MULTILINGUALISM AND THE PARADOX OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: Multilingualism has become the dominant ideology in human societies. It can even be said that multilingualism is actually the norm in human societies, as it becomes more and more difficult to come across monolingual societies. However, what is at stake in multilingual societies is the issue of cultural identities. The objective of the current analysis is to show that in a multilingual setting, there is no longer a pure type in terms of identity, for the cultural and linguistic communities in contact necessarily impact the identity of individuals as well as that of social groups. Moreover, although multilingualism modifies the identity of cultures and therefore that of the individuals in contact, it has the merit of ensuring the culture of linguistic mediation which predisposes the individual to the acceptance of difference resulting in social harmony.

Keywords: cultural identity, dominant ideology, modify, Multilingualism, social harmony

Résumé : Le multilinguisme est devenu l'idéologie dominante des sociétés humaines. On peut même affirmer que le multilinguisme est à présent la norme des sociétés humaines car, il devient de plus en plus difficile de rencontrer des sociétés monolingues. Ainsi, ce qui est en jeu dans les sociétés multilinguismes est la question des identités culturelles. Aussi, l'objectif de la présente analyse est-il de montrer que dans un cadre multilingue, il n'y a plus de type pur en matière d'identité, car les communautés culturelles et linguistiques en contact impactent nécessairement l'identité des individus ainsi que celle des groupes sociaux. Par ailleurs, bien que le multilinguisme modifie l'identité des cultures et partant, celle des individus en contact, il a le mérite d'assurer la culture de la médiation linguistique qui prédispose l'individu à l'acceptation de la différence ayant pour résultat l'harmonie sociale.

Mots clés : harmonie sociale, identité culturelle, idéologie dominante, modifier, Multilinguisme.

Introduction

Language and culture have always been of a great importance for various disciplines amongst which we have linguistics. In fact, the relationship between language and culture is of interest for research domains such as sociolinguistics. The link between these two concepts is important that the diversity of languages represents the diversity of cultures; as each language is the vehicle of a specific culture. In other terms, the diversity of languages goes together with the diversity of cultures, an aspect which is particularly of interests for sociolinguistics.

The issue which is the focus of the current analysis is the way these multiple languages and cultures can be managed to found an interlinguistic or rather an intercultural coexistence, otherwise called intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is the interest of a new field of social sciences derived from anthropology and linguistics known as Ethnography of Communication (EC). Ethnography of communication focuses on the patterns of communicative behavior as it constitutes one of the systems of culture. The main focus of EC is to provide a framework for the collection and analysis of descriptive data about the ways in which social meaning is conveyed, constructed, and negotiated. But its objectives are dominated by questions such as what does a speaker need to know in order to communicate appropriately and to make sense of communicative situations within a particular speech community? In the context of the current analysis, speech community can also refer to a whole society.

Society remains the frame whereby people meet and share their experiences, cultures, visions and opinions, through the agency of language. As such, language appears not only as a means of communication but also as an important factor which guides social relationships. The complexities of human conditions which call for an opening, sometimes poses the issue of how can a society be opened to others, use their languages without losing its true identity? In other terms, can a society develop by simply remaining folded upon itself? Is it not by means of an opening that development is achieved by a society? However, does the opening of societies to one another with multilingualism as one of the resulting consequences not a threat for the cultural identity? These three questions work as a sort of paradox in the understanding of the opening of societies and the issue of identity, hence the topic: 'multilingualism and the paradox of cultural identity'. Leaning on the sociolinguistic theories of language contact as well as the theory of ethnography of communication, the objective of the current analysis is to show that though there might be a mitigation in terms of authenticity of cultural identities in multilingual settings, there is always a lot to gain with regards to the prevalence of linguistic mediation,

ferment of intercultural communication. However, to what extent is multilingualism a ferment to struggles between languages? What makes specific human cultures? How far is the concept of identity paradoxical? These are the questions to answer through this work

1- Overview of the Topic's Key Concept
1.1. Multilingualism as a Ferment of Struggles Between Languages

Multilingualism can be defined as the use of more than one language by an individual or by a speech community. In such a situation, there is always a sort of struggle between languages which in the best case would be a struggle for the control of the setting, and in the worst case, it stands as a struggle for survival.

