

## **A study case of passive bilingualism of individuals in Scottish Gaelic Community**

**SALMON PANDARANGGA**  
STIE KRISWINA SUMBA - NTT

### **Abstract**

There are so many different definition and perspective of bilingualism that particularly link to active and passive bilingualism as so many scholars and experts still debated and even contradicted themselves about bilingualism and its definition. It is thus this paper aims to define the definition of bilingualism based on elaboration of some scholars such as Beardsmore, Collin, Skutnabb-Kangas and others. The finding indicates that the ability to use two languages either actively or passively highly related to the level of proficiency. The author also proposes that those who use the other language for limited vocabulary or who understand but not produce the language still considered as bilinguals.

*Keywords : bilingualism, bilinguals, proficiency, competence.*

### **Introduction**

Bilingualism has become one of the subjects being discussed widely among the scholars, language experts, students, and common people. A lot of findings and research have been conducted around the world. However, these findings still debated among the language experts worldwide. One of the reasons is those experts have their own perspective, even develop their own definitions. These definitions are sometimes contradicted. Some of them believe that individuals can use two languages perfectly. Others, however, label as bilinguals to those who produce a very limited sentences of second or foreign language, or those who can use other language with a certain degree of proficiency. It can be seen that the definition of bilingualism is still in grey concept, not a black or white concept. In other words, the concept and/or definition of bilingualism are still difficult to define precisely. Thus, bilingualism is still open for discussion.

The phenomenon of bilingualism or multilingualism exists in community. As a part of community, individuals have a very important role to use and preserve the languages. The individuals' abilities to use the languages are various, in a range of those who use other language perfectly to those in limited degree. These individuals can be active with

one of the languages or both, while others can be passive with one or both languages. It is not uncommon if individuals are passive in one of the languages, but it is uncommon if the individuals are passive to both languages. For example, there are some Finnish immigrant students live in Sweden in which those students are passive in both languages, Finnish and Swedish (Skutnabb and Kangas, 1981). Interestingly, the same case also happens in Scottish community where there are individuals who are passive in both languages, English and Scottish Gaelic (Dorian, 1982). I will elaborate the case of passive individuals in Scottish community and the review literatures with the reference to Dorian's research.

### **Review literature**

This review literature will not discuss all the definition of bilingualism in general, but will focus on some definition of bilingualism that link to passive bilingualism. From Beardsmore's point of view that bilingualism is a concept that "has open-ended semantic" (1982). He further stated that most people may have their own definition for bilingual even though their interpretation can vary considerably. In other words, the concept of bilingualism is a continuum where there are lot of possibilities for considerable variation. According to Bloomfield bilingualism is producing foreign language perfectly without

losing its native language or “native-like control of two languages” (1935). People in Indonesia, for example, can produce and understand English as foreign language as perfect as Bahasa Indonesia. However, he also contradicts his own statement “native-like control of two languages” that “one cannot define a degree of perfection” in order to become bilingual. In other words, the distinction of bilingualism is relative. Also, it is thought by some theorists, for example, Mackey (1953) and Weinrich (1957) cited in Beardsmore (1982) that bilingualism is entirely relative to the same individual who use and produce two or more languages. Yet, it is believed that there are very few people can produce native proficiency in two languages (Abudarham, 1987) or even to reach balanced bilingualism (Beardsmore, 1982). Similarly, Titone’s point is that bilingualism is a level of communicative competence that is sufficient for effective communication for second or foreign language (1989). He further states that the effectiveness in communication with more than one languages needs the ability to understand and produce the meaning correctly.

