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Bilingualism and Biliteracy: The Case of Palestinian Learners of English

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the extent Palestinian learners are bilingual and biliterate of Arabic and English languages. The study examined some research papers by English graduating students at An-Najah National University to assess the dimensions of bilingualism by Baker (2011) and the continua of biliteracy according to Hornberger (1989, 2000, 2003). I concluded that English language is practiced in a rather mono-cultural setting, and that makes it more additive or elective. By situating the graduates' research papers across the continua of biliteracy, it was found that Palestinian learners are not biliterate and their operation of the notions of culture and context in monolingual settings was not sufficient to engage in communication cross-culturally or study abroad contexts.

Keywords: Biliteracy, bilingualism, Arabic, English, Palestine, language learning

ثنائية اللغة و ثنائية المهارة في استخدامها: متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية في فلسطين انموذجا

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى التعرف الى المستوى الذي يمكن وصف متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية الفلسطينيين بثنائية اللغة بالاضافة الى قدرتهم على استخدام المهارات الاساسيه في كلتا اللغتين - العربية والانجليزية- ولتحقيق الهدف من الدراسة قام الباحث بتقييم بعض الابحاث المقدمة من قبل الطلبة كمشاريع تخرج في قسم اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة النجاح الوطني بالاضافة الى اعتماد الباحث على ملاحظاته من خلال تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لمستويات مختلفه, ولهذا الغرض تم اعتماد نظرية هورنبرغر حيث تم تصنيف الملاحظات ونتائج الطلبة حسب محاور متنوعه تختص باطار استخدام اللغة, تطورها, ووسائل التواصل بها, وقد وجد الباحث ان الفلسطينيين من متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية ابعد عن وصفهم بثنائية اللغة حيث ان اللغة الانجليزية يتم ممارستها في اطار محدود جدا وهذا بالطبع ينعكس على قدرتهم اللغويه في استخدام اللغة الانجليزية على مستويات ثقافيه مفتوحه أو مناسبات متنوعه.

كلمات مفتاحية: ثنائية اللغة, ثنائية المهارة, الانجليزية, العربية, متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية, فلسطين

1. Introduction

This paper is not about the right method of teaching a foreign language, nor the difficulties faced by Arabs learning English as a foreign language. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether the Palestinian learning context qualifies as a case of bilingualism (Baker, 2011) by situating some students' research papers across the continua of biliteracy according to Hornberger (1989, 2000, 2003, 2004). This paper follows from my observation that most of the students who join the English Department at An-Najah University are incapable to communicate in English language though they start to learn English from the first grade. After four years in the English Department, they develop their language skills and become more capable to foresee what could be problems of language learning/teaching as prospective language teachers. From this observation follows one main presumption: Students as prospective teachers of English language, when they carry out research on foreign language learning/teaching, formulate their research problems according to their experience as learners and provide solutions as prospective teachers. Though this presumption may still need to be substantiated by empirical data, I believe it could provide some primary remarks on the level of the Palestinian learners' biliteracy. The present study therefore will consider English major students' perspectives, knowledge and views relevant to biliteracy in Palestine. For this purpose, the present study investigates a number of research papers the students concluded as a requirement for fulfillment of their undergraduate degree in English language and literature at An-Najah National University. Before I proceed any further, I must admit one major limitation of this study; this study, whilst covering potentially interesting ground, depends on a limited source of information. As such, the transferability and generalizability of its findings are restricted to the Palestinian context. The paper also does not really place the research in a wider pedagogic context. For this, more research on this topic should be followed by using more varied sources of information and types of data.

Biliteracy is assumed through schools' endeavor to improve students' proficiency in two languages. In Palestine, this is obvious in the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education's (MOHE) mission (2015)¹. This mission requires that schools and training programs improve the quality of teaching and learning through teaching life skills, effective communication skills, openness to other cultures, and providing students with the skills needed for critical thinking, decision-making and problem solving to increase their environmental awareness. These skills are equally necessary to prepare students to perform their roles by communicating in both Arabic and English languages. The mission has become a policy at the MOHE; its underpinnings disseminate in form of teaching methods, teaching materials and evaluation criteria in Palestinian schools. The vision is implemented through bicultural-intercultural education and transforms the discourse of language education into a discourse about diversity, cross cultural understanding, and globalization. As such,

¹ Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Palestine

it demonstrates the role of context, culture and critical thinking which are necessary to develop literacy in Arabic and English, and therefore are important themes in my discussion of bilingualism and biliteracy in this study.

