

## **Bilingualism as a Factor at Developing Reading and Writing Skills in the Bosnian Language**

Larisa Đapo

Azamat Akbarov

larisadapo@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

Research on "Bilingualism as a Factor at Developing Reading and Writing Skills in the Bosnian Language" was conducted at the International Primary School in Sarajevo, where we meet children who speak two, and occasionally three languages. How they acquire and master the language is interesting, and in particular, how they acquire the beginning level reading and writing skills of the Bosnian language. This study attempted to determine whether bilingual students were more proficient or less proficient than monolingual students at developing reading and writing skills in the Bosnian language.

**Key words:** bilingualism, Bosnian language, reading, writing

### **Introduction**

#### **Beginning Reading and Writing**

Beginning reading and writing is one of the most important issue in primary schools. Success in school in general, depends on how the student masters reading and writing. Beginning reading and writing has specific content, specific goals, and objectives (Hubijar, 1996). However, even more requirements are placed in front of teachers if a bilingual child does not use his second language with both of his parents. According to Filipović (1998), reading implies: perceptive recognition of graphic letter structure and consistency in identifying the structure of all letters as symbols, identifying voices-letters in a syllable and words, and understanding the meaning of words, sentences, text.

Writing is graphic visualization of the content of thought and feeling, and a letter is symbol in various combinations which symbolically represent the content of the real and the imaginary

(Milatović, 1996). Writing is a voluntary and a very complex psycho-physiological skill that should be created, developed and perfected in process of learning.

Mioč (1996) pointed out that learning to read and write depends on the nature of a language. According to Hubijar (1996), duration, quality, and methodical organization of preparation for the beginning reading and writing depend on the following factors:

- a) “structure of class with regard to chronological age and ability of students,
- b) the previous knowledge of students,
- c) the perceived difficulty in speech of individual students, the difficulties related to bilingualism, and difficulties related to the reorientation to the mother language with children that lived and attended classes abroad,
- d) curriculum, concept of a textbook of the beginning reading and writing,
- e) the number of students repeating a grade,
- f) professional and didactic-methodical competence of the teacher and his professional experience
- g) objective circumstances in which the teaching takes place, first grade class, and teaching resources available to schools “ (pg. 62).

## **Bilingualism**

The term bilingualism can be defined differently. While for some bilingualism represents the ability to communicate in two languages equally, for others represents the ability to communicate in two languages, but with the possibility of exceptional skills in only one of these two languages.

According to Šipka (2005) bilingualism (lat. bilinguis) is defined as the ability of an individual, group or people to use two languages without visible greater tendency for one of them.

When speaking about bilingualism it is necessary to distinguish between several terms (Kangas,1991):

- Early bilingualism is considered to be the acquisition of both languages by the age of four years, and late bilingualism is acquiring a second language after the age of four.

- Symmetric bilingualism is the equal knowledge of both languages, while asymmetrical means lesser knowledge of the second language (passive bilingualism, receptive bilingualism)
- Bilingualism is divided to social, which includes a social group, and individual, which is individual isolated phenomenon.
- Adequate bilingualism means that the subject can be equally free to speak and think in both languages in every situation and on every subject.
- Active bilingualism represents mastery of the second language in its oral and written form.
- Passive bilingualism represents partial or incomplete mastery of the second language, it is the ability to understand, but not the possibility of answering or transmission of text.
- Legislative bilingualism is characterized by respect for the norms (grammatical, phonetic) of both languages.

## **Methodology**

### **Research problem**

One of the aims of this research is to find out if the children whose mother tongue was not Bosnian show the specifics and problems in acquiring reading and writing skills. The focus was on three groups of children.

The first group was the children who have the Turkish language as their mother tongue. The second group includes the children with whom their parents speak two different languages, given that the parents have different backgrounds and speak different languages, e.g. a mother speaks French, a father Albanian.

The third group includes native Bosnian speakers and this group will be used for comparison with the students of the first and second group.

### **Research objective**

To examine whether children whose mother tongue is not Bosnian have difficulties in acquiring, reading and writing the Bosnian. To find out what are specific characteristics of these difficulties in relation to the difficulties of reading and writing of students whose native language is Bosnian.

