in language learning

Therefore, it can be inferred that the students' inability in dictation can be related to factors other than bilingualism. One the factors may be due to inefficiency of teachers in having proper pronunciation resulted from the influence of their mother tongue. According to Modares (2003), in writing dictation deficiency in accurate understanding followed by pausing and attempting to concentrate by learners prevent them from controlling their ability in writing and confuse them. The results implied that being bilingual and having a native language different from formal language of the country play no crucial role among children who are learning a foreign language. Pedagogically, it can be stated that involving children in foreign language courses can be accomplished without considering their mother tongues and their status of bilingualism; that is to say, people with different native languages can attempt to learn a foreign language and their academic and professional improvement would be related to the factors other than the number of languages they are able to speak. Based on the findings of this study, teachers do not have to pay much attention to the students' bilingualism in teaching English language and therefore, they will need to consider other affective, cognitive and situational factors in the academic performance and achievement of students.

The present study was limited to be conducted among elementary students of second grade in only two cities of Iran. Due to limitations related to time and getting the required permissions from different schools in Tabriz and Tehran cities, only restricted number of students took part in this research.

Based on the results of this research future studies can concentrate on the effect of bilingualism on academic achievement of students in different age groups, with different majors and performance level. In addition, the effect of bilingual students' intelligence level on their achievement in learning a foreign language can be investigated and compared with monolingual students.

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