

Psychology of Bilingualism and Multilingualism
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Hello and welcome to the course Introduction to The Psychology of Bilingualism and Multilingualism. I am Dr. Ark Verma from the Department of Cognitive Sciences at IIT Kanpur. In this week or in the last lecture of this week as I might say, I will be talking to you about bilingualism and multilingualism and a very important aspect that is emotional expression. Now, so far we have seen how bilingualism might affect various aspects of our cognitive functioning such as its relationship with thought processes, intelligence, memory, cognitive control and so on. However, if you see language is actually a vehicle through which emotions are expressed and given that bilinguals have often more than one language at their disposal, they are, they have that much more opportunity to label and express emotions.

It presents an interesting opportunity you know through bilingualism to study the dynamic interaction between emotions and language and this is typical, this is precisely what I am planning to do in this current lecture. Now, researchers have actually shown that the emotions are actually influenced by the cultural and social context in which they are experienced. Cultural context can actually serve to organize and structure our emotional experiences. For example, if you look around, there are certain ways in which emotions are understood and expressed in various cultures.

For example, in the eastern you know in the eastern part of the world for example, in countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China or Japan, there are, there is a certain way of expressing our emotions. People typically think of emotions in a more you know important way, they give their give their own emotions a lot of importance, they think of emotions in a collective way, they also are not very shy of expressing themselves in a sense that they are basically you could say very comfortable in expressing their emotions. It is not considered for example, a mark of their weakness if somebody is emotional. Obviously, there are gender stereotypes, obviously there are aerial differences, obviously there are so many of these particular variables that play a part in but typically if you say that eastern or oriental populations as I just mentioned are technically deemed to be a bit more emotional, they have their own different ways of expressing emotions, they are collective in the way they express emotions and emotions are not really seen as a sign of weakness. So nobody is you know typically embarrassed or shy of expressing their emotions.

However, on the other hand if you talk about the western culture, if you talk about countries like the United States, the UK, Canada, Europe and so on, the emotions are expressed in a very different way. It is not that people are not emotional but their manner of expressing their emotions is relatively different to ours. Their manner of identifying emotions, putting a label on each emotion or even being aware of you know what kind of emotion they are expressing is relatively different from us and these are the kind of and these differences not only exist on this you know broad axis that I have drawn in terms of western and eastern cultures but these there could be differences between different countries as well, within different countries in different regions as well. Say for example, people could point out that maybe the you know the way in which let's say Punjabis express their emotions or in which Malayalis express their emotion or you know some of our northeastern brothers and sisters express emotions would have you know differences within each other. So there are obviously cultural you know annotations, there are cultural underpinnings underlying how people label their emotion, express their emotions and even in some sense express their emotions.

Accordingly, the languages that are spoken by these cultures can also sort of have an influence on how people are you know talking about their emotions, labeling them, putting a tag to them and also expressing these emotions you know cross-culturally and cross-linguistically. For example, Kitayama and colleagues you know in the kind of example I was talking about, Kitayama and colleagues actually found that Japanese participants were much more likely to describe their emotions using socially engaging terms such as you know friendly, feeling and guilt and so on and on the other hand, participants from the United States describe their emotions using socially disengaging emotion words such as anger or pride. You could see very well that the focus on how do you want to project yourself emotionally is also different in these two cultures. Say for example, typically in Kitayama's older work also you can see that he highlights Western cultures as more individualistic and Eastern cultures as more collectivistic and in that sense many many differences in cognitive styles and the way people express themselves can be understood. Now interestingly, some researchers have coined the term indigenous emotions to refer to the emotions which are not really found in the Western culture.

For example, Scollon and colleagues did this in 2004 and there could be many examples. You could take examples from Urdu, you could take examples from Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, Sanskrit and so on but for example, one of the examples that you know has been used in Bharti and Ritchie's book that I'm referring for this chapter basically mentions the Japanese notion of amai. Now Amai basically refers to the ability to depend and presume upon others love and basically bask in others indulgence. Now it is something that you could actually associate with the Japanese culture and how people

are sort of brought up and how people you know can depend upon each other, can count upon each other in order to you know rear them emotionally in order to understand and empathize them wherein this sort of an emotion, wherein this sort of a feeling of Amai actually makes sense and since this cultural equivalent is not really found in the Western culture, it is also consequently very difficult to find a linguistic equivalent or a translational equivalent for the word Amai in Western culture. Say for example, the closest English translations for amai are actually things like whining, sulking and pouting and I'm sure that Japanese speakers would not really agree to the fact that oh I don't think that this is a you know a faithful translation of the word amai in English or the word the word translational equivalence in English are actually not expressing the word as we would want you know in a way we would want it to express.

