

types of multilingualism

important notes and some links for further study

two meanings of “multilingualism”

- ◆ The word *multilingualism* is ambiguous.
- ◆ There are **multilingual places**: any place that has more than one language. For example, there are multilingual countries, such as Belgium. There are multilingual cities, such as Bolzano. There are multilingual schools, and multilingual clubs. There are even multilingual households.
- ◆ There are also **multilingual persons**: any person that uses more than one language.

a multilingual person

- ◆ A **multilingual person** is able to use more than just one way of speaking. Almost everyone in Japan is multilingual to some extent. A multilingual person is often said to have a dominant language, but even the skills in the nondominant languages can be native or nativelylike.
- ◆ A multilingual person does not have to speak every language perfectly. It is very common to speak some languages better than others.

multidialectal

- ◆ The different ways of speaking that a person uses do not have to be completely different (mutually unintelligible) languages. Many people use different **dialects** or **sociolects**. Some people are masters of a **creole continuum**, or they can speak a broad range of **language varieties**.
- ◆ At KGU, it is common for students to use two or three types of Japanese, as well as English, and possibly other languages.

a bilingual person

- ◆ A **bilingual** person is able to use **two** languages. We say **multilingual** to emphasize that a person knows **more than one** or perhaps even **many** languages; however, we say **bilingual** to emphasize **two**.
- ◆ Sometimes we mean **at least two** languages, and other times we mean **only two** languages.

a bilingual translator or interpreter

- ◆ We also tend to use the term **bilingual** whenever the relationship between two particular languages is important; for example, as when we are looking for a **bilingual** translator for German and Italian, or when we need an interpreter for **two-way** simultaneous interpreting.

diglossia

- ◆ A **diglossic** person is the typical bilingual person of a diglossic community, which is a community where two languages are regularly used for communication. One of the languages is a **high** language, and the other is a **low** language. For example, the high language might be used for religious, scientific, or other scholarly discussion, whereas the low language might be used for shopping and light entertainment. Examples of diglossia include: the use of both Bokmål and Landsmaal in **Norway**; the use of both Spanish and Guaraní in **Paraguay**; and the use of both English and Patois in **Jamaica**.

language skill variation

- ◆ Although a person from a diglossic community is often a **balanced bilingual**, most multilingual people have different levels of skill in the different languages they use, or even in different genres of those languages. We sometimes refer to these contrasts when describing a multilingual person's skills:
 - nativelike versus foreign sounding
 - fluent versus halting
 - grammatical versus ungrammatical

common reasons for skill deficits

- ◆ Speakers are typically (but not always) more competent in their first or native languages.
- ◆ native versus nonnative — Language learned before the **critical period** often sounds more natural.
- ◆ first versus second language — The first language intuitions may differ from those of languages learned subsequently.
(cf. caretaker language; mother tongue)

a multilingual community

versus a multilingual person

- ◆ Not everyone in a **multilingual community** is a multilingual person. Multilingual communities are the result of human migration and other travel, and there are various types of multilingual communities. This travel has typically resulted in contact between speakers of different languages, and such contact can result in speaker multilingualism, language change, new language birth, and even language extinction.

immigrants often switch languages

- ◆ It is not uncommon for immigrants to use the **majority** language of their new community. Especially when the immigrant language is a **minority** language, it may be used less and less. Eventually, some of the descendants of the immigrants may no longer know their **ancestral language**.
- ◆ Many of the descendants of 20th Century immigrants to Japan from Korea and China cannot speak Korean or Chinese.

oracy, literacy, ...

- ◆ **Oracy** is the ability to competently speak; i.e., to speak fluently and grammatically.
- ◆ **Literacy** is the ability to competently write and read.
- ◆ A **script** is a system of writing. A language can be written with different scripts. For example, Serbo-Croatian can be written either with the **Latin alphabet** or with the **Cyrillic alphabet**.

natural languages: speech and deaf sign

- ◆ **Speech** is the most typical form of language, and the Ethnologue lists **thousands of natural spoken languages**.
- ◆ **Sign** (deaf sign, deaf sign language) is naturally used by deaf communities, and the Ethnologue also lists **many natural signed languages**.
- ◆ Both normal speech and deaf sign can be written, but writing is not the same thing as a natural language.

The preceding ends the important notes,
but here are some links to sites for further study:

- ◆ the Ethnologue
- ◆ creole continuum:
acrolect, mesolects, basilect
- ◆ diglossia
- ◆ linguistic genre
- ◆ critical period for language learning
- ◆ Serbo-Croatian
- ◆ scripts, writing systems
- ◆ deaf sign transcription