

## EFFECTS OF BILINGUALISM – ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES FOR BILINGUALS, BILITERATES, MONOLINGUALS

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### Abstract

Bilingualism is a complex phenomenon. In the past, the characteristics of a bilingual have been perceived from many different perspectives, such as the cognitive perspective that views bilinguals as those with only half of the cognitive capacity to learn a second language (Bloomfield, 1935), and the socio-cultural perspective that views bilinguals as those who interact with others in different languages in some ways (Mohanty, 1994).

It is this presentation's aim that teachers, educators, and colleagues will gain better understanding of the strengths and possible weaknesses their students have as bilinguals, biliterates, or monolinguals. This presentation is conducted in three parts. Part one discusses the characteristics of a bilingual based on four dimensions from Baker's (2006 & 2010) framework: the ability and proficiency in two languages; the balance between the two languages; age when the languages were learned; and the contexts in which the languages were acquired and used.

Part two reviews research on the effects of bilingualism. Existing findings, although mixed, have generally pointed towards advantages being associated with speaking two languages, such as cognitive flexibility (Cummins, 1976). However, some research did report on negative effects such as poorer lexical access, which is a monolingual-specific advantage (Bialystok, Craik & Luk, 2008; Ivanova & Costa, 2008). Others have found no effects of bilingualism at all (Kempert, Saalbach & Hardy, 2011). Few studies have examined the effects of biliteracy, that is, the effects of reading or writing in two languages.

Many people consider writing to be hard work. This is particularly true of second language (L2) student-writers. The ability to convert multiple thoughts into grammatically sound and contextually meaningful texts in a less proficient language requires conscious effort to master. Part three of the seminar explores the effects of writing in two languages with a special focus on writing processes and writing knowledge.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, Bi-literates and Monolinguals.