

LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE TRIGGERED BY BILINGUALISM

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Abstract: *The linguistic contact results in linguistic interferences. The purpose of this paper is given by language interferences, which can be regarded as the transfer of elements of one language to another in terms of lexis, grammar, phonology or orthography alterations. Irrespective of the aspect of the linguistic interference as a result of a contact between languages, the starting point is always a certain degree of bilingualism. This paper is an attempt to outlay and analyse some of the various aspects with respect to language interferences as a result of bilingualism. This purpose has largely determined the general plan of the paper.*

Keywords: *language interference, bilingualism, linguistic contact, borrowing, linguistic transfer*

As a greatly significant phenomenon, the linguistic contact results in linguistic interferences. The contact between languages is actually the outcome of extra-linguistic phenomena: cultural, economic and political relations alongside cultural co-existence of mixed population. Bilingualism is not a unique phenomenon, but from the point of view of human needs and communication possibilities it is a general and all-important phenomenon, leading to the most various linguistic contacts: both to contacts exceeding territorial borders and contacts that break social boundaries. It is a language contact going deep within the geographical and the social dimension as well. As a manifestation of bilingualism, the linguistic contact creates interferences and borrowings, thus leading to linguistic alterations. The purpose of this paper is given by language interferences, which can be regarded as the transfer of elements of one language to another in terms of lexis, grammar, phonology or orthography alterations. Irrespective of the aspect of the linguistic interference as a result of a contact between languages, the starting point is always a certain degree of bilingualism.

In their historical development, social communities, no matter their names, have not existed in isolation, but have established contacts of the most diverse nature with each other leading to mutual influences on various levels of social life. Language, as an expression of society, is a testimony to intercultural relations. This concerns not only relations between official languages, i.e. the “main” culture carrier languages, but also the relations between official languages and minority languages on the territory of a state. These are communication media of different civilizations that end up in evolving collaterally. Do these influences extend from the official languages towards minority languages, or do they also occur in the reverse direction as well?

This paper is an attempt to outlay and analyse some of the various aspects with respect to language interferences as a result of bilingualism.

By bilingualism or linguistic dualism we understand the ability of an individual or of a community or population to make use of two different linguistic systems in communication.

Language interference can be regarded as the transfer of elements of one language into another at different linguistic levels. In terms of phonology, for instance, linguistic interferences are related to foreign aspects such as intonation, pitch, accent and speech sounds from the first language influencing the second. Grammar of the first language would interfere with the second language by affecting it on the level of usage of pronouns and determinants, verb tense, mood and even double negation and, equally important, word order. As far as lexis is regarded, language interference means word borrowings from one language alongside word transformations as to sound more naturally in the other language. These transformations also trigger changes in spelling.

Collective or mass bilingualism has been known ever since ancient times when various people invaded foreign territories and overwhelmed local populations not only in size but also in terms of language, culture and civilization. (see the Roman Empire and its countless colonies; likewise, the British Empire in turn or the Spaniards and their colonies) Of course, from this point of view, bilingualism is the main origin of several

contemporary languages. Romanian is the most natural example that comes to mind in this respect.

Another noteworthy example of bilingualism is the official bilingualism – as in the case of federal states with two or more official languages that are used by a large part of the population. Such is the case of Switzerland or Belgium in Europe or of Canada and the southern states of the USA on the North-American continent. In Africa on the other hand, there are countries where alongside the indigenous language another international language is used officially. This is a conscious and voluntary bilingualism, unanimously accepted out of practical necessities of social, political and cultural nature brought about by the right to self-determination of nations and peoples or by the intensity and extent of spiritual and material values in the modern age.

An important result of collective bilingualism is the change in the physiognomy of a language rather than its structure. This means that the transformations suffered by a language after the massive contact to another, in spite of being touched on (almost) all linguistic levels, do not affect the former's genetic and original structure. After all, French and Romanian, for example, have a different typological structure than Latin, yet the result materialised into two independent Romance languages.

These phenomena are studied both by psychology and by linguistics.

Psychology is concerned with the study of bilingualism in terms of language acquisition by children in order to establish the right age for a child to commence the study and the correct use of a foreign language. Most bilingual children who learn two languages (one of which is their mother tongue) before the age of 5 do not have an accent in either language, while bilingual persons who learn a second language later in life often do have an accent. Thus, the earlier a bilingual learns his two languages, the more like a native speaker they will sound. This is where psychology and linguistics share a common ground.

Linguistics deals with bilingualism as related to the interference between two linguistic systems or to the evolution of a particular language after its exposure to, or contact with a foreign language.

Psycholinguistics studies the processes associated with the comprehension, memorization and production of a bilingual person's languages.

With bilinguals who have learned both languages at the same time, most likely living in a bilingual family as a child we speak of simultaneous bilingualism. When people learn their second language later in life, either as a result of moving to a foreign country or during their schooling we speak of consecutive or sequential bilingualism.

In terms of fluency, bilinguals who can speak, read and write fluently in both languages are referred to as biliterate. The extent to which they make use of their fluency in either language depends on the opportunities they have to use both languages. Sometime, bilinguals have different skills in their two languages and use them for different purposes. Although their levels of fluency may be comparable, bilingual persons may use one of their two languages more than the other, or may use one under certain circumstance (or in certain groups

of people), and the other one in a different context (or with different people). For instance, a bilingual may speak one language at home with their family and the other language with their friends or at their work place.

