

Bilingualism (Ancestral Language Maintenance) Among Native American, Vietnamese American, and Hispanic American College Students

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Abstract

The role of attitude, motivation and other affective factors have been shown to have major effects on second language acquisition, but their role in ancestral language maintenance has been under examined. This paper explores background and affective variables affecting ancestral language maintenance and bilingualism for college students of three ethnic minority groups. Results suggest that belief about parental attitudes, view of importance of learning the ancestral language, and integrative motivation are significantly related to adoption of ancestral languages.¹

Introduction

Research supporting the claim that attitudes and motivation have major effects on learning a second language is extensive, but the role of attitude and of other affective factors influencing ancestral language maintenance and bilingualism has not been given adequate treatment. Second language acquisition research on affective variables and on sociocultural factors may shed light on our understanding of why some ethnic minorities in the United States are bilinguals (speaking their ancestral language and English) while others are monolinguals who speak only English.

Gardner and Lamberts (1972) seminal work on positive and negative attitudes aiding or inhibiting second language acquisition suggests that motivation plays a major role in L2 acquisition. They identified two types of motivation for learning a language: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation suggests that learners want to acculturate and become a full-fledged member of the target language community; that is, they want to take on the customs, values, etc. of the L2 group; learning the target language is an important vehicle for this integration. On the contrary,

¹Our appreciation goes to Mardo Salinas and Dr. Pete Coser of Oklahoma State University's Multicultural Development and Assessment Center for providing the invaluable mailing lists and labels for the study.

instrumental motivation is that held by learners whose reasons for taking on an L2 are largely socioeconomic or utilitarian ones (e.g. getting a job). It has been suggested that integrative motivation may be the more effective of the two types for second language acquisition. However, Hidalgo's (1986) work on English, Spanish, and English-Spanish code switching claims that the notion of two distinct motivations, instrumental and integrative, may be inadequate. Instead, she emphasizes the importance of the local milieu on language attitudes and the influence of attitudes toward the target language on actual use of that language. She argues that there really is no practical difference between instrumentality and integrativeness;" her subjects showed a balance of integrative and instrumental motivation. The more successful language learners did not show more integrative or instrumental motivation (p. 214). Rodrigues (1988) supports Gardner and Lamberts notion of distinct motivations but suggests that Puerto Rican bilingual children are more successful at acquiring English when they have instrumental motivation rather than a desire for total integration into mainstream society. While these studies on instrumental and integrative motivation have varying and even conflicting results, none of them deny that attitude toward both native and target language affects one's motivation to learn a given language or dialect.

Several researchers have focused on major sociocultural factors influencing language acquisition, without necessarily attempting to see which of the two types of motivation is more effective. Schumann's (1978) Acculturation Model and Giles' (1977) Accommodation Theory both purport that sociocultural factors are crucial for L2 acquisition. Schumann suggests that the extent to which an L1 group has positive or negative feelings toward the L2 group is indicative of the extent to which the L1 group will acquire the L2, and Giles argues that uses of ethnolinguistic markers are used to varying degrees to express ethnic identity; that is, the closer the L1 and L2 groups are the less likely it is that the L1 group will use markers that will distinguish them from the L2. The more different the native and target language groups are the more likely it is that the L1 group will use markers that will distinguish them from the L2 group; this means that a great divergence between L1 and L2 groups may be closely tied to the L1 group's need for native language loyalty and identity. Furthermore, Rodriguez-Brown & Ruesta (1987) have shown that university students in three different education tracts (bilingual, linguistic, and cultural) had different

attitudes and motivation toward college-level Spanish. These authors suggest that attitudes toward the L1, L2, and L2 teacher all affect L2 learning. They argue that foreign language teachers should consider the importance of motivation and attitudes toward the target language as a part of instructional objectives (p. 18).

All of the studies above, along with numerous others, show a positive relationship between motivation/attitude and successful acquisition of L2s. Very few studies have been done, though, which have examined the effect of attitude, motivation and similar variables on the adoption and maintenance of ancestral languages in the United States. While Wherritt & Gonzales (1989) argue that identity and heritage are strong variables affecting Spanish maintenance in a small Iowa town, the overwhelming trend with language maintenance studies is to emphasize saving dying languages; usually these are minority languages facing extinction largely due to sociopolitical and economic reasons. Political and economic factors are often highlighted while attitude is often backgrounded or left unaddressed. This is justifiable though when dealing with dying languages, as political/economic forces are often the driving force behind language planning choices, and the desire to save as many languages as possible is a noteworthy goal. Theiberger (1990) makes a very interesting examination of reasons for preserving Australian aboriginal languages; he says that morality and social justice are important reasons for ancestral language maintenance of any type. Similarly, the fostering of bilingualism is equally valid. Since it is possible for numerous languages to be maintained without a resultant increase of bilingualism, more research needs to be done with goals of maintaining ancestral languages along with bilingualism. Furthermore, research shedding light on attitudes and similar variables affecting native language adoption and maintenance is lacking.

