Attitudes about Multilingualism in the U.S.A

Clarissa Gutierrez, B.A. Candidate in English

California State University Stanislaus

Introduction

With globalization on the rise, many countries have encouraged multilingualism so their citizens can navigate the world. Although in America, there seems to be little to no progress in the educational systems compared to countries abroad. Many factors influence this such as English commonly being dictated as the common language in America or from misconceptions about language learning. In addition to systemic factors, social aspects such as racism, immigration, assimilation or career prospects influence people's opinion about multilingualism. Aspects like this can unconsciously influence one's opinion on multilingualism or the language learning process, especially if their beliefs are outdated. Many people have monoglossic beliefs, believing there should be a dominant language in society and the classroom rather than multiple languages coexisting, which can stem from misconceptions about multilingualism or the language acquisition process. There are many popular myths about language that persist upon many people.

Research Questions

- What are people's attitudes about multilingualism? Do the attitudes about multilingualism differ from monolingual speakers compared to bilingual or multilingual speakers?

- What misconceptions about multilingualism do people have?

- How do social and cultural implications affect people's language ideologies?

Background & Literature Review

- Some of the most popular beliefs according to Mehmedbegovic & Bak (2017) are the beliefs of a limited resource model, monolingualism as the default state of the brain, and the goal of native-like proficiency (2017).

- In a study done by Jaowrska & Themistocleous in the U.K., the results revealed the public to be positive towards multilingualism, however, there are still negative perceptions towards multilingualism which need to be counteracted (2018).

- Unlike the U.K. or other countries, Americans do not seem to have a strong motivation to learn languages other than English. Within immigrant households, families commonly state that English will help their children navigate the U.S, and teaching children their heritage language is based on whether it would help hinder or help their social standing (Kaveh 2020).

- In Europe, languages are offered as foreign languages yet these courses do not reflect the realities of multilingualism (Saville 2019). In European and American schools language policies do not reflect research and modern views towards language as they set unrealistic goals for students who become disappointed when they cannot meet these goals.

- Language classrooms often overlook the value of communication and instead focus on native like proficiency and test scores. School systems should instead be a space where all levels of fluency can exist, like how people co-exist in reality (Saville, 2019).

Significance

Although people consider California a welcoming place of diversity, California is not immune to negative attitudes towards linguistic diversity. It is important to understand the societal and systematic factors that influence people's attitudes towards multilingualism, in order to adequately promote language learning. English is not the national language, but monoglossic

ideologies continue to be incorporated into educational systems despite ongoing research and increases in the celebration of diversity.

Methods

<u>Participants</u>

Participants will be recruited from Stanislaus State and will include undergraduate and graduate students whose ages typically range from 18 - 26 years old.
Participants for the interviews are chosen from the same pool of survey participants. Survey recipients can choose to volunteer at the end of the survey, and I will later choose two participants to interview.

<u>Data Collection</u>

- Surveys will be created and administered online. Surveys will be anonymous. The survey will consist of about 10 - 15 questions in the format of the Likert scale.

- Interviews will be administered and recorded through Zoom. Only audio will be recorded. Interviews will be semi-structured with pre-written questions first and then general conversation.

Expected Results

- Despite the Central Valley being a diverse area, I expect there to be a mix of positive and negative language attitudes.

- There will most likely be a portion of people who have monoglossic mindsets.

- I expect people to believe many language myths.

- I expect people's language attitudes to be formed by factors such as culture, education, and society.

References

Fox, Rebecca, Corretjer, Olga, & Webb, Kelley. (2019). Benefits of foreign language learning and bilingualism: An analysis of published empirical research 2012–2019. *Foreign Language Annals*, 52(4), 699–726. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12424

Hult, F. M., & Hornberger, N. H. (2016). Revisiting Orientations in Language Planning: Problem, Right, and Resource as an Analytical Heuristic. *The Bilingual Review*, 33(3), 30.

Jaworska, S., & Themistocleous, C. (2018). Public discourses on multilingualism in the UK: Triangulating a corpus study with a sociolinguistic attitude survey. *Language in Society*, 47(1), 57–88. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404517000744

Kaveh, Yalda M. (2020). Unspoken dialogues between educational and family language policies: Language policy beyond legislations. *Linguistics and Education*, 60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2020.100876

Mehmedbegovic, D., & Bak, T. H. (2017). Towards an Interdisciplinary Lifetime Approach to Multilingualism: From Implicit Assumptions to Current Evidence. *European Journal of Language Policy*, 9 (2), 149-67.

Saville, Nick. (2019). How Can Multilingualism be Supported through Language Education in Europe? Language Assessment Quarterly, 16(4-5), 464–471. https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2019.167624**6**

Contact

Clarissa Gutierrez

California State University, Stanislaus

cgutierrez34@csustan.edu