The Bilingual Mind

If languages influence the way we think, do bilinguals think differently in their respective languages? And if languages do not affect thought, why do bilinguals often perceive such influence? For many years these questions remained unanswered because the research on language and thought had focused solely on the monolingual mind. Bilinguals were either excluded from this research as 'unusual' or 'messy' subjects, or treated as representative speakers of their first languages. Only recently did bi- and multilinguals become research participants in their own right.

Pavlenko considers the socio-political circumstances that led to the monolingual status quo and shows how the invisibility of bilingual participants compromised the validity and reliability of findings in the study of language and cognition. She then shifts attention to the bilingual turn in the field and examines its contributions to the understanding of the human mind.

ANETA PAVLENKO is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Temple University (Philadelphia) and President of the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL). Her book *Emotions and Multilingualism* (Cambridge, 2005) won the 2006 Book of the Year Award of the British Association of Applied Linguistics.

The Bilingual Mind

and what it tells us about language and thought

Aneta Pavlenko

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521888424

First published 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Pavlenko, Aneta, 1963–
The bilingual mind : and what it tells us about language and thought / Aneta Pavlenko.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-88842-4 (hardback)
ISBN 978-0-521-71656-7 (paperback)
1. Bilingualism–Psychological aspects. 2. Second language acquisition. 3. Language and languages–Study and teaching. 4. Cognition. 5. Psycholinguistics. I. Title.
P115.4.P39 2014
404′.2–dc23
2013038662

ISBN 978-0-521-88842-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-71656-7 Paperback

Contents

Tables

Acknowledgments

I have always wanted to write this book. In fact, I sent a proposal for a similarly titled book to Andrew Winnard at Cambridge University Press when I was still finishing my dissertation. Fortunately, he never responded. I want to thank Andrew for the wisdom of ignoring that proposal (as a novice writer I was not ready to write this or any other book), for taking the book on, ten years later (when it seemed I was ready), and for his patience, when the writing process took years longer than it was supposed to (it turned out I was not as ready as I thought I was). The key to the transformation of a hesitant writer into a confident one was the quality of the interactions I had, over the years, with many wonderful colleagues, some of whom became close personal friends, and with many books, essays, and articles, some of which also became dear friends.

My favorite books will become obvious when you start reading this one and so I turn to people. For their generous friendship, productive collaboration, inspiration, ongoing dialog and, in some cases, feedback on parts of this book, I am deeply indebted to Panos Athanasopoulos, Ewa Badowska (who introduced me to Eva Hoffman's work), Emanuel Bylund, Jean-Marc Dewaele, Alexandre Duchêne, Marianne Gullberg, Catherine Harris, Scott Jarvis, Michèle Koven, Barbara Malt, Viorica Marian, Alexia Panayiotou, Ingrid Piller, Monika Schmid, Robert Schrauf, and Li Wei. For their constructive feedback and criticism, I am very grateful to the anonymous readers, to students in my Bilingual Mind class, and to two graduate students, Rafał Jończyk (the first reader of this book) and Elizabeth Ann Hepford, for the time and effort they put into reading the manuscript and helping me make it more accessible to novice scholars. I am very thankful to Barbara Schmiedtová and Guillaume Thierry, who opened their labs for me and allowed me to take part in their experiments, and to Andrew Pawley and Caleb Everett, who promptly responded to my inquiries. I have also greatly benefitted from sometimes brief, sometimes long but always memorable conversations with Colin Baker, Mary Besemeres, Vivian Cook, Susan Ervin-Tripp, Cliff Goddard, John Gumperz, Steven Kellman, Claire Kramsch, William Labov, John Lucy, Michel Paradis, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Klaus Scherer, Dan Slobin, Tzvetan Todorov, and Anna Wierzbicka. Special thanks to François Grosjean, whose *Life with Two Languages* inspired

me to study bilingualism, whose insistence led to my first publication in the field, and whose friendship and support over the years meant more to me than I can ever say in any language.

At Temple University, I have the privilege to work in a very supportive academic environment, with wonderful colleagues, great students, and that wonder of the modern academic world, unfailingly supportive administration. For being there when I needed them most and for letting me be myself, I am deeply grateful to Dean James Earl Davis, Associate Dean James Byrnes, and outstanding department chairs Michael Smith and Thomas Walker.

Ten-hour-long writing days would have been impossible without daily visits to my favorite gym, Balance Chestnut Hill, and Kathy Murphy, a kindred spirit and trainer *extraordinaire*. At home, I owe a debt of gratitude to two wonderful men who long ago came to terms with the fact that my writing sometimes comes first: Nik, who never ceases to amaze me and make me proud, and Doug, who still takes my breath away after almost two decades together. My greatest debt, however, is to my guardian angels, Julia, Liza, Kevin, and DJ, without whom there would be no book – this one is for you.

