1

# Language and emotions: What can a multilingual perspective contribute?

> I had studied Fula for two years . . . but despite this indispensable apprenticeship I needed a year of life with the Fulani before I spoke fluently; today I continue to make many mistakes, and up until the last moment of our stay I was always learning new words and turns of speech. When I think of all that I have still to learn, I wonder how I could have written the pages which follow.
>
> (Riesman, 1977: 3)

Jenny B. is a young, charming and enthusiastic doctoral student in linguistics, interested in the language of emotions. This year she was awarded a grant to conduct her field research in Karani, a language that has not been extensively studied before. After lots of bureaucratic complications, she had finally gotten her visa and airplane ticket, survived the flight (or rather an endless series of flights and rides), and at long last arrived in The Village, located at the heart of the Karani-speaking community. It took her a few days to settle in and then she was ready to begin her research in earnest.

Based on a few previous studies of languages related to Karani and on the remarks of anthropologists who had worked with Karani speakers before, Jenny hypothesized that Karani emotion terms might differ from their English counterparts. Prior to the trip she had taken an intensive, summer-long Karani course; upon arrival, she immediately began listening to conversations around her and taking notes. Unfortunately for her research, it appeared that the emotion terms known to her were used similarly to their English counterparts, which raised Jenny's apprehensions about her understanding of Karani and the validity of her initial assumptions.

Jenny's advisors knew that she would not be able to make definitive claims about Karani after six months of fieldwork based exclusively on her own proficiency, and reminded her repeatedly that she would have to work

with local informants. This seemed like a good way to go. Jenny's courses in linguistic fieldwork gave her some basic knowledge of informant selection criteria, such as preferable age, gender, and psychological characteristics. A workshop offered at the Summer Institute in Linguistics also trained her in the basics of monolingual fieldwork. This approach seemed unnecessary, however, as Jenny also knew French, the local lingua franca. She had studied French in high school and college and practiced during the study-abroad semester in France. Jenny hoped that French would become the key to the mysteries of the Karani emotion lexicon.

And so she began scheduling meetings with informants, among them the local school teacher, Monsieur Robert, who spoke fluent French. Their first meeting took place in a sunny classroom that doubled as a library. Excited, Jenny got out her crumpled list of Karani emotion terms. Monsieur Robert nodded and benevolently translated the terms into French: "*Ah oui, c'est pareil à 'l'amour', et ça, c'est pareil à 'la haine*.'" (Ah yes, this is similar to 'love,' and this is similar to 'hate.') Jenny felt a frisson of panic – is that all there is to it? Is it possible that Karani terms function just like their English and French counterparts? Did she make a mistake coming here in search of cross-linguistic differences? Did she find universals instead? Or is she missing something in Karani conversations? Or perhaps miscommunicating with Monsieur Robert?

As her fieldwork goes on and her knowledge of Karani improves, Jenny undoubtedly will gain a better understanding of Karani emotion terms and then will be able to decide just how similar or different they are compared to their English translation equivalents. For now, however, her progress had been slowed not only by her limited competence in Karani but also by her lack of understanding of second language learning and bilingualism. She remembered that her stay with the French family during her semester abroad did wonders for her French fluency and expected the same outcome for Karani during her stay in The Village. She did not, however, consider the fact that prior to her visit to France she had studied French for several years, while all she had in Karani was one summer of intensive study. She also did not remember that even by the end of her stay in France she was unable to follow really rapid talk or conversations on complex topics, such as politics or philosophy. Nor did she think about ways in which her English influenced her learning and use of French or, for that matter, Karani. It is quite possible that her inability to pinpoint language-specific features of Karani emotion talk stemmed not only from her lack of competence in the language but also from semantic transfer, in other words the imposition of English semantic categories onto Karani. Monsieur Robert may have similarly imposed the categories of his native language, Karani, on French, and in reality the emotion terms in the two languages may not be as similar as he believes. Or, if Monsieur Robert spent a long time in France, his Karani categories may have shifted in the direction of their French counterparts.

Jenny is not thinking about her interactions with Monsieur Robert or Karani villagers from the perspective of bilingualism, though, and regrettably her attitude is far from unique. At present, most programs in linguistics, psychology, and anthropology espouse a 'monolingual' view of language advanced by Chomsky, whereby the only worthwhile form of a language is that spoken by 'idealized' monolingual native speakers. Student training in such programs ignores the fact that cross-cultural research is most often conducted through the medium of a second or third language, and that linguistic competencies and histories of researchers, informants, and translators may impact the research findings in profound and unexpected ways. When such possibility is acknowledged, students are simply told to stay away from bilingual speakers – because their competencies are deficient, their minds function in mysterious ways, or simply because they are not representative of their community.