The majority of speakers in the United States are monolingual and monocultural; although we have numerous cultures (and languages) represented in this country, our neighborhoods remain largely homogeneous and monolingual. That is, there are too many speakers of English only, Chinese only, Spanish only etcetera, and too few bilinguals in this country. This is not to suggest that multicultural and multilingual programs have not made progress; we are much further along today than fifty years ago (thanks to bilingual education and foreign language programs). But I maintain that we have yet to achieve a truly multicultural society; that is, one

composed of people who have strong ties with their unique cultures and who not only appreciate other cultures but can understand them. Since language and culture are inseparable, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a society that has more multilingual speakers is one that has a better understanding of speakers who may differ socioculturally.

Of special interest here is the great number of monolingual ethnolinguistic minorities in the United States (Chinese American, Native American, Vietnamese American, Hispanic American...). The purpose of this study is to explore variables which may explain why some members of these groups, whose ancestral language is a language other than English, adopt and/or maintain their ancestors language(s) while others do not.

Since previous research has shown major ties between motivation/attitude and second language acquisition, it is expected that these factors also influence acquisition of ancestral languages. The subjects in the study all speak English, but some also speak their ancestral language (bilinguals) and others do not (monolinguals). Major questions in this study were: (a) What are the common background, attitude, and motivational factors among bilinguals not present among monolinguals of the same ethnic groups? and (b) Are the independent variables which affect ancestral language adoption and maintenance among the same for three groups under study (Hispanic American, Vietnamese American and Native American)? Answers to these questions should aid in finding better ways to promote bilingualism and more specifically, the preservation of rich linguistic heritages and cultural pluralism among ethnic minority groups in the United States.

Methodology

Subjects

Subjects were 21 Hispanic American, 22 Native American, and 10 Vietnamese American college students. Subjects were students who responded to a questionnaire mailed to persons randomly selected from the college Minority Programs mailing list. Twenty four percent of the 221 persons who were mailed the questionnaire responded. Those selected included males and females, residential and commuter students, and students of varying college classifications.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation questionnaire contained 24 items (See appendix). The first six questions were designed to obtain biographical information (ethnic identity, age, gender, birthplace, length of stay in the U.S., college classification).

Questions 7-19 were language identity questions which addressed such issues as first language, language spoken in different locales, language spoken by parents and ancestors, native language and reasons for calling a certain language the native one, and ancestral language competence in comparison to English language competence.

Question 20 asked for information about the strength of family, peer, minority and non-minority relationships.

Questions 21-23 were probes for integrative and instrumental motivation concerning the importance of knowing and not knowing one's ancestral language. The purpose of these questions was to determine if the bilinguals and monolinguals had different orientations toward learning their ancestral language.

The final question dealt with subjects' feelings about parental expectations concerning their children knowing the ancestral language.

Analysis

Using Chi square analysis, all independent variables were examined separately to find significant differences ($p < .05$) between monolinguals (those who speak only English) and bilinguals (those who spoke English and another language). Based on answers to questions 7-17 of the instrument, subjects were identified as monolingual or bilingual. Subjects who said that they spoke a language other than English when they were a child, that a language other than English was spoken most frequently in their parents home, and that the language they used among friends in high school also said that language was their native language; these subjects were identified as bilinguals. It was not automatically assumed that subjects who said that English was the language of use for the above situations were monolinguals (i.e. did not know their ancestral language). Instead, subjects who said that English was their native language (#12) and who said that they cannot speak, understand, read or write in their ancestors language (#14-17) were considered to be monolinguals (this is a nontraditional use of the term to refer to subjects who are not competent in their ancestral language).

