

Language interaction

Is it valid to compare a bilingual's level of competence in a specific language with that of a native monolingual speaker? As suggested above, the interaction of innumerable linguistic, social and political variables which are part and parcel of social communication and domains has an inevitable effect on the linguistic practices of individuals, such as the way one language affects the other, namely *interference* and *alternation*.

In reference to what is called *contrastive analysis*, that is, the comparison of languages to analyze the differences between them, Baetens Beardsmore (1986:86) states that, in a bilingual's speech, there is no consistent correlation necessarily between the *degree* of difference between two linguistic *systems* and any interference or deviation from monoglot norms. However, Hoffman (1991:94) refers to attributes which can characterize the bilinguals' speech:

...when listening to bilinguals talking to each other, we can notice certain features which are absent from monolingual speech, such as a 'foreign accent', the incorporation (wholesale or in adapted form) of words or expressions from the other language, and sudden switches from one code to another, the latter perhaps occurring more than once within the same utterance.

Fundamental differences between the language of monoglot speakers and most bilingual speakers include:

- Interference
- Code-switching
- Code-mixing
- Borrowing

Perhaps the student should be advised from the outset that there is some degree of academic discussion, not to mention disagreement, regarding what constitutes some of the terminology which is used in this area of linguistic study and this is clearly reflected in Baetens Beardsmore's (1986) discussion.

Baker (2008) states that it is not that simple to differentiate between code-switching, code-mixing and language borrowing as they form a continuum and, according to Eastman (1992:1), "efforts to distinguish code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing are doomed."

However, despite any academic disagreement, it is necessary to continue investigating linguistic phenomena by which the speech of bilinguals can be distinguished from that of monoglots. With a view to introducing the student to additional terminology relevant to this topic, we should mention that the *source* of any borrowing which appears in a bilingual's language is referred to as the *source* or *donor language* and the language in which the borrowing is incorporated is known as the *recipient language*.

Interference

Baetens Beardsmore (1986:70) states:

It can often be seen when examining interference that the greater the points of similarity between two discrete language systems the greater the likelihood of interference.

Mackey (1968:569) provides us with a simple definition:

Interference is the use of features belonging to one language while speaking or writing another.

According to Romaine (1995:51), “what has been called ‘interference’ is ultimately a product of the bilingual individual’s use of more than one language in everyday interaction.”

Weinreich (1953:1) defines interference as:

...those instances of 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 i.e. as a result of language contact.

This is, arguably, akin to Mackey’s (1968) definition, although Jones (1997) contentiously interprets the use of the word ‘deviation’ as a negative connotation. The term ‘interference’ has been, historically, and is still often perceived as a negative linguistic phenomenon, suggesting that there is a problem with a bilingual’s speech (Baker, 2006). For example, in Oestreicher’s (1974:9) description of bilingualism as “complete mastery of two different languages *without interference*” (italics added), the term implies a deficit.

Grosjean (1982: 299) refers to interference as “the *involuntary* influence of one language on the other”, which again suggests a more negative definition than that of Weinreich (1953), “involuntary” implying that it is not intended to happen. In comparing code-switching and interference (see below), Baetens Beardsmore (1986:75) implies the *involuntary* nature of the latter by emphasising the element of *deliberation* attached to the former and provides examples of code-switching “operating as a fairly conscious device.”

...it would seem that interference is determined by internal linguistic factors, whereas code-switching is determined by extra-linguistic factors. Bilingual speakers with more than one language at their disposal may *choose* to use the whole repertoire of linguistic elements available, where the monoglot might interpret the inclusion of elements extraneous to one of the languages as manifestations of interference.

Since interference is acknowledged to be a norm when bilingual people interact with each other, should we accept more neutral definitions?

Sharwood-Smith and Kellerman (1986:1) suggest that the more neutral term ‘cross-linguistic influence’ should be used when one language influences another,

whereas Edwards (2006) states: “Some writers have...opted for the more neutral term *transference* which implies, among other things, a greater element of volition.”