When a bilingual is only fluent in speaking, reading and writing in one language but can only speak or, out of lack of self-confidence, only understands the other language, then we deal with passive bilingualism.

According to Grosjean [1], "one of the most interesting aspects of bilingualism is the fact that two (or more) languages are in contact within the same person. This phenomenon, which has led to a vast body of research, can best be understood if one examines the bilingual's various language modes. In their everyday lives, bilinguals find themselves at various points along a situational continuum which induces different language modes. At one end of the continuum, bilinguals are in a totally monolingual mode in that they are speaking (or writing) to monolinguals of one - or the other - of the languages that they know. At the other end of the continuum, bilinguals find themselves in a bilingual language mode in that they are communicating with bilinguals who share their two languages and with whom they normally mix languages (i.e. code-switch and borrow;). For convenience, we will refer to the two end points of the continuum when speaking of the monolingual or bilingual language modes, but we should keep in mind that these are end points and that intermediary modes do exist. This is the case, for example, when a bilingual is speaking to another bilingual who never mixes languages, or when a bilingual is interacting with a person who has limited knowledge of the other language. We should note also that bilinguals differ among themselves as to the extent they travel along the continuum; some rarely find themselves at the bilingual end whereas others rarely leave this end (for example, bilinguals who live in tightly knit bilingual communities where the language norm is mixed language)."

Sometimes, bilingual persons show a tendency to switch languages within the same sentence. This is a phenomenon widely researched by sociolinguist and is referred to as code switching (also spelt "code-switching").

Depending on various circumstances, a speaker may switch from one code to another, intentionally or unintentionally. This switch from one language to another, from one dialect to another, or from one style to another may be triggered by numerous causes. Several factors may bring about code-switching according to various contexts: to manifest solidarity among persons within an ethnic group, to express certain feelings or to persuade a distinct type of audience. Likewise, a bilingual teacher in class may switch his or her language in order to elaborate a certain point.

Woolard [2] defines code-switching as "the investigation of an individual's use of two or more language varieties in the same speech event or exchange"

Gumperz, in turn, [3] defines "conversational code-switching" as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems [...] as when a speaker uses a second language either to reiterate his message or to reply to someone else's statement"

Code-switching between languages occurs on a regular basis among bilingual speakers and may occur under different forms, including alteration of sentences or phrases from both languages succeeding each other. Switching languages during a conversation may become disruptive at a certain point to the listener when the speaker switches due to an inability to express themselves. Nevertheless, it provides an opportunity for language development. The listener, in this case, is able to provide translation into the second language thus providing learning of new vocabulary. Consequently, this allows for a

less switching and reduced later interference as time progresses.

Yet code-switching does not mean language interference in the sense that it may supplement speech. When used because of an inability of expression, it provides continuity to the speech rather than providing interference in the respective language. The socio-linguistic advantages are regarded as a tool of communicating solidarity with a particular social group, whereas code switching should be viewed from the point of view of providing a linguistic benefit rather than a hindrance to communication. Moreover, code-switching allows a speaker to convey their feelings and to emphasise points. Making use of their second language allows bilinguals to enhance the effect of their speech and use it in an efficient manner.

From a lexical perspective, code-switching is different from lexical borrowing since it is mostly a result of linguistic competence while borrowing is based on the lack of lexical terms in a certain language. A bilingual who makes use of code-switching has a wide choice of lexical terms that make it possible for them to shift codes freely in various contexts and for various reasons.

Marlin Dwinastiti [4] suggests that bilingualism is one of the major causes of language interferences. He regards interference as a negative aspect of bilingualism. "When an individual's understanding of one language has an impact on his or her understanding of another language, that individual is experiencing language transfer. There can be negative transfers, otherwise known as interference, when the understanding of one language complicates the understanding of another language. Alternatively, there can be positive transfers such that knowing one language can aid in developing skills for a second language. Language interference is the effect of language learners' first language on their production of the language they are learning. It means that the speaker's first language influences his/her second or and his/her foreign language.

The effect can be on any aspect of language: grammar, vocabulary, accent, spelling and so on. Language interference is considered as one of error sources (negative transfer), although where the relevant feature of both languages is the same it results in correct language production (positive transfer). The greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative the effects of interference are likely to be. It will inevitably occur in any situation where someone has not mastered a second language."

In conclusion, based on scientific research, it has been ascertained that, especially in the case of linguistic enclaves or islands, the mother language is the most likely to be abandoned, making room to the language spoken by the surrounding majority. The best results of research have proved to be the "confessions" of bilinguals who have studied the phenomenon based on their personal linguistic experience. Thus, a multitude of instances occur: bilingual persons master both languages to the same extent when the structures of lexical systems used in communication do not alternate in communication (code-switching); in other cases, the mother tongue, which is better mastered by the speaker leads to alterations in the use of the second language. Yet there are also bilinguals who feel more comfortable in using, in the most intimate occasions, the other language as his first language rather than their mother tongue. Still, there is no such thing as a bilingual speaker who would achieve a whole utterance based on the lexis belonging completely to one of the two languages while using the grammatical structure of the other language. There are no such monstrosities.

Interferences only occur with bilinguals between the better mastered language (usually the mother tongue) and the newly acquired language and they become more intense when the latter is used in a specific environment.

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