Despite this declared mission by the MOHE, this discourse of diversity and cross cultural understanding in Palestinian schools has many challenges. They are inherent in the dissimilarity between Arabic and English languages and cultures, poor teaching quality in some public schools, and learners' motivation/attitude to language teaching, teachers, and language curricula. Education in Palestinian schools is still standard where Arabic is given the lion's share of classes and home schooling. The national identity is mainly construed through Arabic language, history and culture. So transforming education with such kinds of challenges into a discourse of cultural diversity constitutes an ideological paradox, and results in a language education that is fragmented and deficient. It lacks continuity and students fail to develop sufficient skills in English language. Students after 12 years of teaching still find communicating at international encounters or study abroad contexts difficult. Given the dearth of research on biliteracy and the growing demand to develop both biliteracy and bilingualism, there is a dire need to evaluate the Palestinian context of language learning from this perspective. Situating research on language learning and teaching across the continua of biliteracy, consequently, reflects, though indirectly, on language planning and policy; it creates a more comprehensive framework of biliteracy in the Palestinian education and improves pedagogical practices and instruction quality.

To delimit the extent Palestinian learners are biliterate, the current paper will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Do Palestinian students qualify as bilingual and biliterate learners of English language?
2. Where do language learning, teaching and research in Palestine situate along the continua of biliteracy according to Hornberger (1989, 2000, and 2004)?

Before I answer the research questions or explain the methodology of this research paper in the subsequent sections, the following part should define biliteracy.

1.1 What is biliteracy?

More often, biliteracy is associated with the development of writing and reading skills in two or more languages (Hornberger, 2003). What we are concerned with in this research is emergent biliteracy which refers to "the ongoing, dynamic development of concepts and expertise for thinking, listening, speaking, reading, and writing in two languages (Bauer and Gort, 2012, 2). It should be pointed out that literacy is not just the learning of the four language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing (Garcia et al. 2007). It is however "a socially contested term" (Gee, 1996, p. 22), and "a complex phenomenon with cognitive, socio-cultural, and sociological dimensions" (Gort and Bauer, 2012, p. 2). It entails the practices influenced by the social, cultural and political factors that vary across situations and entails complex social interactions (Garcia et al. 2007). According to Hopewell and Escamilla (2014), biliteracy is a complex and dynamic process because language acquisition takes place in a wide range of social contexts where variation is the norm. Besides, Hopewell and Escamilla contended, languages are

not stable or fixed but in constant evolution. Biliteracy is a more complicated phenomenon as it implies two cognitive, socio-cultural and sociological phases of communication which are necessary for learners to engage with two literate worlds meaningfully and communicatively. That implies going beyond the four basic language skills to more contextualized and cultural interactions. One understanding of biliteracy that is illuminating to my discussion in this study is by Gort and Bauer (2012, pp. 2-3). Their conceptualization of this phenomenon could be recapitulated as following:

1. Biliteracy is developed in two languages, simultaneously or in succession, in supportive contexts.
2. There are multiple paths to biliteracy development. It is encouraged, nurtured and promoted in either language or through a bidirectional process.
3. It is developed in supportive contexts that include the classroom, home and community. Learners can engage in a variety of formal and informal contexts, and through a wide range of communicative practices and ways.
4. Context and personal traits play an important role in biliteracy. Some learners may become good writers before they are good readers or speakers.
5. Bilinguals apply what they learn in one language to their other language in a way that suggests that languages support each other.
6. The contexts where learners develop biliteracy affect the level of biliteracy development and the degree of biliteracy achieved.
7. Teachers who bring dynamic, holistic and bilingual philosophy and practice to the classroom support and encourage biliteracy in classroom and beyond.

