LANGUAGES IN CONTACT

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Contents

Summary

Language contacts have been in the focus of interest ever since philologists became aware of the fact that there is no language which would be free of foreign elements and that languages influence one another on different levels. At the beginning the structural approach to the problem of language contact was dominant in most of the investigations carried out by linguists who tried to explain all the intricate relations between two language systems. In the course of its development contact linguistics has drastically changed its profile in favor of a more complex approach which includes several disciplines closely related to the problem of language contacts. Among those which are indispensable for a thorough insight into the phenomena in question are above all sociology, anthropology, ethnology, and psychology. The sociolingustic approach to contact linguistics research has shed new light on a number of problems studied within the scope of the field that used to be called *languages in contact* or *linguistic borrowing.* Many phenomena could not be solved by simply comparing the structural features of two languages coming into contact: taking into account rather complex sociological, cultural and various other elements, linguists managed to achieve more accurate data and find precise answers to questions that seemed difficult to answer. Through this new

insight it became obvious that there is much more to the transfer of elements from one language into the other than the mere adaptation at the phonological, morphological and semantic levels. Many other factors play an extremely important part within the integration processes of foreign elements into a receiving language and they have to be studied thoroughly. Questions as who is borrowing a word, where, why, and how have to be answered before one can have a complete view of the problem. This is the reason why current research within the frame of contact and conflict linguistics has different goals from those in the past, especially due to globalistic trends present in all fields of science.

1. Introduction

According to some authors, the roots of contact linguistics can be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century when lexicographers, collecting material for dictionaries, encountered the problem of numerous words of foreign origin which they were compelled to analyze and decide whether to include in their dictionaries, and to what extent. Philologists became aware of the fact that what they used to call *mixed languages* or *Mischsprachen* at that time was something to be considered as an important issue of language research. As interest in these problems grew, linguistic borrowing, influences of one language on another, interference, bilingualism, codeswitching etc. became frequent topics of numerous studies. Contact linguistics as a separate linguistic discipline, however, has not been alive for much more than 40 years now.

2. History of language contact research

As a matter of fact there has been research into language contacts ever since philologists started investigating rather intricate etymologies of certain words in a language: they necessarily had to take into account the historical development of the language in question and also all the possible contacts this language could have had in the past. They also had to take into account the influences that other—mostly neighboring—languages had on the language they investigated. In their etymological research they tackled many of the problems which have been topics of contact linguistics studies as well, but at that time it was within another scope of interest and with different aims. It became clear that languages must have influenced one another with various intensity, and under various circumstances. The result of such influences was the fact that each language possessed quite a number of words originating in other languages, both closely related and genetically distant ones. There was no language which would be an exception to that so quite naturally, philologists came to the conclusion that most of the languages were what, at that time, they used to call *mixed languages*.

2.1. Mixed languages

During the nineteenth century the terms *mixed languages* or *language mixture* were quite common although there were disputes about them among philologists. On one extreme were those who believed that all languages were mixed, and on the other, those who claimed that mixed languages did not exist at all. Among those who advocated the

theory that mixed languages did not exist were Rusk and Schleicher. Schleicher regarded language as a natural organism forming a unity so language mixture to him was out of the question. Rusk, on the other hand, claimed that lexical items could show signs of mixing, but grammatical structures very rarely. Whitney believed that the English language could serve as an example of a normal process of language mixing: he found out that although nearly half of the English lexis consisted of non-Germanic words, there were no traces of French conjugation or declension. All the borrowed nouns and verbs were adapted to the native, Germanic, system and changed their forms accordingly. Whitney thus managed to prove that if within a community the speakers of language A came into contact with the speakers of language B, the two languages did not merge into one language AB, although they both took over some of the elements of the other language. This is why the result was always language A^B, or language B^A. Hugo Schuhardt arrived at the conclusion that language mixture was undoubtedly one of the most important issues to be discussed within linguistic research. Contrary to those who claimed that mixed languages did not exist at all Schuhardt claimed that no language existed which would be unmixed. Windisch shared Schuhardt's opinion that every language mixture was based on a more or less developed bilingualism. He also thought that there was no cultural language without foreign elements. In Herman Paul's book *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* a whole chapter under the title *Sprachmischung* was dedicated to the problem of mixed languages. According to him the most favorable areas for language mixture are borders between two different linguistic communities where a sufficient degree of bilingualism is present. As the term *mixed languages*, in its original meaning, seemed controversial and inadequate, it was abandoned in favor of some new ones, but nowadays it is still being used when referring to *pidgins and creoles*. Thus the problem of mixed languages has not lost on its actuality but has shifted its scope of interest to another type of language contacts.