Subjects in the study may have learned languages other than their ancestral language, which would mean some may speak English plus some language other than that of their ancestors. However, since the emphasis of the study was on use of ancestral languages, subjects who did not know their ancestral language were not classified as “bilinguals” (though, technically they may be multilingual, speaking English, French, Swahili, Arabic, Japanese...). Thus, the two groups of subjects are as follows: monolinguals (do not know their ancestral language) and bilinguals (know their ancestral language); both groups know English. To eliminate from the bilingual group subjects who know just a few words or phrases in their ancestral language and who are not truly fluent in the language, questions about degree of knowledge of the language in comparison to English (all subjects are fluent in English) were used to determine native-like fluency (see questions #14-17). Furthermore, the question regarding which language was considered to be the native one (#12) was not used alone as a determinant for placement in the bilingual or monolingual group because, as Davies & Bentahila (1989) suggest, subjects’ reasons for considering a language to be their native one vary; therefore, question #13 attempts to determine how subjects decide which language is their native one. Subjects who identify a language as their native language (#12) but cannot speak, write, read, or understand the language well were placed in the monolingual group. Once the two groups were established, comparisons were made between the groups for the following variables: ethnicity (#1), length of stay in the U.S. (#2, 3), age (#4), gender (#5), college classification (#6), relationship with peers of the same race (#20), importance of knowing ancestral language (#21), instrumental and integrative motivation (#22, 23), and parental attitudes about ancestral language (#24).

For questions #22 and #23, choices regarding usefulness for career and number of people speaking the language (choices a and b) were considered to have instrumental motivation while the choices regarding heritage, sophistication, perception... (choices c, d, and e) represented integrative motivation. Subjects who chose “Strongly Agree” or “Moderately Agree” for instrumental items were identified as having instrumental motivation and subjects who chose the same for the integrative items were considered to have integrative motivation for knowing or not knowing the ancestral language. When designing these questions, it was not assumed that persons who were neutral or who disagreed with instrumental reasons would

automatically have integrative reasons, and vice versa; that it is possible for a person to have both types of motivation, as the two are not mutually exclusive, was taken into consideration.

Results

Of the ten independent variables (length of stay in the U.S., ethnic identity, age, gender, college classification, relationship with peers of same race, attitude toward importance of knowing ancestral language, instrumental motivation, integrative motivation, and perceptions about parental attitude), five had a significant effect on ancestral language maintenance at the $p > .05$ level.

Table 1
Raw Frequencies for Ethnicity and Gender

	Native American			Hispanic American			Vietnamese American			All subjects		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Bilingual	5	1	6	6	4	10	5	5	10	16	10	26
Mono-lingual	9	7	16	1	10	11	0	0	0	9	18	27

*M=Male F=Female T=Total

As Table I shows, there is a difference in the three ethnic groups' knowledge of their ancestral language. All ten (100%) of the Vietnamese American subjects were fluent in Vietnamese, ten of the 21 (48%) Hispanic Americans knew Spanish, while only 6 of the 22 (27%) Native Americans knew their ancestral Native American language. Statistical analysis suggests that these differences are significant (Chi square=16.47, $p > .05$).

Gender differences were also detected for ancestral language knowledge. While 16 of the 25 (64%) males were bilingual, only 10 of the 18 (36%) female subjects knew their ancestral language; these observed differences proved statistically significant (Chi square=4.51, $p > .05$). While there was a significant effect detected for gender when comparing all males to all females, gender comparisons within ethnic groups showed different results. Vietnamese American and Native American males and females were much more homogeneous in terms of ancestral language, but there was a significant difference between Hispanic American males and females; six of seven (86%) Hispanic American males knew

Spanish while only four of ten (29%) Hispanic American females knew their ancestral language.

As expected, subjects' beliefs about the importance of learning their ancestors' language did have a significant effect on whether subjects' knew the ancestral language (Chi square=8.89, $p>.05$). Twenty five of the 26 (96%) bilinguals in the study felt it was important to know their ancestral language while only 17 of the 27 (63%) monolinguals believed it was important. (See Table 2)

Table 2
Motivation and Importance of Learning Ancestral Language

	Integrative Motivation		Instrumental Motivation		Important to learn ancestral language	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Bilingual	24	2	18	8	25	1
Mono-lingual	16	11	16	11	17	10

*Three subjects did not respond to the parental attitude question.

As Table 2 suggests, monolinguals and bilinguals also show differences in instrumental and integrative motivation. The greatest difference was detected for integrative motivation; while 92% (24 of 26) of the bilingual subjects had integrative motivation, only 59% (16 of 27) of the monolinguals had this type of motivation for believing that learning their ancestral language was or was not important (Chi square=7.83, $p>.05$). No differences were detected for instrumental motivation though; 69% (18 of 26) of the bilinguals had instrumental motivation while 59% (16 of 27) of the monolinguals had instrumental orientations. Interesting to note is that among monolinguals, there is no difference in the number of subjects with integrative and with instrumental motivation; that is, 59% of the monolingual subjects had instrumental motivation and 59% had integrative. This is not the case for bilinguals though; while 69% of the bilinguals had instrumental motivation, 92% had integrative. Integrative motivation was more evident among bilinguals than was instrumental, but neither was more prevalent among monolinguals.

