

THEMA: FEATURES OF BILINGUAL SPEECH – INTERFERENCE, BORROWING,

CODE-SWITCHING

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Interference	3
2.1 Phonological Interference	3
2.2 Grammatical Interference	5
2.3 Lexical Interference	6
a) Interference at the word level:	6
b) Semantic interference:	7
2.4 Interference in spelling	7
3. Borrowing	8
3.1 Lexical Borrowing	8
a) Loanwords	10
b) Loanblends	10
c) Loanshifts:	11
3.2 Grammatical Borrowing	11
4. Code-switching	13
4.1 Why do bilinguals code-switch?	13
4.2 Types of code-switching	15
5. Conclusion	16
6. Bibliography	17

1. Introduction

Characteristics of bilingual speech have been of special interest for some decades now: Researchers hope to discover how language processing actually takes place, how bilinguals mentally organize their languages, and in which manner the two codes interact.

In the early 1960s, behaviourists and linguists established an activity termed “Contrastive Analysis“ (CA), in which grammatical structures of languages were examined for their similarities and differences. The intention of this research was to be able to predict sources of difficulty in second language acquisition.

The behaviourists viewed language acquisition as habit formation: Through the linguistic input of their surroundings and positive ‘feedback’ for correct speech production, learners were said to develop their proficiency. In this process, L1A (‘Language one acquisition’) was regarded as the ‘building up of habits’, L2A (‘Language two acquisition’) as the process of retaining and making good use of them where the two languages resemble each other, and overcoming these L1 habits where they differ.

This theory assumes that learners rely on their L1-habits when acquiring a second language. According to the ‘CAH’ (‘contrastive analysis hypothesis’), structural similarities are learnt without difficulty, whereas differences between the codes often cause problems. The CAH has more or less been abandoned, as it both failed to predict all of the errors that indeed occurred and falsely suggested errors that were never made.

Yet it can hardly be doubted that a learner’s mother tongue has an impact on the acquisition of the foreign language. However, this phenomenon cannot simply be put down to ‘habits’; it is “rather a systematic attempt by the learner to use knowledge already acquired in learning a new language.“

In this paper, I shall try to give a survey of the most important features of bilingual speech, i.e. interference, borrowing, and code-switching. They will be illustrated with examples either from literature or, as far as possible, from my own experience with bilinguals.

2. Interference

Interference is one of the most essential features of bilingual speech. There are several approaches to define this concept, which is also called (negative) transfer. The linguist Uriel Weinreich described 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’; it is thus the influence of structures, rules and elements from the source language in the production of the target language. Or, to put it very briefly, interference is “[l]earners’ use of patterns of the first language in second language sentences.”

L1 and L2 must resemble each other in a way to give rise to interference. If they lack any similarity, transfer is highly improbable, which is the case between German and Chinese, for instance, since their syntactical structures notably differ from each other.

In contrast to borrowing and code-switching, interference is mainly regarded as a rather involuntary process; but this categorization has often been criticized, since there is evidence for both voluntary and involuntary occurrence of all these phenomena.

Four different types of interference have been distinguished:

2.1 Phonological Interference

Phonological interference involves the transfer of the phonological system of L1 to L2, which also includes the sound characteristics of the first language, e.g. stress, rhythm, and intonation. This type of interference is likely where sound features of the two languages differ from each other, or if an element of one language is not represented in the other.

Phonological interference is mostly observed in older learners, as the phonological system of their mother tongue tends to affect their pronunciation of L2. This phenomenon can be put down to neurological and physiological grounds: Adding new pronunciation habits to the existing ones appears to cause great difficulty.

The ‘th’, for example, which is produced as either [θ] or [ð], is a very typical sound feature of the English language, and speakers of other mother tongues which do not have this particular sound often cannot produce it properly. Therefore, they often replace it with a seemingly

corresponding sound of their native language. Germans, for instance, often use [s] resp. [z] instead, while others, e. g. native speakers of Arabic languages, pronounce [d] or [t] for [ð] and [θ]. This shows clearly that phonological interference can easily be recognized as a 'foreign accent'.

Examples:

- French speakers of German often leave out the glottal stop, which is barely used in French, but accounts for the typical sound of German. Consequently, French speakers frequently fail to differentiate between the words 'vereisen' and 'verreisen', which they often pronounce alike.
- Both English and German dispose of a highly complex vowel system which consists of about 16-20 vowels and diphthongs, whereas Greek and Italian only use 5 to 7 different vowel sounds. Consequently, Italian and Greek speakers of German are prone not to distinguish between long and short vowels: Thus, both 'sit' and 'seat' might come out as [sit].
- In German, consonants in final position are devoiced, thus 'Rad' and 'Rat' are pronounced alike. Due to this speech-habit of devoicing, native speakers of German often fail to differentiate between 'bag' and 'back', or 'and' / 'ant'.

