

LIGN177: Multilingualism

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Multilingual individuals

- people who use two (or more) languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives
- this broad definition includes varying degrees of competence
- few of us are perfectly balanced bilinguals or multilinguals
- a multilingual does not represent the knowledge and competence of two or three monolinguals

Multilingual individuals - terms

- L1 – 1st language learned
- L2 – 2nd language learned
- Dominant language – language used most often, language of greatest proficiency
- Dominant language may be the L2
- Balanced bilinguals – similar proficiency

Multilingual individuals

- Multilingual individuals operate in different modes
- w/ monolinguals → one language
- w/ bilinguals → one or both languages
- the other languages are 'suppressed' but may still exert influence

Multilingual individuals

- Minor errors creep in, even in highly fluent individuals:
 - *I saw this on the page five*
 - *He made a lot of recom'mendations*
- Evidence from psycholinguistics (perception and production) that two languages are not completely separate

Individual language choice

- Multilingual individuals interacting with other multilingual individuals face a *language choice* problem: which language should I speak?
- Multilinguals often select a 'base language'
- Various factors come into play in selection of base language and use of other languages

Factors affecting language choice

- Take into account:
 - the domain of the interaction (discussed Tues.)
 - the interlocutors
 - topic
 - function of the interaction

Interlocutors

- A simplified view is to think about the language repertoire of the other person or the *interlocutor*
- Decision trees – useful, but too rigid
- 2nd generation Mexican American encounters:
 - A non-Mexican American → English
 - A Mexican American → English or Spanish
 - Deciding between English or Spanish is impacted by the age of the interlocutor, language ability, relationship, etc.

Interlocutors and accommodation

- *Interpersonal Speech Accommodation Theory* (Giles 1973) - speakers adjust or accommodate to the interlocutor
- Common with dialect/accent shifting
- See Mendoza-Denton, Hay, Jannedy (2003) on 'ai' pronunciation (words like 'buy', 'fine') by *Oprah Winfrey* – found that [a] pronunciation of *infrequent* 'ai' words is influenced greatly by ethnicity of interlocutor → African-Americans cause Oprah to say [a]

Accommodation - convergence

- Does accommodation operate for multilinguals, too?
- Speakers will converge towards speech of interlocutors for social approval
- Degree of convergence will depend on positive feedback
- Customer service interactions → convergence towards customer's preference

Accommodation in Montreal

- French is the official language
- West End → more English; East End → French
- English and French are both used in stores, restaurants
- Expectation that customers should use French, but servers accommodate to client

Accommodation - divergence

- Divergence can occur to
 - dissociate personally from the interlocutor
 - establish in-group identity that excludes interlocutor
- Social meaning of language choice is interpreted by interlocutors, and not always in same manner

Interlocutors: ethno-linguistic affiliation

- Choice of language and accommodation reflects ethno-linguistic identity:
 - In Montreal, if a bilingual French Canadian is addressed in English, s/he may respond in French → signal of disapproval reflects political position
 - Bond & Yang (1982) found that Chinese students in Hong Kong expressed their Chinese identity more strongly with English interviewer and English questionnaire than they did with Chinese ones.

Functions

Language fulfills many functions. Besides the obvious, there are some social functions:

- *Poetic* – jokes, puns, word play, arguments, emotions
- *Metalinguistic* – use of one language conveys speaker's attitude towards language use
- *Phatic* – use of language to fulfill a social function (conventions, small talk)

Topic

- Topic choice influences language choice
- Topic choice is often connected to domain
- School – language used in education system will (often) be preferred
- Family – language of informal conversation with family triggers use of that language when discussing family

Expressive affect

- One language can have the function of expressing feelings and emotions better
- L1 is often for anger, deep emotions
- But... 'I tend to use English when I'm angry, Japanese when I'm hurt or sad... I guess I like the sound of the (English) swearing words'
 - Ryoko, Japanese/English bilingual (cited in Pavlenko (2005) *Emotions and Multilingualism*)