### **Research tasks**

1. To examine which difficulties in acquiring the Bosnian have students whose mother tongue is Turkish.
2. What are the errors in writing and reading skills of students who had communicated in two foreign languages before they enrolled in school?
3. To recognize the reading and writing difficulties of the students whose native language is Bosnian and compare it to the difficulties of students who have a foreign language as their mother tongue.
4. To examine teachers' attitudes about bilingualism (their experience of the advantages and difficulties)
5. To examine students' attitudes about the Bosnian language.

### **General hypothesis**

There will be differences in the errors in reading and writing skills between the students whose language is Bosnian and the students whose native language is not Bosnian.

### **Specific hypotheses**

1. Students whose native language is Turkish will demonstrate difficulties in reading and writing which students whose mother tongue is Bosnian do not have.

2. Students with whom their parents speak a variety of languages will demonstrate difficulties in reading and writing which children whose mother tongue is Bosnian do not have.
3. Students whose native language is Bosnian will demonstrate difficulties in reading and writing that will be different compared to students for whom Bosnian is a foreign language.
4. Teachers will think that bilingualism is an advantage in the process of education.
5. Teachers will have a positive experience working with bilingual children.

### **Sample**

The sample in this research was consisted of seven students whose native language was Turkish, five students who had been learning different languages before they enrolled in school, and seven students whose native language was Bosnian. All children were attending the second grade at the International Primary School in Sarajevo.

**Research methods:** method of theoretical analysis, content analysis method, empirical nonexperimental method, descriptive-analytical method

**Procedures:** survey and assessment

**Instruments:** a questionnaire for an interview for the children and teachers, writing test and a check list for teachers, test of reading comprehension, and a check-list for teachers

### **Analysis and Interpretation of Research Results**

#### **1. Interview for Teachers, Analysis of Responses**

The hypothesis that there will be differences in difficulties was confirmed by the analysis. However, there were a number of teachers who disagreed. Teachers had a unified opinion that the most common issues that occurred in the teaching of the Bosnian language to non-native Bosnian speakers resulted from the lack of reading comprehension, a lot of unfamiliar words, the interpretation of reading comprehension, unfamiliar words, the interpretation and spelling,

which was reflected in reading and writing, was also emphasized. The biggest problem with students who were learning to read and write the Bosnian language were the cases, gender, number, nouns, and grammar in general. The students who began learning the Bosnian language in the first grade showed significantly better results in the beginning reading and writing than students who started in higher grades. The problem of misunderstanding words was constantly present. Teachers mentioned that the biggest difficulty in working with students is not having adequate textbooks for students who are beginning to learn the Bosnian language, and misunderstanding of words and texts.

## **2. Discussion on the Students' Answers**

During the research, students' views of learning the Bosnian language were investigated. From their answers it could be concluded that all students preferred to learn the Bosnian language, found it interesting and not difficult. It is very important that the vast majority of them believed that they were successful in learning which was very important for their selfconfidence, and also their desire to learn. It was concluded that the students learned the Bosnian language with interest and they showed desire to learn, and positive energy which directly affected their success.

## **3. Writing Test- Results And Analysis**

TMT- Turkish mother tongue

BMT- Bosnian mother tongue

FAEMT- French, Albanian, English mother tongue

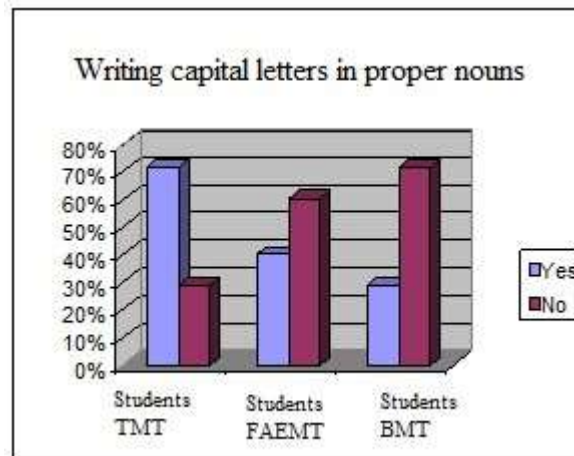


Figure 1. Writing capital letters in proper nouns

The best results were achieved by BMT, then FAEMT, and TMT.