However, at the opposite extreme, Macnamara (1969) cited in Abudarham (1987) seems to be claiming that the use bilingualism term is to describe people who can speak, write, listen, read and understand a second language, even to a minimal degree. In other words, the person will be considered as a bilingual, even though, he/she just knows a lyric of a song or few sentences of a second or foreign language. Furthermore, Haugen (1953) cited in Beardsmore (1982) thinks that a bilingual is one who can produce a meaningful utterance in a complete sentence of foreign language. The term “produce”, is used, however, is to focus more on bilingual’ expressive rather than receptive skills (Aburahman, 1987). Aburahman further argues that, in fact, some people have the ability to understand the (second or foreign) language but have difficulties to produce that language. Similarly, it is thought by some theorists, for example, Beardsmore (1982) and Baker (2006) that people are able to understand the messages by just listening and reading. They defined this situation as passive bilingualism, contrary with active

bilingualism, the ability to produce both languages.

Furthermore, Titone’s point of view is that bilingualism is related to individual and societal conditions that imply a level of communicative proficiency which is sufficient to communicate effectively in more than one language (1989). He further claim that to be effective requires the ability to understand the meaning of the messages and the ability to produce meaningful messages in more than one language. He further argues that bilingualism has three characteristic linked to proficiency levels of bilingual(s):

1. There is a clear consciousness of having and using more than one language in which is being identified with more than one culture.
2. There is, as a rule, a capability of thinking in two or more different languages, of controlling and programming messages related to more than one language and various situations.
3. There is capability to produce messages in more than one language with appropriate pronunciation and the ability to read, write, listen, and speak effectively without serious difficulty.

In other words, bilingualism is linked to the ability to produce or express both languages which can be used to describe individuals’ ability (Lyon, 1996). Moreover, in order to have more background knowledge of passive bilingualism, it is really important to consider the degree of bilingualism (ability), the context of bilingualism, and the bilingual competence.

1. The degree of bilingualism.  
According to Chin and Wiggleworth (2007) the degree of bilingualism can be defined as the level of language proficiency a someone can achieve in order to be considered as a bilingual. The concept of proficiency itself can be found in many definition of bilingualism. There are some definitions related to degree of bilingualism will be discussed. They are maximalist and minimalist bilingualism, dominant bilingualism, passive bilingualism, and semilingualism.

a. Maximalist and minimalist bilingualism

According to Beardsmore (1982) bilingualism can be classified into two interpretations, that is, maximalist (Bloomfield) and minimalist (Macnamara and Haugen). Maximalist bilingualism is a bilingual who is able to produce and understand all the activities and capacities in two languages perfectly (Beardsmore, 1982) like a native who is able to control two or more languages (Bloomfield, 1933 cited in Baker, 2006). In other words, maximalist refers to the ideal bilingual (Chin and Wiggleworth, 2007) and also seems to be too extreme and ambiguous because Bloomfield fails to explain what is meant by "control" (Baker, 2006). While, minimalist is a bilingual who is able to produce and understand the second or foreign language in limited activities with perhaps just a few set of grammatical rules and vocabularies (Beardsmore, 1982). Thus, a bilingual whose second or foreign language competence is minimal can be squeezed into the bilingual category (Baker, 2006). For instance, children who can sing a few lyrics of a foreign song can be considered as bilinguals. Another thing, balanced bilingual refers to individuals who are fully competent in two languages (Lambert, Havelka, and Gardner, 1959 cited in Chin and Wiggleworth, 2007). In other words, a person can be considered as balanced bilingual if he/she can approximately equally produce and understand both languages across various contexts (Baker, 2006). He further explains a child who is able to understand the delivery of curriculum language in one language and able to operate other language in classroom activity would be one example of balanced bilingualism.

b. Dominant bilingualism

The term of dominant bilingual describes individuals who are dominant in one language but less dominant, as subordinate language, in another language (Chin and Wiggleworth, 2007). They further states that the term "dominance" may not be suitable to all domains. It can be said that bilingual who is dominant in Arabic would not exhibit this dominance in all areas. An Arabic-English teacher, for instance, would speak Arabic all times but when he/she is discussing about education issue in Australia, then, he/she uses English. Similarly, a student who is dominant in Bahasa Indonesia would always speak Indonesian with his/her classmates at school, house, neighbours, however, he/she will uses local language when he/she visits his/her grandparents in village (most people who live in village still speak local language). Another example, the Welsh community use English as the domain language or dominant language (e.g. education, television, newspaper) and the Welsh language becomes a subordinate language or less dominant (Baker, 2006).

c. Passive bilingualism.