Biliteracy implies bilingualism and bilingualism is literacy in two languages (Baker, 2011). Baker maintains that a language balance is necessary to achieve biliteracy in two languages. If one language dominates the other, biliteracy is in danger. Factors like power relations and minority/majority heritage language are crucial in schools that strive to establish a balanced literacy in two languages (Baker, 2011). Biliteracy therefore is a social practice where two languages are important to establish social relations and cultural understanding (Kabuto, 2011).

1.2 Why does biliteracy matter?

The world is increasingly connected; it is becoming a small village and that implies "the ability to communicate both across and within multiple languages and cultures in a variety of ever changing and nuanced contexts" (Hopewell and Escamilla, 2014, p. 181). It is not alone through speaking, reading, writing and listening that communication is maximally achieved, but also through awareness of language context, language function and culture (cf. García et al, 2007). This involves transformation from a monolingual to bilingual language context. The unit of analysis in language learning and research should be transformed from the sound, word and sentence to meaning and function in order to account for biliteracy in cross cultural settings. It is no longer

through role plays, drills and simulation alone that a foreign language should be practiced, but through real life situations and global cross-cultural contexts.

Palestinian learners are emergent bilinguals. That is, according to Garcia et al. (2008, p. 6), "through school and through acquiring English, these children become bilingual, able to continue to function in their home language as well as in English". Palestinian learners and English language graduates are encouraged to incorporate English in their communicative and literacy practices. Palestinian learners are also required to learn English while preserving their Arabic language as a carrier of identity and culture. As such, bilingualism and biliteracy become more challenged in a rather monolingual setting. It is important therefore to qualify the degree the Palestinian context is a case of biliteracy and bilingualism. For this purpose, a framework is needed to situate both research and teaching of biliteracy in both languages, English and Arabic. In the present study, I will use the continua of biliteracy by Hornberger (2004). This model demonstrates the multiple and complex interrelatedness between bilingualism and literacy through the dimensions of contexts, development and media by which biliteracy develops. According to Hornberger (2004, p. 156):

The continua model depicts the development of biliteracy along intersecting first language–second language, receptive–productive, and oral–written language skills continua; through the medium of two (or more) languages and literacies whose linguistic structures vary from similar to dissimilar, whose scripts range from convergent to divergent, and to which the developing biliterate individual's exposure varies from simultaneous to successive; in contexts that encompass micro to macro levels and are characterized by varying mixes along the monolingual–bilingual and oral–literate continua.

2. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative and descriptive method of data analysis. To achieve the goals of this paper, I collected all the research papers by the graduating students at the Department of English of An-Najah University which can provide some insights into their views on biliteracy and problems of language learning and teaching in the Palestinian context. All research papers with keywords like 'problem' and 'language learning' were selected. The papers were categorized according their topic of study, questions, and findings (consider Table 1 below).

To qualify the extent the Palestinian learning context of English language is bilingual and biliterate, I employed the dimensions of bilingualism (Baker, 2011) and the continua of biliteracy (Hornberger 1989, 2000, 2003, 2004). These models will be used as a theoretical framework to contextualize my observations as a teacher of English Language at An-Najah University. The model suggests that "the more learners' learning contexts and contexts of use allow learners and users to draw from across the whole of each and every continuum, the greater the chances for their full biliterate development and expression become" (Hornberger, 1989: 289). The notion of continuum is intended to convey that "although one can identify points on the continuum, those points are not

finite, static or discrete" (Hornberger, 2004. p 156). They are however interrelated and interconnected. This paper will use only the the continua supported by the data in Table 1 below.

The career most often selected by graduates of English language is teaching. Their perspectives therefore are valuable to this study, both as language learners and prospective teachers. As language learners this research would benefit from their knowledge, experience and what they perceive as problems of biliteracy. As prospective teachers, their remarks on language learning and teaching would provide a benchmark to understand and develop biliteracy in the Palestinian context. The flaws in their research papers are also insightful to answer the questions of this study.

