

Multi-Lingualism and the Role of Cognitive Powers

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Abstract:

This paper is intended to look into the inter-relation among the development of multi-lingual faculty and the cognitive powers. The inter-relationship study will prove to be of some help in designing the course content for multi-lingual learning and enhancing the cognitive power through the multi-lingual approach of learning.

Keywords:

Multi-lingualism, Cognitive power, mental faculty, cognitive learning, multi-language skills

Introduction

Language is the medium of communication between two or more individuals. Most people know at least one language and we can find some people who learn more than one language. Such persons are called multilingual. We will now look at some of the definitions of multilingual.

The dictionary meaning of multilingual is the ability of an individual speaker or a community of speakers to use multiple languages. A person who can speak multiple languages is known as a polyglot or a multilingual.

Cambridge Dictionary defines multilingual as (people or groups) able to use more than two languages for communication, or (of a thing) written or spoken in more than two different languages.

Dictionary.com defines multilingual as an adjective like using or able to speak several or many languages with some facility; spoken or written in several or many languages: a multilingual broadcast; dealing with or involving several or many languages: a multilingual dictionary of business terms and as a noun as multilingual person.

Discussion

Being multilingual is a matter of great achievement. Multi-language learning skill depends on various factors like place of birth, socio-economic environment, education and intelligence of the individuals. But keeping in view the limit of the time and the word restriction for this article, we will be discussion more on how cognition plays an important role in being multi-lingual. It should be known that Cognition is the process, by which the sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored,

recovered, and used (Neisser, 1967). It is also seen that multilingual character is associated with exposure to more knowledge sources and widening of perspective on different issues.

It is also a fact that there are more bilingual persons than persons knowing more than two languages which is due to the existing education systems in many countries where English is the medium of instruction and teaching in spite of the fact that the local languages are different. This process on one hand has made English a universal language while most other a regional languages when seen in global perspective (Franson, 2011).

Cummins (1984) has studies the development of multilingual proficiency in detain and he says that for a common underlying proficiency hypothesis, in which cross-lingual proficiencies can promote the development of cognitive, academic skills. It can be noted that common proficiency means the inter-relation of skills and knowledge that enables our mind to learn faster.

We will look at some of the examples across the globe to find how the different people acquire the multilingual skills. India, most of educated citizens know at least three languages. The have national language as Hindi and their educational system in based English system. It should be noted there India has more than 680 local languages (Devy, 2013).

If we take the case of United States of America, we find more than fifty percent of the population is bilingual. This is due to the fact that most of the residents are migrant coming from other places having different languages and cultures.

Similarly, in many countries this trend of multilingual character can be seen which is contributed to the changing socio-cultural and economic factors. Many

countries of Asia adopted English as a medium of education to train their workforce to actively participate in the economic affairs of the globe. Chinese and Japanese societies got transferred into economically productive when they promoted learning of English as a language of business communication.

Many a time the existing social conditions like a migrant to other nation has to learn the language of the host country or region so survival. The melting borders and online businesses has led to demand for being more multi-lingual as online information is mostly available in English language and some other languages has started to do so but fail to compete with English which necessitate the need for learning it whatever your mother tongue might had been.

The inter-relationship of the cognitive abilities and the linguistic is an area of good research and we can find that they are intimately related. Some positive and some negative impacts in learning are also noted. For example, Diaz (1983) says that bilingualism in children can result in enhanced acquisition of meta-cognitive skills and flexible thinking ability while other researchers have shown that bilingualism has an adverse influence on language learning and this is evident in delays in lexical acquisition (e.g., Pearson, Fernandez, & Oller, 1993; Umbel & Oller, 1995).

Some research has examined the role of cognitive processes such as working memory in the acquisition of a second language (Harrington & Sawyer, 1992). This has led to further researches revealing the inter-relationship of language skills and the cognitive abilities. It is a proven fact that children's cognitive development is related

to the increase in both attention and representation which in turn help one acquire language skills more easily.

We can see that how cognitive abilities influence the chances of being a multilingual and how they are inter-related. It is also seen that linguistic and cognitive processes interact across the lifespan, with linguistic function tied to development of cognitive control throughout childhood and to its decline during aging (Comalli et al., 1962).

In this regard it will be helpful to note that the research results of bilingualism or multilingualism has some effects on cognitive processing and it is more evident in children and young adults (de Groot & Kroll, 1997, and Harris, 1992). It is quite common that skills acquired in earlier stages of life persist for longer time in our life than what we learn in older age. Cognitive development can have inseparable relationship with learning of new skills like languages.

From above discussion it also become clear that cognitive abilities has a role in the development of a multilingual traits in children and learning of more than one languages also aids in enhancing the cognitive abilities.

Thus, a plethora of factors influences the development of multilingual traits but the deep impact of cognitive abilities is more evident. The recent research in this field will surely pave the way for beneficial use of the cognitive abilities in learning more than one language and use of more languages skills to enhance the cognitive abilities can also be done. The widening of the horizon of thinking through multilingual ability acquisition can play wonders in coming days.

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About Author

Harish Kumar is graduate of political science and he has deep interest in the field of political science, sociology, economics and psychology. He did schooling from Jawahar Navoday Vidhyalay and graduation from Nalanda Open University. He has been actively writing on the social, economic and political issues. He has one of the founder member of the SureShotPOST Online Publishing.

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