Assessing Multilingual Competence

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Introduction

- As globalization and immigration continue to shape the contemporary landscape, the ability to communicate in multiple languages is increasingly associated with academic and socioeconomic development. In many places around the world, developing and maintaining multilingualism has become a norm at all education levels. Even where multilingualism is absent from official educational policy, students often arrive at school with a repertoire of multiple languages, and most of them are encouraged to learn additional languages, whether through schooling or through interaction with peers outside of school. With the addition of assessments to immigration and schooling policies, measurement of multilingual – or heteroglossic – competence has become increasingly common.

- Multilingualism is generally assessed based on a monoglossic view of languages as separate entities, a view that tends to ignore the complex communicative practices of multilinguals and their simultaneous uses of multiple languages. Multilingualism viewed as the unitary linguistic and sociolinguistic ability of individuals to use more than one language in everyday and academic contexts.

- Increasing numbers of students with multilingual backgrounds enroll in schools and often have to learn academic content in an environment designed for monolingual (e.g., English only) and actively participate in increasingly complex societies.

Early Developments

Defining Multilingualism

the traditional monolingual (monoglossic) perspective on bilingualism and multilingualism, primarily based on the work of Grosjean :

- (Grosjean 1985) The assumption in a monoglossic perspective is that there is no difference between the language development of monolinguals and multilinguals.

- (Grosjean 1989) views multilinguals as having multiple, separate language systems that develop linearly and they are treated in the mind as separate

entities and not as a unified system.

- Multilinguals are seen as the sum of two or more monolinguals.(Multilinguals as Multiple Monolinguals)

- The ultimate goal for multilinguals is to achieve monolingual native competence in each language. This perspective implies that multilinguals should have full, native-like control of all their languages.

- However , Most bilingual or multilingual speakers rarely achieve native-like competence in all their languages.

Assessing Multilingualism

historical perspectives on assessing bilingualism and multilingualism: -

- Historically, most educational and testing contexts have been dominated by a monolingual or monoglossic paradigm in which multilingualism and the multilingual practices have often been ignored (García and Torres-Guevara 2010).

- The traditional way to measure bilingualism is to assess the two language systems separately from one another and then to compare the results (Hamers and Blanc 2000).

- Assessments of multilingual competence that reflect a monoglossic perspective "try to account for ultimate native-like proficiency in all the languages" and "assume that the multilingual is the sum of the native-like monolingual competence in each language" (Stavans and Hoffmann 2015, p. 157).

- Herdina and Jessner (2002) argue that "as long as bilinguals are measured according to monolingual criteria, they appear to be greatly disadvantaged both in linguistic and cognitive terms" (p. 7). When multilingual competence is assessed using monolingual constructs, test takers are expected to respond exclusively in the target language, even if they may have multiple languages in their repertoire. Test takers' performances are scored using monolingual scoring rubrics, meaning that if they respond using any other language than the target language (either partially or completely), their responses are usually ignored or penalized.

Major Contributions

the concept of multilingualism and multilingual competence has shifted and discuss current practices in multilingual assessment.

Redefining Multilingualism

In recent years, many scholars have called for a more holistic view of language,

language acquisition, multilingualism, and multilingual development. Our global multilingual reality has caused SLA researchers to begin constructing new theoretical paradigms, and greater focus is being placed on the social context and the language learning environment

- (Block 2003; Lafford 2007) argues for placing more focus on communicative strategies, which may draw upon resources in multiple languages rather than on mastering a particular language.

- (Herdina and Jessner 2002) The interaction between language systems is multifaceted and multidirectional, with each language system influencing and being influenced by other language systems. Thus, speakers in multilingual communities around the world develop proficiencies in two or more languages and learn how to negotiate the relationships between all these languages.

-Various scholars point out that there are differences in the linguistic practices of multilinguals and monolinguals :-

- (Herdina and Jessner 2002, p. 59) , A bilingual "has a specific linguistic configuration characterized by the constant interaction and coexistence of the two languages involved"

- Cenoz and Genesse (1998), explain that although monolinguals and multilinguals share the same range of communicative situations, multilinguals possess "a larger linguistic repertoire than monolinguals" (p. 19). Moreover, multilinguals employ two or more languages in interaction in various domains and communities of practice and draw on all their linguistic resources, using one or more languages in the same discourse, or even in the same utterance

- (García and Wei 2014). The ability that multilinguals have to shuttle between languages is often referred to as translanguaging (García and Wei 2014). Translanguaging is defined as an approach to the use of language that considers the language practices of multilinguals as one unified linguistic repertoire rather than as two autonomous, separate language systems (García and Wei 2014).

- (Otheguy et al. 2015) When speakers trans language, they are able to strategically use their entire linguistic repertoire according to the context and communicative needs

- (Franceschini 2011). an individual with knowledge of an extended and integrated linguistic repertoire and who is able to use the appropriate linguistic resource(s) for an appropriate occasion.