Here I should mention that the terms *student* and *learner* refer to two different people; a *student* is a prospective teacher who has completed a research paper in partial fulfillment of a degree of BA in English language and Literature at An-Najah National University. A *learner* refers to those who receive instruction at school or university level to improve their language skills.

No	Title of the research project	Questions/objectives hypotheses	Method	Findings
1	Spelling errors made by An-Najah Students	Analyze spelling errors most common by learners of English At An-Najah University	Secondary by resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most students write as they pronounce. • Some of the problems are addition, deletion and substitution of some letters.
2	The factors that affect the learning of second language vocabulary.	What factors do influence students' choice of vocabulary?	Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment (classroom, self-learning) • Gender (males and female students)
3	Ambiguity in pronunciation	Why do some students make mistakes in pronunciation?	Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother tongue interference (mispronunciation of final e 'memorable' as in the Arabic word 'kataba')
4	The problem of pronunciation in Arab countries	Determine/ decode and analyze the reasons for mispronunciation of English words in the Arab world?	Secondary resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude • Exposure to target language • Mother tongue • Accent • Stress/intonation/ rhythm • Inconsistency of English vowels
5	Using L1 in the English Classroom	To investigate the use of Arabic language in English language classrooms at An-Najah National University	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 50% of the students think that Arabic should be used in the classroom. • Those who are against this believe that if it is in anyway necessary to use Arabic, it should be to explain difficult concepts, to define new vocabulary and to explain if there is a cultural difference between both languages.
6	Communication problems facing Arab learners of English	Discusses language problems specific to university graduates of the Arab world	Secondary resources	<p>Improve strategic competence and the use of communication strategies.</p>

universities.

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|----|---|--|---------------------|--|
| 7 | Errors in second language learning | Analyze some of the errors committed by students learning English as a second language. | Secondary resources | • Arab students tend to translate from Arabic into English.
• They apply Arabic grammar, and writing conventions into English language. |
| 8 | The reasons behind weaknesses in English. | To find out the reasons behind students' weakness in English language. | Questionnaire | • The material does not match the learners expectations.
• Learners are not consistently encouraged to use the different language skills in the classroom.
• Students are not motivated.
• Learners' attitudes towards the language and teacher.
• Lack of confidence [some students are hesitant to participate in the classroom] |
| 9 | Arabic students' errors in determining the particle placement of the phrasal verb | Analyze Arab students' errors and problems in determining the particle placement of the phrasal verb. | Test | • Students were unable to explain the factual and metaphorical meanings of phrasal verbs.
• The students were unable to place the particle in the right place when asked to rewrite the sentences. |
| 10 | Learning errors in second language | Analyze the errors committed by learners of English as a second language. | Secondary resources | Arab learners tend to translate from Arabic literally when they speak English. |
| 11 | Techniques for teaching vocabulary | Lack of motivation/self-confidence/ language skills lead to students problems of choice of vocabulary. | Questionnaire | Lack of motivation/self-confidence/ language skills lead to students problems of choice of vocabulary. |
| 12 | English phonological errors by native speakers of Arabic | The reasons for phonological errors by native speakers of Arabic language | Questionnaire | • Lack of second language exposure
• Mother tongue interference
• Instruction
• Age |

13	Reasons that cause English reading difficulties	Provide some insight into reading problems by Arab native speakers	Test and questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •50% of the students find difficulties in reading an English (vocabulary/ where to pause) •Most of the students do not consider themselves good readers. •Many students seem to agree that poor reading skills in first language lead to poor reading skills in the second language • The majority of students agree with the proposition that class material and motivation affect their appetite for reading to a large extent. • The competency of English language is not satisfactory. Students lack sufficient reading practice in their language and inside the classroom
14	Lack of students creativity in writing at An-Najah National University	Explain the reasons behind the students' lack of creativity in their writing.	Questionnaire Interviews Text analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' lack of creativity is attributed to reasons that have to do with both of teachers and students. • Methods of teaching play an important role in improving students' creative writing.
15	Difficulties students of English language and literature face in understanding literary texts	Problems and solutions of students understanding of literary texts	Qualitative Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of old English in the curricula • Use of figurative language • Cultural differences • Long texts

Table 1: Research by students according to topic, questions, instrument, and findings.

