

In a Cosmopolitan City Facilitative Factors of Bilingualism and Multilingualism in Foreign Language Learning Process*

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to find out the advantages of the bilingualism and multilingualism on foreign language learning in a cosmopolitan city. As a cosmopolitan city Mardin, has a multicultural characteristic, in Mardin Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac and Armenian people live all together, as a result of this different languages are spoken and most of the population is bilingual or multilingual. For this study 250 students aged from 16 to 20 that study in language classes at different high schools of Mardin were asked a questionnaire in order to investigate which languages they daily speak in their social life or at home, which languages they know, which languages they can understand when they hear, how many languages they know, whether the languages they know facilitate their foreign language learning or not. The results of this study demonstrated that bilingual and multilingual students that live in Mardin tend to learn foreign language more efficiently, especially the languages they already know facilitate the process of language learning. Additionally, the results show that knowing more than one language help them have a better social relationship in their daily life.

Keywords: *Bilingualism, Multilingualism, Multiculturalism*

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* Research Article - Submit Date: 23.04.2020, Acceptance Date: 14.05.2020

Doi Num: 10.17932/IAU.IJMCL.2015.014/ijmcl_v06i1004

Kozmopolit Bir Şehirde Yabancı Dil Öğrenme Sürecindeki İki Dillilik ve Çok Dilliliğin Kolaylaştırıcı Faktörleri

Öz

Araştırmanın amacı, iki dilliliğin ve çok dilliliğin kozmopolit bir şehirde dil öğrenimi üzerindeki avantajlarını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Kozmopolit bir şehir olan Mardin çok kültürlü bir özelliğe sahiptir, Mardin’de Türk, Kürt, Arap, Süryani ve Ermeni halkı hep birlikte yaşamaktadır, bunun bir sonucu olarak farklı diller konuşulmaktadır ve nüfusun çoğunluğu iki dilli veya çok dillidir. Bu çalışma için Mardin’in farklı okullarındaki dil sınıflarında okuyan 16-20 yaş arası 250 öğrenciye sosyal hayatlarında ve evde hangi dili konuştukları, hangi dilleri bildikleri, duyunca hangi dilleri anlayabildikleri, kaç dil bildikleri ve bildikleri dillerin yabancı dil öğrenimine yardımcı olup olmadığını bulmak amacıyla bir anket soruldu. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, Mardin’de yaşayan iki dilli ve çok dilli öğrencilerin yabancı dili daha verimli öğrenme eğiliminde olduğunu, özellikle de zaten bildikleri dillerin dil öğrenme sürecini kolaylaştırdığını göstermiştir. Ek olarak, sonuçlar birden fazla dil bilmenin günlük yaşamlarında daha iyi bir sosyal ilişkiye sahip olmalarına yardımcı olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İki Dillilik, Çok Dillilik, Çok Kültürlülük

Introduction

More than half of the population of the world is bilingual or multilingual. Being bilingual or multilingual in such a large extent requires the necessity to investigate the effect of bilingualism and multilingualism in language learning process (Trask, 1999). In a foreign language class, students may be monolinguals, bilinguals or multilinguals. Studies show that the state of being bilingual or multilingual in language learning process can provide advantages to the language learners. Accordingly, the study of Hopp et al., (2019) demonstrated that the bilingual immigrants’ native language experiences enable them to learn another language, with its grammar and vocabulary less difficultly. Together with the proficient command of two languages, bilinguals have a lot of benefits: they have not only several cognitive and linguistic advantages but they have executive functions and metalinguistic awareness as well (Adesope et al., 2010; Barac et al., 2014; Bialystok, 2010, 2017). Peal & Lambert (1962) stated that children who

are bilingual, if compared to monolinguals, have superior performance on verbal and nonverbal tasks. Furthermore, Eisenstein (1977) looked for the effects of childhood bilingualism on language learning during adulthood. The study of (Thomas, 1988; Valencia & Cenoz, 1993) demonstrated that bilingual people have superiority and more advantages in learning foreign language than monolinguals do. (Thomas, 1988) showed that bilinguals are able to learn foreign language more efficiently than monolinguals thanks to bilinguals being more sensitive to language system. It was reported in the study of (Hopp et al., 2019) that bilingual learners may have advantages of acquiring two or more languages efficiently in foreign language classroom owing to enhanced cognitive and meta-linguistic abilities. While monolingual students have just one language to rely on, bilinguals have resources to structural transfer of the properties of both first and second languages at the initial state of learning foreign language (Garcia-Mayo, 2012). Several models of third language acquisition hold that transfer from the various source languages may be cumulative and facilitative (e.g. Flynn et al., 2004) in that bilingual learners can select from a larger pool of grammatical options and thus exploit cross-linguistic correspondences to a greater extent than monolingual foreign language learners. Linguistic effects adhere to the usage of the languages known previously.

