

THE PERCEPTION OF MULTILINGUALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of bilingualism which goes into diverse scientific fields is the leading one among the terms which cannot be compromised on. In their work “Second Language Acquisition”, Gass & Selinker (2008) manifested that there are thirty four different definitions of bilingualism and most definitions enter the scope of another definition. Likewise, Skourtou (2000) maintains that there are sixty eight different definitions. According to Lambeck (1984), the definitions have only one common aspect, which is “existence of more than one language”. In general, it is observed that there is not a consensus on the definitions of bilingualism.

The term “bilingualism” is a concept both with individual and social qualifications. Various definitions have been made about this concept. Vardar (1980: 93) defines bilingualism in this way: “The case of an individual’s knowledge of two languages or usage of two languages in a society.” Aksan (1998: 26) also made similar definition to Vardar’s: “The case of an individual’s acquisition, usage of more than one language due to different reasons and under different conditions, or learning a second language at a close level to his mother language is called bilingualism.” The case of bilingualism causes diverse problems in psychological, sociological and educational issues. In Turkey there is no social and institutional bilingualism. Other languages are spoken inside our political borders. However, these languages are not at the position of official language. Turkish is the mother tongue of the great majority of our society (İmer 1990: 166).

Just as there is not a complete consensus on the definition of bilingualism, there is not a consensus on the concept of multilingualism. The term multilingualism which is used as a general concept carries different meanings depending on the situation it is used and its user. The term multilingualism is used especially together with the term immigrant and has a key role in the adaptation of the immigrants.

According to Yıldız and others (2002) multiculturalism is examined in four different methods depending of the academical and political approach.

1. The approach which perceives multiculturalism as a threat: This approach starts from the ethnic and homogenous nation concept. It is perceived as the conflict potential of the ethnic mixture and sometimes as a threat.

2. Tolerant, participative multiculturalism understanding: Inside this understanding multiculturalism is perceived as a acquisition or as the enrichment of its own culture.
3. The multiculturalism understanding which contributes to democracy: Inside this understanding a transformation towards democratization in the society in terms of multiculturalism is targeted.
4. Radical, strictly universal multiculturalism understanding: This understanding rejects the definition of a society beyond its culture. According to this, society is composed of individuals, not groups. It is stated that social problems are not based of ethnicization grounds. (Yıldız 2002, 20)

As for multiculturalism as a political concept, following perspectives come to prominence:

1. **Traditional understanding of multiculturalism:** According to this understanding cultural and ethnic differences appear as a transitional phenomenon. Inside this understanding an assimilation understanding namely a melting pot is applied. According to this, lingual and cultural minorities are gradually integrated and assimilated into the society forming the majority. This model is especially applied in the USA.
2. **Neoconservative understanding of multiculturalism:** It maintains the coalescence of different cultures. Although all the cultures are considered equal, their differences from the culture which is defined as the homogenous culture are emphasized. Cultural mixture and intertwinement of the cultures are absolutely rejected.
3. **Leftist liberal progressive understanding of multiculturalism:** Inside this understanding of multiculturalism, recognition of the cultures, considering the cultures equal against law are evaluated. Monocultural schedules in the schools and universities are absolutely rejected. Instead of that, application of multicultural schedules is maintained. This understanding supports high level discriminatory understandings.
4. **Critical reflective understanding of multiculturalism:** Inside this understanding equality is aimed. In the one hand the ideologic aspect of multiculturalism is reflected critically; on the other hand multiculturalism is defined as the opposition setting of the minorities against the dominant culture. It accepts culture as dynamic phenomenon rather than static. Setting is provided for the cultural hybridization which intersects the ethnic and cultural mixture and formation of upper identities of the nations (Yıldız, 2002, s. 15-17)

As it is observed the concept of multiculturalism which is used as a frame concept appears to be a concept which is difficult to define. It is accepted that similar perceptions affect both politics and academic discussions also in the Republic of South Africa.

Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in South Africa

South Africa attracted immigrants mainly from Holland of which it was colony in the 17th century. The National Party which came to power in 1948 in the country which was captured by the English in 19th century implemented a policy based on the disintegration of the races. The practice of a regime based on race discrimination politically, socially, legally and economically is a system which includes every field of life and is based on protection of the minority white population and evaluation of each individual according to the ethnic root he belongs (Niedrig 2008).