3. Discussion:

The situation in Palestine is linguistically diverse where Arabic and English are important. A Palestinian learner is not like minority immigrants in the United States who are immersed in the society through extensive language courses; therefore concepts like minority/majority languages and language learners do not apply here. Also a Palestinian learner of English is not like a native speaker of Flemish and French in Brussels where both languages are acquired at the same time in different contexts ranging widely from the classroom to reading stories at bedtime. Palestinian learners however develop biliteracy in supported contexts, mainly in the classroom, where they learn to read and write in both languages from the first grade. Before I discuss biliteracy, I should explain to what extent the learning of English language in Palestine qualifies as a case of bilingualism.

3.1 Bilingualism

To help define and delineate the context of language learning and understand what a Palestinian language learner is, I should apply the dimension by Baker (2011) (cf. Valdés and

Figuroa, 1994). According to Baker (2011), bilingualism can be analyzed along the following dimensions:

1. Ability (incipient, receptive, productive)
2. Context where each language is employed (home, school)
3. Balance of two language.
4. Development of language (ascendant, recessive)
5. Age (incipient, receptive, productive).
6. Circumstances (learning another language to survive), or election (Individuals choose to learn a language).

Table 2 below categorizes Palestinian learners according to the six dimensions mentioned above. On the basis of the components of this table, I can establish an understanding of the Palestinian learner's bilingualism. I should acknowledge that more data should be considered to construct a more valid and reliable conceptualization of bilingualism in the Palestinian context. However, until this is possible through a more detailed study to this purpose, I will try to qualify Palestinian learners' bilingualism as following:

Ability	
Actively speak and write in two language	✓
Passive bilinguals (understanding or reading)	✓
Emerging bilinguals (moving through the early stages of acquiring a language)	✓
Balance of two languages	
Equal abilities	
Dominant language	✓
Age	
Simultaneous	✓
Consecutive/ sequential	
Development	
Incipient (one well developed language and other is in the early stages of development)	✓
Ascendant (a second language is developing)	

Recessive (one language is decreasing)	
Culture	
Relatively monocultural	✓
Bicultural	
Bicultural with confidence	
Context	
Endogenous communities (use more than one language on daily bases)	
Additive (learning a second language at no cost to their mother language)	✓
Circumstantial or elective	
Circumstantial	
Elective	✓

3.1.1 Ability

The ability of language learners depends on a number of factors as could be explained from students' research papers, for example the learning environment (inside the classroom, outside the class room), gender (male, female), attitude, exposure to TL, and mother tongue (papers 2, 3, and 4). Such factors place the English learners at different levels of ability; for example they actively speak and write the language (demonstrated through the students' ability to accomplish their research papers); they are passive bilinguals who can read and understand only (learners have communication problems as appears from paper 6), or just emerging learners of English (as in the case where learners apply Arabic conventions in pronunciation and writing (paper 7)). The ability to use English by Palestinian learners is challenged mainly by mother tongue interference and their inability to understand language at the covert level, such as metaphorical or figurative meanings (paper 15). The question that should be considered in relation to ability is: to what extent do Palestinian learners of English language able to cross boundaries to international contexts and settings and adopt a different concept of their identities in the new era of globalization? This is indeed a question of biliteracy that I will approach below.

3.1.2 Context

To explain this dimension, we need to raise the following question: Do Palestinian learners use more than one language on daily bases? The answer is no. English as a foreign language is

rather additive; that is, Arabic is the language of communication and English is only used in the classroom, or to be more accurate, is used in specific circumstances, mostly professional (at universities, at ceremonies with international themes, in diplomacy, and inside PR departments at state and organization levels). Students have no chance to practice English outside the classroom except in very rare situations - more particularly, when they meet strangers in public places or if they have to make a contribution in public discussions or study abroad contexts. A look at students' research papers, we notice that they mainly consider the classroom as the sole context of learning in schools and universities alike. Some of the factors that could be inhibiting students' learning of English language in different contexts are students/teachers motivation and students' self-esteem to initiate discussions or ask questions (this could be noticed in the findings by many papers in table 1 above).