The term passive or recessive bilinguals describes individuals who have ability to listen, read and understand a language yet they do not necessarily produce (speak or write) the language (Beardsmore, 1982 and Collin, 2006), also it can refer to those who are less competent even gradually losing the language, usually because of not using it (Chin and Wiggleworth, 2007). Bilingual communities where one less dominant languages shift gradually to more dominant language, it is not unusual to find bilinguals who are able to understand but cannot use the less dominant language. For example, Cavallaro (1998) cited in Chin and Wiggleworth (2007) found that second generation Italian

(children) and third (grandchildren) live in Australia have difficulties to respond their Italian grandparents (first generation) when their grandparents speak Italian. Instead of speaking Italian, the children or grandchildren reply in English because they grow up with an increasingly passive understanding of the Italian language. In other words, they do not use actively the Italian because it has been gradually replaced by English. Similarly, there some cases in which learners of university graduates in a foreign language who are not able to communicate their ideas in their native language but have no or little difficulty to read and understand the language (Beardsmore, 1982).

d. Semilingualism

The term of semilingualism or limited bilinguals refers to those who appear to have defective and imperfect linguistic proficiency (Loman, 1974 and Pinomaa, 1974 cited in Skutnabb and Kangas, 1981) of two languages. In other words, the bilinguals are not having “sufficient” competence in both languages (Baker, 2006). The term semilingualism was first introduced by Hansengard (Skutnabb and Kangas, 1981) to refer to Finnish immigrant students in Sweden who have poor proficiency in both languages, Finnish and Swedish. Furthermore, the Finnish students are described as “these children know neither Finnish nor Swedish properly”, “are backward in linguistic comprehension and vocabulary in both Swedish and Finnish”, “know neither mother tongue (Finnish) nor Swedish well” (Heyman, 1973; Schwarz, 1973; Toukomaa, 1972 cited in Skutnabb and Kangas, 1981). According to Hansengard (1968) cited in Romaine (1995) there are six guides or parameters to describes six aspects of language proficiency. These are:

- The size of repertoire words and phrase or vocabulary. These vocabularies are understood and available in speech.
- Linguistic correctness. The ability to produce and understand the language correctly and properly and to realize the elements of a language in speech act such as intonation, suffixes and other elements.
- The stage of automatism. The bilingual(s) can use and understand the language actively without blockages or conscious deliberation.
- The ability to create (language). The bilingual(s) continuously think about language production
- Mastery of the language functions (e.g. cognitive, emotive and volitional functions)
- Richness and poorness in interpreting meanings and images.

Thus, Hansengard seems to be claiming that:

“We may describe a bilingual individual(s) as semilingual, if they show quantitative deficiencies (smaller vocabulary, etc) compare with those who speak the languages as their only language, and who have the same individual prerequisites (social group, school education, etc.), and if the bilingual in addition to this deviates more from the formal for the two languages and has a lower degree to automatism than monolinguals (see aspect 1-3 above). This is probably what many people have understood semilingualism to be....” (Hansengard, 1975 cited in Skutnabb and Kangas, 1981)

Hansengard further claims that the last three aspects of semilingualism:

“We have a case of semilingualism (aspect 5) if an individual (s) if an individual(s) cannot give full linguistic expression to her (his) feeling, or is not fully affected emotionally by a language. ...with a

kind of inner silence and a defective emotional contact. An individual(s) may well speak Swedish (a language) correctly and fluently but the emotional experience behind the flow of words seems meagre. The explanation of this lack, and others relating to aspects 4 and 5, can lie in a poverty of individual semantic experiences (aspect 6)” (Hansegard, 1975 cited in Skutnabb and Kangas, 1981)

Hansegard’s argument seems to be that if individuals do not fully meet those six aspects of language proficiency in bilingualism, then, these individuals will be considered as semilingualism in terms of deficiencies.