The goal of this book is to offer a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of bi- and multilingualism on the example of one field – language and emotions – in order to help students like Jenny understand what to expect from their own learning of other languages and from other speakers of more than one language. Consequently, the book has three interrelated aims: (a) to point to new and interesting questions bi- and multilingualism allow us to ask about the relationship between language and emotions; (b) to show how a deepened understanding of emotions as physical and conversational phenomena could enhance our understanding of bi- and multilingualism; and (c) to argue that reliability, validity, and true interdisciplinarity in cross-linguistic research require insights from the field of bilingualism.

I will approach these issues from two viewpoints: that of an audience familiar with research on language and emotions (but not necessarily on bilingualism), and that of an audience familiar with research on bilingualism and second language acquisition (but not necessarily on emotions). Chapter 1 will address the first contingent; Chapter 2 will argue for the need to see emotions in a more comprehensive manner in bilingualism research. In what follows, I begin with an argument against the monolingual bias in the study of language and emotions, followed by a short overview of the relevant terms, concepts, and findings in the field of bilingualism. Then I will highlight the role played by bi- and multilinguals in language and emotions research and show how assumptions made about second language learning, competence, and translation may serve as a deterrent in this research and may also bias its results.

### 1.1. The perils of the monolingual bias

In the past two decades, we have seen a great surge of interest in the relationship between language and emotions. That surge culminated in the

appearance of several monographs, edited volumes, and state-of-the-art reviews in such diverse fields as cognitive linguistics (Athanasiadou & Tabakowska, 1998; Harkins & Wierzbicka, 2001; Kövecses, 1990, 2000; Wierzbicka, 1999), linguistic anthropology (Besnier, 1990; Lutz 1988; Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990), pragmatics (Arndt & Janney, 1991), communication sciences (Fussell, 2002; Planalp, 1999), and cognitive, cultural, social, and discursive psychology (Edwards, 1997; Russell, 1991a). However diverse their perspectives, all of these texts have one thing in common: They examine the relationship between language and emotions from a monolingual (meaning one language–one speaker) perspective. None considers the implications of bi- and multilingualism (for example, the representation and use of French, English, and Italian emotion terms in trilingual Canadians), nor, for that matter, the implications of language variation (for example, differences in French emotion terms in France, Canada, and Algeria).

This absence is not surprising: As I have argued earlier, the Chomskian view of language (which continues to dominate traditional linguistics and cognitive psychology) obliterates both language variation and bilingualism as uninteresting phenomena that have little if anything to contribute to the theories of language and mind. This attitude has translated into two common scholarly practices. First, researchers recruiting participants for language studies often try to avoid bi- and multilinguals, whose perceptions, intuitions, and performances might exhibit 'impure' knowledge of the language in question and thus skew the results. Secondly, when bi- and multilingual informants and participants do take part in language studies, their multiple linguistic competencies are often obscured in the reporting, as a fact irrelevant to their 'native speakerness.'

This monolingual bias is problematic for both the scope and the methodology of research in the field. In terms of methodology, the bias obscures the fact that the implicitly 'monolingual' cross-linguistic research is conducted by bi- and multilingual researchers (or at least with the help of multilingual assistants, informants, and translators), with participants who may be proficient in more than one language – all of which could potentially influence the results. In terms of scope, monolingual bias overlooks the fact that most of the world's population is bi- or multilingual, and that even those who view themselves as monolingual often have a long history of foreign language exposure. Yet theories of the relationship between language and emotions continue to privilege the one speaker–one language viewpoint, exhibiting an implicit assumption that whatever applies to monolinguals will also apply to bi- and multilinguals.

This assumption is tantamount to saying that whatever applies to men will also apply to women. Feminist scholars have exposed the bias behind such an assumption and have pointed to a variety of ways in which gender may impact human experiences, perceptions, and linguistic expression.

As a consequence, these days both ethnographers and experimental researchers are conscious of the gender distribution in their informant pools and participant samples. The present book aims to make the same argument with regard to bi- and multilingualism, exposing a pervasive monolingual bias in all areas of language research, including research on emotional expression. I argue that the monolingual bias legitimizes perceptions and experiences of a precious few, namely white middle-class monolingual college students, as normative, and leaves out as illegitimate speakers those who have been 'tainted' by another language. In doing so, researchers continue to privilege the knowledge and competencies of the monolingual minority, shying away from the complexity of bi- and multilingualism and segregating it into a marginal field of its own. How can this disparity be addressed?