Baetens Beardsmore (1986:44-46) in distinguishing between the linguistic behaviour of the bilingual and the monoglot, however, emphasizes the importance of *communicative competence* and the need to consider “not only the knowledge possessed by the user of the formal code of a particular language or languages but also the social implications of choice within and across the languages involved.” Therefore, whereas interference was originally seen in the narrowest of terms, as reflected in Mackey’s (1968) definition for example, Baetens Beardsmore (1986:45) argues that:

...the notion of communicative competence...has widened the scope of enquiry beyond the purely formal linguistic elements to include other features of linguistic behaviour which can possibly distinguish a bilingual from a monoglot. Thus it is doubtful whether every departure from the monoglot norm by the introduction of elements extraneous to given language should be seen as interference.

Widening the notion of interference to include social use of language and aspects other than those which are purely *linguistic* also enables a valid investigation of what Baetens Beardsmore (1986:46) calls *negative interference*, that is, the *omission* of elements in the bilingual’s speech but which *would* be included in that of the native monoglot speaker. The avoidance of the *passé simple* in French is offered as an example, to which we could add the avoidance of short forms of verbs in the preterite tense in Welsh in favour of periphrastic alternatives.

Aspects of Interference

Despite arguments *against* treating every deviation from monoglot norms as interference in the bilingual’s speech by giving due consideration to more strategic aspects of communicative competence, nevertheless, it is also important to discuss those *linguistic* features which have historically been identified with interference. Interference from one language to another comes in different forms:

- Phonological: a ‘non-native’ accent
- Lexical: e.g. nouns, adjectives
- Grammatical: e.g. syntactical characteristics
- Prosodic: differences in stress and intonation between languages

Phonological Interference

Weinreich (1953:24) states that interference is most prevalent in terms of phonology:

...it requires a relatively high degree of cultural sophistication in both languages for a speaker to afford the structural luxury of maintaining separate subphonemic habits in each.

When someone speaks a language with a foreign accent there is interference at the level of pronunciation. Although phonological interference occurs at various levels, Romaine (1995) states that it is often thought to be the most pervasive. However, as Baetens Beardsmore (1986:71) points out, phonology is perhaps “the most difficult area of all for the avoidance of interference...though often the child or early bilingual has no problems here.”

Elaborating on this last point, Baetens Beardsmore refers to “standard theory on language acquisition as developed by Lenneberg (1967) which posits a critical age of approximately 11 + for the development of language ability, be it in monoglots or bilinguals.” This is referred to by other academics (Asher & Garcia, 1982) as the *sensitive* period for the acquisition of an interference-free phonological system in young bilinguals. Evidence from experiments seems to show that children who achieve early bilingualism (that is, before approximately 11 years of age) develop native-like phonological systems in both languages, whereas late bilinguals fail to develop separate systems after the age of puberty despite continuing usage of the second language. The resulting interference is caused by the reduced level of ‘plasticity’ in the area of the brain which processes phonological aspects of language acquisition, thus causing L2 sounds to be fused with L1. Baetens Beardsmore (1986:71-73), based on the work of Weinreich (1953), refers to four types of phonological interference:

- under-differentiation
- over- differentiation
- re-interpretation
- phone substitution

and provides an account of each which the student is invited to investigate further. However, since this module is not a course on pure linguistics, the above will suffice in illustrating one aspect which can distinguish the speech of some bilinguals from that of monoglot speakers.

Phonological interference, arguably, raises wider political and socio-cultural issues in addition to those related directly to pure linguistic aspects. Simply put, with which monoglot norm does one measure phonological interference? What are the criteria by which we make a comparison? Bearing in mind that English is increasingly a global language, does an American or an Australian accent constitute phonological interference, or for that matter, most accents heard in Britain? As Chin & Wigglesworth (2007:13) point out in Reading 1:

With many languages, the issue of what constitutes native-speakerness has become more complex with increasing globalisation. Many researchers...discuss the difficulties of identifying who native-speakers are with the creation of local identities and increasing diversity.

Lexical Interference

In relation to lexical transfer, Haugen (1956) states that *nouns* are the most likely forms of interference in another language whereas grammatical, functional words are the least.