2.2 Grammatical Interference

Grammatical Interference refers to syntactical features, that is, sentence structure (=word order), use of pronouns and determiners, prepositions, tense, etc. In English, for instance, adverbs or adverbial clauses of time are normally placed at the end of a sentence, which contrasts to e.g. Israelian and German word order. Thus Israelian or German speakers attempting to speak English might produce sentences like:

- "I went three years ago to London."
- "I bought yesterday the car."

Germans may be prone to transfer their familiar negation patterns to English:

- “Seine Mutter ging nicht aufs College und sein Vater *auch nicht*“ ⇒ “His mother didn’t go to college and his father *didn’t* go, *too*.” – Contrarily to German, English has a special expression for the negation of ‘too’.
- “You go not swimming.”/ (You don’t go...)
- “I want not play.”

Moreover, German word order and sentence structure often give rise to utterances like the following:

- “Speak you English?”
- “They have hunger“ can be derived from either German or Spanish influence: “Sie haben Hunger“ resp. “Ellos tienen hambre“

Prepositions are very often subject to be interference from L1 to L2, though monolingual children also have a tendency to confuse them:

- “I’m good *in* maths“ (at) ⇒ gut sein in
- “this is typical *for* him“ (of) ⇒ typisch für
- “ich gratuliere *auf*“ ⇒ to congratulate s.o. *on* s.th.

typical “false friends“ derived from German speech habits:

- “In her position as president...” (of)
- “I have not seen them for long years“ (many)

Especially Germans have difficulty in properly using the Present Perfect, since there is no German equivalent of this tense : “I have seen him yesterday“ ⇒ Ich habe ihn gestern gesehen.

- Czech (adult) learners of English often leave out articles when speaking English, because Czech does not have any articles: “I should like to learn foreign language.“

2.3 Lexical Interference

Two different types of lexical interference can be distinguished:

a) Interference at the word level:

The use of a word from the source language (L1) while speaking the target language. One common reason for this is 'linguistic deficiency': a non-native speaker does not know a certain word, so he tries to make himself understood by replacing it with a word from his mother tongue. This 'borrowed' word can even be adapted phonetically and/or morphologically according to the rules of L2:

– An English-Spanish bilingual child could not think of the Spanish word for "belt" (cinturón) when she wanted to ask her father if he was going to wear it: "Te vas a poner el belto?"

or: "Pam, can you *desentie* this?" (untie) ⇒ Spanish morpheme for "undoing"; "de la *scula*" (school), "*lokar*" ⇒ from English "lock" plus Spanish infinitive word ending; or: "*sender*" ⇒ "to send"

– the calf ⇒ "das Kalf"

b) Semantic interference:

the meaning of a word from L1 is extended to a corresponding word in L2.

An example of this is the semantic transfer that has been noticed in the German of Greek children:

– "warum" was used for both "why" and "because", resp. "warum" und "deshalb" in German, while Turkish children never came up with this mistake. It can easily be concluded that Greek does not have a single lexical item for these two words, whereas Turkish distinguishes them.

Another example of semantic transfer was provided by Saunders, 1982:

– a nearly 5 year-old German-English bilingual wanted to tell his English mother that he and his father had bought air tickets for the summer holidays: "Mum, we got the cards."

Mother (not understanding): "What cards?"

–"The card so we could go to Grandma's."

In this example, the meaning of English 'card' is overextended to include 'ticket'; as "Karte" can mean 'card', 'ticket', and 'map'.

A very recent occurrence that nicely illustrates this overextension is the new ticket system of our local transport services: They now distinguish 'tickets' and 'cards'. Nonetheless, the latter are certainly supposed to be tickets, too.

Moreover, semantic transfer often occurs in idioms or idiomatic expressions:

- “I’ll press my thumbs for you“
- “das läuft in der Familie“ (=das liegt in der Familie) (it runs in the family)

2.4 Interference in spelling

This kind of interference means the transfer of writing habits or conventions of one language to the other. It predominantly occurs when learners of a language are not very familiar with its orthography yet, and therefore they might be tempted to apply the rules of spelling of their native language and/or follow their perception of the less familiar language:

- “Adresse“ (address); “es felt mir schwer“; “korregieren“ (correct).

