

Language Affecting Perception within Thai-English Bilingual Groups

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Abstract---In Thailand, more and more people are giving importance to English language. However, some of them decided to travel to English-speaking countries in order to learn the real use of the language while some of them study in language school in Thailand or from their schools. Therefore, the research would like to investigate the differences of efficiency in using bilingual languages from people in different age groups as well as differences between people studying English in English-speaking country and in Thailand. As the uses of both languages are different, the research was expected to see differences in perception and usability from those groups of samples.

Keywords: Bilingual, English-speaking country, languages

I. INTRODUCTION

Charlemagne stated that to speak another language was to have another soul. We are posed with two different ideas; that cognition is based on culture, and in turn language, and the idea that cognition is universally the same worldwide, independent of culture and language. This paper aims to discover which idea is closest to the scientific reality. It will aim to identify if Thai bilinguals, who speak English fluently with automaticity and who have never studied in an English-speaking country, adapt their perception based reasoning depending on which language they speak at a given moment. In other words, do bilingual speakers change their ideas and personalities based on language? If this is the case, this paper will evaluate as to why they do this – is it based on grammar or on a culture encountered because of the second language. The hypothesis of the author is that a Thai bilingual speaker of English will adapt their change their ideas and personality, and adapt their perception based reasoning depending on whichever language they use at a given time.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to investigate links in a proficient bilingual population completing linguistic tasks, and viewing how they contrast to monolinguals of their respected languages completing the same linguistic tasks. This study discovers if bilinguals do adapt or change their perceptions based on which language setting they are in. This study will address the reasons why certain semantics may affect a task, and isolate how and in what way. It will also look to understand if bilinguals who do change their perceptions can do so freely and easily based on what the situation requires.

The participants in this study are Thai monolinguals and English monolinguals, specifically to compare the results with, and Thai-English multilinguals who have not spent an extended period of time living in an English-speaking country. Within the Thai language, conversation is usually based around locations, rather than actions- as is the case with English, or most standard European languages for that matter. Another vast difference between the two languages is, in a way, a poetic sense. English is full of synonyms- it has more words than any other languages due to its evolution and history, but the Thai language has few synonyms, especially for adjectives. A crucial question will be to see if the bilingual participants adopt similar styles of using various synonyms and differing adjectives to describe specific items when speaking English, and if so, for which items would they utilize the different adjectives available? Through different tests, the crucial questions are to find the differences and similarities, and why each semantic or lexical item is used.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea that language shapes our world view is not a recent phenomenon. It is an idea that has been around for decades. As early as the 19th century, Wilhelm von Humboldt, in his study of language, believed that the internal process involved in the production and use of language held a power over humanity. In his mind, language was essential to cognition, which came from identical grammar structures being used in internal thought. (Lonosky, M. 1999) Throughout the 20th century, it was a popular belief that language, culture, and cognition were intertwined, and that *inferior languages*- that is to say Languages that were not of Indo-European decent, were part of the reason for the perceived *savage behavior* of some cultures. Of course, this is not to say that one language or culture is superior to any other, but only that this was the belief at the time (Bafou, P. 2012).

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study consists of several smaller studies to give a greater insight and more rounded view into this particular area of study. In this study, a mixed empirical method was used by undertaking four small qualitative experiments which recorded the behavior and opinions of the participants. Statistical analysis was then used to give a quantitative result based on the evidence.

The first method was a survey given to two different groups of 15 Thai students aged 12-18. The first group of participants were students who only spoke Thai. The second group were students who were Thai-English bilinguals. Both

groups were given a survey in their native language, Thai in a Thai-speaking setting, which they completed. After a period of one month, as to allow the participants to forget their previous answers and not link the two surveys together in the hopes of not affecting outcomes based on what they thought their answers needed to be rather on natural and honest answers, the bilingual group were given the same survey as before but in English, in an English-speaking setting. The results of all surveys were compared and examined for differences. The Thai and English monolingual survey results would be quantified in terms of x and y ; x being the mean results of the English monolingual answers, and y being the mean results of the Thai monolingual answers. The Thai-English bilingual results in each survey will be compared to these using the Pearson-product moment of correlation using the formula $r = \Sigma (xy) / \sqrt{[(\Sigma x^2) * (\Sigma y^2)]}$. From this, we can see if the answers of the bilinguals differed depending on the language used.

The second study, and second method, was an observation of ten 18-30 year old Thai bilinguals in a natural, yet controlled, setting. The participants were filmed speaking in a comfortable setting in both English and Thai intermittently. They were given a list of topics in the form of 20 flashcards and asked to speak about each topic for as long as they are comfortable, and to move on to a new topic when the conversation became stagnant. They were instructed to do this for 20 minutes in English, at which point to change and do the same for 20 minutes in Thai. This was repeated twice, and of the 20 flashcards there were 10 that were repeated, e.g. items of food and holiday destinations, and 10 that were not as to make the setting feel more natural and comfortable. The video recordings were to be used as evidence and compared to see if they changed their views about the same or similar topics when speaking one language rather than the other. Any differences were noted, and are to be used as purely qualitative data.

In the third test, an interview was conducted. Ten 18-30 year old Thai citizens who speak English fluently, and have never lived in an English-speaking country for an extended period of time were interviewed in Thai, and then again in English, by the same interviewer. The interviewer was given strict instructions not to detour from the questions provided. The interviews were conducted at separate occasions, two weeks apart and questions were mostly surrounding holidays, food, life goals, and family. Answers of the participants were then compared to find differences and similarities between the two interviews. Following this, a further 10 Thai citizens, who did not speak English, were interviewed by the same interviewer with the same set of questions. These results were checked against the bilinguals. Differences between the Thai monolinguals and the Thai-English bilinguals will be recorded as a numerical figure of 1. These differences will be quantified by calculating the range of differences and will be used to compare with the Thai-English bilinguals in their interviews within a Thai setting. The answers given by the Thai-English bilingual participants in both interviews, English and Thai, will be quantified by looking at contrasts and differences. For each difference in answer, a numerical figure of 1 will be given. The following equation will be used to quantify the results; $s^2 = \Sigma (x_i - \bar{x})^2 / (n - 1)$.

In the fourth, and final test, participants consisted of ten Thai citizens who did not speak English between the ages of 18-30, ten Thai-English bilinguals who hadn't lived in an English-speaking country, also between the ages of 18-30, and ten native English speakers who did not speak any other language, again aged 18-30. The participants were shown 20 ambiguous pictures of people who were not technically performing an action, in a particular setting, but who were likely about to or had just completed an action. For example, one picture was of a woman with a surfboard at the beach. Participants of each group were simply asked to "Talk about the picture", and their answers were noted. It is important to note that under no circumstances were the instructors allowed to ask questions which elicit either actions or locations as a response. The purpose of this test was to find out if the Thai monolinguals did in fact, on average, answer with a location and if English monolinguals did answer with an action, but more importantly, if the Thai-English bilinguals' answers changed depending on the picture, possibly because they felt one fitted better than another. The results of the English and Thai monolinguals will be recorded, and compared with the Thai-English bilinguals. For each time the bilingual participants give an answer similar to an English monolingual participant, it will be recorded in terms of y . For every time a bilingual participant gives an answer similar to a Thai monolingual, it will be recorded in terms of x . The results will be quantified with the use of a Pearson-product moment correlation graph, using the formula $r = \Sigma (xy) / \sqrt{[(\Sigma x^2) * (\Sigma y^2)]}$ to give us the results we need.

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