Method and Technique:

The target population for the study is the students studying in language classes of the different high schools of Mardin. The participants were selected from all the language classes of different high schools and about 250 participants were included in this study. About 230 of the participants (Turkish-Kurdish, Turkish-Arabic and Turkish with more than one of these languages) are bilingual or multilingual and there was a group of about 20 monolingual students among 250. In the Personal Information Questionnaire the students were asked to indicate their age, gender, which language/s they know and family language use. As a result of the questionnaire, the general idea of the participants was analyzed and the languages they know, the languages they just hear and the languages they can understand were stated. As the students study at high schools, their ages vary between 16 and 20.

This study is a descriptive research and for this purpose, two hundred and fifty students who study English as a Foreign Language in language classes of the different high schools of Mardin were chosen as participants. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire. The data was analysed to find out the relevance between the participants' being monolingual or bilingual/multilingual and their attitudes towards foreign language learning. In the previous similar studies, the participants in bilingual group were in general homogenous and the findings of that research demonstrate that bilingual learners have more positive attitudes toward foreign language learning. Yet, I think those the studies may not fulfil the "bilingual" criteria completely. For this reason, the group of bilinguals in this study was configured heterogeneously. The bilingual participants have some language pairs in this study such as Turkish-Arabic, Turkish-Kurdish and some of the participants are multilingual that know Turkish-Kurdish-Arabic, Turkish-Kurdish-Arabic-German, Turkish-Kurdish-Arabic-English and so on.

Findings and Discussion

After giving the questionnaire to 250 students that study at different high schools in Mardin, it was seen that, as it was estimated, multilingualism and bilingualism facilitate foreign language learning process greatly. As a result of the questionnaire and the given responses, it is clearly seen that already knowing two or more languages gives advantages to the learners in the process of learning another foreign language.

Age & Gender

The ages of the participants vary from 16 to 20 and from the 250 students that participate in the questionnaire 193(77,2%) are female and 57(22,8%) are male. The participants were taken randomly from the schools that have language classes in Mardin.

Table 1: Do you speak any other language except from Turkish at home?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	218	87,2	87,2	87,2
No	32	12,8	12,8	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

The participants were asked whether they speak any other language except from Turkish at home? 218(%87,2) of the students from 250 said that they speak another language or some other languages with their family at home and only 32(%12,8) of the 250 students said that they don't speak any other language at home with their family. Mardin is a cosmopolitan city that has a multicultural characteristic, in this multicultural city different languages such as Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac are spoken daily by the regional people. That's why it is so natural to have such a proportion as %87,2 which shows that 218 students from 250 speak another language except from Turkish at home (Table 1).

Table 2: Please state which language/s you speak at home except from Turkish.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid none	23	9,2	9,2	9,2
Kurdish	150	60,0	60,0	69,2
Arabic	31	12,4	12,4	81,6
Kurdish, Arabic	19	7,6	7,6	89,2
Valid Kurdish-English	14	5,6	5,6	94,8
Arabic-English	10	4,0	4,0	98,8
Kurdish-Arabic-English	3	1,2	1,2	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

The participants were asked to state the language/s they speak at home except from Turkish and the responses are as following: 150 Of the students said that they speak Kurdish, 31 Arabic, 19 Kurdish-Arabic, 14 Kurdish-English, 10 Arabic-English and 3 Kurdish-Arabic-English. At the previous table there were 32 participants stated that they speak only Turkish at home

with their family but at the current table just 23 students stated that no other language except from Turkish is spoken at their homes, this shows that the families of some of the monolingual participants are bilingual or multilingual but their children are monolingual. There is such an idea in Turkey as some of bilingual or multilingual parents think that they should speak in Turkish at home in order their children to be successful at school or in order their children not to fall behind their peers and not to lose time with struggling in learning Turkish when they start primary school or kinder garden, so the children learn no other language at home. However, the parents forget about that they neglect the advantages of knowing more than one language and the positive effects that bilingualism bring with itself (Table 2).