### 1.2. Bi- and multilingualism

Feminist scholars arguing against gender bias in the social and medical sciences began by explaining gender and the difference it makes. I will follow their lead and begin with a short introduction to bi- and multilingualism. It is perhaps understandable that scholars who do not commonly work with bilingual participants are apprehensive about the multitude of factors to be considered in this research. Bilingualism has been studied less extensively than monolingualism. Theoretical models of bilingual development, competence, performance, and processing have not been sufficiently elaborated, and conceptual notions and definitions show a great deal of variability. As a result, empirical research may produce conflicting results, and it is not always clear what methodological considerations need to be taken into account in each particular case (Grosjean, 1998). The purpose of the following discussion and the book as a whole is to introduce readers unfamiliar with research on bi- and multilingualism to the key terms and findings in this area and to clarify what needs to be taken into account in emotions research with bi- and multilingual speakers.

Traditionally, the field of bilingualism studied the competence and performance of people who speak two or more languages, with the focus on the phenomenon of bilingualism. Recently, concerns about the limitations of this focus caused the field to significantly expand its boundaries and examine such phenomena as trilingual acquisition, third language acquisition, and the competence and performance of multilingual speakers (Cenoz, Hufeisen & Jessner, 2001, 2003). To reflect these new developments, I use *multilingualism* in the title of this book as the more inclusive term. To respect the history and traditions of the field, I use the term *bilingualism* in the body of the book to designate the field of research that examines both bi- and multilingualism (Baker, 2001; Baker & Prys Jones, 1997; Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004; Grosjean, 1982; Li Wei, 2000; Romaine, 1995). The term

*bilingual*, unless specified otherwise, will be used to refer to speakers of two languages and the term *multilingual* to refer to speakers of more than two languages. *Majority language* will refer to the language used by the wider community and most often designated as its official language (for example, Spanish in Mexico or Estonian in Estonia). *Minority language* will refer to languages spoken by ethnic groups living in the wider community (for example, Spanish in the United States or Russian in Estonia). These somewhat problematic and dichotomizing terms are used not to draw attention to the numerical size of particular linguistic groups but to refer to situational differences in power, rights, and privileges (May, 2001; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004b; Piller, 2002a).

For lack of better commonly accepted terms, I also use the much-maligned terms 'competence,' 'performance,' and 'proficiency.' Following the current trend in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), *competence* will designate the mostly unconscious knowledge a speaker has of the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and communicative principles that allow the interpretation and use of a particular language and that typically is deduced through metalinguistic tests/performance. Following recent developments in the field of linguistic anthropology, *performance* will refer not simply to language use but also to the creative construction of self and others, as in 'performance of affect.' (In the past two decades the competence/performance dichotomy repeatedly has come under fire, and rightfully so [cf. Duranti, 1997]. Nevertheless, I find the distinction between representational knowledge and language use helpful enough that I choose to maintain the dichotomy despite its problems and weaknesses.) Finally, *proficiency* will refer to the overall level of achievement in a particular language and the level of achievement in discrete skills, such as speaking or writing, measured through standardized tests or self-assessment.

Who is considered a bilingual these days for research purposes? A layperson definition posits that bilinguals are people who have similar levels of proficiency in two or more languages, typically learned from birth. In contrast, scholars in the field of bilingualism favor a use-based definition of *bi-* and *multilinguals* as speakers who use two or more languages or dialects in their everyday lives – be it simultaneously (in language contact situations) or consecutively (in the context of immigration). Research shows that these speakers rarely exhibit equal fluency in all language skills, due to the *complementarity principle* – that is, the fact that their multiple languages are usually acquired and used in different contexts, with different people, and for different purposes (Grosjean, 1998). Some of these languages may be undergoing the process of *attrition*, meaning inhibition or (temporary) loss of certain skills, lexical and structural elements, and linguistic and conceptual distinctions. The difference between proficiency-based and use-based definitions is an important one, as the latter involves a much larger group

of people, including researchers and research participants who are not commonly viewed as bilinguals.