The struggle between languages is fed by the fact that languages stand as the most powerful instrument for the preservation and the development of cultural heritage, and by the same token, that of cultural identity. Therefore, dominating over other languages entails to having control over the situations and circumstances which necessarily count for the valorization and promotion of a given culture. However, how to define culture? To what extent does multilingualism impact cultural identity?

1.2. Human Culture and its specificty

Culture defines as the set of characteristics and knowledge comprising language, religion, arts, social habits, music …etc, which are specific to a particular group of people. In other terms, culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values and meanings of a society. It is a sort of collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of a group. On this basis, culture can be defined as a set of material and/or immaterial things which characterize a group.

Anthropologists had even vacillated between material and non-material definitions of culture, to finally agree on a more inclusive definition which takes into account thoughts, behaviors, customs and, above all, language. In fact, Roger Keesing (1974) has outlined three 'ideational' theories of culture that anthropologists have most emphasized during the 60's and early 70's.

They first consider cultures as *(a)* cognitive systems. In the work of Ward Goodenough (1981) culture consists of whatever one has to know or believe in order to operate in a way which looks as acceptable for members of a given society.

The second definition is that they consider cultures as *(b)* structural systems. This definition is the one suggested by Lévi-Strauss who views 'cultures as shared symbolic systems that are cumulative creations of mind. He seeks to discover in the structuring of cultural domains such as myth, art, kinship, language, the principles of mind that generate these cultural elaborations (Keesing Roger M., 1974).

The third definition considers cultures as *(c)* symbolic systems. Such a definition is made by Clifford Geertz(1973a) who like Lévi-Strauss views cultures as semiotic systems, but which he wants to study as shared codes of meaning underlying symbolic action.

Along with all these definitions, it comes out that culture is transmitted from one generation to another and it leans on the human capacity to think symbolically. However, what distinguishes the cultural aspect which distinguishes human cultures from those of other species is language. In fact, thanks to language, the culture of a given community is not only transmitted by and amongst generations but it also modifies to adapt to social realities and moments. That is to say, culture is not actually static, it is rather dynamic thanks to a couple of factors amongst which we have the indispensable necessity to open for the sharing with other cultures.

Opening to other societies necessitates an acceptation of features from other cultures with languages as main shared aspects. As such, the meeting ground is progressively transformed into a setting whereby multilingualism prevails. Multilingualism is very often analyzed in three possible perspectives. First of all, we have the language richness which have something to do with the popularity of a language among other languages which are used in the same geographical setting. Secondly, we have the phylogenetics which deals the number of language families in the area. Finally, we have the structural diversity or the variation found among structures within languages. In fact, when individuals from different linguistic background coexist, they create a kind of linguistic tie so that to interact adequately. In so doing, they sometime adapt their initial languages so that other individuals may grasp what they mean. Another possibility is that they may resort to a given language as means of communication in the social setting. Therefore, Languages not only serve to create ties between individuals, but at the same time, they are the most powerful instruments for the preservation and development of the cultural systems.

1.2- Paradox and its Implication

A paradox is a statement or a concept which contains conflicting ideas. In logic, a paradox is a statement that is contradictory. A paradox, sometimes considered as working as

antinomy[1], is a logically self-contradictory statement or a statement that runs contrary to one's expectation. To better illustrate the notion of paradox and at the same time to cope with the current analysis, my example can be the following: *in a multilingual setting, there is a quest for unity in a plurality.* In this example, something might not be working fine. Normally 'unity' and 'plurality' cannot work together as their meaning content are contradictory, and yet in the structure, they work as complementary.

1.3- Paradoxical Feature of the Concept of Identity

To refer to identity, the concept with which the concept of paradox works in the current analysis, it can be said that identity is in itself paradoxical. In fact, identity may refer, at the same time, to the components of an individual identification repertoire, as well as those of the group to which the individual belongs. But what is most salient in identity, is that it is not only meant to characterize the specific trait of an individual, but it also modifies along with situations and contexts.