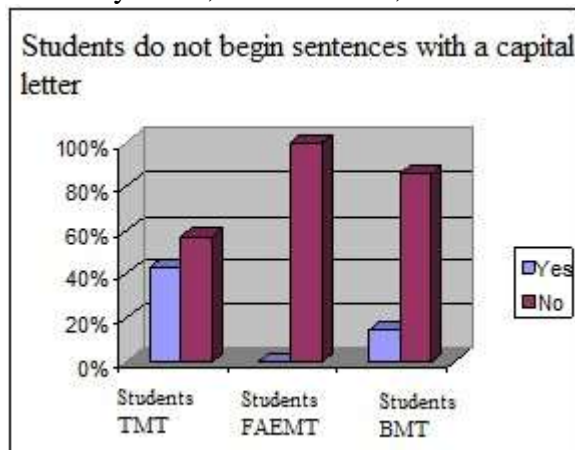


Figure 2. Students do not begin sentences with a capital letter

The best results were achieved by FAEMT. Writing the capital letter at the beginning of a sentence is present in all world languages, so this rule was familiar to children from their own languages. Good results were achieved by BMT, as well as TMT because more than a half of children wrote this correctly.

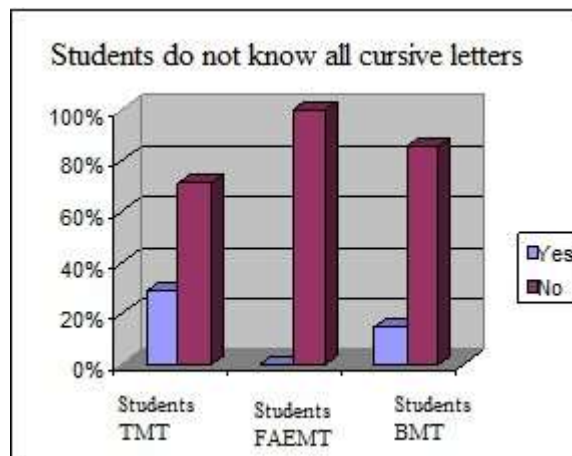


Figure 3. Students do not know all cursive letters

All the students FAEMT knew cursive letters, so this category of students achieved the best results. They were followed by BMT, and then the students TMT. It should be emphasized that there was only a small number of students who did not know all the letters.

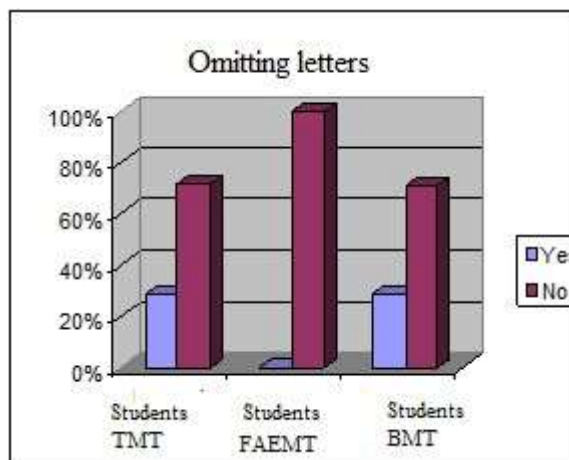


Figure 4. Omitting letters

Students FAEMT omitted letters the least, so it could be noticed they were very careful while writing. Students BMT and TMT showed the same results in omitting letters.

#### 4. Reading Test- Results And Analysis

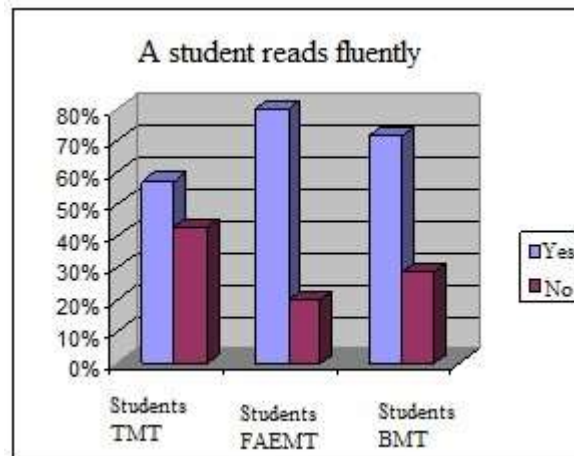


Figure 5. A student reads fluently

The best results were achieved by the students FAEMT. This data coincided with the attitude of the students of this category who indicated that they loved to read. Some teachers observed that reading is best mastered by the students whose native language is not Bosnian.