The spelling might also correspond to the perception: “Pilts“; “Geschpräch“.

3. Borrowing

“[M]orphemes and grammatical relations belonging to one language can occur in the speech of another language as borrowings“.

Borrowing is another feature of bilingual speech, which, confusingly enough, is often aligned with interference. Weinreich for example does not distinguish between interference and borrowing; however, a considerable number of his examples of lexical interference would as well meet the criteria for borrowing. According to his concept, lexical interference is the transfer of a sequence of phonemes into another language. Weinreich does not use a special term to distinguish this phenomenon from other sorts of transfer, yet his definition matches up with other linguists’ understanding of ‘borrowing’ as “the incorporation from language F into language S of a form (with or without its associated meaning) previously absent in S.“

In fact, there might be a theoretical need to keep transfers and borrowings apart, but this appears to be barely possible in many cases. Many linguists try to separate these two concepts by describing borrowing as an unpredictable “performance strategy“ which is meant to bridge gaps in the interlanguage, whereas transfer belongs to the acquaintance process.

Borrowing is mainly subcategorized in 1) lexical and 2) grammatical borrowing.

3.1 Lexical Borrowing

Lexical borrowing is generally perceived as the incorporation of lexical items of other languages. In the past, many languages borrowed words from Greek and Latin, but these days, English has obviously become the 'dominant' language, though it has also borrowed words from other languages: "Zeitgeist", "Angst", "kindergarten", "hinterland", and "wurst" are just a few examples loaned from German.

Nevertheless, most words are definitely adopted the other way round, that is, English is the prevailing "donor" or "source" language.

Language purists claim that borrowing can even lead to language decay, e.g. in case two languages do not transfer words mutually, the process of loaning is restricted to one direction. That is, one language borrows massively from the other, while the latter only adds "folklore" words which belong to a special cultural environment and cannot be found outside. The German term "Abendbrot" is a good example of a "folklore" word which cannot be translated easily, since it evokes specific associations and connotations which are closely connected to German culture. Purists also point out that loanwords do not enrich a language, but impoverish it, for they often substitute indigenous words. This substitution is called "relexification", that is "the replacement of the vocabulary of one language with that of another language, while maintaining the original grammar" as far as possible, since the transfer of function words for instance often brings about grammatical changes. Therefore, relexification can also belong to the category of grammatical borrowing. It might even go along with "linguistic colonialism", as it happened with the Breton indigenous names for diseases which have been completely substituted by non-indigenous concepts.

In order to systematize lexical borrowing, some linguists term two 'actions', namely importation and substitution: Importation means the transfer of a particular pattern (e.g. morphemes) into the language, whereas substitution "involves replacing something from another language with a native pattern."

Both substitution and importation account for different types of borrowing at the lexical level: loanwords, loanblends, and loanshifts

a) Loanwords

This is the most widespread kind of borrowing; morphemes are imported, substitution may occur at the phonemic level.

The examples above of German words transferred to English (e.g. kindergarten) are typical examples of loanwords.

Despite the efforts of the French Academy to forbid 'franglais' words, 'le parking', 'le weekend', 'le hotdog' are widely used in France.

Expressions loaned from English are, for instance, "Jazz, Jeep, Job, Jogging, Image, Manager, Jeans...". Many speakers integrate these words phonetically according to 'German pronunciation habits' by replacing the original [dz] sound with a more or less devoiced [tʃ]. A German 'counterexample' that rather copies the original English pronunciation is "Computer": This is indeed the only 'German' word with the sequence [pj].

b) Loanblends

Both importation and morphemic substitution are involved, as a part of the foreign model is imported and another part of it replaced by an element which is already in the borrower language. Examples of this are hybrids like Dutch 'soft-ware huis' (from soft-ware house), and German 'Second-hand-Laden', 'Codewort'.

In addition, a morpheme (often a suffix) which belongs to the recipient language could be added to the original word stem to create a loanblend. Thus 'surfen, joggen, rappen, biken, recyclen, skaten' were formed by attaching the German suffix -(e)n which indicates the infinitive ending.

The verb 'einloggen' was derived from 'to log in/on'; it was integrated into German by the prefix 'ein' corresponding to English 'in/on', put at the top of the new formed word similar to verbs like 'einladen, einreisen' + German infinitive suffix.

c) Loanshifts:

Loanshifts are also called loan translations, since they are literal translations of items imported from the donor language/culture. Thus it could be regarded as an importation of meaning, substitution is not involved.