Table 3. Can you understand when you hear another language?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	238	95,2	95,2	95,2
No	12	4,8	4,8	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

The students were asked if they can understand any other language when they hear except from Turkish? 238(%95,2) of them answers as ‘yes’ and only 12(%4,8) answered as ‘no’. This results show that most of them understand some other languages when they here, even most of the monolinguals among our participants (Table 3).

Table 4. Please state the language/s that you can understand when you hear.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
None	7	2,8	2,8	2,8
Kurdish	67	26,8	26,8	29,6
Arabic	16	6,4	6,4	36,0
English	4	1,6	1,6	37,6
Kurdish-English	81	32,4	32,4	70,0
Kurdish-Arabic	20	8,0	8,0	78,0
Arabic-English	14	5,6	5,6	83,6
Kurdish-Arabic-English	18	7,2	7,2	90,8
Kurdish-English-German	4	1,6	1,6	92,4
Valid Kurdish-Arabic-English-French	1	,4	,4	92,8
Kurdish-English-Arabic-German	7	2,8	2,8	95,6
English-Arabic-Norwegian	1	,4	,4	96,0
Arabic-English-German	2	,8	,8	96,8
Russian - Kurdish	1	,4	,4	97,2
English	7	2,8	2,8	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

The participants were asked to state the language/s that they can understand when they hear and 238 (%95,2) of the students stated that they can understand another language or some other languages but just 12 (%4,8) of them stated that they cannot understand any other languages out of Turkish. Except from the minorities, the responses show that the students generally can understand Kurdish, Arabic and English. And the results show that most of the participants are bilinguals or multilinguals. Due to the fact that being exposed to the languages spoken in this city and thanks to knowing at least one of the languages spoken there, the students can more easily learn the other regional languages, too. That is, for example having already known Arabic is one of the facilitative factor to learn Kurdish,

another one is to be exposed to Kurdish daily and knowing these languages are again a facilitative factors to learn another or some other languages. Together with the facilitative factor of bilingualism and multilingualism in foreign language learning process, languages affect the way people make decisions and the way they think. It gives optional variants to think and having different ways of thinking or making decisions help people think broader (Table 4). Dylman & Larsson also stated that in a multilingual and increasingly globalized society, the people's noticing of the facilitating factors that affect the way people make decisions will be paramount to an array of societally central domains, ranging from politics to education to economics. The terms multilingual and bilingual are importantly heterogeneous. Some people learn a foreign language in an emotionally neutral setting in their young adulthood, while many other learners learn a foreign language, or some parts of the foreign language, through films or music. Or as it commonly happens worldwide, following an emigration, people learn the local language. Thus, there is a wide range of dynamics in the multilingual world, which necessitates further investigation of the boundaries and nature of the Foreign Language effect (Dylman & Larsson, 2020)

Table 5. Do the languages you already know have any effect on learning the next language?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	203	81,2	81,2	81,2
No	47	18,8	18,8	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Whether the languages the participants already know have any effect on learning the following language was asked to the students and 203 (% 81,2) of them answered as 'yes' and 47 (% 18,8) of them answered as 'no' but here it was not stated whether the effect is positive or negative in this table. The following table will show what the students think about it, whether the effect is positive or negative. Because of different reasons, people have always been in touch throughout the history, therefore they have always needed to communicate and this owing to this communication

they learned a lot from each other's languages, what's more, they have exchanged words. As a result, now each language has some similarities with some other languages in vocabulary or in grammatical patterns. It is a very deep topic but cognates can be an example to the similarities among the languages (Table 5). As generally defined cognates are the words which have a common origin and a similar or identical meaning. Schmitt (1997) explains them as "words which have descended from a common parent word but belong to different languages". However, following Otwinowska-Kasztelanica (2011), the category of cognates is based on formal and semantic similarity and include what Rusiecki (2002) calls "interlingual synonyms", i.e.: Cognates derived from a common ancestor, borrowings (e.g., *sweter* in Polish, derived from the English *sweater*), internationalisms, or words, usually of Greek or Latin origin, which are "common to many languages" Rusiecki (2002), such as *program(me)* in English, *Programm* in German, *program* in Polish, etc., as well as words that were borrowed by both the learner's native language and the language he or she is learning, from a common source, such as *slalom* in Polish and English, borrowed from Norwegian. 'Cognate' is just one of the examples that can be given for the similarities between the languages, but it even alone shows that the more languages you know the more you can understand the words or the grammatical patterns in foreign languages (Rusiecki, 2002).

