

LANGUAGES IN CONTACT

FINDINGS AND PROBLEMS

by
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With a Preface by
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Preface

There was a time when the progress of research required that each community should be considered linguistically self-contained and homogeneous. Whether this autarcic situation was believed to be a fact or was conceived of as a working hypothesis need not detain us here. It certainly was a useful assumption. By making investigators blind to a large number of actual complexities, it has enabled scholars, from the founding fathers of our science down to the functionalists and structuralists of today, to abstract a number of fundamental problems, to present for them solutions perfectly valid in the frame of the hypothesis, and generally to achieve, perhaps for the first time, some rigor in a research involving man's psychic activity.

Linguists will always have to revert at times to this pragmatic assumption. But we shall now have to stress the fact that a linguistic community is *never* homogeneous and hardly ever self-contained. Dialectologists have pointed to the permeability of linguistic cells, and linguistic changes have been shown to spread like waves through space. But it remains to be emphasized that linguistic diversity begins next door, nay, at home and within one and the same man. It is not enough to point out that each individual is a battle-field for conflicting linguistic types and habits, and, at the same time, a permanent source of linguistic interference. What we heedlessly and somewhat rashly call 'a language' is the aggregate of millions of such microcosms many of which evince such aberrant linguistic comportment that the question arises whether they should not be grouped into other 'languages'. What further complicates the picture, and may, at the same time, contribute to clarify it, is the feeling of linguistic allegiance which will largely determine the responses of every individual. This, even more than sheer intercourse, is the cement that holds each one of our 'languages' together: It is different allegiance which makes two separate languages of Czech and Slovak more than the actual material differences between the two literary languages.

One might be tempted to define bilingualism as divided linguistic allegiance. Divided allegiance is what strikes the unilingual person as startling, abnormal, almost uncanny in bilingualism. Neither the layman nor the dialectologist will use the term 'bilingualism' in the case of country folks using alternately some form of a standard language and their own patois because there should be no linguistic allegiance to the latter. Yet the concept of linguistic allegiance is too vague to be of any help in deciding, in doubtful cases, whether or not we should diagnose a bilingual situation. Furthermore, nothing would be gained for the linguist by thus restricting the use of 'bilingualism' if this might induce the language contact specialist to exclude from his field a vast number of sociolinguistic situations that deserve careful consideration. The clash, in the same individual, of two languages of comparable social and cultural value, both spoken by millions of cultured unilinguals, may be psychologically most spectacular, but unless we have to do with a literary genius, the permanent linguistic

traces of such a clash will be nil. The coexistence, in a number of humble peasants, of two at times conflicting sets of linguistic habits, the one a prestigious language, the other a despised patois, may have important repercussions on the linguistic history of that part of the world. Linguistic allegiance is a fact, an important fact, but we should not let it decide when language contact begins.

We all, more or less, adapt our speech to circumstances and differentiate it from one interlocutor to another. Now this unceasing process of adaptation would seem to differ basically from what happens when we shift from one language to another, as from English to Russian. In the former case we, all the time, make use of the same system; what changes from one moment to the next, is our choice among the lexical riches and expressive resources which the language, always the same, puts at our disposal. In the latter case, we leave aside one totally homogeneous system and shunt off to another totally homogeneous one. This is at least what we assume would take place in an ideal bilingual situation. But to what extent is this situation actually realized? By the side of a few linguistic virtuosos who, by dint of constant cultivation, manage to keep their two, or more, linguistic mediums neatly distinct, wouldn't careful observation reveal in the overwhelming majority of cases some traces at least of structural merger? On the other hand couldn't we imagine all sorts of intermediate cases between every successive two among the following ones; a unilingual who shifts from style to style; a substandard speaker who can, if need be, trim his speech into something close to standard; a patois speaker who can gradually improve his language from homely and slipshod to what we might call his best linguistic behavior, for all practical purposes the standard language; another patois speaker who will treat his vernacular and the standard as two clearly different registers with largely deviating structures? Mutual understanding cannot be used as a criterion of unilinguality because it is no great problem for Danes and Norwegians, Czechs and Slovaks to converse, each man speaking his own language. Mutual understanding is a highly relative concept. Who knows all of 'his' language? It will often be easier to understand the foreigner enquiring about the station than to follow the discussion of two local technicians. Two speakers who, when first brought together, had found their respective dialects mutually unintelligible, may in a few hours or a few days discover the clues to unimpeded intercourse. If cooperation is a pressing necessity every one will soon learn enough of the other man's language to establish communication even if the two mediums in contact have no genetic ties or synchronic resemblances of any sort. If the will to communicate is wholly or mainly on one side, a bilingual situation will soon develop on that side.