Incidentally since this cause you know it is therefore you can say that it's very difficult for speakers in the Western culture say for example native English speakers to actually understand even this concept you know very well and for you know Japanese people to express this concept in English. Again we are not really making you know strong assumptions about that people are not able to experience emotions in different cultures because of cultural linguistic differences because there has been a lot of work on emotions and you can talk about Lewin's basic emotions and so on where there is obviously a certain degree of universality but what we are trying to do here is we are trying to look at a nitpick at you know smaller differences we are trying to nitpick at you know subtle differences between how emotions are categorized, labeled and expressed or experienced across different linguistic groups or different cultural groups. Now also it has been pointed out that the context in which people learn a second or a third language can also play a very important role in which you know in a way they are able to represent their emotions in that language. For instance you know a native language is typically when you are growing up and you're first speaking of language that native language is actually used to encode one's childhood experiences, your first feelings of happiness or sadness or shame or disgust or you know being elated and basically what we do is we use our first language to actually label these experiences and then we keep recalling them back to sort of encode any similar experiences that we may have and these words these emotional words actually provide a context for our future thoughts and feelings and this is basically the initial learning that we are doing. Now interestingly the context in which we are picking up a second language let's say we're picking up a second language in a very formal setting, let's say in a setting that is emotionally neutral in a language class or you know through an instructor who's sort of doing it in a very cold manner.

Now as a result what would happen is that these individuals would never get the opportunity to code the emotional experiences in this second language and because they've never gotten the opportunity to encode their emotional experiences in this second

language they would never be very good at expressing themselves or experiencing emotional words that are said in the second language and this is precisely what sort of happens when you know bilinguals have actually been reported to often show a bias towards answering questions in their native language when they are actually discussing emotional topics, this is what I was just telling you you know moments ago. Also it's interesting that you know research suggests that bilinguals actually tend to show more effect when they are speaking in their native language when you are planning to you know express your affection towards someone let's say a very good friend or your partner or you know you're talking about a very emotional and a touchy topic you typically try and resort to the language that you can best do it in and for a lot of probably majority of people that is their first language or that is their native language. Finally in the same vein that individuals typically say for and very good example you know it's been taken by this book is the experience of swear words or taboo words you know for example a lot of individuals actually express that they experience you know the intensity of the swear words or the taboo words much more in their first language than in their second language because those mappings between emotional experiences and the languages and words of the first language is are much more stronger than the mapping of experiences of hurt or shame or disgust with words in their second language sometimes and you would probably be able to you know share this feeling that if somebody is talking to you badly even for example in your second or third language and if you're not very good at just second or third language you might not even be able to appreciate the gravity of what the person has said and because you're not able to appreciate the gravity of what the person has said you're not going to be you're not going to be as hurt or not going to be you know appreciating the the insult that is contained in those words and this is very interesting because a bunch of experiments have actually been done in this regard and it has actually been confirmed. Interestingly research has also shown that taboo words are associated with greater anxiety when they are expressed in one's first language rather than when they are expressed in a second or a third language. Now in line with this fact that the context of acquisition of the second language really plays a role in one's expression of emotion Harris in 2004 actually reported that childhood reprimands when represented in an individual's native language elicited much stronger emotional reactions than when they were presented in the first language.

Say for example in an experiment I am you know trying to remind you of some you know typical scoldings that we get in our house through our parents you know mothers, fathers, grandparents etc etc and when these you know reprimands are represented to you again first time in your first language, second time in a second language because they were you know there is a certain degree of encoding specificity because there is a certain degree of when did you hear them first in what language what impact it had on you when you know you first heard it all of that comes back and therefore they would elicit much