Both bilinguals and monolinguals are *aware* of the common practice of this form of linguistic alteration, especially if they live in a bilingual country or where languages exist in close proximity. This *awareness* may be especially true of monolinguals since, being able to speak only one language, they cannot engage in lexical interference in any regular fashion but are very conscious of it in the speech of those who can and tend to treat it as a linguistic deficiency.

Edwards (2006) gives the example of a French speaker in Brussels using the Dutch 'vogelpik' rather than 'fléchettes' in a game of darts.

Nouns and adjectives are more likely to interfere in another language *in their original form* than verbs and adverbs e.g. television, computer, peaches, slow. For example, when English verbs are sometimes adopted by Welsh-speakers, the verb is morphologically adapted by adding an '-o' in the infinitive form e.g. 'wreito' (to write), the correct form being 'ysgrifennu'.

Lexical interference is often the most perceived as indicating linguistic weakness in bilingual proficiency and as the detrimental effects of bilingualism. However, as Baetens Beardsmore (1986:94) mentions, such interference does not necessarily reflect any *dominance* of one language over the other since "it may be accounted for by cultural and technological developments which cannot be handled with ease in the importing language."

Grammatical / Syntactical Interference

Grammatical interference can sometimes be seen in the *syntactical* influence of one language on another. Baetens Beardsmore (1986:69) states that "the most obvious case of structural interference is that manifested by word order divergences from monoglot norms." For example, in Welsh, an emphasis is usually placed at the beginning of a sentence. Therefore, whereas in spoken English one would normally say "He lives in London", Welsh-speakers might sometimes say "In London he lives", based on the Welsh "Yn Llundain mae e'n byw". Interestingly however, such syntactical interference can, on occasions, also transfer to the spoken *English* of some who do not speak Welsh.

Adopting the wrong preposition from another language to accompany verbs is another example of grammatical interference e.g. 'siarad i rywun' instead of 'siarad â rhywun' (speaking to someone) due to the influence of the English preposition 'to' (in the direction of e.g. to London) = 'i' in Welsh.

Edwards (2006:18) provides the example of "Tu prends ton plus haut chiffre" ("You take your highest figure") which reflects the correct practice in Dutch of placing the adjective before the noun, but which would be incorrect in this case in French. Baetens Beardsmore (1986:70) refers to the tendency amongst English – French bilinguals "to neglect the gender agreement of adjectives or past participles in French because of their absence in English."

An increasingly common practice in Welsh is to express the genitive case in the same way as the English. Whereas this can often be expressed in two ways in English (e.g. 'the boy's mother' or 'the mother of the boy') there is only one way in Welsh ('mam y bachgen'). However, when the second method is the only one available in English, it also tends to affect the mode of expression in Welsh e.g. 'the first month of the year' becomes 'y mis cyntaf o'r flwyddyn' where the definite

article is incorrectly used twice (as in English) instead of once ('mis cyntaf y flwyddyn').

Prosodic Interference

Baetens Beardsmore (1986:73) refers to this aspect of interference as “the least well-documented in the literature”, describing “the subtle differences in stress and intonation patterns between two languages” as being “amongst the earliest patterns established in language acquisition and consequently probably most deeply anchored...”

The fact that interference may not necessarily reflect any linguistic ‘weakness’ is arguably confirmed by the way Baetens-Beardsmore (1986) distinguishes between interference and code-switching i.e. that interference may be due to internal linguistic factors whereas code-switching is due to non-linguistic factors (see below). Hoffmann (1991:96) explains the difference by stating that interference is present in the speech of bilinguals when also speaking to monolinguals, whereas code-switching is evident when bilinguals speak to other bilinguals.

With regard to the connection between interference and language *dominance* (see below), Baetens Beardsmore (1986) raises the issue of how *language distance* i.e. the extent to which two languages differ from each other, can affect the amount and type of interference.

Integration

A further complication arises when we consider what is termed *integration* i.e. when the constant use of a borrowed word is finally integrated in a language and assumes general usage.

Baetens Beardsmore (1986:50) draws attention to this issue:

A further problem with the notion of interference is pinning down the stage when an element extraneous to a particular code by monoglot norms but constantly present in bilingual speech has stopped being a question of interference.