## 2. The context of bilingualism

Most individuals have similar experiences to understand and/or produce more than one language. The differences, however, are the level of proficiency (has been discussed above) and the places where they acquire, learn and produce the languages. The places or domains where the individuals acquire the languages are varied (Chin and Wigglesworth, 2007). Some learn the languages at schools, some at homes, others at churches, neighborhoods or through travel and study at foreign countries. The languages used by the individuals can be different depend on context of the domains. Following from Baker’s point that the two languages used by bilinguals are different depend on the events and purposes (2003). He further argues that language cannot be separated from the context where the language is used. The Moslem people in Indonesia, for instance, use Bahasa Indonesia in their daily life context but they use Arabic when they pray or read the holy Koran for religious context.

The individuals who learn and acquire the languages are the component elements of the community (Beardsmore, 1986). According to Baker (2003) some individuals live in community where the community use just two languages or

bilinguals (e.g. an Arabic bilinguals who live in Australia) and more than two languages or multilingual (e.g. an individual who live in community with three languages exist). In addition, some bilinguals live with monolingual and monoculture community where the bilinguals have connections with other bilinguals through holidays, social gatherings, email, phone and other connections. According to Fishman (1966) based on the context of bilinguals, there are two types of bilinguals in the community, that is, the individual bilingualism (has been discussed, see degree of bilingualism) and the societal bilingualism. The societal bilingualism refers to understanding of how the linguistic patterns are present in community; its inter-relationship; and its connection with other elements in the community such as economic, politics, education, culture and other elements (Beardsmore, 1986). He further argues that the societal bilingualism originally diverges most from the study of individual bilingualism. Therefore, there is a strong link between the individual bilingualism with the societal bilingualism. Interestingly, the individual bilingualism becomes a linguistic moderator among the different groups present in community.

## 3. Bilingual competence

Some observation and study of language interactions among individuals have been conducted in bilingualism. The interactions take places in a range of domains, such as, schools, homes, market, churches and other domains in community with different contexts. Even though, the authors have similar perception about the classification of interactions, they use different terminology; linguistic borrowing; interference; and transference. Haugen (1989) cited in Scotton (2002) uses “linguistic borrowing” refers to the use of linguistic features of one language to another language. Another thing, “transference” adopts the elements of linguistic from one language (Clyne, 1967). While, Weinreich (1953) calls “interference as “deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the

speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language". The last two terminologies cited in Ginsberg (1996). Moreover, Clyne (1967) cited in Ginsberg (1996) distinguishes some types of transference:

- Morphological transference is process of adoption of a word-form from another language, or the morphological pattern of another language becomes a model for a word.
- Morphosemantic is a process of mixed adoption both of word-form and content of two languages
- Phonic is the process of transferring of sounds from one language to another language
- Semantic is the process adoption of meaning without the actual word-form
- Syntactic is a process of adoption of a sentence pattern of other language.

Consequently, bilinguals will experience a process of mixing vocabulary of different languages. According to Hock and Joseph (1996) cited in Malt, Sloman and Gennari (2003) vocabulary of each language can be different over time. It is changed by variety of forces such as cultural needs, contact with other languages, and sound changes, which include meaning shifts such as narrowing, broadening, reinterpretation, and differentiation of individual word meanings, and which the words can be added or deleted from the language's lexicon (Hock and Joseph, 1996 ; Keller, 1994 cited in Malt, Sloman and Gennari, 2003).

## Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the key features of the bilingual situation, that is, the context, ability, and linguistic competence. These three features are interesting to discuss because these features are relevant to the case study of passive bilingualism of individuals in Scottish Gaelic community.