stronger emotional reaction than when they are actually presented merely in the second or a third language and interestingly when this experiment was run no difference you know for early bilinguals no difference was found in reaction to these childhood reprimands between the two languages because when you are learning both the languages in at a very early age typically the the mapping of emotional experiences can happen with the words of both the languages so typically what happens is that early bilinguals who get exposed to a second language or a third language at a very early age let's say one and a half years two years or since birth they would actually have the opportunity of mapping their early emotional experiences with the words of both the languages and hence they would not have this asymmetry of emotional experience in their two languages for them there would be no asymmetry and they would be able to feel emotion express emotion in both the languages equally so the taboo words will be equally hurtful in both you know let's say for me English and Hindi as opposed to for someone who has just learned English only after their 20s or after their 30s and this is something you know rather interesting which tells us that there is a very you know strong and interesting interplay of emotional experiencing and emotional expression that is going on between the languages of a bilingual or a multilingual also something that has been very interestingly pointed out is that the properties of a specific language can actually be an important factor in how individuals emotions are represented I was talking to you about poetry I was talking to you about you know how poetry is almost non-translatable because when you are expressing yourself in a poem in you know let's say in Urdu or in Hindi or in English you are actually using the linguistic structures of that specific language to express the deepest feelings of your heart and it is the properties of that specific language that is helping you encode your deepest feelings in a very particular unique manner that maybe is not allowed or maybe will be differently allowed in the second or third language so in this regard Gutfreund actually reported that participants responded with greater effect greater emotional you know experience in Spanish even in cases when Spanish was the individual's second language so basically the case that they're trying to make is because Spanish allows for a much more you know smoother experience or expression of emotion people who are second language learners of Spanish actually you know could express their emotions better in Spanish and again remember Spanish is you know deemed as one of the more romantic languages of the world much like French and obviously a bunch of our Indian languages now it has been suggested that perhaps the specific nature of a language can actually impact the way emotions are represented in individuals or speakers of this language for example that is one of the reasons why Spanish speaking individuals for Spanish speaking individuals the therapeutic process and if you are linking this with mental health and today there is a lot of brouhaha about mental health a lot of people have suffered significant mental health issues and mental health problems post-covid and there are a lot of people who are out there who want to provide help to these people who want to provide therapy to these

people what the insights for people like those would be that you know the the kind of language that you're using in therapy may actually be very instrumental in this whole therapeutic process I mean one of the researches that I'm deciding is that for Spanish speaking individuals the therapeutic process may actually be much more productive and meaningful when it is done in Spanish since these individuals also prefer to express themselves in Spanish another very interesting aspect you know or finding that has been actually reported was that individuals who are proficient in their second language you know Spanish and let's say English but actually you know they responded equally well to emotions in both the languages so again as I'm saying if you are very well proficient in both the languages let's say if you are early or simultaneous bilingual it might not really matter whether you know the emotional content is being expressed in either language but typically when you are let's say sequential bilingual you have acquired your second language much later than after you've acquired your first language it may create that asymmetry in both expression and experience of emotion that I am talking about it seems therefore that it is possible for bilinguals or individuals to acquire emotional representation in second language as you know provided that they are learning the two languages very early in age provided they are very highly proficient in both the languages because indeed some individuals have found perfectly capable of representing emotions in their second language along with their first say for example I know people who are very good in writing poetry or songs in both their languages I had a friend who could write poetry in Malayalam and English as well at the same time sing in Malayalam and English as well at the same time and could express you know himself emotionally and otherwise in both the languages equally well so if you are if you have acquired the two languages very early in age if you are very highly proficient in both the languages there is no reason why your emotional expression would be handicapped in a second language it could be at par with your first language as far as if your proficiency in both the languages is very high and in this regard Diwala actually reported that individuals who learned a second language in a natural setting actually gave higher ratings for the emotional force of sphere or taboo words in the second language as compared to those who learned the second language in a classroom setting so again we were talking about context of acquisition you know very recently and you can see here from this study that the context in which you have picked up the language if it is a very emotionally neutral context if it is a very cold and you know non interactive sort of context then obviously these handicaps will build it but if you are being allowed to learn a second language in a communicative in an interactive in a natural setting by talking to your friends and peers then you will probably acquire the language in a much more natural way and therefore you will have acquired the ability to express and experience emotion even in your second or a third language so the result from Diwala studies actually implies that second language learning can also perhaps acquire a deeper emotional representation in a naturalistic learning setting than in a classroom obviously further research could actually

help to strengthen you know the second language acquisition programs and tailored them to be more consistent with ecological experience and that basically would help individuals to experience and express their emotions in a second or a third language equally well as they are doing it in the first language that is all that I wanted to talk to you about in this week we have talked about various aspects of how bilingualism and multilingualism affect our different manners of cognition and in the next week I am going to move on to more different slightly miscellaneous topics about how bilingualism really has an impact on you know different things in our life. Thank you so much.