

ON SOME PROBLEMS OF BILINGUALISM, CODE SWITCHING AND A SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Our study goes along the lines of the concept needed to understand how two languages (the native and the LSP) which are already in certain contact with each other, can serve as a good basis for a third language acquisition.

By becoming bilingual a person is affected as he/she tries to reach beyond the borders of the first language into a new one, a new culture a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. As language is part of culture, bilingualism develops a broader cultural understanding and multicultural sensitivity, greater tolerance and social harmony. The learning of a second language is a complex process and very few people achieve fluency in a foreign language only in the classroom. Knowledge, skills and concepts learnt in one language can easily be transferred into the other.

Bilingualism is an individual characteristics that may exist to degrees, varying from minimal competency to complete mastery of more than one language. The problem of evaluating the degree of bilingualism emerges. Such evaluation is complicated because any system intended to be used for evaluating bilingual competence must take into account the degree of competence in both comprehension and production in the spoken language as well as in the written mode of it. This kind of an evaluation system also has to consider the relative competence of the individual in the numerous stylistic variations in the speech code that characterize a native speaker. A new term, *balanced bilingual* is introduced which is used to refer to individuals fully competent in both languages.

Another issue regarding the problem of defining bilingualism is the question of what actually constitutes the notion of *different languages*. At one extreme an individual may be fluent in two languages from distinctly different language families or he might simply possess more than one stylistic variation of the same language (e.g. colloquial and formal Englishes). A bilingual is a person who speaks two or more languages, dialects or styles of speech that involve differences in sound, vocabulary and syntax. Under this definition most normal adult speakers of any language would be considered bilingual.

In general a bilingual is said to have one or two principal systems by which he organizes his two languages, namely *compound bilingualism* and *coordinate bilingualism*. The difference between these systems is one of relationship among a word in language *A*, the corresponding word in language *B* and the reference of each. If a speaker considers a word in language *A* as having the same meaning or reference as the corresponding word in language *B*, then he

has a compound system. It is generally expected that the factors of the environment will determine which language is predominantly used by the bilingual speaker. Two main factors influence bilingual's language behavior irrespective of the speech situation. These are the speaker's aptitude and his switching facility.

For bilinguals who have learned their two languages consecutively with a wide separation in time between the two, the ability to learn a foreign language will be an important factor in determining language performance in both the first and the second languages. To a speaker bilingual from early childhood, neither language is foreign, and a different type of ability must be involved. Some linguists think that early bilingualism is a handicap in the learning of a third language, while others think that it is beneficial. However, since language learning in the child is qualitatively different from language learning in the adult, childhood bilingualism will have no consistent effect on later ability to learn languages.

Code switching ability refers to the bilingual's facility at changing from one language to the other when appropriate. This should exclude switching back and forth when inappropriate, as for example in the middle of an utterance. The latter form of switching occurs commonly: a bilingual speaking language *A* who cannot think of a correct word and inserts its equivalent in language *B*. On the other hand, there are bilinguals who cannot switch back and forth between languages or only with the greatest difficulty. The proficient multilingual may frequently be this sort of speaker since the ability to learn a large number of languages may be necessarily concomitant to the ability to keep them all separated and not confuse them.

In the acquisition of two foreign languages after the native language has been mastered, two courses may follow: the languages may be studied consecutively or they may be studied concurrently. A possible solution is teaching both languages together in a coordinated program using a double class period of about two hours a day divided into thirds. The first third is devoted to instruction in language *A*; the second, to comparison between *A* and *B*, the third, to instruction in language *B*. A major advantage of this method is that it presents a controlled learning situation; the parallels between languages *A* and *B* can be presented.

In studying two foreign languages consecutively there is a technique which seems to be most appropriate, i.e. the teaching of the second foreign language using the first as a base, instead of in the student's native language. For example, a student who has studied English for three or four years and wants to learn Spanish, would take a course in Spanish, using a standard English teaching grammar of the Spanish language. Any spot translations found necessary would be from Spanish to English rather than Spanish to native language. Thus, the

student will be able to learn *B* without either having to suppress *A* or to lose his proficiency in it.

The goal of many language instructions is to induce students to form a series of linguistically coordinate systems of the foreign and native languages, so that each language learned would be a system in itself independent of other foreign languages controlled by the speaker, and his native language as well.

The basic linguistic problem besetting a bilingual speaker is interference, or influence of one of the speaker's languages upon the other. The term *interference* implies the rearrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domains of language. Interference may be phonological, morphological or syntactic. It is an inevitable concomitant of bilingualism, since at least in theory anyone who speaks two languages demonstrates some influence of one upon the other, regardless of circumstances of acquisition.

Interlingual interference is a far more striking problem in secondary than in primary bilingualism. Interference may take place at any level of the language. It is regarded as a syndrome rather than a unit process. The most common type of linguistic interference is probably phonological, i.e. interference between the sound systems of the speaker's two languages. The speaker, for whom language *A* is dominant, may fail to distinguish differences in language *B* which are not recognized in his dominant language. A speaker may also substitute phonemes from the dominant to the non-dominant language, as, for example a Russian-English bilingual who uses the Russian sound [x] instead of English [h] or the Russian sound [r] instead of English [t].

Morphological and syntactic interference frequently seem to be caused by attempts at literal translation (i.e. word for word or morpheme for morpheme), especially in languages which do not seem structurally incompatible to the speaker. In this case the sentences are built according to the structure of the dominant language. In most bilingual situations the speaker is more fluent and at ease in one of the languages, and shows less interference in this language. Such a speaker is likely to use with more confidence the language he/she speaks better. This may be because he/she learned the dominant language first and used it all his/her life adding the second only later. That is why most speakers do not show interference from their second to their first language.

The goal of modern foreign language teaching at some faculties of Russian-Armenian Slavonic University aims at creating within a limited time competence in two or more foreign languages, proficiently coordinating the acquisition process in two consecutive phases of study of the first and then the second and the third languages. This technique seems to be most appropriate as it allows to use the first foreign language, i.e. English not the native one, which at the above mentioned university is either Armenian or Russian as a basis of acquisition of the second or third language (Spanish, French, Persian, Arabic or

Turkish) through forming coordinate systems of languages which may be phonologically, lexically, morphologically or syntactically different but interconnected. Perfect competence and fluency in the first foreign language makes it possible to avoid language interference to a great extent.

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