

Summary of Grosjean Interview 2002

Title: An Interview with Francois Grosjean on Bilingualism

Author: Judit Navracscics, Veszprem University, Hungary asked the questions. 2002

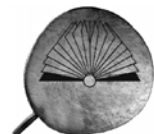
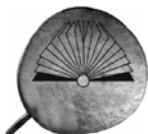
Source: A number of publications include this interview. It is available at: http://www.francoisgrosjean.ch/interview_en.html

Main questions:

- What is bilingualism?
- What do we need to know about bilinguals to effectively test / examine or study them?
- What does it mean when bilinguals 'restructure language'?
- What is the complementary principle; how does it relate to bilingualism?
- What does the concept 'language mode' mean; how does it relate to bilingualism?
- What is inference; how does it relate to bilingualism?
- What are mixing, code switching, and borrowing; how do they relate to bilingualism?
- What is the 'bilingual model of lexical access'?

Some background ideas:

- Children need community or educational support or other motivating factors to acquire a minority / second language and use it naturally. For example living in an English or other dominant language environment can make it very difficult to become / be bilingual.
- Bilingualism is extremely widespread and is the norm, not the exception, in today's world.



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Main comments and conclusions:

- Bilingualism means people use two languages or dialects in their everyday life. A bilingual is rarely equally or completely fluent in the two languages. Bilinguals use two languages separately or together for different purposes, in different areas of life, with different people (complementary principle). They may use one language for some areas of life, the other language for other areas, and two or more languages for yet other areas. Bilinguals communicate differently than monolinguals.
- Bilingualism applies to deaf people. The only way a deaf child can meet their needs to communicate, gain knowledge, and be a part of the hearing and deaf world is to become bilingual in sign language and speech.
- The layperson / monolingual view of bilingualism often is that people are balanced and equally fluent in two languages – ‘two monolinguals in one person’. Bilinguals may adopt this view and belittle their bilingualism because they do not master both languages to the same level.
- People become bilingual for many different reasons: economic, educational, political, religious migration; nationalism and federalism; education and culture; trade and commerce; intermarriage. People that have contact with two or more languages become competent in their languages to fulfil their various linguistic needs.
- The complementary principle states: “Bilinguals usually acquire and use their language for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life normally require different languages.” Bilinguals rarely have the same fluency in their two languages, they use two languages for all areas of life and often use both languages at the same time.
- Bilinguals change their language skills over time as their environment and the needs for particular language skills change.