Table 6. If there is an effect of the languages you already know on learning another language, is it positive or negative?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid none	31	12,4	12,4	12,4
positive	205	82,0	82,0	94,4
negative	14	5,6	5,6	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

According to the responses of the participants, 205 (% 82) of the students think that there is a positive effect of the languages on learning another language while 31 (% 12,4) of them see neither positive nor negative effect and 14 (% 5,6) of them think that the languages they already know have

negative effect on learning another language. As the results demonstrate, the big proportion of the participants (the students in language classes) state that having known more than one language have facilitated their foreign language learning process so far (Table 6). Some studies that conducted by (Thomas, 1988; Valencia & Cenoz, 1993) demonstrated that bilinguals have advantages in foreign language learning process in contrast to monolinguals. (Thomas, 1988) also stated that compared with monolingual learners, bilinguals are more sensitive to language system and can act more efficiently in formal learning.

Table 7. When you hear a conversation in a language you don't know, do you understand any part or word?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	232	92,8	92,8	92,8
Valid No	18	7,2	7,2	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

The participants were asked whether sometimes it happens them to understand any part of the conversation or any word from the conversation in a language that they don't know at all. 232 (% 92,8) of the students stated that it had happened them to understand and sometimes it happens and 18 (% 7,2) of them stated that it hadn't happened (they cannot understand any part or word of a conversation that they don't know). According to these responses it is seen that the languages they already know help them understand some parts of the languages they don't know (Table 7). Linguistic effects of bilingualism in foreign language learning: On top of metalinguistic and cognitive aspects, bilingual students bring specific linguistic resources of previously acquired languages to the task of further language learning. They command an overall more diverse linguistic repertoire across languages, which they can tap into for foreign language acquisition (Bialystok et al., 2010; Pearson et al., 1997). As a result of having this linguistic repertoire, bilingual or multilingual language learner may understand the similarities between his/her own language and a foreign language.

Table 8. If you understand any word or any part of the conversation that in a language that you don't know, is the reason of it your bilingualism or multilingualism?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid none	5	2,0	2,0	2,0
Yes	202	80,8	80,8	82,8
No	43	17,2	17,2	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

According to the responses of the participants that were asked what the reason is for understanding any part of the language that they don't know at all and if it is the languages they already know that help them understand any part or word of the conversation that they don't know, 202 (% 80,8) of the participants think that the languages they already know enable them to understand, 43 (% 17,2) of them think that the languages they already know have no effect while 5 (% 2,0) of them stood neutral. At the previous table 232 participants agreed on the idea that they can understand some parts of a conversation or some words in a language that they don't know and this clearly shows that the languages they already know open new gates for them and help them catch the similarities (Table 8).

Table 9. Please state how many languages you know.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1 language	7	2,8	2,8	2,8
2 language	106	42,4	42,4	45,2
3 language	110	44,0	44,0	89,2
4 language	25	10,0	10,0	99,2
5 languages	2	,8	,8	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

The students were asked to state the number of the languages they know. According to the responses 106 (% 42,4) of them are bilingual, 137 (% 54,8) of them are multilingual and 7 of them are monolingual students. That means that 243 (% 97,2) participants are bilingual or multilingual. Except for 7 participants, all of the students know another or some other languages out of Turkish and this facilitates the process of learning foreign language efficiently (Table 9). Like many researchers Hunt et al., (2004) also pointed out that bilinguals use their metalinguistic awareness and learn more efficiently target language than monolinguals.

Conclusion

Since ancient times, Mardin has historically multilingual and multicultural character. But this is now more evident than ever before. The population make up of Mardin today is largely heterogeneous as the city has a population of diverse linguistic and cultural background. As a result of this people speak different languages in the streets of Mardin. And the study showed that knowing more than one language give many advantages for learning another language, that is bilingualism and multilingualism in the city facilitate language learning process effectively. Being able to speak two or more languages means to already have more than one linguistic repertoires which help bilinguals and multilinguals switch inter languages, and this enable them to be psychologically ready to get one more language. This readiness helps language learners be able to switch faster inter languages and help the learners be able to think in target language while speaking it, because thanks to being bilingual or multilingual they have always done it unconsciously and this added a lot to their linguistic skills.

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