

# LIGN177: Multilingualism

December 1, 2009

Multilingual education/literacy

## Bilingual education in U.S.

- Early bilingual education programs focused on German-English (Ohio in 1839, St Louis in 1870s)
- by 1917 German in schools is discontinued – backlash against German and other languages
- 1960s – bilingual Spanish-English schools established in Miami for Cubans
- 1968 – federal Bilingual Act provides federal funding for native-language instruction

## Milestones in bilingual education

- 1967 – California SB 53 allowed use of languages other than English in public schools
- 1974 [Lau vs. Nichols Supreme Court decision](#)
  - 8 year old Kenny Lau sued SF School Board over English-only schools
  - ruling in Lau's favor that lack of native language instruction violates Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide equal education
  - districts with limited English proficiency (LEP) students must provide service to minority language students

## Proposition 227

- 1998 labeled the 'English for the Children' initiative or the Unz initiative, after Ron Unz, the entrepreneur who sponsored it
- Supported by One Nation, US English, English Only
- Passed 61/39% and effectively ended 30 years of bilingual education programs in California (Arizona passed a similar law in 2000)

# Literacy

## Sound-meaning correlation

- Words in language involve an arbitrary match between sound and meaning
- Orthography or spelling is sometimes one-to-one: *nag blond pat tap apt*
- But in many writing systems (like English), symbols do not match well with actual sound: *cough, comb, phlegm, seek, seal, piece, knife,*

## Phonological awareness

- Must have tacit command of phonology of language -> knowledge of how sounds are pronounced in different contexts, even if written the same way
- *beauty, tree, toad, beet, atone, button*
- *cops, pits, blocks, ribs, pads, frogs, bulls, pins*
- Spanish:
  - *caldo [d], conde [d], dia [d], crudo [ð]*
  - *saco [s], ese [s], dos [s], mismo [z], rasgo [z]*

## Phonological awareness

- Ability to access and manipulate sounds in words
- Syllables, division of syllables into onsets and rimes, basic phonemes
- Onset: consonants that begin syllable: *pl*ank
- Rime: vowel + consonants that end syllable: *ank*
- → important skill for reading

## Other factors in reading

- *Phonological memory* – short-term memory for sounds
- *Rapid automatized naming capability* – speed of retrieval and production of words
- *Oral vocabulary knowledge*

## Implications for education

- Sound-symbol connection means that oral competency is required in order to master reading
- Early literacy should ideally be in first language
- Oral competence in second language is needed before literacy skills taught

## Interdependence

- Positive interdependence between two languages
  - → cognitive advantages of bilingualism
  - → building blocks of L1 towards L2

## Some criticisms of positive interdependence

- *Profile effects* – bilingual learners perform better on some tasks but worse than others compared to monolinguals
- Cummins has argued that positive interdependence is strongest for academic tasks, as they involve *context reduction* and high *cognitive involvement*
  - But academic settings use extensive *context-embedding* and *high cognitive involvement* is found outside school

## Shared elements

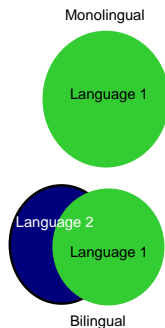
- When languages are similar, does that help learning?
- Concrete structural elements → phonology
- Similar writing systems → yes, but do not help as much as shared structure

## Studies show...

- Turkish/Dutch in Netherlands
  - Bilinguals show lower vocabulary scores, but good decoding skills
- Spanish/English in Miami
  - Bilinguals showed low oral vocabulary and lower reading comprehension than monolinguals; good decoding
    - → consistent across immersion contexts, and high socio-economic groups also fared worse than monolinguals

## Vocabulary

- Bilinguals' vocabulary may actually be as large or larger than monolinguals when both languages are considered



## Decoding

- Why are decoding skills good in these groups of bilinguals?
- Share an alphabet
- Graphemic-phonemic mappings (sound-writing symbol) are finite
- Many phonological elements and graphemic elements are common across languages

## Transfer – alphabet vs. non-alphabet

- Spanish-English bilinguals between K and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade outperformed English monolinguals on phoneme segmentation but Chinese-English bilinguals do not (Bialystok et al 2003)
- → sharing of alphabetical system helps
- but, languages are similar structurally, so isn't that a confound?

## Transfer – alphabet vs. non-alphabet

- Holm & Dodd (1996) tested mainland Chinese students exposed to *pinyin* (Chinese alphabetic writing system) versus Hong Kong students learning traditional Chinese logographic system
- Pinyin learners better at segmenting English words and naming nonwords
- Chinese ESL students who perform well on real words perform worse than English students on spelling nonsense words (Wang & Geva 2003)

### Transfer - different alphabetical writing?

- Urdu and Persian use Arabic writing, which has right-to-left directionality
- Bilinguals were strong readers if words followed **regular** sound-grapheme relations
- Low Urdu/High English competency correlated with better reading skills for **irregular** sound-grapheme relations
- → transfer effects stronger if shared alphabetic writing
- → bilinguals' performance best on **regular** sound-grapheme relations

### Literacy

- In general, literacy skills should be taught in the native language
- Transfer effects will occur if shared alphabetical system, and to a more limited extent with non-shared alphabets
- Oral competency is required prior to literacy for both first language, and is preferred for second language