### 1. Context

My context is both individual and societal bilingualism in the land of Scotland. I discuss individuals' bili-

gualism and little bit of societal bilingualism. The reason why I focus more on individuals bilingualism because these individuals exist among two different ethnics, which is different to each other; one is bilingual while the other monolingual. The bilinguals are those who speak English and Gaelic while the monolinguals are those who speak English. The individuals are those who are passive in both languages. To have more understanding about the context, it is really important to know the story of Scottish Gaelic language. The following summary is the story of Gaelic language.

**Gaelic** is the traditional language of the Scotti or Gaels. As one of the Celtic family, Scottish Gaelic has close relative of Cornish, Breton and Cornish, and also have a deeper and intimate relationship with Manx Gaelic. Gaelic was once a language that dominated the majority land of Scotland. Gaelic, by about the century, became the official language of the king, court and most of the people. It was all the centre of education where kings and noble men sent their sons to be educated in Scotland. The Gaelic language was used to teach the students. It is believed that Gaelic developed simultaneously as a language, even had been advanced fast in Argyll and in Ireland. Moreover, the Gaelic was advanced fast because the Gaelic churchmen used the language to convert most part of Scotland to Christianity. It was closely associated with the highlands; it is well-known as Western Isles nowadays. However, the status of Gaelic as national language declined gradually. In contrast, English became the official language all over the Scotland. Nowadays, Scottish Gaelic still exists but with a small number of speakers who still use the language. Gaelic is unique and interesting language. For example, one of the residents of Berneray is Fred MacLeod, his name in English. While, his name in Gaelic is: mac Dhomhnaill Thormoid Dhomhnaill Mhoir. *Mac* means "son of", *mhoir* means "big" and *beag* means "small". Thus, Fred's name can be translated as son of Donald, son of Norman, son of big Donald.

According to Dorian (1982) in a Highland district, there are two distinctive ethnic groups, that is, eastern Sutherlandshire and East Sutherland Fisherfolk (Dorian, 1982). She further explains that the first one is a district that has used English for a relatively long history. In other words, English has become monolingual language for this community. While the second one, Fisherfolk descendants has been bilinguals in which they have used both language, Scottish and English, for a long time. Dorian says: "They constitute a speech island, in that they are surrounded by English monolinguals (Sutherlandshire) and are not in contact with any other dialect of Gaelic.....in which their Gaelic is of a distinctive East Sutherland variety which is unlike other Gaelic dialect" (1982). For example, the Gaelic of the fishing villages of Easter Ross showed the biggest similarity to East Sutherland Gaelic, but the Gaelic of Easter Ross had been extinct (Watson, 1974; Dorian, 1978 cited in Dorian, 1982). However, there are some individuals, considered as a third group, in the region that are "low-proficiency 'semi-speakers' and near passive bilinguals in Gaelic and English" (Dorian, 1982). She further explains that semi-speakers are **individuals** who are almost not able to produce full fluency and proficiency of East Sutherland Gaelic because of deviations from those who speak fluently with the norms within the community. In other words, these individuals have difficulty to use fluently both languages. Moreover, Dorian (1982) states that "in term of their active use of Gaelic, they cannot be easily included in the East Sutherland Gaelic community....as they speak only English with any readiness, and they speak mostly English in their day-today living...even some of them rarely make any active use of Gaelic..". In other words, even though they live in the Gaelic community, these individuals use English when they go to certain places such as market, shops, neighbours and other places. In addition, these individuals have an ability to control their both languages in order to respond in a range of situations (Titone, 1989), even

though both language proficiencies are limited. For example, the individuals know when and where to use English or Gaelic.