For Jérôme Tourbeaux et Béatrice Valdes (2014, p.77), identity defines as an intellectual construction which is progressively made along with the social, political and historical conditions of each moment. In this perspective identity is a social construct which is permanently liable to negotiation and reconstruction. Moreover, identity stands as a complex system from which emerge processes in interaction and which activate a dynamic of self-representation as well as the representation of the society. Such representation(s) can be qualified as what is called identity and which is built on the basis of interactions between individuals and their environment. As such, the individual participates in the construction of his own identity (Anne-Marie Costalat-Founeau, 2008, p.66)

The necessary need for communication leads an individual or a community to become consciously or unconsciously bi/multilingual. As such multilingualism transpires as the result of a linguistic attitudes which are not always static. These attitudes vary as influenced by the experiences, co-speakers and contexts of interactions. In fact, in a given society, individuals are not always necessarily conversing with individuals of their linguistic community. Co-speakers may be from other speech communities and this requires a necessary compromise between individuals. In a multilingual setting, communication between individuals from different

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[1] Cantini Andrea and Riccardo Bruni (2017, p. iv). But for them, a terminological warning is in order, for, the word "antinomy" is used below as alternative to, and synonymous with, "paradox". Most paradoxes—but not all—involve contradictions; for such cases, we often use the word "contradiction "as well.

linguistic communities necessarily requires a linguistic bridge to make the communication effective. In that case, either a language belonging to one the interactant will be used or a third language (that is a language belonging to none of the interactant) to solve the communication need.

In each of the sus-mentioned cases, speakers need to have grasp on the languages at stake in the communication situation. Moreover, it comes out that adaptation of the linguistic attitude is what actually functions in modern societies, because of the great nesting of different linguistic communities in various societies. This is what David Lasagabaster (2006) is somehow stating when he argues:

> Le concept d'attitude jouit d'une grande popularité dans la société actuelle, c'est la raison pour laquelle il est utilisé dans des domaines très différents. Il est important de rappeler que les attitudes ne sont pas innées, mais qu'elles s'acquièrent : elles s'apprennent, se transforment et mûrissent, bref, elles sont éducables. Les attitudes sont fondamentalement sociales, nous les acquérons dans l'interaction sociale qui peut être directe ou indirecte. À travers le comportement nous pouvons inférer les attitudes des autres, en même temps que les autres infèrent les nôtres, même s'il est aussi possible d'essayer de les cacher (ou bien de les rendre publiques de manière explicite). Le contexte social est fondamental quand nous analysons le phénomène des attitudes[2] (P. 403)

A multilingual society is a space whereby individuals are exposed to difference, be it from the point of view of language or from the point of view of culture. In either case, individuals are supposed to readjust their attitudes for the best of the communication. However, this readjustment of attitudes in order to allow effective communication mainly with other speakers from different speech communities is not without impacting their (sociocultural and linguistic) identity.

2- Multilingualism and Identity

In a multilingual context, there is a kind of struggle for survival among languages for the maintenance and the preservation of the cultural system they represent. By the same token,

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[2] The concept of attitude enjoys great popularity in today's society, this is the reason why it is used in very different fields. It is important to remember that attitudes are not innate, but they are acquired: they are learned, transformed and grown, in short, they are educable. Attitudes are fundamentally social; we learn in social interaction which can be direct or indirect. Through behavior we can infer the attitudes of others, and at the same time others also infer our owns, although it is also possible to try to hide them (or to make them public explicitly). The social context is fundamental when we analyze the phenomenon of attitudes. (My translation).

the use of languages, depending on some circumstances, necessarily impacts cultural identities in a multilingual setting.

