

Bilingual memory has been a subject of psycholinguistic experimental studies for the last 6 decades, whereas the study of multilingual memory has so far largely been excluded. Moreover, the psycholinguistic studies, though proven highly insightful, have always excessively relied on the experimental tasks used in them to the extent that the subjects as language users were overshadowed. These were the two concerns that led the present study to examine two of the psycholinguistic phenomena, multilingual memory and lexical access, phenomenologically without disregarding the insight gained from psycholinguistic studies. Under the phenomenological framework, lived experiences of Punjabi-Urdu-English (P-U-E) trilinguals were explored in order to find out the processes these trilinguals employed for learning the three languages and making them work. Three of the phenomenological methods: semi-structured lifeworld interviews, focus group discussions and essay writing, were used for eliciting the experiences of 40 P-U-E trilingual participants, chosen from three different age groups (18-23 years, 30-40 years, and 50-60 years or above) to observe developmental changes in the learning and use of the three languages over a long period of time. Data explicitation was carried out using Hycner's (1985) 15-step process, especially formulated for keeping the essence of the participants' experiences of the phenomena intact. Major findings were: (1) the effect of the age of acquisition on the learning of new languages, L2 as well as L3, (2) Dependence on Urdu for using English and translation asymmetry at lower L3 proficiency levels, (3) Developmental aspect, (4) The need to exert conscious control for stopping interference from the other two languages in order to speak one language consistently, and (5) Proficiency as the most significant factor in lexical selection. On comparing the findings of this phenomenological study with the results of psycholinguistic experimental studies, a phenomenological model emerged that attempts to capture the trilingual memory structure of a P-U-E trilingual, i.e., how the three lexicons are organized, how they interact with each other, and how lexical access is accomplished.