Preface

Let me begin this book by confessing that its title is a misnomer and a misrepresentation. In reality, there is no such thing as *the* bilingual mind: bilinguals vary greatly in linguistic repertoires, histories, and abilities, and *the bilingual mind* appears here as an umbrella term to refer to a variety of speakers, including multilinguals. The modifier *bilingual* is also a problem because languages are not easily identifiable, discrete, and countable entities. A popular source of information on world languages, *Ethnologue*, states upfront that the boundaries between them are blurry and that languages are best seen as continua of features that change across time and geographic space.[1] These continua are nevertheless psychologically real to their speakers and we would be remiss if we did not try to understand their functioning in contexts where speakers see themselves as learning another 'language' or speaking more than one 'language'. Respectful of this psychological and social reality, throughout this book, I will unapologetically use the terms 'language', 'bilingualism', and 'multilingualism', all the while recognizing their discursively constructed, approximate, and interpretive nature.

Yet the biggest oversimplification in the title is arguably the *mind* – we will see that the mind/body dichotomy is illusory and embodiment is central to understanding the bilingual mind. The *mind* also leads the reader to expect an overview of linguistic and cognitive processing in bilingual speakers but this is not my aim. De Groot (2011) and Grosjean and Ping Li (2013) have authored superb introductions to the psycholinguistics of bilingualism and I see no need to cover the same ground. This book will focus exclusively on the interaction between language and cognition or thought[2] and its genre could be defined as an academic quest that seeks answers to four questions: Are we justified in treating 'language' and 'cognition' as independent entities? If so, what do we mean by linguistic thought, that is, what, if any, aspects of cognition are mediated by language? Is linguistic thought affected by cross-linguistic differences?

[1] www.ethnologue.com/about/problem-language-identification
[2] The two terms will be used interchangeably in order to avoid reifying a distinction encoded in English.

And if so, how do speakers of more than one language resolve ambiguities and accommodate such differences? A decade or two ago, such a project would have been impossible, because the first question had already been answered in the positive, the second and third were – and by some still are – answered in the negative, and the last was – and by many still is – deemed irrelevant. The purpose of this book is to justify its relevance and to capture a passing moment in the ongoing change of scientific paradigms, *the bilingual turn* in the study of language and cognition.

One cannot speak about language and cognition from 'nowhere in particular' – my own approach is shaped by my North American context (in Europe, I would have written a very different book), my history of multilingualism and my professional training in linguistics. Now, I have to tell you immediately that I am not 'a *linguist* linguist'. As perceptively noted by John McWhorter (2001), "regardless of the caliber of his work in another subfield, the linguist who does not display at least token interest in the Chomskian endeavor is not considered 'a *linguist* linguist' in the back of the minds of a great many in the field" (p. 282). I, for one, have never had any interest in the shape-shifting theory that dissociates language from human behavior. My academic home is in the fields of bilingualism and applied linguistics and I treat language not as Chomskyans do, with the focus on abstract structures, but as psycholinguists and sociolinguists do, with the focus on people. My treatment is further affected by my idiosyncratic linguistic repertoire that includes English, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, French, Spanish, and Italian, but, alas, not ancient Greek, Latin, or German, nor any non-Indo-European languages, which means that at times I will be forced to rely on translations and interpretations by others.

I also would like to make transparent the criteria that guided my decisions in the writing process. To begin with the areas of research selected for review, I am fully aware that traditional research on linguistic relativity is limited to the subject matter of Chapters 2 (categorization of colors, objects, and substances), 3 (encoding of time, number, and space), and 4 (event construal) but does not extend to the topics of Chapters 5 (autobiographical memory and narrative thought), 6 (inner speech, interpretive frames, and accomplishment of intersubjectivity) and 7 (emotions). I am also aware that I have omitted some areas that come under the purview of mainstream linguistic relativity research, such as the effects of gender as a grammatical category.

My decision-making in this case was guided by three criteria. The first was the *relevance* of the research area to the understanding of the *bilingual* mind and it functioned as an inclusion criterion leading me to consider topics, such as inner speech, that are not commonly treated in discussions of language and cognition but are extremely relevant to bilingual experience. The exclusion criteria involved *interdisciplinarity*, that is availability of findings from more than one discipline that would allow for triangulation of evidence, and *ecological*

validity, that is availability of ethnographic studies and speakers' own testimonies that would link the scholarly issues to everyday lives. The research on gender has failed to pass the second and third test – for now, it is limited to a handful of psycholinguistic studies documenting effects (or lack thereof) in artificial tasks and it is not clear what, if any, implications these findings have for habitual thought. In contrast, studies of autobiographical memory and language emotionality pass all three criteria and reveal aspects of the interaction between language and cognition in the bilingual mind that are invisible in studies with monolingual speakers.