The greatest statistically significant effect was detected for belief about parental attitudes concerning children learning their ancestral language (Chi square=16.10, $p>.0001$). Eighty eight percent of the

bilingual subjects believed their parents wanted them to speak their ancestral language while only thirteen percent of the monolingual subjects held this belief about their parents (See Table 3).

Table 3
Parental Consent for
Learning Ancestral Language

	Yes	No
Bilingual	23	3
Monolingual	8	16

*Three subjects did not respond to the parental attitude question.

Conclusion

Results of this study show that there is a relationship between knowing one's ancestral language and the following affective variables: integrative motivation, view of importance of learning the language, and belief about parental attitudes toward learning the ancestral language. That is, subjects who believed that learning their ancestral language was important, had integrative reasons for saying that learning the language was important, and believed that their parents wanted them to learn the language were more likely to be in the bilingual group, which was composed of subjects who spoke English and their ancestral language. Subjects for whom all three of these elements were not present were generally the monolingual subjects, who spoke English and not their ancestral language.

Ethnic identity also seemed to be important. While all of the Vietnamese Americans spoke Vietnamese and almost half of the Hispanic Americans spoke Spanish, less than thirty percent of the Native Americans spoke a Native American language. One might think that the very high percentage of Vietnamese speakers is due to the comparably recent immigration of this group. That belief is held along with the notion that the longer an immigrant group stays in the U.S. the greater the chances of native language shift or death. The results of this study suggest that length of stay is not the important factor here. Whether the third and successive generations will speak Vietnamese may be more dependent upon the affective variables mentioned above (especially integrative motivation, whether Vietnamese Americans will still feel a need to reinforce their own culture via language) and on socioeconomic relationships between this group and English speaking groups in the US than on length of

stay. Xia (1992) also challenges the claim that non-English languages in the U.S. will eventually shift to English over time. He says that the Chinese language will remain strong in the U.S. because of sociopolitical, sociocultural, and social demographics. The results of this study confirm Xia's general claim and suggest that affective variables also affect individuals' choices regarding speaking their ancestral language.

The low percentage of Native Americans in the study who spoke their ancestral language also seems closely related to the three aforementioned variables; most of the Native Americans in this study reported that no one in their immediate family spoke their ancestral language, that they did not feel it was important for them to know the language, and they generally gave instrumental reasons for their beliefs.

The Hispanic American group was much more heterogeneous with regard to knowledge of Spanish. It was expected that perhaps the growing recognition and status of this language in the United States would affect subjects' views of the importance of Spanish which would show even higher percentages of Spanish speakers in the study. However, since instrumentality does not seem to carry as much weight as integrativeness for bilingual subjects, what appears to be happening is that the increased job opportunities for Spanish-English bilinguals may not be a strong enough impetus for acquiring the language. In other words, the bilingual subjects believed that their parents wanted them to know Spanish, and they felt that knowing Spanish was important not just for utilitarian reasons; a large percentage of the Hispanic Americans who spoke Spanish gave integrative reasons related to heritage and to relating to relatives and other Spanish speakers. Among the monolingual non-Spanish speaking Hispanics were subjects who thought it was important to learn Spanish in order to get a job but did not necessarily have integrative motivations. This study suggests that affective variables play an important role in adoption of the ancestral language.

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Appendix

1. How would you describe yourself?
a. Native American b. Hispanic American c. Vietnamese American
d. Other: (Write in)_____
2. Were you born in the United States?
a. Yes b. No
3. If you answered "no" to question #2, how long have you lived in the USA?
a. 1-2 yrs. b. 3-5 yrs. c. 6-9 yrs d. 10 or more yrs.
4. To which age group do you belong?
a. 17-25 b. 26-30 c. 31-35 d. 36-40 e. above 40
5. What is your gender?
a. Male b. female
6. What is your college classification?
a. Freshman b. Sophomore c. Junior d. Senior e. graduate
7. What was the first language you spoke when you were a child?
a. English b. Spanish c. Vietnamese d. Other language(s):
(Write in)_____
8. What language is (was, if deceased) spoken most frequently in your parents' home?
a. English b. Spanish c. Vietnamese d. Other language(s):
(Write in)_____
9. What language do (did, if deceased) your grandparents speak?
a. English b. Spanish c. Vietnamese d. Other language(s):
(Write in)
10. What language did you use among your friends in high school?
a. English b. Spanish c. Vietnamese d. Other language(s):
(Write in) _____
11. What language do you speak among your college friends?
a. English b. Spanish c. Vietnamese d. Other language(s):

(Write in) _____

12. What language do you consider to be your native language?

- a. English b. Spanish c. Vietnamese d. Other language(s):

(Write in) _____

13. How did you determine which language was your native one, in question #10? YOU MAY CIRCLE MORE THAN ONE ANSWER FOR THIS QUESTION; CIRCLE ALL CHOICES WHICH SEEM APPROPRIATE.