3.1.3 Balance of two languages

We can claim that students' abilities in both Arabic and English languages are anything but balanced. Most of the students' perspectives and research findings, as we can notice from Table 1 above, support the claim that Arabic dominates learners' performance of English at the sound, word and grammar levels. For example, the research papers demonstrate mother tongue interference through learners' spelling of English words, their mispronunciation of the final 'e', when they translate literally from Arabic to English, and when they use Arabic writing conventions.

3.1.4 Age

Learners come to English language classes four times a week in public schools (each class is 40 minute face-to-face tutorial). They start to learn English from the 1st grade, when they are 7 years old, and this synchronizes with their first Arabic language classes. Given that they acquire Arabic from infancy, their ability in the two languages varies at this age. They meet in Arabic language classes seven times a week. Though learning both languages at school is simultaneous, Arabic is still predominant as the heritage language, and this justifies the main finding in most of the papers (see Table 1 above) about mother tongue interference.

3.1.5 Development

The dimension of development is similar to the dimension of balance of two languages. Arabic is well established and autonomous in terms of listening and speaking. Much attention is given to reading and writing from the 1st grade. When they learn English, however, learners have to start from scratch.

3.1.6 Culture

One important observation from Table 1 above is the absence of students' treatment of the notion of culture. Culture is not emphasized as one important aspect of learning a foreign language in the papers though learners, as I explained before, study English from grade 1 to grade 12. The findings from the papers seem to suggest, though indirectly, that students are not aware of the role of culture in encounters involving English language. From the papers above, the focus of students'

attention is on the sound, word and grammar of English language. I presume that when culture is part of students' language performance, they should be able to perceive its role as a source of misunderstanding, and therefore it should be part of their conceptualization of language learning problems in the Palestinian context just like sounds, words and grammar. This could also be due to other different reasons: The students are concerned with more transparent data to accomplish their research paper; they cannot assess the role of culture as they cannot provide the necessary data to that end; they are unable to understand how the English culture can be significant in interaction. Though all the mentioned reasons are possible, I am inclined to find the last one the most plausible. This marks a deficit in the students' cultural competence. From my experience as teacher of English language for 10 years, many of my students are unable to recognize the cultural aspect of the message. This is not because of the curricula, but rather due to the limited environment inside the classroom where they practice English language.

3.1.7 Circumstantial or elective

Language learning in Palestinian is never circumstantial; that is language learning does not occur for a learner to survive as in the case of majority and minority languages. So bilinguals who belong to this category must become bilinguals to operate in the majority language that surrounds them (Baker, 2011). The Palestinian learners are elective bilinguals who choose to learn English in the classroom. Elective bilinguals come from a majority language and learn a second language without losing their first language. Palestinian learners speak Arabic as first language, and they learn English without their Arabic being endangered.

3.2 Bilinguality

From the discussion above, we should conclude that Palestinian learners do not fully qualify as bilinguals, basically because of their operation of the notions of culture and context in monolingual settings. This conclusion still needs to be substantiated by following a conceptual analysis of bilinguality. The second question that we need to address in this paper is where language learning, teaching and research situate along the continua of bilinguality according to Hornberger (1989, 2000, 2004). In the present study, the continua that will be used to assess the Palestinian learners' bilinguality are context (micro-macro, monolingual-bilingual, and oral-literate), development (reception-production, L1-L2 transfer), and medium (simultaneous-successive).

3.2.1 Context

The term context refers to speech events or components of language use. The components are Setting, Participants, Ends, Act, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genres as formulated by Hymes (1974). In this paper, I will try to identify the themes that are significant for understanding bilinguality in the Palestinian context. By looking at the research papers by the students we may be able to identify the extent context is assumed as an important part of learners' bilinguality in both languages. Context in this paper will be defined following three continua, the micro-macro continuum, the monolingual-bilingual continuum and the oral literate continuum.