3. The foundations of the theory of languages in contact

In spite of the fact that there were numerous investigations on various phenomena on language contacts as early as the end of the nineteenth century, one cannot speak of a systematized theoretical framework before the 1950s. There was a lack of advanced methods on one hand, and on the other linguists dealing with language contacts frequently arrived at conclusions, which were based on pure intuition. This approach was not sufficient to build up a theory which would meet strict scientific standards. The theoretical foundations of contact linguistic research are thus usually centered around four capital works which somehow defined the scope and methods of further investigations in the field: Werner Leopold's *Speech Development of a Bilingual Child* (1939-1949), Uriel Weinreich's *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (1953), Einar Haugen's *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study of Bilingual Behavior* (1953), and William Mackey's significant article 'Towards a redefinition of bilingualism' (1956). In particular, Haugen's and Weinreich's works published more or less simultaneously—thus bringing about a sort of interaction between the two scholars—cannot be neglected in any serious study of language contact phenomena even today, more than fifty years from their appearance. Although belonging to the structural linguistic school they both expressed the necessity of including social and psychological aspects into language contact research. It became clear that without some extralinguistic factors certain problems of language contacts could not be explained

precisely enough; as a matter of fact, some phenomena could no be explained at all if these factors were not taken into account. It was also evident that neither a separate linguistic nor a separate sociological investigation could solve all the intricate relations on the axis of language – nation – social setting – politics. These two disciplines were found to be complementary, thus a trustworthy research of language contact necessarily had to rely on both linguistic and sociological data. It is because of this that Haugen's and Weinreich's works can be regarded as the beginning of a sociolinguistic approach to different problems studied within the frame of contact linguistics.

4. Terminology

4.1. Languages in contact and linguistic borrowing

Parallel to the development of the theory and methods, terminology was one of the important issues to be discussed. While the nineteenth century was marked by terms like *language mixture* and *mixed languages*, the twentieth century linguists, as we have already mentioned, found the terms inappropriate so new ones were introduced. Ever since the appearance of Weinreich's book, *languages in contact* was the term widely accepted by most of the scholars dealing with problems of language contact. At the same time Haugen's *linguistic borrowing* was introduced and thus both terms have been used simultaneously to the present day. As a matter of fact the term *borrowing* was not entirely new: as early as 1921 Edward Sapir dedicated a chapter of his book *Language* to inter-linguistic influences and said that the simplest way a language can influence another one is the borrowing of words. He also mentions cultural borrowing which happens each time a new (foreign) cultural trend is being introduced into a society that brings along new loan words. In Leonard Bloomfield's monograph of the same title three chapters dealt with three types of borrowing: *cultural, intimate,* and *dialect borrowing*. According to Bloomfield, by means of cultural borrowing words are borrowed for new concepts, things and ideas, while in intimate borrowing two or more languages have to be used within the same geographical area or the same political community where the so-called 'higher' language becomes the source of borrowing for the language with a lower sociolinguistic status. Dialect borrowing takes place within one language where the standard can borrow from the dialect or vice versa, or one dialect can borrow from another. The term *borrowing,* although having been used for so many years, has in a way been misleading from the semantic point of view and several scholars have noticed that one cannot speak of borrowing in a strict sense as it would imply the source language temporarily lending one of its forms to the target language and expect it to be returned, which, of course, is impossible. In spite of the mentioned inadequacy the term has persisted.

4.2. Bilingualism

All the studies dealing with linguistic borrowing were based on the notion of *bilingualism* and regarded the *bilingual speaker* as the place of language contact and a rich source of interaction between different linguistic patterns. The phenomenon of bilingualism, however, had to be redefined: the old and rather narrow definition which implied that a bilingual speaker had to master both language systems in the same way a native speaker did was replaced by a new, more flexible one, which said that a bilingual

speaker had to produce at least some sentences in another language. It became clear that 'ideal' situations of bilingualism are relatively rare and that it had to be regarded in a much wider sense including also speakers of standard and dialect. Bilingualism thus seems to be an extremely widespread phenomenon and as W. Mackey once remarked, it is a problem which affects the majority of the world's population. Nevertheless, discussions about various types and degrees of bilingualism have not ceased even today, although there is a more or less accepted agreement that a bilingual speaker is a person who can easily switch from one language to another if the situation calls for it. Areas that are favourable for the development of bilingualism are, above all, regions close to national borders where two nations—consequently also two languages—come into direct contact.

4.3. Codeswitching

Closely connected to bilingualism is *codeswitching* which is defined as the alternate use of more than one linguistic system (code) by a bilingual individual within a single conversation. In his/her speech the bilingual speaker introduces completely unassimilated words (sometimes even parts of sentences) from the other language into the one he/she is actually speaking. Codeswitching is a rather frequent phenomenon in bilingual families where children easily switch from one language into the other.

4.4. Interference

It was Weinreich who substituted the once traditional term *interlingual influence* by the new term *interference*; the term was later adopted by Haugen in the meaning of *simultaneous overlapping of two norms* in cases where bilinguals could not or would not keep the two language codes apart. It is defined as a deviation to the norm of both languages which occurs in the speech of a bilingual speaker. Interference appears on all language levels: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical. Numerous examples can be quoted to show how interference works. It is always present when a bilingual speaker includes elements of another language into the one he is speaking, mostly not being aware of it. The two language systems interfere with one another—on the part of the listener this is perceived as either a foreign intonation or accent, a wrong inflection, an unusual word order or an unfamiliar metaphor.

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Biographical Sketch

Vesna Muhvić-Diamanovski is head of the Institute of Linguistics at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, Croatia, and editor in chief of the Croatian linguistic journal *Suvremena lingvistika* (Contemporary Linguistics). Her research interests include contact linguistics, lexicography and neology. She has worked on several research projects dealing with language contacts, among others the one on anglicisms in European languages and on the theory and practice of neology. She is the author of an extensive theoretical study on loan translations in Croatian and several articles on anglicisms, neologisms and different aspects of lexicography. She is also co-author of a dictionary of neologisms in Croatian.