

The Development of Second Language Proficiency

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Introduction

This book is about a major five-year research project conducted during the 1980s in the Modern Language Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The purpose of the project, entitled the Development of Bilingual Proficiency (DBP), has been to examine a number of educationally relevant issues concerning the language development of school-age children who are learning a second language. Specific issues addressed in the research are: the nature of language proficiency, the effect of classroom treatment on second language learning, the relationship of social-environmental factors to bilingual proficiency, and the relationship between age and language proficiency. The research draws on a variety of minority and majority language learning populations attending schools in the Province of Ontario, including students of Japanese-, Portuguese-, and Spanish-speaking home backgrounds, students attending a French-language school, and students of mainly English-speaking home background learning French as a second language in core and immersion programs.

The aim of this book is not to present the component studies of the Development of Bilingual Proficiency project in all their detail, but instead to place the project in perspective by bringing together short summaries of the research on each issue and a set of discussion papers written by experts in the area of bilingualism and second language education. These papers, prepared for a project symposium held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in November 1987, provide a reflective, and sometimes critical, view of the DBP studies from the outside. They consider the theoretical and practical implications of the research, and point to further research needs. The reader interested in the full details of the research is directed to a series of interim and final reports (Allen, Bialystok, Cummins, Mougeon, and Swain 1982; Allen, Cummins, Mougeon, and Swain 1983; Harley, Allen, Cummins, and Swain 1987) available through the ERIC Clearinghouse for Languages and Linguistics.

The papers in the present volume are organized according to topic in six sections. In Part I, the theme is the nature of language proficiency. In our opening paper, we present the theoretical framework underlying the DBP project and summarize a large-scale factor-analytic study con-

2 *Introduction*

ducted in French immersion classrooms. This study was designed to test an educationally relevant model of language proficiency that distinguishes grammatical, discourse, and sociolinguistic competencies, and recognizes the demands of different task conditions for their use. Several other smaller-scale DBP studies focusing on the nature of language proficiency are then outlined: two follow-up studies of the written second language (L2) proficiency of French immersion students, and a study concerned with assessment of oral proficiency in bilingual children. This initial paper summarizing the research is followed by two discussion papers, one by Lyle Bachman and the other by Jacquelyn Schachter, focusing mainly on theoretical and methodological issues in connection with the model-testing study. Part I concludes with a brief response to the papers by Bachman and Schachter.

Part II is concerned with the issue of how classroom treatment affects the development of second language proficiency. The first paper in this section summarizes four DBP studies concerned with instructional practices: the development and validation of an observation scheme, a process-product study using this scheme in core French classrooms, an observational study of language-use patterns in French immersion classes, and a classroom experiment in the teaching of grammar in an immersion context. Again two discussion papers, the first by Patsy Lightbown and the second by H. H. Stern, focus on theoretical and methodological issues raised in the research. A short response by the DBP team to the Lightbown and Stern papers follows.

In Part III, which deals with the theme of social and individual factors in the development of bilingual proficiency, the introductory paper outlines the DBP research on social-environmental variables and age in relation to bilingual development. It incorporates two studies involving Portuguese-Canadian students, one investigating the relationship between language-use patterns, language attitudes, and bilingual proficiency at the grade 7 level, and the other – an ongoing longitudinal study – examining the interactional patterns of young children in relation to later academic achievement. Also included is an ethnographic study of students at a French language school, and several studies examining the relationship between age and language learning, including a study of metaphor comprehension by bilingual Spanish-speaking children, a study of Japanese immigrant students' literacy skills in Japanese and English, and a comparison of the French proficiency of English-speaking students attending three different L2 programs. There are three discussion papers in this section. The first, by Richard Bourhis, focuses exclusively on the study of Portuguese-Canadian students at grade 7 and presents a number of alternative theoretical models for interpreting the results. The second paper, by Alison d'Anglejan, discusses each of a number of the DBP studies in turn. In the next paper, Barry McLaughlin

introduces an additional individual factor, language aptitude, that was not investigated in the context of the DBP project but that he considers of major importance. Part III ends with a response to some issues raised in the discussion papers.

The next section of this volume, Part IV, is devoted to the practical and policy implications of the DBP studies. Jean Handscombe, in her paper, discusses the implications of the classroom treatment studies from the perspective of an educational administrator. Christina Bratt Paulston, in the second paper, considers more broadly the practical and policy implications of a number of the DBP studies.

Part V, which consists of a single paper by Wallace Lambert, places the Development of Bilingual Proficiency project in the context of thirty-five years of research on bilingualism. Lambert's paper, presented in connection with the DBP symposium as a public lecture, provides a fascinating account of issues in bilingualism to which he has devoted his remarkably productive career.

In a concluding chapter, Richard Tucker provides an overview of the implications of the DBP project.