The Roots of the Debate about “The Bilingual Problem”

Drawes (1902)
- Book looking at bilingual teaching in Belgian schools
- Bilinguals perform worse than monolinguals
- Director of Schools quoted states this difference arose because of bilingualism itself
- No further evidence added

Pavlovich (1920)
- Serbian-French case study of a child
- No evidence for a “language handicap” caused by the L2 found

Saer (1923)
- Study on Welsh-English bilingual children
- First study to explicitly address the question how bilingualism and intelligence relate?
- Bilinguals found to have lower intelligence than monolinguals
- But background information unreliable and not controlled for socio-economic status of children

Smith (1923)
- Welsh-English children tested with a battery of verbal intelligence tests and a rhythmic task
- Monolinguals perform better than bilinguals

Pintner (1923)
- Studied Italian, Polish and German Immigrants in the US
- Found that non-verbal intelligence tests are better suited to test bilinguals
- Bilingual immigrants performed equally well as the native speaker Americans on the non-verbal tests – but not worse on the tests involving verbal IQ tests

Ronjat (1923)
- German-French case study
- Found no negative effect of bilingualism on general intelligence

Williams (1915)
- Also investigating bilingual teaching in Belgian schools
- Little evidence presented re: intellectual benefits or disadvantages of bilingualism
- Different Director of Schools quoted, who considers bilingualism beneficial and “enlightening”

Young (1922)
- Doctoral thesis looking at immigrant groups in the US
- Concludes that reduced verbal ability in children’s L2 plays less important role than previously assumed
- And that the observed ‘mental retardation’ of bilinguals could not be explained by it

Pintner & Keller (1922)
- Suggests verbal IQ tests might be unsuitable to compare the intelligence of monolinguals and bilinguals

Mead (1926)
- Sociological review, suggesting that the ‘language handicap’ affects intelligence test scores
- Emphasises that differences in education and socio-economic status have not been sufficiently considered

Yoshioka (1929)
- Japanese-English bilingual children were found to perform closer to the level monolinguals as they get older

Committee for Research in Education (1931) lists “Influence of Bilingualism upon Mental Processes” under “Research Planned or in Progress” for the University of Bangor