Contact breeds imitation and imitation breeds linguistic convergence. Linguistic divergence results from secession, estrangement, loosening of contact. In spite of the efforts of a few great scholars, like Hugo Schuchardt, linguistic research has so far favored the study of divergence at the expense of convergence. It is time the right balance should be restored. Linguistic convergence may be observed and studied in all places and at all times, but its study becomes par-

ticularly rewarding when it results from the contact of two clearly distinct structures. It is a scientific exploration of contemporary bilingual patterns that will enable us to define exactly what shall be meant by such terms as substratum, superstratum, and adstratum, and to what extent we have a right to apply them to a given historical situation. We needed a detailed survey of all the problems involved in and connected with bilingualism by a scholar well informed of current linguistic trends and with a wide personal experience of bilingual situations. Here it is.

ANDRÉ MARTINET

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U. W.

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A NOTE ON THE REPRINTED EDITION (OF 1963)

Ever since the original edition of 1953 went out of print, the author has been eager to prepare a thoroughly revised version of the book, in which he could incorporate what he has learned about language contact in the ensuing years: from the criticisms of reviewers, colleagues, and students; from his readings, both in older sources previously missed and in current literature; and from his own and his students' investigations of various aspects of bilingualism and linguistic interference. However, academic duties and urgent research commitments prevent the immediate completion of this major task; in the meantime, the demand for copies of the original edition appears to be undiminished. Consequently, it was with great satisfaction that the author accepted the proposal of Mouton to reissue the original edition in a photo-mechanical offprint and to keep it available while the revised version of the book is in the works.

U. W.

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1 The Problem of Approach

→ Cambi
P. 14
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1.1 Contact and Interference

In the present study, two or more languages will be said to be **IN CONTACT** if they are used alternately by the same persons. The language-using individuals are thus the locus of the contact.

The practice of alternately using two languages will be called **BILINGUALISM**, and the persons involved, **BILINGUAL**.¹ 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, will be referred to as **INTERFERENCE** phenomena. It is these phenomena of speech, and their impact on the norms of either language exposed to contact, that invite the interest of the linguist.

The term interference implies the rearrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domains of language, such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of the morphology and syntax, and some areas of the vocabulary (kinship, color, weather, etc.). It would be an oversimplification to speak here of borrowing, or mere additions to an inventory. As Vogt puts it (599, 35),² "every enrichment or impoverishment of a system involves necessarily the reorganization of all the old distinctive oppositions of the system. To admit that a given element is simply added to the system which receives it without consequences for this system would ruin the very concept of system." In the more loosely patterned domains of a language—some of the syntax, or vocabulary of an incidental nature—"borrowing" might more properly be spoken of when the transfer of an element as such is to be stressed. But even there the possibility of ensuing rearrangements in the patterns, or interference, cannot be excluded.

1.2 Difference Between Languages

Language contact and bilingualism will be considered here in the broadest sense, without qualifications as to the degree of difference between the two languages. For the purposes of the present study, it is immaterial whether the two systems are "languages," "dialects of the same language," or "varieties of the same dialect." The greater the difference between the systems, i.e. the more numerous the mutually exclusive forms and patterns in each, the greater is the learning problem and the potential area of interference. But the mechanisms of interference, abstracted from the amount of interference, would appear to be the same whether the contact is between Chinese and French or between two sub-

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all remarks about bilingualism apply as well to multilingualism, the practice of using alternately three or more languages.

² Bold-face numbers in parentheses refer to the bibliography (pp. 123 ff.); light-face numbers indicate pages in the cited works.

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TRANSCRIPTION NOTE

For the presentation of phonemic and phonetic forms, the International Phonetic Alphabet has been utilized. However, because of typographical limitations, small capitals have been used to indicate lax, voiceless stops; thus, [b] = I.P.A. [d̥]. Also, for retroflex *r*, the sign [ɻ] had to be employed. Where the pronunciation is not relevant, forms are cited in conventional orthography. Forms belonging to languages that do not use the Latin alphabet are cited in a transliteration which includes the following graphs: ξ = [ʃ], ζ = [tʃ], ξ = [ʒ], j = consonantal *i*, x = [x]; ' = palatalization. Stress is indicated in the transliteration by an acute accent over the stressed vowel, e.g. Russian *noǎ́*, *noǎ́zka*.

As for the transliteration of bibliographical titles, see note on p. 123.