In accordance with the apartheid system, South Africans were divided into four groups as Whites, Black Bantus, Asians and hybrids. With the first apartheid law which was promulgated in 1949, people from different groups were banned from marrying or living together. Schools, offices, salaries, parks, cafes, restaurants, everything and every place started to process in accordance with the apartheid system. Those who were not White were banned from performing political activities, even the graves of the Whites and the other groups were separated (Thompson 1985).

That regime which lasted for half a century collapsed with African National Congress' coming to power, which collected 62 % of the votes in the general election held in 1994. With Nelson Mandela becoming president traces of the apartheid regime are tried to erase. Studies towards everybody's learning his own language were started in the country where divergent languages were spoken.

Eleven of the spoken languages gained legal status. Nine of these are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Swati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulucan. The others are African and English. By this application the administration adopted the liberal language policy (Herbert 1992). Although these local languages are acknowledged, educational activities are performed in English and African languages.

Distribution of the languages spoken

Distribution of the languages spoken in South Africa in legal status regarding with the population is in the following way: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu which are known as the African languages are 78 %. Although they form 78 % in total, their ratio in the population is lower than the African and English. Those who speak African form 13 % of the population. Following the African language, 8 % of the population speak English. People who speak the other languages form 1 % of the population. However, the fact that English is the language of education makes it dominant over all the other languages. As the common language also English is used.

The History of Multilingual Educational Studies and Legal Arrangements

When we look at the history of multilingualism policy in South Africa, we go to the year 1994, which is the beginning of collapse of the apartheid regime and black people's having a say in the administration of their own country. We can array the studies made in this stage as follows:

11 of the 25 languages spoken in 1994 gained the status of official language.

In 1996 the Council of South Africa recognised all of these languages as official language.

In 1997 the language policy which the government prepared got through the parliament.

In 2002 language policy in the higher education was officially announced.

Between 2002-2004 institutes were given the right to arrange their own language policies.

In 2005 ministry commission of Higher Education announced the improvement and usage of local African languages in the higher education (South Africa Republic 1996).

The government of South Africa has made the necessary legal arrangements for supporting multilingualism and education in the mother language. These arrangements include the articles in the constitution related with the policy of National Education (1996), Law of Schools (1996), The Document of Language of Education Policy (1996), Law of General Education Evaluation (1998), Multilingualism Policy Application Plan (2001) and Curriculum of National Education (2001).

Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in the Higher Education

In contrary with the applications in the first and secondary education the multilingual educational studies in the higher education do not go beyond the legal arrangements. Since the university administrations maintain that languages except for English like Afrikaans and African languages are not suitable for academic studies, education in the local languages in the higher education is not performed. In the graduate studies qualification of English is sought, and knowledge of Afrikaans and African languages are not enough for continuing this education.

The Aim of the Research

Determining the language perceptions of the university students who study in the Republic of South Africa, which has a multicultural social structure constitutes the aim of this research.

The Importance of the Research

Creating awareness in national and international level in terms of multicultural societies and sub-societies' preserving and keeping their mother language alive during the process of living together in a globalizing world.

The Boundaries of the Research

It is bounded with Universities of Rau and With in the Republic of South Africa.

METHOD

This study is a research in depictive survey model towards determining an existing case, conducted in order to determine the lingual perceptions of the university students who live in the Republic of South Africa.

Field and Sample

The field of study is composed of graduate students who study at the universities of Rau (n = 78) and Witts (n = 94) in the Republic of South Africa. The research sample is composed of totally 172 students chosen with random method. In the study where participation is based on volunteering, researcher took part in the process for the questions which the participants would ask at the points they have difficulty.

Means of Collecting Data

A four question survey which is developed by the research is applied. The questions of the survey were revised by receiving expert opinion and the questions which were considered suitable were transformed into the final form and applied in written interviews.

Analysis of Data

In the resolution of the research data depictive statistics and chi-square technique are used, research findings are tested at $\alpha = 0,05$ significance level.