To differentiate between the various languages of multilingual individuals, scholars in bilingualism and SLA use such terms and abbreviations as 'first language' (L1), 'second language' (L2), 'third language' (L3), and so on. *Second language* often designates not only the language learned chronologically after the first, but any language learned later in life. Take, for instance, a speaker of Norwegian who studied English and German in secondary school and college, then married a French-speaker, moved to France, and began to study and use French for everyday purposes. A researcher interested in this speaker's acquisition of French might refer to it as an L2 in this case, even though technically it is an L4. A researcher interested in this speaker's English or German proficiency or attrition might also refer to the language in question as an L2. This is commonly the case when a study involves the L1 and one other language. If, on the other hand, the research design considers all languages an individual has studied, each will be referred to in sequential order as L1, L2, L3, and so forth. In accordance with the traditions of the field, in what follows, *first language*, or *L1*, will refer to the language or languages learned first, regardless of the speaker's current proficiency or dominance. *Second language*, or *L2*, will refer to a language learned later in life, whether or not it would be the second language in chronological terms. In discussions of speakers of three or more languages, I will also appeal to the term *LX*, which refers to any language but L1. *Linguistic repertoire*, a notion originally introduced by Gumperz (1964), will refer here to the totality of linguistic resources available to the individual.

SLA scholars also differentiate between *second (L2)* and *foreign (FL)* languages: The former refers to the language used in the speaker's daily life and the latter to the language studied in an educational context. (In other words, Japanese studying English in Japan are FL learners, and those who come to study it in the United States are L2 learners.) Albeit useful, this distinction is not always clear-cut: For instance, secondary and higher education establishments in the United States teach Spanish as a foreign language, while it is also the language of the largest linguistic minority in the country.

To distinguish between different types of engagement with language, Cook (1999, 2002) has advanced the notion of the *L2 user*. This term has a dual purpose: It avoids the notion of 'non-native speaker' and it offers a useful distinction between L2/FL learners (people who are in the process of learning a language in the classroom or by themselves) and L2 users (people who use a language learned later in life for real-life purposes). Accordingly, I will use the terms 'L2 learners' and 'FL learners' to refer to speakers who are studying a particular language but do not use it outside of the learning

context, and the terms 'bilinguals,' 'multilinguals,' and 'L2 users' to refer to those who use the second language outside of the learning context, regardless of the level of proficiency they have in it.

Bi- and multilinguals can be subdivided further based on a number of factors. The three factors important for our purposes are age and context of acquisition and language dominance. In terms of dominance, *balanced* bilinguals are those who have a relatively similar proficiency in their languages, and *dominant* bilinguals are those who exhibit higher proficiency in one of the languages. Language dominance is a complex issue, as bilinguals may be balanced in some language areas and skills and dominant in others. For instance, many L2 users living in the L2 context are L2-dominant in their professional fields. They might experience difficulties when discussing or writing up professional matters in the L1 but still exhibit L1 dominance in other areas. Furthermore, dominance may not always mean higher proficiency: Speakers may have similar proficiency levels in two or more languages overall, but the one they use daily is much more easily activated and thus appears dominant.

In terms of the age of acquisition, *simultaneous* bilinguals are those who acquired two or more languages from birth, *childhood* bilinguals learned their additional language or languages in early or late childhood, and *late* or *post-puberty* bilinguals acquired additional languages as teenagers or adults. The age of acquisition is extremely important in understanding language learning outcomes. If all other factors, such as amount of exposure and interaction, are held equal, early, that is, simultaneous and childhood, bilinguals typically achieve higher levels of linguistic competence and proficiency than do late bilinguals.

In terms of the context of acquisition, we can talk about *coordinate* or *bicultural* bilinguals who learned their languages in distinct contexts, *compound* bilinguals who learned the languages in the same cultural and social context, and *subordinate* bilinguals who learned one language through the medium of another, most often in the classroom. In the past, these distinctions often appeared in discussions of bilingual memory, mental lexicon, and cognitive representations. It was suggested that coordinate bilinguals have fully distinct representations corresponding to their two languages, while compound bilinguals have two lexical items attached to one representation, and *subordinate* bilinguals attach a new lexical item to an already existing representation. Recent research has convincingly demonstrated that this was an oversimplified approach to the bilingual mental lexicon, and that different types of representations may coexist within the same lexicon, depending on the speaker's individual trajectory. At the same time, the distinction between naturalistic acquisition contexts and classroom contexts still holds, because only naturalistic exposure and second language socialization lead to development of coordinate – distinct and language-specific – representations, while classroom learning results

in subordinate representation – mapping of new linguistic items onto the preexisting conceptual system.