'Skyscraper' has been the source for loanshifts to numerous other languages: German *Wolkenkratzer*, French *gratte-ciel*, Spanish *rasca-cielos*, Italian *grattacielo* are its direct equivalents.

The Hebrew */mixonat ktiva/* (typewriter) literally means 'writing machine'; it may come from either the French *machine à écrire* or from 'Schreibmaschine'. Such is the case with */gan yeladim/*, which means 'garden of children.'

Loaning terms from other languages is often accompanied by change of meaning. A good example of this would be the expression 'fix', which exists in English, French (fixe), and German. It was originally derived from Latin *fixus*, implying something like 'solid, immovable'. This meaning has been retained in French and English, but only partly in German, e.g. in compositions like "ein fixes Gehalt". In colloquial speech, however, it means 'quick, fast': "Das geht fix". Yet this shift of meaning is not as illogical as it appears, since the word 'fast' in English corresponds exactly to German 'fix'. Perhaps subconscious associations link up these conceptions of firmness – power – speed.

3.2 Grammatical Borrowing

According to Appel & Muysken, at least five different ways account for grammatical borrowing:

- a) convergence
- b) cultural influence and lexical borrowing
- c) relexification
- d) second-language learning
- e) imitation of prestige patterns

a) Convergence is "the achievement of structural similarity in a given aspect of the grammar of two or more languages, assumed to be different at the onset of contact." Thus the interaction of two languages spoken in the same area and more or less by the same people may converge if these languages coexist for a long period of time. It mostly starts off at the phonetic level, that is the sound features may become increasingly alike, without favouring one direction. This phonological convergence has occurred between Chinese and Tibetan, some dialects of Swedish and Norwegian, and between Baltic languages, for example. Convergence may also influence syntactical and grammatical approximation.

b), c) Cultural influence often leads to lexical borrowing, often at the idiosyncratic level or as a complete relexification, which has been dealt with in 3.1.

c) Second-language learning / Language acquisition: A language may change considerably when e.g. emigrants take it to a region with another mother tongue and people from that area learn it as a second language. In that case items of their native language may have a substrate influence. A number of differences between the Roman languages, which have all developed from Vulgar Latin, can be put down to the influence of a specific substrate: For example, French has borrowed elements from Franconian and Celtic substrate languages, whereas Spanish has been influenced by Basque.

e) Imitation of prestige language patterns: A language may borrow patterns of a prestigious language as far as they can easily be adopted to the recipient language. Therefore, this kind of borrowing is restricted to a very superficial stage; very complex structures of a language cannot be integrated into a differing language. This has occurred with many Latin expressions which were considered highly sophisticated; they were adopted by various European languages in the Renaissance.

4. Code-switching

Code-switching is “the alternate use of two languages or linguistic varieties within the same utterance or during the same conversation.” Code-switching can occur across sentence and phrase boundaries and concern both single and complex lexical items. This phenomenon is often called mixing when it takes place within a single sentence (intra-sentential code-switching). Code-switching is neither connected to age nor gender; i.e. it can be found in children as well as in adults of both sexes. A considerable degree of proficiency is required to enable bilinguals to code-switch within one sentence. Therefore, children are said not to code-switch until they have achieved thorough knowledge of their codes.

4.1 Why do bilinguals code-switch?

There are various reasons why bilingual speakers code-switch frequently:

If a learner of a foreign language is not very proficient yet, he/she often tries to gap this deficiency and try to convey meaning by shifting to the native tongue. This lack of facility is evident in the following utterance of an Italian-German bilingual child who obviously has not come across the German word for handkerchief: “Mami hat gekauft für Lisa ein fazzoletto.”

Code-switching on grounds of unfamiliarity with a language has been termed serving the “referential function.” Or, correspondingly, e.g. in conversations requiring a specific vocabulary, the speaker may also switch out of consideration for his partner who is not as familiar with the language. This type of switching which serves the referential function is the most conscious one; people are normally well aware of the different languages they put together.

Proficient bilinguals often use it as a rhetorical device, e.g. for highlighting or saying something very emphatically, or repeating it.

Switching also occurs when a speaker quotes another person.

They may also prefer one language depending on different environments, themes, and contextual situations, e.g. a particular expression of one of the languages may have special unique connotations, therefore this language is chosen. Thus code-switching has a “phatic” function, it marks a change in tone of the conversation, and has also been termed “metaphorical switching”. This is very effective in monolingual discourse, too; e.g. switching from Standard English to a regional dialect may point out a shift from formal to colloquial speech and mood.