FINDINGS

It can be stated that one of the significant indicators of multiculturalism is "protection and keeping alive of the divergent local languages spoken other than the official language". Inside this frame it is observed in the Republic of South Africa that sociocultural infrastructure towards usage of different languages exists and individuals in the university vicinities can speak different languages as seen in Table 1. It is observed that 83,1 % of the participants continuing both the University of Rau and University of Witts know local language. Nonetheless, it is observed that those who attend the University of Witts know local language at a lower ratio than those who attend the Unviersity of Rau.

Table 1

The number of languages known by the university students

		Do you know a local language other than your official language?		Total
		Yes	No	
University	Rau	74 94,9 %	4 5,1 %	78 100 %
	Witts	69 73,4 %	25 26,6 %	94 100 %
Total		143 83,1 %	29 16,9 %	172 100 %

When the answers to the question “how the participants feel in terms of language” are analyzed with the aim of determining how the individuals living in a multicultural society perceive themselves in terms of language, it is observed that while 30 % of the graduate students attending Rau University perceive themselves monolingual, 32 % defines themselves bilingual and 38 % multilingual. On the other hand, while 16 % of the graduate students attending Witts University defines themselves monolingual, 36 % defines themselves bilingual and 49 % multilingual. As a result of the chi-square analysis which is conducted in order to compare the participants in terms of language perceptions, participants coming from the Rau and Witts universities display a difference at 0,05 level in terms of language perception. This situation shows that the language perception is more traditional at the Rau University where black students study.

Table 2

Language perceptions of the university students

		How does he define himself			Total
		Monolingual	Bilingual	Multilingual	
University	Rau	34 30,1 %	36 31,9 %	43 38,1 %	113 100 %
	Witts	16 15,5 %	37 35,9 %	50 48,5 %	103 100 %

When the answers to the question “Should language be protected by the government?” which is asked with the aim of determining what the participants think about protecting official and local languages and keeping them alive are examined 55 % of participants from Rau and 78.4 % of

participants from Wits answered yes. This finding shows that the necessary setting is provided for protecting the languages spoken other than the official language and keeping them alive in the Republic of South Africa which is a multicultural society. In the chi-square test made in order to compare the ratio of those who believe that language should be protected by the government and those who does not believe, meaningful difference at the 0,05 level is detected.

Table 4

Participants' perceptions related with whether language is protected by the government or not

		Is the language protected by the government			Total
		Yes	No	No Idea	
University	Rau	61	32	18	111
		55 %	28,8 %	16,2 %	100 %
	Wits	80	15	7	102
		78,4 %	14,7 %	6,9 %	100 %

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Significant arrangements were realized in South Africa for the sake of multilingual and multicultural education. Necessary legal arrangements for the multilingual education which is adapted as government policy were also made. The lasting of influence of English in social, economical and political fields for long years before the multilingual education prevented the learning of local languages. The lack of equivalent of multilingual education offered in primary and secondary education in the universities also decreases the interest in multilingual education. The increase of the translations into the local languages from English in the translation books printed in recent years can be accepted as the positive result of the efforts. In parallel with the change of the political structure the university students in the Republic of South Africa define themselves multilingual and multicultural. Most of the university students speak at least three or more languages, almost all know local languages. It is observed that although education is offered in English, the fact that the students are multilingual makes South Africa different from the countries in multilingual status. Because, it was the colony which built such a understanding. Today, studies have been made towards keeping divergent languages alive in the Republic of South Africa. The fact that the local language spoken by the majority cannot be official language was efficient in the failure of nationalization process and the colonization under the rule of the colonial countries between 17-19 centuries. The colony administration announced English as the official language. Colony administrations did not perform studies towards obliterating divergent local languages. However, sociologically, they averted strong reactions for taking precautions against social reactions which could come from conscious of using common language stemming from nationalism

movements. The most negative aspect is that it does not seem possible for years in Africa for the other languages to develop and improve since the official language of education is English. Because of the fact that occupations and public service is not offered except for English shows to the people that multilingualism and multiculturalism do not provide any benefits in praxis by decreasing the importance of the other languages. An ostensible multilingualism is observed by the divergent languages spoken in the country being overshadowed by English. There is no such application in practice.

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