This brief discussion does not and cannot do justice to the complex phenomenon of multilingualism, because human linguistic trajectories are extremely varied and intricate. The scholarship to date has focused predominantly on childhood and immigrant bilingualism, where adults move from one country to another. In reality, however, in the contemporary world of transcultural migration, individuals and groups of people often make multiple linguistic and cultural transitions that affect their linguistic repertoires. Russian Jews living in the Ukraine, for instance, grow up speaking Russian and may have some knowledge of Ukrainian, Yiddish, and a foreign language, most commonly English, French, or German. Upon emigration to Israel, their linguistic repertoire is transformed – they learn Hebrew, improve their English, and may also pick up some Arabic. Some may continue the immigrant journey out of Israel and into the United States, where their repertoire changes once again – they work in English and speak Russian to friends and family members, while Hebrew, Ukrainian, Yiddish, and Arabic undergo the process of attrition. What happens in the lives of many individuals, then, is the ongoing change in dominance, competence, and proficiency in all languages in question.

Traditionally, linguistics has treated L1 competence of individual speakers as a stable property, meaning that once the speaker's language system has 'matured,' linguistic competence would no longer be subject to change. A particularly strong version of this argument is presented in MacWhinney (1997), who suggests that once a local brain area "has been committed, it then begins to accept input data that lead toward a fine-tuning of the activation weights governing processing. If a second language is then to be imposed upon this pre-existing neural structure, it would directly interfere with the established set of weights. In fact, the use of transfer in second language learning allows the learner to avoid such catastrophic interference of L2 back upon L1" (p. 136). Recent research in SLA and bilingualism has challenged this assumption, demonstrating that L1 competence is a dynamic phenomenon that may be subject to both L2 influence and L1 attrition, evident in metalinguistic tasks and in L1 performance and processing (Cook, 2003; Pavlenko, 2000a; Schmid, 2002). Of particular importance is the fact that these effects may be visible even in learners and speakers of a foreign language who are still residing in their native language context (Kecskes & Papp, 2000; van Hell & Dijkstra, 2002).

These results have important implications for the typically homogeneous category of 'native speakers' that figures prominently in cross-linguistic research: The results indicate that people who know more than one language may perform differently from monolingual speakers in their L1, exhibiting different metalinguistic judgments and patterns of pronunciation, a slower rate of lexical processing, and more sophistication and

creativity in speaking and writing. The results also explain why many successful bi- and multilinguals judge themselves as not fully native-like in all of their languages – they are measuring their own performance against a monolingual yardstick (cf. Harris, 2004; Marx, 2003).

Not surprisingly, L2 competence and performance may also be distinct from the monolingual speakers of the target language. L2 learners may exhibit *L1 transfer*, that is, L1 influence on the acquisition and use of subsequent languages, including but not limited to incorporation of L1 structural and lexical elements and perception of L2 input in terms of L1 categories. The field of SLA has accumulated an impressive body of knowledge about L1 transfer in phonology, morphosyntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Gass & Selinker, 1992; Jarvis, 1998; Kellerman & Sharwood Smith, 1986; Odlin, 1989). The research suggests that L2 users may deviate from standard usage in production, may impose L1 categories in perception and comprehension, and may experience miscommunication when using the L2 both with other L2 users and with speakers of the target language.

This is not to say that L2 users never approximate native speakers of the language. Early research on the critical period hypothesis suggested that ultimate (native-speaker-like) attainment was an insurmountable challenge for adult learners, at least in the area of syntax (Johnson & Newport, 1989). In contrast, recent research demonstrates that some late or post-puberty bilinguals can perform within the native-speaker range in phonology (Bongaerts, 1999; Bongaerts et al., 1997; Hansen, 1995; Ioup et al., 1994), morphosyntax (Birdsong, 1992; Ioup et al., 1994; White & Genesee, 1996), sociolinguistic judgments (Ioup et al., 1994; Piller, 2002b), pragmatics (Ioup et al., 1994), and conceptual framing (Pavlenko, 2003a). This means that on a variety of tests and tasks some late bilinguals are indistinguishable from native speakers and they can also pass for native speakers in some naturalistic contexts (Piller, 2002b).

Unfortunately, until recently the research on ultimate attainment has focused predominantly on grammar and phonology, giving short shrift to lexicon, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse. Indirectly, however, existence of a large contingent of writers, from Joseph Conrad to Ha Jin, who write in a language they mastered in adulthood, suggests that native-like mastery of the L2 lexicon, semantics, and discourse is also possible and that writing is an area where L2 users may at times be superior to native speakers. Altogether, research on ultimate attainment suggests that there is no conclusive support for the existence of a critical period for second language learning. Rather, there exists an age-of-acquisition effect that is mediated by the amount of exposure, interaction, motivation, and individual differences (Birdsong, 1999; Harley & Wang, 1997; Marinova-Todd, Marshall & Snow, 2000). This effect is particularly pronounced in phonology and morphosyntax, and less visible in semantics and pragmatics.