Another ‘rhetorical use’ of code-switching serves the “poetic function of language”; it is used for puns and jokes and reflects a playful use of language. A passage in Molière’s *Malade imaginaire* exemplifies a mix-up of Latin, Italian, and French:

Quam bella cosa et bene trovata,
Medicina illa benedicta,
Quae suo nomine solo,
Surprenanti miraculo,
Depuis si longo tempore,
Facit à gogo vivere
Tant de gens omni genere.

Code-switching can also serve a directive function; i. e. it is employed consciously to include or exclude persons from a conversation.

Extra-linguistic motivation can also explain the code-switching of some bilinguals: Using two languages in a conversation can be meant to stress the mixed identity, the sense of belonging

to two different countries and cultures.. This is also called “the expressive function” of code-switching.

4.2 Types of code-switching

Several aspects can initiate code-switching, e.g. so-called trigger words: A word taken over from another language often sets off a shift to this language: “[...] handelt von einem alten *secondhand-dealer and his son.*“

In this example, the word ‘secondhand-dealer’ produces a language shift affecting the following sequence as well.

Another type of this internally conditioned switching = triggering is this quotation: “...haben wir ON A *farm* gewohnt.“ In this example the switched words (which are capitalized here) anticipate the trigger word (in italics).

Both examples account for intra-sentential mixing, which is also termed code-mixing.

Emblematic switching concerns a short item like a tag or an exclamation; this type of switching seems like a brief, often emotional interjection, like in the following utterance of an adult Spanish-American English bilingual: “Oh! Ay! It was embarrassing! It was very nice, though, but I was embarrassed!”

Another example of emblematic switching was provided by a fairly excited three-year-old Russian-English bilingual:

*“Tam yest chto-to. Ty posmotrel i tam yest chto-to...Stop! Seychas’ ty vidish’ chto-to?
(There is something. You looked there and there is something...Stop! Now do you see something?)“*

A third type of code-switching is called inter-sentential, since it goes beyond sentence boundaries:

English is the world’s most complicated language when complicated things are to be said. Yet English is the world’s simplest language when things are to be said simply – which, as a rule, they should. Englisch hält Schritt mit Dir – it keeps pace with you, no matter how fast or slow you wish to move. Es wirft Dir nicht schon bei Deinen ersten fremdsprachlichen Gehversuchen Dutzende von Deklinations- und Konjugationsknüppel zwischen die Beine. Some languages do.

5. Conclusion

Interference, borrowing and code-switching are some of the most fundamental features of bilingual speech, and they have been subject to numerous different researches and studies. Many different approaches have produced a variety of hypotheses and theories that are often contradictory: Some linguists point out that there is no clear-cut distinction between these three phenomena, thus they do not thoroughly differentiate between them: Uriel Weinreich, for example, did not bother to separate (lexical) interference from borrowing. Others, however, carefully kept them apart, e.g. S. P. Corder, who considered borrowing a (conscious) performance strategy, whereas transfer was said to go along with the acquisition of a foreign language. Other linguists do not even equate transfer and interference, e.g. Clyne, who sees transfer as a mere descriptive term naming the phenomenon of language mixing, whereas interference always hints at its cause. Similarly, code-switching and interference often merge and thus cannot always be clearly distinguished.

In spite of numerous studies, only few questions have been answered satisfactorily, therefore more researches need to be carried out in order to perhaps find more definite categories or even other effects of bilingualism in speech production. Maybe the results could lead to new approaches to improve methods of second language teaching.

6. Bibliography

Appel, René & Muysken, Pieter, Language Contact and Bilingualism, London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1987.

Hoffmann, Charlotte, An Introduction to Bilingualism, Harlow: Longman, 1991.

Lansburgh, Werner, Dear Doosie, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1979.

Lightbown, Patsy, Nina Spada, (eds.), How Languages are Learned, 1st ed. 1993, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 rpt.

Oksaar, Els (ed.), Spracherwerb – Sprachkontakt – Sprachkonflikt, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1984.

Seliger, Herbert W., Vago, Robert M., (eds.), First language attrition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Selinker, Larry, Rediscovering Interlanguage, Harlow/Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1992.

Weinreich, Uriel, Sprachen in Kontakt – Ergebnisse und Probleme der Zweisprachigkeitsforschung, München: Beck, 1976.