



# MEASURING BILINGUALISM

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# Testing and Assessment

- Assessment: tests, projects, portfolios, observation of performance, etc.
- Formative assessment: checks progress of learning
- Summative assessment: checks results at end of program

# Types of tests (purposes)

- **Achievement tests**
- **Admission tests**
- **Aptitude tests**
- **Diagnostic tests**
- **Language dominance tests**
- **Placement tests**
- **Proficiency tests**
- **Progress tests**

# Direct vs. indirect testing

- Direct testing: Ss perform the skill to be measured (e.g., A translation test in which Ss translate a text.)
- Indirect testing: Measures the abilities underlying the skills to be measured (e.g., A writing test in which Ss identify grammatical errors in sentences)
- Semi-direct testing: (e.g., tape recorded speaking test)

# Problems & limitations

- **Direct testing:**
  - only limited tasks can be measured
  - may take long time
  - may require special materials
- **Indirect testing:**
  - trait being measured may not be good indicator of overall skill

# Discrete point vs. integrative tests

## ➤ Discrete point tests:

- Assume that language can be broken down into separate elements
- Focus on one linguistic element at a time
- Tend to be indirect

## ➤ Integrative (holistic) tests:

- Require Ss to address many linguistic elements simultaneously
- Tend to be direct

# Criterion-referenced tests

- Seek to classify Ss according to specific criteria or tasks
- Yield direct info on what Ss can do.
- Yield percentages and cut-off scores.
- Unaffected by other test-takers' performance.
- Tend to be “low stakes” tests.

# Norm-referenced tests

- Indicate how Ss' performance compares to that of other groups of test-takers
- Usually yield percentiles or grade equivalence scores
- May be affected by performance of other Ss.
- Tend to be “high-stakes” tests.



# Objective vs. subjective tests

## ➤ Objective tests:

- require no judgment by the scorer (e.g., multiple choice, T/F tests)
- mechanical cut-offs lack nuance

## ➤ Subjective tests:

- require judgment by the scorer (e.g., essay questions, compositions)
- scoring can vary tremendously

# History of language testing

- **Prior to 1950s: Grammar Translation Method, reading-oriented methods**
- **1950s-1960s: reliance on structural linguistics, behavioral psychology, discrete point tests**
- **After 1960s: concern with testing communicative language ability and more holistic measures**

# Communicative competence

- **The ability to use language effectively to communicate in real-life interactions**
- **Components**
  - **Structural competence**
  - **Discourse competence**
  - **Sociolinguistic competence**
  - **Strategic competence**

# Communicative language testing

- Requires tasks that are genuinely communicative and authentic
- May be more time-consuming
- Ultimately yield richer data
- Should produce better assessments that can lead to curricular improvement

# Problems of measuring communicative competence

- ▶ Language competence is multidimensional and difficult to operationalize.
- ▶ Testers assume that it's sufficient to measure 2 separate monolingual states to obtain an adequate measure of a bilingual
- ▶ An adequate methodology to capture the specific nature of bilingual behavior is lacking.

# Comparative measures

- ▶ Approach: take measures in each of bilingual's 2 lgs and compare them.
- ▶ However, wide variations exist between competence of native speakers of same lg., so it's extremely difficult to identify and operationalize the salient features of native competence.

# Solution to comparisons

- ▶ Compare monolingual competences of bilingual speaker to monolingual standards in each lg.
- ▶ Measures need not be similar for each lg since the comparison occurs at the level of a statistical distribution of competences of native speakers
- ▶ Avoids problem of directly comparing behavior in one lg. with that in another.

## Problem in comparing vocabularies

- ▶ Not fair to compare a bilingual's vocabulary in one language and compare it to a monolingual's.
- ▶ Need to look at total vocabulary and total conceptual vocabulary.
- ▶ Best solution is to add up bilingual's words in each lg. and then subtract the vocabulary shared between the 2 lgs.