3.2.1.1 Micro –macro context

At the micro-macro level, according to Hornberger (2003, 10) "patterns of language use are examined in the context of a situation or a speech event". From Table 1, above, the students have not shown interest in this continuum. They made no attempt to explain choice of language forms according to context in both languages with the exception of one student who made a haste discussion of the problems of communication facing Arab learners of English (paper no 6). Most of the papers however seem to prefer a discussion at the level of linguistic analysis where the micro level deals with small units like the sound, letter, word and sentence The macro level does not address units like culture, ideology, power etc. The best of it addresses individual participants in the learning process with no consideration to one specific language skill. For example, some research papers examine students, teachers and language users and their relationship one to another. Others examine the relationship between choice of vocabulary and gender of language user, attitude of learners and pronunciation difficulties, and university graduates and learning problems.

The students' research does not point in any way, in the research questions or the findings, to English language learning/teaching beyond the language form, teacher, student, and student-teacher relationship. The studies did not give enough attention to language function, particularly the utterance, speech event or context of use. What we need therefore is a holistic approach to emphasize connectedness and interconnectedness, dependency and interdependency between language form and culture, speech event, context, and society in both languages. A different language form is connected/interconnected, dependent/interdependent on the context of use, language user, and culture. This could be rather an ecolinguistic approach which "relates linguistic data to the complex totality of the speaker's situational positioning and the socio-cultural and socioeconomic characteristics of the speech community" (Kramsch and Steffensen, 2008, p. 18). This issue needs to be addressed in curricula and language teaching methods. To address this issue, some measures have been implemented at the Department of English at An-Najah University to incorporate courses in the new study plan that take a macro perspective to understand language form. The new study plan introduces courses like discourse analysis and pragmatics where such holistic ecological approach is applied. These courses employ micro units of language analysis to the understanding and conceptualization of some macro units like ideology, power relations, culture and context. For example, pragmatics teaches students that the acts of saying and meaning diverge; that is, a language user may say something and he/she means more than what he/she says, less than what he/she says, or just the opposite of what he/she says. To understand such meanings, a learner needs to consider the context and speech event. The impact of such courses on the skill of reading a text, for example, is immense. Learners when reading a text should be able to reflect on its ideological orientation, articulate relations of power, subjugation and dominance, and understand its orientation to culture through notions like politeness and face wants.

3.2.1.2 Monolingual-bilingual

This continuum comprises language varieties, for example high-low varieties, formal-informal languages, etc. (Hornberger, 2003). The issue in this continuum is the extent Palestinian

learners "possess two complete sets of functions and uses of language, one for each language" (Hornberger, 2003, 13). According to Hornberger "bilinguals are perceived to have unique and specific linguistic configuration that are different from those monolinguals in either language, in the same way that a hurdler is neither a sprinter nor a high jumper but something completely different" (2003, p.14). Normally students are engaged in questions about code-switching between English and Arabic in varied contexts and for different functions. The students seem to be aware of language shifting in classroom environments as appears in Table 1 above (research no 5).

Arabic is a diglossic language with high and low varieties. The high variety is used in ceremonies, ritual settings, and formal situations. This kind of language is mostly linked to the written form. The low variety is more vernacular; it is used in ordinary life situations and interpersonal communication. It is characterized with a high degree of informality to perform functions like establishing intimacy, initiate friendly talks, or show belonging to a group. With this in mind, more is needed to emphasize the bilingual end of this continuum in English classes, such as the difference between formal-informal English, the appropriacy of language variety to context, language function according to speech event, etc.

3.2.1.3 Oral- literate

The oral-literate continuum suggests a balanced mastery of the four language skills in both languages. From my observation of school language textbooks, both Arabic and English, the reading skill is more emphasized. Learners read and practice the high formal language variety and are expected to use it in speaking and writing in both languages. From Table 1 above, context does not seem to be central in what students may consider a problem of learning/teaching the language skills. It seems therefore that policy makers and teachers need to emphasize this aspect both in curricula design and teaching. For example, they need to consider reading in different contexts at home and work, reading for leisure and pleasure, reading diaries, notebooks, adds, etc.