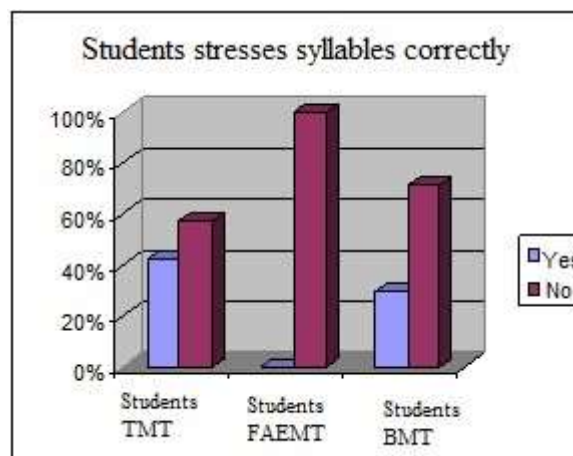


Figure 6. Students stresses syllables correctly

The children FAEMT achieved an excellent results because all of them stressed syllables correctly.

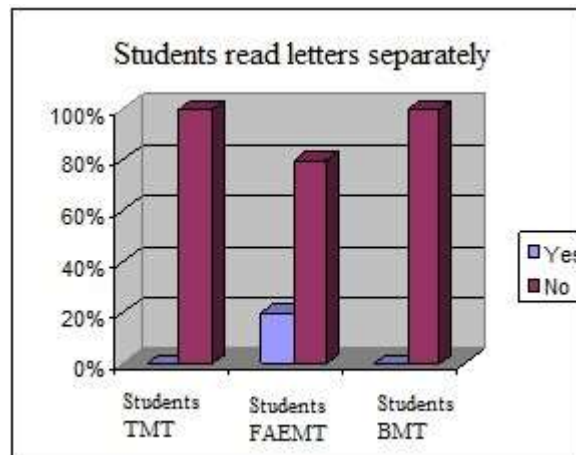


Figure 7. Students read letters separately

Students TMT and BTM achieved an excellent result. They did not read letters separately. Only one student FAEMT made an error in this task.

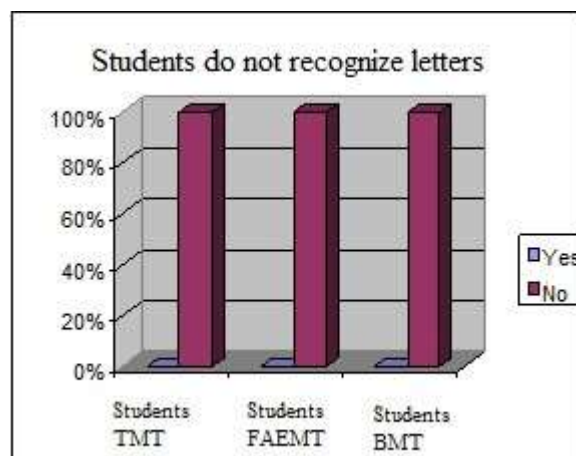


Figure 8. Students do not recognize letters

All students recognized all the letters. The students had enough time to learn all the letters since they have enough classes to learn (seven classes a day).

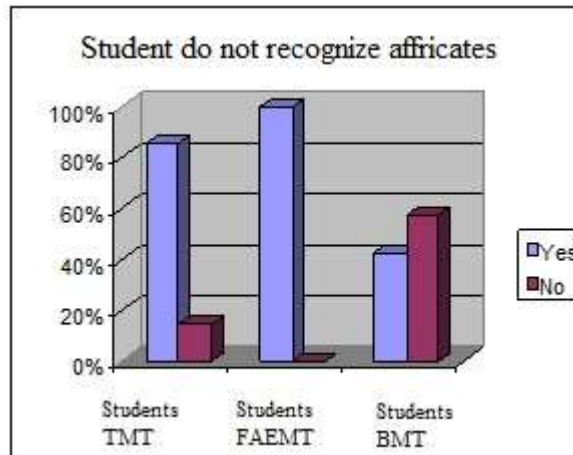


Figure 9. Student do not recognize affricates

All students FAEMT had difficulties with affricates as well as the students TMT. The best results were achieved by the students BMT.

