Bilingualism in minority settings in Canada: Integration or assimilation?☆

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This study explores social psychological correlates of bilingualism in the Canadian context. First, it investigates the relation between language confidence and identity as moderated by ethnolinguistic vitality. Second, it examines whether bilinguals can be distinguished from predominantly unilingual participants on subjective vitality and language usage and evaluates the impact of ethnolinguistic vitality on these differences. Data from Statistics Canada collected among minority Francophones outside of Quebec and minority Anglophones in Quebec ($N = 7377$) were used for analysis. The results show that language confidence is significantly related to levels of identity for all regions. Bilinguals are significantly distinct from predominantly monolingual participants on most factors for maintenance of identity. However, among all Francophone samples, bilinguals most resemble the French-dominant participants.

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1. Introduction

Being bilingual corresponds to the ability to communicate in two languages (Hamers, 2004). Beyond the linguistic knowledge it implies, bilingualism's influence on identity has proven to be of interest for much research and speculation, particularly as concerns the situation of minority linguistic groups. As a case in point, several studies have shown that many Canadian Francophones tend to identify themselves as "bilingual", associating with both French and English language groups (Boissonneault, 1996, 2004; Dallaire, 2003, 2004, 2006; Dallaire & Denis, 2005; Duquette, 2004; Gérin-Lajoie, 2003, 2004). In fact, the importance of bilingual identification has been highlighted in studies suggesting that between 66% and 93% of Francophones in minority Francophone settings throughout Canada adhere to it (Landry, Allard, & Deveau, 2010). Implications for first identity maintenance and group survival, however, remain under studied. The present study will, therefore, seek to bring understanding to the meaning of bilingualism by exploring its acculturative consequences among Canadian Francophones and Anglophones living in regions where they constitute a numerical minority.

1.1. Identity and the Canadian context

Identity, characterized by feelings of belonging to a group, is generally considered to be self-defined and to develop and change through time following social interactions (Hamers & Blanc, 1982, 2000; Liebkind, 1995; Noels & Clément, 1996). Contact with majority group members among the minorities would lead to the incorporation of both languages in their identity as a response to the societal context (Clément, 2008; Landry, Deveau, & Allard, 2006). Lambert's (1981) notions of subtractive and additive bilingualism clearly illustrate this phenomenon. Specifically, second language (L2) learning can impact the relation to the first language (L1) in an additive or subtractive manner: there is retention of identity and cultural components in the case of the former or loss in the case of the latter (Lambert, 1981). It has been proposed that the outcomes of second language learning in a minority setting would follow a pattern of subtractive bilingualism, whereas the outcomes of L2 learning for members of the majority group would resemble additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1981). Although no consensus has been reached as to the meaning and acculturative consequences of bilingualism in a minority situation, two main perspectives dominate: one, following Lambert (1981), proposing that, in certain cases, bilingualism leads to assimilation and another endorsing the view that it is an integrative response to the societal context.

The assimilative perspective suggests that bilingualism serves as a mid-point on a linear continuum with monolingualism in the L1 at one end and monolingualism in the L2 at the other. It is seen as a stepping-stone towards assimilation (Castonguay, 1999). For example, from a sociological standpoint, Bernard (1997) suggests that bilingual identity leads to a progressive fading of the maternal identity, language and culture. Similarly, in a series of pan-Canadian studies by Landry and collaborators among Francophones living in minority settings, it is shown that the demographic representation of Francophones in diverse areas of Canada is positively related to the usage of French but negatively related to the usage of English (e.g. Landry & Allard, 1994a,b). Still among minority Francophones, Landry and Allard (1997) show that variations in the presence of French in families and schools positively impacts French identification and the usage of French. Closer to the purpose of this study, Landry, Deveau, and Allard (2006) created an identification continuum ranging from exclusive identification to the majority group to exclusive identification to one's own minority group passing through a state of bilingual identity. They report a linear and positive relationship between that continuum and the concentration of Francophones in the area, identification to Francophones, perceived competence in French and usage of French in everyday life. Globally, these studies illustrate the relationship between demolinguistic characteristics of a community and a family of linguistic phenomena including language competence and identity, such that low demolinguistic representation is paired with lower dominance of French in everyday activities.

These studies do not, however, delve far into the nature of the link between bilingualism and identification. Research by Noels and Clément (1996) shows that increased confidence in English as a second language is related to Francophones' increased identification to the Anglophone group and decreased identification to Francophones. In the same vein, Noels, Pon, and Clément (1996) report on a group of Chinese Canadians whose increasing competence in English resulted in greater identification with English Canadians and less identification with Chinese Canadians. Furthermore, this assimilative pattern, not found among majority Anglophones, was linked to improved psychological adjustment, thus engendering consequences supporting a subtractive form of bilingualism. Taken together, these two trends of research would suggest that a declining demographic representation would be linearly and negatively related to first language competence and use and greater identification to the majority group. This research also clearly links second language competence and identity.

In contrast, the integrative approach to bilingualism among minority group members proposes that bilingualism may, in fact, lead to a new and distinct form of identity resembling Lambert's additive bilingualism. Evidence comes, in part, indirectly from studies that were not necessarily meant for that purpose. It is interesting to note, for example, that in the Landry et al. (2006) study in which a 7-point identity continuum is used, ranging from exclusive identification to the majority group (1) to exclusive identification to the minority group (7) passing through bilingual identity (4), 49% of the national sample studied correspond to the 5th point, which deems them highly francophone *and* highly bilingual. It seems that highly identified Francophones are also highly bilingual, a finding that contradicts the notion of a continuum of assimilation as demographic representation plummets. In addition, in a study by Gaudet and Clément (2009) conducted among minority Francophones from Saskatchewan, the importance of one's Francophone network was positively related to English social support, which was related to French social support, which was related to psychological adjustment. Furthermore, English language confidence was positively related to French language confidence, which was related to French identity. The permeability of group boundaries depicted in this study suggests that there is, among minority group members, an integration that not only involves linguistic competence, but also identities and social ties.

The fact that intergroup contact entails cultural changes in both groups is a central tenet of the research on acculturation (see, for review, Sam & Berry, 2006). According to Berry (1984) and Berry, Kim, Power, Young, and Bujaki (1989), the preferred acculturation strategy among minority group members corresponds to what is labelled 'integration', the willingness to simultaneously maintain relationships with both groups. In a study conducted among Francophones from Ontario living in a region where they constitute only 5% of the population, Clément, Gauthier, and Noels (1993) report that indeed, the preferred approach to acculturation is integration. Their results also show, however, a strong relationship between their degree of identification to the French and English groups and their preferred language. These results and, more globally, the acculturation literature underline the importance of linguistic choices and open the possibility that the results of acculturation may not be the loss of the first language and culture, even among minorities.