Multilingualism and cultural identity have often been the ground for many researches. Man Park (2013) raises the issue of immigrant students and cultural identity maintenance in host societies. His article has enlightened the fact that immigrant students in north America can maintain their background language and subsequently their cultural identity if they are actively protected and promoted by parents and families, ethnic communities and schools in the host society (p.49). along with the personal and social benefits of preserving the background language, Park states that a few numbers of immigrants succeed in maintaining them. And for him, this possibility is due to the 'indifference of the dominant group in Canada toward minority background languages (2013, p.49).

As for Rizgar (2013), 'one is able to renew and affect his identity with new interests, places and relationships (p.36). In fact, because of the discrimination they have endured, the denial of personal roots and the trial to escape from one's cultural identity are noticeable in the behaviors of the characters.

Furthermore, the linguistic reality of Zambia which is a multilingual country, is depicted by Lutz Marten and Nancy Kula (2007). In their analysis, we can read that multilingual practices originate from precolonial era. It was the arrival of the British colonists in 1800's which brought about a modification and extension to the existing system with the insertion of the English language. However, it was only in 1900's that this perception changed with a focus on the importance of African languages for the construction of Zambian identity.

Another analytic perspective has been the role of cultural identity in education in multilingual contexts. In this perspective, Lestinen et al. (2004) provide basic theoretical views to teachers of higher education. In a booklet entitled 'identity in multicultural and multilingual contexts', they state that 'educational institutions have a key role in the transmission, reproduction and development of cultural reality. They reflect the system of social relations in any given society, and by the same token, they influence and change these (2004, p.2). In other terms, education plays a basic role in the construction of student's cultural identity.

To close this section on the various work on multilingualism and cultural identity, an allusion was made to the work by Summerer K. S. et al. (2017). These authors analyze the impact of foreign languages on local languages in the cultural realm. They emphasize an

interpretation of the role multilingualism plays in the construction of identity during the selected period and makes a link between this early situation and today northern European societies.

The importance of the sus-mentioned works resides in the fact that they all broach the aspect of multilingualism with a specific focus on the issue of identity. Along with these works my point consists in raising the paradoxical feature of identity in a multilingual feature. The objective is to show that in a multilingual setting, there is always a move of the identificatory frontiers, as the identity of individuals is in constant modification and reconfiguration. It is as if identity posits as a continuum whereby it becomes difficult to draw the frontiers in the identification traits of individuals. In fact, the link between multilingualism and the concept of identity can lead to various linguistic and cultural modification either at the cultural level and/or at the level of languages, the unconditional vehicles of culture.

Moreover, it is important to discriminate different types of multilingualism. According to Appel and Muyeken (2005) two types of multilingualism should be distinguished. On the one hand, we have the individual multilingualism and on the second hand, there is the societal multilingualism. Societal multilingualism is when there is more than one language spoken in a given society. As for individual multilingualism, it refers to the state of an individual who can use and understand two or more the two languages. The importance of each of these types will be visible in the different factors that constitute the identity of an individual, and by the same token, that of a society or a group.

2.1- Multilingualism as a Cultural Mixture

At the cultural level, multilingualism sounds as a mixture of cultures. It entails the breaking up of frontiers between different cultures in the same geographical setting. In the same vein, for Baker (1995), states that 'those who speak two languages symbolize the essential of humanity of building bridges between people of different color, creed, culture, and language'. Along with this position supported by Baker (1995, Lüdi Georges (2001, p.15-16) argues that 'multilingualism entails breaking up the prison of a single culture, putting the concepts and values of each distinct cultural system in relative terms, bridging cultures and integrating them into a metasystem'.

The specific characteristic of a multilingual is that he appears as a person who is able to adapt his/her language choice to the situation of communication. He is capable of switching

from one language to another independently from the balance between his linguistic competences. In so doing, this person allows himself the capacity of crossing not only the linguistic borders but also, the cultural borders. In such a condition, he (the multilingual individual) can be identified with the languages speaks.

A multilingual (individual) represents a sort of mediation between various cultural systems. In fact, being a multilingual, entails the development of intercultural competence and at the same time, it raises the issue of identity polyphony and that of multisensoriality in the perception of meaning, the empathy in the change of point of views, the universe of beliefs and the affects of individuals in interaction[3]. Therefore, multilingualism reads as a kind of mediation between different languages and different cultural systems. Thus, invested with the power of social mediation, languages serve as means to fight against intolerance and to promote the culture of difference.