## 2. The degree of bilingualism

Dorian states that the individuals (the third group) are low-proficiency and near passive bilinguals in Gaelic and English (1982). She further argues that there is some evidence why she considers these individuals as near passive bilingualism because:

- They forget the nouns or verbs of Gaelic or English.
- They make deviations from the local grammatical norms.
- They often leave incomplete sentences.
- They have a tendency to make syntactic elimination.
- They also make phonological deviations

Based on the finding above, it can be seen that the individuals cannot be categorized as maximalist and minimalist bilingualism because these individuals in Scottish Gaelic community are near-passive in both language, English and Gaelic. Another thing, the individuals also cannot be categorized as dominant because, in fact, both of languages are less dominant. The individuals can be categorized as passive bilingualism or semi-lingualism, however. My disagreement with Dorian is that these individuals cannot be considered as near-passive bilinguals because these individuals can still produce the sentences even though they make deviation. Similarly, I agree with Loman and Pinomaa in respect of their point that the term of semilingualism that refers to those who appear to have a defective and imperfect linguistic proficiency of two languages (1974 cited in Skutnabb and Kangas, 1981). Moreover, these individuals do not meet the six aspects of language proficiency as defined by Hansegard (1968) cited in Romaine (1995). These individuals often forget their Gaelic or English noun or verb (Dorian, 1982), while Hansengard pointed

out that if individuals perform quantitative deficiencies either in verbs or nouns, then the individuals would be considered as semilinguals (Romaine, 1995). However, Dorian points out that "...grammatically deviant in ways that are labeled "mistakes" by fluent speakers, which is true enough. But when left to their own devices, so that they can speak when they wish to, briefly and in the structures they are most comfortable with, semi speakers are often able to reduce to deviance" (1982). In other words, she defines new terminology, "semi-speakers", that these individuals can use both languages if they feel free to talk regardless their deviation. Thus, it can be concluded that the individuals are considered as near-passive bilingualism when they make deviation in their sentences but as semi-speakers when their deviations are ignored.

3. The competent linguistic of bilingualism

Actually, I have some difficulty to find Dorian's book about Scottish Gaelic language. I just found an article written by her in which she discussed about the Scottish Gaelic language. The data I got is not sufficient to support my essay. However, there are some points that can be analysed based on her finding which I can relate or even assume from the review literature. They forget the nouns or verbs of Gaelic or English. The individuals frequently make mistakes by deviation from the local grammatical norms, syntactic elimination, incomplete sentences, phonological deviation (Dorian, 1982). It can be assumed that the individuals adopted both word-forms from another language to their languages, English to Gaelic or vice-versa (Clyne (1967) cited in Ginsberg (1996). Furthermore, there is a slight possibility that the individuals make deviation because of influence of another language such as transferring sound, adoption of a sentence pattern, meaning without the actual word-form from one language to another language.

## Conclusion

After discussing this essay and, I think my definition of Bilingualism is the ability to use two languages, either passively or actively, depending on the level of proficiency either in monolingual or bilingual communities. I elaborate my definitions from some authors such as Beardsmore (1982); Collin (2006); Titone (1989); Abudarham (1987); Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984). Moreover, I do agree those who use the other language for limited vocabulary can be considered as bilinguals or those who understand but not produce the other language as bilinguals. Individuals can be considered as bilingualism depends on their level of proficiency. Therefore, the key word in my definition is proficiency.

## Implication

The implication for education programmes incorporating two languages are:

1. Passive bilinguals. For passive bilinguals, the education programs can design a curriculum that can encourage students to be active in classroom. For example, promoting bilingual literacy. Bilingual literacy can help the students to interact with other students who have different culture background and share their experience in classrooms (Hornberger, 1995). She further states that students' interaction with bilingual text can help the students to draw and develop their knowledge for understanding the text spontaneously and systematically. Moreover, this strategy can help the students to connect and transfer strategies in communication across languages.
2. Proficiency. The education programmes that incorporate two languages can encourage and increase the students' ability to store information in their brains in which it can increase their cognitive or academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1980 cited in Baker, 2006).
3. Preservation. The bilingual programmes in education can help to preserve minority or endangered language. Language is a symbol of identity that can provide security and status to the certain community (Baker, 2006). He further

argues that languages provide a link to reach the archive of knowledge, ideas and belief of certain culture from the past. In other words, if a language becomes endangered that lead to death language, then, it will be a great loss and sorrow for humanity. Thus, the only way to preserve these languages is by passing them to young generation through education.

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