### 5. Analysis of the writing test and reading comprehension

Students were asked to read the fable *The Squirrel and the Wolf* and to answer with full sentences to the five questions. The results were presented individually. Due to space limitations, only conclusions are presented.

By comparing the responses of MBT with other students, we could see that other students gave answers in simple sentences without nominal and verbal supplements, which was not the case with the pupils MBT.

Some students, who during the exercise of cursive writing did not have any errors, on this occasion forgot to begin of sentences with capital letters as well as a full stop at the end. Basic characteristics of the writing of the students BMT were:

1. All the students understood the text.
2. All the students answered in complete sentences.
3. Students' answers were clear and understandable with a word order that is inherent in the Bosnian language.
4. The sentences were either compound or complex.
5. Most of students began sentences with a capital letter and used a full stop at the end.

6. There were very few spelling and grammatical errors.

## **6. Conclusions**

1. Analysis of the results showed that in the process of reading and writing of the Bosnian language there were differences in errors among BMT, FAEMT, and TMT. This confirmed the main hypothesis.
2. The sub-hypotheses that the students TMT would exhibit difficulties in reading and writing, which were not peculiar to BMT proved correctly. The students most often made mistakes in the use of gender, number and case, which did not happen for BMT. Most students made error in the use of capital letter, did not begin sentences with capital letter, made errors in the use of affricates, omitted letters and did not know all cursive letters.
3. The following sub-hypotheses concerning the specificity of the reading and writing skills of FAEMT proved to be justified. However, this difference was not always to the detriment of FAEMT. The analysis of reading test of the Bosnian indicated that children who knew many foreign languages did better in reading than students whose mother tongue was Bosnian. If we compare the reading rules of Bosnian and English we can conclude that the Bosnian is much easier to read. This was probably the reason FAEMT students were more successful. This category of students also showed the best results in the knowledge of letters, and copying a text.
4. BMT showed, as well as TMT and FAEMT some difficulties in learning the Bosnian language. These errors were sometimes the same as for FAEMT and TMT (errors in capitalization, errors in affricates, omission of letters). The most common problems experienced by FAEMT and TMT, but which Bosnian students did not experience were:
  1. Improper use of the number, gender and case of nouns.
  2. Word order that is not peculiar to the Bosnian language.
  3. Writing nouns in capital letters.
  4. Misunderstanding of words (e.g. 'neveseo' unhappy).
  5. Writing letters that do not belong to Bosnian ('vjevericy' instead of 'vjeverica').
  6. Accent that is not peculiar to Bosnian.

5. By examining the attitudes of teachers, it has been pointed out how important it was to emphasize the individuality of each child. When observing this issue, the context in which a child was, has to be taken into consideration. The results obtained can be limited to this a group of students, and not generalized.
6. The teachers responded that students could simultaneously learn the native and foreign language. These students had difficulties because they sometimes did not learn all the programs provided for students whose mother tongue was Bosnian. However, although not often, there are students who do succeed. TMT and FAEMT have difficulties, but we can say that for BMT as well. Sometimes FAEMT students show better results than students who are BMT. However, looking at individual progress and effort students FAEMT and TMT achieve an excellent result in learning the Bosnian language. They achieved a great progress and at some stage of learning they became equal (sometimes even better) than students whose BMT.
7. Results of student interviews have indicated a positive attitude towards learning the Bosnian language.
8. The results pointed out the need for adequate Bosnian language textbooks for children whose first language is not Bosnian, but who want to learn Bosnian. This textbook would be the best gift that our country could give to people who, under the circumstances have become our diaspora and who want their children to learn our mother tongue. This textbook would probably reduce the number of parents who are not interested in their children learning the Bosnian language and increase the number of people who would, due to the knowledge of our language, get to know our culture and tradition and therefore respect more the country in which we live.

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