Baetens Beardsmore defines the term *integration* as “the *regular use* of material from one language in another in the form of an established loan, particularly when no alternative ‘non-foreign’ is known or used” and provides the French word ‘blasé’ regularly used in English as an example. Another example used in English, arguably, is the Welsh word ‘eisteddfod’ which is a musical, literary and cultural festival. However, this is an example of where categorisation becomes difficult since it is only used to refer to the festival being held in Wales and, although used regularly in Wales amongst English speakers (since no other term exists), perhaps not as regularly outside Wales.

Words can also be categorized as being examples of integration rather than interference when they have been changed phonologically or morphologically.

Jones(1997) refers to Morris-Jones (1988) who quotes ‘pwtu’ in Welsh (derived from the English ‘to put’) and Baetens Beardsmore (1986:50) refers to the use of the French word ‘liqueur’ [likœr] which is pronounced [lik’juə] in English. Therefore, when such a change does not happen, it remains an interference. However, Baetens Beardsmore (1986) shows how this qualification remains problematic (pp. 50-51), and later (pp.52-56) illustrates the importance of contextualising any investigation of purely *linguistic* phenomena (within the so-called “interference-integration dichotomy”) in a wider sociolinguistic framework, especially in the case of what is referred to as “residual bilingual” communities.

Mackey (1976) tries to illustrate the distinction between interference and the process of integration by placing each on opposite ends of a continuum and on a scale of 0-100% according to the level of *usage* in the recipient language, but, arguably, succeeds rather more in showing how difficult it is to separate the two:

0%	100%
Interference	Integration

As previously mentioned, grammatical interference often appears in the use of wrong syntax or the wrong preposition. However, whereas this is often seen as a sign of weakness in bilingual competence, it is often the case that fluency in both languages can cause grammatical interference to become *integrated* without any awareness on the part of the speaker.

Code-switching and Code-mixing

One often distinguishes between code-switching and code-mixing by saying that code-switching describes the change from one language to another at sentence level, whereas code-mixing usually denotes a switch at word level *within* a sentence. Gumperz (1982:59) defines code-switching as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems.”

Baker (2011:107) provides a simple example to distinguish between the two. “Leo un magazine” (I read a magazine) is code-mixing: “Come to the table. Bwyd yn barod (Food is ready)” is code-switching. However, such differentiation is not as clear in Baker (2017: 98) due to the decision to “simply use the term codeswitching to refer to any switches between languages that occur within or across sentences during the same conversation or discourse.”

As previously mentioned, it is often difficult to distinguish between them, Eastman (1992:1) being of the opinion that “Efforts to distinguish between code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing are doomed.” Code-switching is often perceived as showing a lack of proficiency in both languages. Edwards (2006:19) refers to such disparaging terms as Tex-Mex, Franglais and Japlish to which we could add Wenglish, although Romaine (1995:120) believes that it is a “natural and frequent part of bilingual behaviour”. Meisel (2004) sees the practice of code-switching amongst bilinguals as reflecting a higher level of linguistic proficiency. Likewise, rather than being an indication of

linguistic deficiency, code-switching has also been noted as one of the *cognitive* benefits of being bilingual i.e. that code-switching is a sign of mental flexibility. Neufeld (1974), however, is critical of this standpoint and points out that monoglot speakers also change linguistic *registers* to accommodate different situations and contexts.

Baetens Beardsmore (1986:49) believes that “code-switching is not arbitrary but rule governed and depends on factors such as topic, code being used, situation and participants”, an aspect of code-switching known as ‘situational shifting’ which has occupied the attention of some scholars. Baker (2011) also maintains that there are a number of factors and variables which determine the amount of code-switching in a conversation, such as the status of the listener (or the speaker’s perception of the listener), the topic, and in what context the conversation takes place. Furthermore, Baker (2017: 98-103) analyses code-switching and, in addition, *translanguaging*, outlining how both have a wide range of overlapping purposes in everyday conversation, including:

- to emphasise a point
- to substitute a word or phrase a person may not know in a language
- for ease and efficiency of expression
- to reinforce a request
- for repetition to clarify
- to be accepted by a group or to express group identity
- to quote someone
- to interject in a conversation
- to exclude someone from a conversation
- to cross social and ethnic boundaries
- to ease tension in a conversation

Weinreich (quoted in Romaine, 1989) maintains that code-switching happens under the influence of the location, the subject of the conversation and the context or domains, whereas Gumperz (1982) believes that the speaker is more responsible for code-switching than the domains themselves. According to Edwards (1994:82):

...if context determines linguistic choice then, equally,
language (or dialect or accent or style) choice can influence
the psychological situation.

As Hoffman (1991), points out, code-switching can reflect a powerful inter-personal dynamic other than that which is purely linguistic (see also Communication Accommodation Theory below):

Code-switching, then, constitutes a habitual and often necessary part of social interaction among bilinguals. Whereas monolinguals have only one linguistic code at their disposal, bilinguals can rely on a four-way choice (the two languages and various forms of mixed and switched codes, since they are able to code-switch in both their languages). (Hoffman, 1991:116)

Baetens Beardsmore (1986:47) makes it clear that he does consider code-switching to be a reflection of interference:

A further problem connected with the delimitation of the concept of interference, even, at the formal level, is that of deciding when the use of elements of one language within the context of another ceases to be interference but represents a switch in language, or *code-switching*.

As suggested, distinguishing between interference and code-switching can be problematic. Haugen's (1956:40) explanation is that code-switching (as opposed to interference) happens when a large chunk of one language is adopted in the course of using the other. However, Baetens-Beardsmore (1986:47-48) succeeds in showing how difficult it can be to apply such a distinction.

According to Myers Scotton (1983, 1991), code-switching can reflect a tendency to make a deliberate or purposeful change of language (e.g. for social, economic or political reasons), in which case it is called "marked choice of language." Where that is not the case, it is referred to as "unmarked choice of language." This, it seems, is a useful contribution to the debate in terms of emphasising a fundamental factor, namely, a *deliberate decision* on the part of the bilingual to switch languages.

Borrowing

Borrowing is usually a term applied to the use of a foreign word in another language e.g. 'le weekend' in French.

Grosjean (1982) differentiates between *code-switching* and *borrowing* by stating that borrowing is when a word has been morphologically adapted and code-switching is when it has not. Therefore, as Jones (1997) points out, according to Grosjean (1982) 'code-switched' would be code-switching in the middle of a French sentence whereas 'code-switché' would be borrowing.

Appel & Muysken (1987:172), however, highlight problems of definition whilst trying to differentiate between *code-mixing* and borrowing:

The classical view is that code-mixing and borrowing can easily be kept apart : with code-mixing the non-native items are not adapted morphologically and phonologically, with borrowing they are.

We, therefore, have the same difference in definition between:

1. *Code-switching* and borrowing (Grosjean,1982) and
2. *Code-mixing* and borrowing (Appel & Muysken,1987).

This, possibly, reminds us again of the earlier observation made by Eastman (1992:1): "Efforts to distinguish between code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing are doomed".

Does code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing happen in both directions and to what extent do these linguistic phenomena reflect the status of languages or other sociolinguistic factors within a bilingual or diglossic context? These are questions which are again linked to issues discussed in the next module (ECDA-7011: Societal Bilingualism) and show the inter-connectedness of variables which impinge on linguistic behaviour at the individual and societal level. However, perhaps we can make some generalisations.

Conditions which contribute to the adaptation (or otherwise) of words in the process of being borrowed from other languages.

The following conditions may be said to contribute to the further adaptation of a borrowed word:

- Frequency of use
- How quickly it will enter the adoptive language and displace the original word, either partially or totally
- How quickly it can be adapted phonologically or grammatically to the adoptive language (Hoffman,1991)
- Whether or not it is transferred from a high status language to a language of lower status; this being the normal process usually rather than the opposite. However, there are exceptions, such as words which relate to specific cultures and which do not exist in other majority cultures.
- Words which are often offensive (Baetens-Beardsmore, 1986).