- a. It is the first language I learned to speak.
b. It is the language I use most frequently.
c. It is the language that I speak and understand best.
d. It is the language that best represents my heritage; it is the language spoken by my parents/ancestors
e. Other reason: (Write in) _____

14. Can you speak in your ancestors' language as well as you speak in English?

- a. No, my English is much better.
b. No, my English is a little better.
c. My speaking ability is the same in both languages.
d. Yes, I speak a little better in my ancestors' language.
e. Yes, I speak much better in my ancestors' language.

15. Can you understand your ancestors' language as well as you understand English?

- a. No, my English is much better.
b. No, my English is a little better.
c. I understand both languages equally well.
d. Yes, I understand my ancestors' language a little better.
e. Yes, I understand my ancestors' language much better.

16. Can you read your ancestors' language as well as you read English?

- a. No, my English is much better.
b. No, my English is a little better.
c. I can read both languages equally well.
d. Yes, my reading skills in my ancestors' language are a little better.

- e. Yes, my reading skills in my ancestors' language are much better.
17. Can you write in your ancestors' language as well as you write in English?
- No, my English is much better.
 - No, my English is a little better.
 - I can write equally well in both languages.
 - Yes, my writing skills in my ancestors' language are a little better.
 - Yes, my writing skills in my ancestors' language are much better.
18. Do you have siblings who could choose answer "c" for questions #14-17? a. Yes b. No
19. If you answered "no" to question #18, please skip this question. If you answered "yes" to question #18, what are these siblings' highest levels of formal education and ages? PLEASE INCLUDE ONLY BILINGUAL BROTHERS OR SISTERS. IF ONLY ONE SIBLING CAN PICK CHOICE "C" FOR QUESTIONS 14-17, YOU SHOULD CIRCLE ONLY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CHOICES AND WRITE IN HIS OR HER CURRENT AGE. IF YOU HAVE SEVERAL SIBLINGS WHO FIT THIS CATEGORY (ARE BILINGUAL AND PICK CHOICE "C" FOR QUESTIONS 14-17), YOU MAY NEED TO CIRCLE SEVERAL OF THE FOLLOWING CHOICES AND SHOULD WRITE ALL OF THESE SIBLINGS' AGES.
- elementary age(s) _____
 - secondary age(s) _____
 - undergraduate age(s) _____
 - graduate age(s) _____
20. How would you describe your relationship with the following people: PLEASE MARK ONE CHOICE FOR EACH LINE.
Excellent good average poor very poor
- mother _____
 - father _____
 - Sibling(s) _____
 - other college students of my race _____
 - non-minority college students _____
 - minority college students not of my race _____

21. Do you think it is important for you to know your ancestors' language?
a. Yes b. No

IF YOUR ANSWER TO #21 IS "YES", TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING REASONS FOR CHOOSING "YES"? FOR EACH REASON, CIRCLE ONE CHOICE.

22. a. It will be useful in my future career.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

- b. Being bilingual will make me more marketable.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

- c. It will help me to better relate to my relatives and other people who speak this language.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

- d. It will make me a more knowledgeable person.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

- e. It is a major part of my heritage.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral

Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

IF YOU ANSWERED NO TO #21, WHY DO YOU THINK KNOWING YOUR ANCESTORS' LANGUAGE IS NOT IMPORTANT? FOR EACH REASON CIRCLE THE CHOICE THAT BEST EXPRESSES THE EXTENT OF YOUR AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT WITH THESE STATEMENTS AS YOUR REASONS FOR ANSWERING "NO".

23. a. It is not important because not many people know this language.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

b. It is not important for my job.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

c. Speaking two languages is too confusing, and English is more important.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

d. People who speak this language are viewed as uneducated.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

e. This language is not sophisticated.

Strongly Agree
Moderately Agree
Neutral
Moderately Disagree
Strongly Disagree

24. How do your parents feel about you speaking your ancestors language. **CHOOSE ONLY ONE ANSWER**
- a. They have constantly tried to encourage me to speak my “native” language and do not like me to use English.
 - b. They do not want me to speak this language; instead, they want me to speak only English.
 - c. They want me to use both languages.
 - d. They want me to use my “native” language, but don’t mind if I also speak English.
 - e. They want me to use English, but don’t mind if I use my “native” language.