

Bilinguals' acceptability judgements on lexical borrowings from the L2

Anna Ewert and Iwona Wegner (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

Traditionally, bilinguals are considered to be the carriers of linguistic change in language contact situations. In such a view, the bilingual is perceived as a somewhat passive transmitter of linguistic innovations from the L2 to the L1. A naive consequence of adopting such a view would be assuming that bilinguals accept borrowings more readily than monolinguals. Our aim is to show that the process of accepting a borrowing has a cognitive and social dynamics, rooted in differences between bilinguals and monolinguals and their patterns of language use, that deserves separate examination. Davies (2003) found that bilinguals tend to be more conservative judging the grammaticality of sentences in their L2 than monolingual native speakers of that language. While Davies (2003: 190) implies that this might be due to the non-native speaker's imperfect knowledge of the target language, we hypothesize that this might be an effect of qualitative differences between bilinguals and monolinguals (e.g. Cook 1992, Cook et al. 2003), stemming from differences in language learning experiences and metalinguistic knowledge.

In order to test our predictions, two studies were carried out with adult Polish-English bilinguals. The materials in Study 1 were 16 sentences containing instances of lexical transfer from English into Polish. These examples were collected by the second author from the speech of the students in the School of English at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. As some of these have actually functioned in this community for generations (e.g. *na bordzie* 'on the notice board'), they will be treated as lexical borrowings. Two groups of 20 bilinguals and monolinguals were first asked if they understood the sentences, and then they were asked to judge their accuracy. While the sentences were understandable to the majority of the bilinguals, the monolinguals often indicated total lack of comprehension. However, the examination of the total number of monolingual and bilingual responses on the accuracy judgement task has shown that the bilinguals significantly more often rated the sentences as less acceptable.

In Study 2, the subjects were asked to complete sentences by choosing between two alternatives. The targets were recent borrowings, as listed by Markowski (2004), considered to constitute instances of 'incorrect' use. In contrast to the target expressions in Study 1, these borrowings function in the language of the media, as well as in popular, colloquial use. They were contrasted with 'more correct' equivalents, provided by Markowski. The borrowings were divided into three categories: 'trendy' cognates, cognates with semantic extension, non-cognates with semantic extension. The results show no difference in lexical preference for the latter two categories. The bilingual subjects showed a statistically significant preference for the 'trendy' cognates over their 'more correct' equivalents. It is possible that the 'trendiness' of these words influences the bilinguals' choices more than their cognate status.

All in all, the results of the two studies show that bilinguals differ in their L1 acceptability judgements from monolinguals. Regardless of the language they actually produce, they are more conservative in their judgements than monolinguals with regard to borrowings that have not entered popular use, and more permissive with regard to items that are widely used.

References

- Cook, V. J. 1992. Evidence for multicompetence. *Language Learning* 42 (4), 557-591.
- Cook, V., Iarossi, E., Stellakis, N., Tokumaru, Y. 2003. Effects of the L2 on the syntactic processing of the L1. In: V. Cook (ed.) *Effects of the second language on the first*, pp. 193-213. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Davies, A. 2003. *The native speaker: Myth and reality*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Markowski, A. 2004. *Praktyczny poradnik językowy*. Warszawa: Wilga.