3.2.2 Development

Development is mainly about the communicative competence of learners, or their knowledge of language. Development is a gradual process; it needs to be nurtured in different contexts, such as the classroom and face to face interactions. Development is identified by three continua which are reception-production continuum, L1-L2 transfer and oral language-written language scale (Hornberger, 2003). In what follows, only the first two aspects will be discussed as they are supported by the data.

3.2.2.1 The reception-production continuum

The main assumption of this continuum is that oral language development precedes the written language development. Receptive skills therefore precede the productive ones. According to Hornberger (2003, p. 15), "the logical sequence of language development was believed to be listening, speaking, reading and writing". To apply this continuum to the research papers by the students in Table 1 above, we notice that emphasis is given to the skills of speaking and reading.

The skill of writing receives little attention, while the skill of listening receives no attention at all. Students seem to reflect on their experience as learners of English language at school and university. Listening is hardly ever emphasized by school teachers, even it is not tested if we consider the Tawjhi exam, for example.

3.2.2.2 L1-L2 Transfer

According to Hornberger (2003, 17), " Biliterate development is defined not only by continuities between spoken and written language, between listening and speaking, and between reading and writing, but also by those between the first language (L1) and the second language (L2)". However, one issue is still pending with regards to the degree the literacy knowledge in one language helps or impedes the literacy knowledge in another language. It should be noted that the relationship between two languages should be emphasized in terms of similarity and difference; while differences impede the process of learning a foreign language, similarities facilitate and accelerate the process. The relationship between L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English), in most of the research papers, seems to revolve more around differences than similarities.

Both languages do not seem to stand as separate or autonomous, but in conflict and in relations of dominance. That is, Arabic is the dominant language that influences students' pronunciation of sounds, spelling and grammar of English language. The students seem to be aware of this as challenging the learning of English as a foreign language. Still what is missing is a macro analysis of the unit of transfer, such as culture and context as I mentioned before. These should be considered along with the micro analysis at the level of sound, word and sentence.

2.2.3 Media

Hornberger (2003) identifies media as the means through which an individual communicates with two languages in a particular context. The continua that characterize this category are simultaneous–successive exposure, similar–dissimilar structures, and convergent–divergent scripts. In what follows, I will only explain the first continuum. The other continua are not considered as students' research does not provide any clues to them.

3.2.3.1 Simultaneous-successive

I would use the term by Hornberger (2003) of 'late bilinguals' to further qualify the Palestinian learners of English. Language learners of this category acquire one language before age three and the other language after that age. Language learners learn English successively; that means, generally speaking, L2 literacy follows on varying levels of L1 literacy. One finding in support of this general conclusion is that many students seem to agree that poor reading skills in first language lead to poor reading skills in the second language. It should be emphasized that Arabic language is not abandoned before English is developed. Arabic is used for communication in different contexts, inside and outside the classroom. English is a means of communication in a very limited environment, mostly inside the classroom. Though students' research provides some

explanation of this continuum, it does not provide any suggestions to improve English as a means of communication in other contexts.

4. General conclusions

Whether a Palestinian learner is bilingual and biliterate of English and Arabic languages was the main focus of this study. The study examined some students' graduation papers at An-Najah National University to address this issue. The findings suggested that Palestinian learners do not qualify as bilinguals of Arabic and English; they however could be described as late bilinguals or emergent learners of English language. Though both languages are learnt at very early stages, Palestinian learners do learn English in a rather monolingual setting. Therefore, their abilities and language skills need to be considered in cross-cultural macro settings where culture and speech event are incorporated in their learning practices of English language inside and outside the classroom. These concerns were part of my discussion of biliteracy. By applying the continua by Hornberger (1989, 2000, 2003, 2004), the Palestinian setting did not fully operate according to the context, development and media continua. From the research papers, the students left unchecked some important continua and that provided some evidence that biliteracy in the Palestinian context is not handled properly in textbooks, by teachers or policy makers. This by far could be a tentative conclusion that needs to be substantiated further by empirical data. Hence, I invite other researchers to go beyond the findings of this research into a more systematic study of biliteracy in Palestine.

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