Book Review

The bilingual mind: and what it tells us about language and thought
Aneta Pavlenko, 2014, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

The Bilingual Mind is painstakingly and extensively researched, providing an excellent reference for students of bi- and multilingualism alike. It contains references to an extensive range of languages, including Japanese. Pavlenko is unparalleled in the way she presents her detailed and meticulous research in an engaging, compelling and accessible manner.

Chapter One, *The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the bilingual turn in the study of language and cognition*, explains the views of scholars of linguistic relativity such as Humbolt, Boas, Sapir and Whorf. Pavlenko challenges the common misinterpretation of Sapir and Whorf that language determines thought, and re-explores the original questions they posed. Rather than assuming a deterministic position, Sapir and Whorf were keenly aware of the plasticity of the mind, which enables both language learning and the concomitant new ways of thinking.

Chapter Two, *Material worlds: linguistic categorization of the 'kaleidoscopic flux of impressions'*, discusses how language shapes perceptions of the boundaries which define lexical categories in the physical world. Noting that even L1 speakers struggle to find the appropriate word, and that speakers of the same L1 may vary in their lexical choices, Pavlenko explains the need for L2 learners to "develop sensitivity to new features, shift prototypes, adjust category boundaries, and, in some cases, acquire entirely new categories organized around distinct perceptual properties" (p.71).

The significance of cross-linguistic differences in number, time and space, for bi- and multilinguals is explored in Chapter Three: *Multidimensional worlds: number, time and space as linguistic systems of symbolic relationships*. Pavlenko reviews an extensive range of languages, and her findings concerning numbers will be of interest to parents of bilingual children in Japan, in particular, her suggestion that "some languages may be more advantageous than others for the processing of numbers" (p. 93). Japanese is one of the languages which transparently reflects the decimal system, and children only need to learn the digits to number 9 in order to produce higher numbers. In contrast, languages such as English require a great deal of memorization to recall numbers up to one hundred. Also of interest is language choice for arithmetic made by bilinguals. This could be due to various factors, such as the L1, the language of instruction for arithmetic, language dominance, the advantage conferred by the particular language for mathematics, and the original language of encoding.

Cross-linguistic differences in the ways languages describe motion events are explored in Chapter Four: *Dynamic worlds: linguistic construal of motion events*. Again, an extensive range of languages is compared, including Japanese. Pavlenko contrasts a group of languages which describe motion according to manner, known as S-languages, with a group of languages which describe motion according to path, known as V-languages. English is an S-language and Japanese is a V-language. Interestingly the transition from V-languages to S-languages is more demanding than the reverse. Pavlenko's insight that "speakers of different languages construct events in somewhat different

ways" (p.160) will fascinate readers; the tense systems of the respective languages constrain the way speakers perceive the passing of events.

Autobiographical memory for bilinguals is discussed in Chapter Five, *Narrative worlds: locating ourselves in storylines.* The language of encoding of experiences affects the language of recall. There are considerable differences in the kinds of memories which are stored in the minds of speakers of particular languages because of "cross-linguistic variation in narrative socialization practices" (p. 186). Furthermore there are a range of coherence systems for bilinguals, ranging from "*one language one personality*'" (p.198), "the *inbetween* system" in which the self is positioned at the intersection of the languages, "the *language of the self* system" which means that only one of the bilingual's languages is the true expression of the self, to the "*language-independent self*" in which the self is unitary and expressed through the prism of the different languages (p.199).

Chapter Six, *Discursive worlds: inner speech, interpretive frames, and the accomplishment of intersubjectivity*, explores the act of thinking in more than one language. It describes the polyphony of voices which may invade the bilingual's mental space, and cites the well-known biography of Kyoko Mori (1997) who suffered loss of her L1 Japanese in favour of English, for the depths of self-expression. An additional finding is that a bilingual's languages offer them a range of different avenues for interpreting reality, such as different vocabulary, metaphors and scripts. When bilinguals change languages, they may be triggered to realign their interpretive frames.

Of particular interest to parents of bilingual children in Japan will be Chapter Seven: *Emotional worlds, emotion categorization, affective processing, and ascription of significance*. Pavenko challenges the assumptions of many that the emotions we currently identify in English can be generalized to other cultures and other times. Bilinguals may need to express their emotions according to the conventions of the language in question in order to be comprehensible to their interlocutors (p.262). Pavlenko describes the need for "affective re-socialization" (p.277) for speakers moving between cultures, in which they may either need to restrict their expressiveness in some cultures, or express themselves more freely and openly in others. Describing the differences in emotional expressiveness when moving back from America to Japan, Pavlenko again cites Kyoko Mori (1997), who is viewed by her Japanese relatives as being too soft when she sheds tears too readily, and does not show adequate restraint by Japanese standards (p.278).

Another important theme of this chapter is the contrasting experience of bi- and multilingual writers when writing prose and poetry. Poetry is more intimately connected with the emotions than prose, and therefore bi- and multilingual writers may prefer to write poetry in their first language, and yet be adept at writing prose in the language(s) learnt subsequently. This reminded me of how onerous it was as the mother of a child in a Japanese primary school when the homework was to write a haiku. Nevertheless, the greater emotional detachment of the L2 or LX learnt after adolescence can also provide advantages. Bilinguals undertaking therapy may prefer the second language because of the greater emotional control it may afford them.

Chapter Eight, *The bilingual mind and what it tells us about language and cognition: some renegade thoughts*, discusses the notion of cognitive dissonance, which occurs when speakers of one language are forced to reorient and remap their existing concepts to make sense of those which fit another

language. The degree of cognitive restructuring which occurs in order to accommodate the second language can be predicted by the age and context of acquiring the L2, the frequency of use, language dominance and proficiency.

In conclusion, cross-linguistic differences are presented spanning lexical, narrative, emotional and discursive levels. An exhaustive range of languages is contrasted, including numerous references to Japanese. The minutiae of cross-linguistic differences highlight both what a challenging task it is to achieve bilingualism, and the enriching nature of possessing alternative ways of being and knowing.

Reference

Mori, K. (1997). Polite lies: On being a woman caught between two cultures. New York: Henry Holt.

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