# Mother tongue competence

- ▶ Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test--measures receptive vocabulary
- ▶ Reynell's Syntactic Complexity Test & numerous lg. tests in traditional lg. batteries--all measure 1 aspect of mother tongue lg. competence, but not clear that aspect measured is most relevant dimension--is it justifiable to separate skills which make up lg. competence?
- ▶ Holistic measures include: cloze tests which tap learner's internalized grammatical knowledge--have predictive power and correlate well with other tests

# Tests of L2 competence

- ▶ cannot compare them with tests of mother-tongue competence
- ▶ do enable us to define levels of dominance in bilinguals
- ▶ useful for identification of developmental stages

# Behavioral measures of L2 competence

- ▶ Reaction or latency-time measures (psychological experiments)
- ▶ Completion and word-detection tests (*dansonodent*)
- ▶ Verbal association tests
- ▶ Interlingual verbal flexibility (translation or switching ability)
- ▶ Use of ambiguous stimuli (*once, dime*)

# Language biographies & self-evaluations

- ▶ Lg. biographies--provide info on age and context of acquisition, past and present use, number of varieties spoken, degree of literacy, etc.--depend on declared behavior, not observed
- ▶ Self-evaluations and judgments by native speakers of proficiency--generally done by assessing lg. skills on 3, 5, or 7 point scale ranging from 'nil' to 'native-like'--very subjective

# Measures of bilingual specificity

- ▶ Grosjean (1985) : bilinguals have patterns of behavior that are unique to them- like borrowing and code switching.
- ▶ A bilingual's full repertoire is fully exploited only in situations in which both lgs. can be used
- ▶ Specific bilingual behavior often mistaken for interference.
- ▶ Mixed code is only inappropriate in terms of monolingual norms.

# Measures of cognitive effects of bilingualism

- ▶ Lots of evidence of correlation between development of bilinguality and cognition exists.
- ▶ However, studies are contradictory, showing both advantages and disadvantages
- ▶ usually involve use of tests of verbal and non-verbal intelligence, verbal creativity, divergent thinking, verbal transformations, symbol substitutions, etc.

# Measures of affective correlates of bilinguality

- ▶ Value judgments toward lgs. and speakers--Lickert-type evaluation scales in which subjects express degree of agreement or disagreement with statements relating to lgs. and speakers (cf. Gardner and Lambert)
- ▶ Semantic differential--matched guise technique--Lambert et. al.--speaker listens to tape recording of one speaker in two guises and makes judgments about speakers based on semantic oppositions (good-bad, smart-stupid, beautiful-ugly, etc.)--problem is that it ignores all elements relevant to communication except voice characteristics
- ▶ Measures of bilingual's cultural identity--multidimensional scaling, ethnic dolls, role playing, questionnaires

# Measurement of cultural minorities

- ▶ **Psychometric tests of academic lg. proficiency are not appropriate for minority children because they have not reached level of development required for tests to be valid.**
- ▶ **Cultural differences can skew results--if child is presented with pictures of objects that are not part of that culture, lack of response by child has no assessment value.**



# Measurement of societal bilingualism

- ▶ **Census**
- ▶ **Index of linguistic diversity**
- ▶ **Index of communicativity**
- ▶ **Surveys**
  - ▶ **Geolinguistic surveys**
  - ▶ **Linguistic atlases**
  - ▶ **Ethnolinguistic studies**
  - ▶ **Government inquiries**

# Sociolinguistic & ethnographic measures

- ▶ Sociolinguistic studies (cf. Labov) examine social distribution of variants of linguistic variables--LePage & Tabouret-Keller (1985) investigated lg. use and attitudes in Belize and St. Lucia--used questionnaires, recorded interviews, correlated linguistic variables with sociological variables-
- ▶ Ethnographies of communication observe small, well-defined multilingual communities in minute detail through participation observation of small groups and networks, descriptive analyses, case studies, etc.—used by anthropological linguists and sociolinguists in many societies around the world

# Conclusion

- ▶ Measuring bilinguality is far from simple.
- ▶ Most important lesson is that a bilingual does not equal two monolinguals squashed together.
- ▶ Bilingual measurement must assess language competence in each language separately.
- ▶ Bilinguals may have less vocabulary in each language compared to monolinguals, but their total vocabulary is bigger.
- ▶ Decisions about bilingual children should be based on the best possible measures of their communicative skills.



**THE END**