- Several scholars suggest that there is a close relationship between multilingualism and multicompetence. Multicompetence takes into account the totality of linguistic knowledge in a multilingual's mind to understand how multilinguals use knowledge

of multiple languages and how these languages interact in the mind .

Multilingual Assessment Continuum

Taking a heteroglossic view that supports the stance that the language repertoire of a multilingual operates as a unified system,

- Shohamy (2011) places multilingual assessments on a continuum. On one end, each language is viewed as a closed and homogenous construct. Although multiple languages may be used in the same assessment in this approach, only responses in the target language are scored.(most current multilingual competence assessments)

- On the other end of the multilingual assessment continuum, we can view all languages as part of an integrated system in which test takers are allowed to mix languages in a dynamic and fluid way, and responses are scored regardless of the language (s) employed, even if mixing occurs within and across utterances (García and Wei 2014).

Works in Progress

The act of assessing multilingual competence can be implemented in a variety of ways. The following presents several current applications and methods of assessments.

Current applications

In the United State there have been contributions in assessing multilingual student and helping them to take their tests appropriately :

1- A research study that focused on designing flexible mathematics bilingual assessments to allow students to trans language whenever needed . This means that test takers are given the opportunity to determine when and how they would like to use their multiple linguistic and semiotic meaning making resources rather than relying on task directions .In these assessments student can see or listen to the items in English or Spanish and also can answer in any language or mix them . An example about this is that the initial investigations of a middle school students performance indicates that the scores obtained from mathematic assessments that allow flexible use of all the students language resources provide meaningful insight to the students skills in both language and mathematic content domain .

2- The other effort to understand multilingual competence in the US context is found in Sanchez et al (2013) work measuring bilingual students "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in English and Spain .

Flexible Multilingual Assessment Methods

Recently, there have been a few efforts to develop flexible multilingual assessment

methods that give the test taker :

1- The freedom to trans language whenever needed .

2- To use whatever features they have in their integrated language system to demonstrate what they know and are able to do with language .

Q/What does Lopez propose to allow multilingual speakers to use multiple assessment features ?

Lopez proposed a technology –enhanced assessment platform to use multiple assessment features so the test takers can :

1- Strategically use what ever language and language practices they have at their disposal .

2- Questions are posed in multiple languages from which test takers can choose and they can use all their languages to answer them .

3- They are also free to mix languages if needed without being penalized .

4- They can also use different semiotic meaning making features which enabling them to perform in writing , orally or graphically .

5- Their responses are scored using conceptual scoring , which allow for the scoring without regard to the language or mode in which the response is given .

Problems and Difficulties

The assessment of multilingualism ,in its current definition and conception , poses a number of challenges :

-First , we highlight some problems related to the multiple influences that impact multilingual assessments .

 -Second , we describe other challenges from a validity perspective .

Imposing Language Policies That Neglect Multilingual Diversity

According to Stavans and Hoffmann (2015) , " measures of multilingualism are usually driven by educational , political and economic forces rather than socio-psychological ones" .In fact Shohamy (2011) argues that tests are tools to impose" national and collective identities " in countries with high number of immigrants and these language tests are used to make decisions about immigration and citizenship.

Many countries now require immigrants to demonstrate proficiency in the dominant language to gain presidency and citizenship . The use of language tests for this purpose takes a monolingual or fractional perspective on multilingualism as they tend not to value the languages of multilingualisms .It has been argued that most assessments in the context of   immigration and citizenship impose monolingual policies and suppress multilingual diversity by ignoring the overall language competence of immigrants .

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was another example of monoglossic policy (2001) in the

Untied State (2001) . NCLB requires all students , including students who have immigrated to the United State , to participate in statewide academic assessment for accountability purposes . And that all students are required to take demonstrate academic proficiency in English . Thus many immigrant students are deprived from this opportunity because there English skills are not fully developed . And these monolingual academic assessments tend to ignore some of the language , knowledge , and experiences that these immigrant students bring to schools .

Conceptualizing , Implementing , and Interpreting Multilingual Assessments

One of the biggest challenges in multilingual assessment is conceptualization the construct that need to be measured .

Q/ What does multilingual test should reflect ?

IT should reflect language practices that are dynamic and fluid , and allowing test takers to select language features from their linguistic repertoire in ways that fit their communicative needs . In order to do this we need a paradigm shift from monolingual / monoglossic / fractional view to amultilingual / multiglossic / holistic view is needed and this require making changes in the following :

1- In assessment policies and practices to promote the value multilingualism .

2-In the implementation and operationalization of the constructs of multilingual assessments .

In additional the other related challenge is finding ways to implement the holistic view of language in multilingual assessment . The rule of the test administrator is becoming crucial if they allow the test takers to use their entire linguistic repertoires by by accepting and mixing of languages. In this type of assessment , test administrators become mediators because they will work together to negotiate and create meaning .

Scoring is also a challenge for multilingual assessment . The holistic view of language define performance in two or more languages as complementary so that those multilinguals could use varying language skills depending on the context and audience . Therefore ,appropriate scoring models have to be developed . Scoring interpretation is also a challenge that its difficult to include every possible target language use .