Moreover, the multilingual individual is at the junction of 'knowledge and the know-how to behave' in different cultural and linguistic settings. In other terms, multilingualism is the competence of an individual to communicate linguistically and to interact culturally' (Philippe Normand, 2013, p.84). The contrary to this point would be that the absence of cultural and linguistic mediation which would have great human and economic negative consequences on societies.

2.2- Impact of Multilingualism at the Societal Level.

One of the first impacts often associated to multilingualism is its incapacity to devising harmony between different linguistic communities. In fact, multilingualism is often looked on as creating competition between languages. In a multilingual setting, there is always an attempt of domination between communities. In such a setting, communities will always try to affirm their hegemony and by the same token they will affirm the prevalence of their linguistic and cultural identity over others. The resulting consequences of such a behavior creates not only conflictual situations, but it does have negative impacts on the functioning of the society and/or on the identity of individuals.

In multilingual settings, the language of the dominant linguistic community is in most cases the one which is used in the context of (modern) education (Romaine, 1995). In so doing,

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[3] This is an adaptation of the point of view of Aden, Grimshaw & Penz, 2010 quoted in Joëlle Aden (2012, p.271)

the members of minority languages are imposed upon to assimilate the dominant language. Such a perspective may impact those speakers' self-image, and by the same token, their identity on the basis that cultural and linguistic identity require the use and value of one's language (Cummins, Wright, 2008). It is in this vein, Javier R. (2007, p.7) states that switching between school and home languages can have some drawbacks on the psychological development of learners.

The negative impact of multilingualism is also often analyzed along with the economic power of linguistic groups. It seems that there exists some relationship between the vitality of the economy of a nation and the vitality of its languages. This is somehow one of the resulting consequences of the inequality and prejudice that surrounds the issue of multilingualism. In fact, very often, native speakers of minority languages are not positively considered by those of the dominant language. And this debasing consideration can even lead members of the minority languages to have negative consideration of their own languages as well as their own selves. For, in the claim of identity, the variables linguistic skills and the feelings of belonging are at stake. It seems that to be or to feel is all what guides the actual functioning of identity. In fact, multilingualism somehow contributes in a way or another to the promotion of cultural identity by creating a competition not only between languages, but also between cultures.

Fortunately, though it creates a sort of modification of cultural identities, multilingualism does not always entail negativity. Multilingualism does have a positive impact not only on individuals, but on the society, and that, with a positive influence on individuals' identity. It goes without saying that having grasp on many languages, which are by definition, essentials factors of identity, is of a paramount important for the individual and for the whole society as a whole. In fact, there is a growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development, not only because they ensure cultural diversity as well as intercultural communication, but they also strengthen cooperation between different linguistic communities. As such, they play an important role in creation and preservation of social harmony.

Social harmony is very important in human societies. In fact, one of the key elements which allow social harmony are among other things, cultural flourishing and experience exchange, to name only these. Knowing more than one's own language connects the individual to other cultures and by the same token, provide him the experience of accepting and speaking other languages. As such he is endowed with the sense of cultural and linguistic relativity whereby, he learns to do with difference. In so doing, his own identity not only modifies, but he learns to see in other cultures and languages some realities worth living.

Conclusion

The opening and nesting of societies to one another, necessarily has an impact on the original identity of individuals and societies. In fact, the notion of multilingualism goes together with the modification of identity. In fact, to speak a language goes together with a way of doing things such as the way of thinking, the way of living, which can all be put into the concept of culture.

Culture consists of explicit and implicit patterns which characterize the distinctive features of a group. All these features are aspects which help qualify a social group at a macro level, and the individual at the micro level. With the nesting of various speech communities, it becomes complex to speak of a cultural purity, that is, there is a necessary modification of the social as well as the individual identity, a modification which surely recalls the invariant value of the notion of identity; that is the state of constant modification.

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