



Diglossia

Marianna Kyriakou

Independent Scholar, Cyprus

What is it?

Diglossia describes a society where two forms of the same language co-exist, each one having different domains of use. One variety is usually a non-standard form, such as a dialect, which is grammatically simple and mainly used in informal domains such as at home, between family and friends. This is called 'low variety' and it is the native variety of the speaker in society. The other, called 'high variety', is grammatically more complicated; it is used in formal domains such as the church, school, on television, and in writing. This is typically the variety taught and learned at school.

Who uses the concept?

The concept of diglossia has been mainly used in linguistics, specifically in sociolinguistics as it is a social phenomenon. The term diglossia should not be confused with bilingualism, more often used in psychology, specifically psycholinguistics, to describe the ability of a person to speak more than one language. Diglossia has been widely used by linguists to describe societies around the world; the concept has been extensively elaborated.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

The notion of diglossia relates to intercultural dialogue when speakers from different cultures use the same standard language, the high variety, as a tool for communication without sharing the same cultural or ethnic identity (for example, a diglossic speaker and a monolingual speaker who share the same standard language). The purpose of this

intercultural dialogue is communication and mutual intelligibility.

What work remains?

Most of the studies that followed Ferguson's initial formulation of diglossia were descriptive (examining whether a situation is diglossic or not); a clear theory of diglossia has not yet been put forth. The creation of a typology of diglossia is not a simple task as it must be more than just a gathering of case studies of language in society, meaning a theory of language in society.

Resources

- Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, 15(2), 325-340.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1991). Diglossia revisited. *Southwest Journal of Linguistics*, 10(1), 214-234.
- Fishman, J.A. (1980). Bilingualism and biculturalism as individual and societal phenomena. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1(1), 3-15.
- Fishman, J. A. (1967). Bilingualism with and without diglossia; diglossia with and without bilingualism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 23(2), 29-38.
- Hudson, R.A. (2002). Outline of a theory of diglossia. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 157, 1-48.