The second instance of decision-making involves the selection of studies reviewed in each chapter. While a reader new to a particular topic may be overwhelmed by the sheer number of studies and references (which is why I included tables summarizing the key studies), a reader familiar with language and cognition research will undoubtedly notice the absence of some personal favorites. Let me assure you that I am fully aware of and very familiar with many more studies than have made their way into this book, yet, like every writer, I face constraints on what is realistic to include and am forced to be selective. My choices have been guided by the following five principles. The first is *impact*, with priority given to studies that made the highest impact as seen in citation records. The second is *replication*: whenever possible, I favored studies whose findings have been replicated by other researchers (but see Chapters 2 and 3 for discussion of prominent cases of non-replication). The third, already discussed above, is *relevance*: despite what the reader may conclude, I do not cite everything I know (really!) and favor studies that move the narrative and the argument forward.

My fourth principle involves *rigor*: in discussion of empirical studies, I have prioritized more rigorous studies and thus studies that appeared in peer-reviewed journals over unpublished manuscripts, dissertations, and studies published as book chapters or conference proceedings. While I do not assume that peer-reviewed journals publish only the strongest work, having spent more than a decade on editorial boards, I have gained great respect for the unsung – and unpaid – heroes of the anonymous peer-review process, which serves to eliminate the weakest work, make mediocre studies stronger and, most importantly, to ensure a degree of transparency with regard to research design and participants. In my experience, empirical studies published in volumes where acceptance is commonly close to 100% (after all, the editors have invited the contributors) do not always pass the rigor standard and may display a variety of shortcomings, from extremely weak design (which prevented the authors from publishing the paper as a peer-reviewed article to begin with) to the lack of transparency with regard to research design and data analysis (which may conceal design weaknesses and threats to validity and generalizability). This is not to say that all studies cited here pass the rigor standard – in many cases

I chose to include studies that, in my view, are biased or flawed, because their biases and flaws also offer us important lessons.

My last principle is *accessibility*: throughout, I have favored journal articles, books, and chapters that are likely to be most accessible to the reader. I have also made three exceptions to this rule. The first involves historic sources, which I deem necessary for proper documentation of the genesis of research problems – in North America every source included here, including Epstein's (1915) dissertation, can be located through the interlibrary loan system. The second involves three recent conference papers, which by the time of the publication of this book will hopefully be available in an article format. The third involves sources in other languages: their use has been limited in the interests of transparency, yet since this is, after all, a book about multilingualism, I felt justified in referring to books and articles in languages other than English.

Now, a few words about my citation practice. My first principle is to avoid second-hand citation. In the case of this book, I have personally read every source and study cited, with the exception of German-language references from the Nazi era – there I go on the authority of Weinreich (1953) and of my German-speaking colleagues who translated some of these articles for me. My second principle is to use direct quotes whenever possible. I rely on direct citation much more than is common in academic literature but not because I lack words of my own. As a fan of Bakhtin's *raznoiazychie* [heteroglossia], I see great value in acknowledging the many voices we are in a dialog with and in giving authors a chance to speak in their own words and the reader an opportunity to see what people actually said, rather than what I think they said. In the spirit of ecological validity, I also appeal to comments by bi- and multilingual speakers and writers, including responses to the Bilingualism and Emotions Questionnaire (BEQ) Jean-Marc Dewaele and I administered through the web to more than 1,800 bi- and multilinguals around the world (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2001–2003; Dewaele, 2010; Pavlenko, 2005).

My own writing is also characterized by heteroglossia, shaped by my dual citizenship in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Conducting experimental research has taught me healthy respect for the challenges of empirical science, while discourse analysis and postmodernist theories provided the tools necessary for critical evaluation of the scientific enterprise. So here is a fair warning to the unsuspecting reader: in violation of conventions of respectable scholarly writing, I will shift mid-chapter, mid-paragraph, and sometimes even mid-sentence between the 'objective' tone of a positivist who believes in 'validity' and 'reliability' and the 'subjective' tone of a postmodernist who privileges bi- and multilinguals' own accounts and 'discursively constructed selves'. And if I do not treat either epistemological tradition with the deference and respect they undoubtedly deserve, it is because I am irreverent by nature and do not think that a single academic discipline – not even one as revered as North American

psychology – is capable of telling a full story of what being bilingual means to real people like you and me.

Only stories can make things real and so, taking a break from the tedious minutiae of research design and participant selection, we will walk down memory lane with Nabokov, place our hands in the water with Helen Keller, steal pears with Saint Augustine, and read poetry written by Chagall. At times, I will point out serendipitous connections between people or phenomena and at other times I will leave traces in the text for the readers to make their own connections. I will also leave you with questions to which I do not have any answers. In this, I follow the advice of my favorite expert on academic writing, Bill Germano, who encourages us to write scholarly books as unfinished quests, for which the reader alone can provide the unwritten chapters. It is all yours now.