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Bilingual Speech Accommodation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate the social assessment of patterns of code selection in interlocutor interactions. It examines particular strategies of code selection which have been mentioned in Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) framework. Speech Accommodation Theory introduces a theoretical framework for the investigation of language behavior in conversational situations which permits the researcher to combine local interactive factors and socio-psychological in the same analysis.

KEYWORDS Speech accommodation; interaction; code-selection; bilinguals

1. Introduction

Speech accommodation theory was proposed by Howard Giles, a British language Psycholinguist, in the early 1970s. The theory aims to provide explanation why bilingual speakers accommodate, i.e. change the manner in which they communicate in face-to-face interactions.

The general assumption of speech accommodation theory is that efforts to adjust linguistic characteristics of an interlocutor (e.g. code-choice, pronunciation, pacing, and etc), which is known as convergence, "may plausibly be considered a reflection of an individual's desire for social approval" (Giles and Coupland 1991). Genesee and Bourhis (1982) demonstrated that in their research the speakers while interaction either converged to the code on the interlocutor or failed to converge. With the help of matched-guise method (i.e. the same bilingual speakers function as both converging and non-converging roles); Genesee and Bourhis asserted that the bilinguals incline to be considered more positively when they converge to the linguistic features or language of the interlocutor. However, such conclusion may not be necessarily universal.

As (Bourhis et al. 1975) depict, when there is a political or social gap or tension between the groups to which the bilinguals belong to, members of an in-group may feel less solidarity with the individuals who converge to the out-group. Moreover, too much convergence can be regarded a threatening to listeners of the group to whose code the speaker converges (Giles and Coupland 1991: 79; Giles and Smith 1979). In the speech accommodation theory tradition, there is a inclination to assess convergence as friendly intergroup, positive and interpersonal strategy (Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles & Coupland 1988: 178).

2. Code selection

The selection of a particular language or language variety for a given situation is called code selection. In different situations may individuals use more than one code while they are communicating with each other, they usually select one code for certain purposes and places, in certain settings and with certain people and may use another code for other purposes in other places and with other people.

3. Bilingual Speech Accommodation

The different frameworks for the examination of multilingual speech have various advantages and disadvantages. While Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1999) draws attention on the effect of the speaker's motivations and beliefs on their multilingual language behavior, Auer's CA approach concentrates mainly on the interactive nature of multilingual speech in a local context. Hamers and Blanc (2000: 251) take into account the significance of 'connecting speech style and its modifications to social psychological processes, such as cultural identity, social perceptions, attitudes and intercultural relations'.

Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) provides a theoretical framework for the examining of language behavior in conversational circumstances which allows the researcher to make a link between local interactive factors and socio-psychological in the same analysis. According to Giles et al. (1991: 2) Speech Accommodation Theory is unique in its 'openness to micro and macro contextual communicative issues in an individual interpretive and theoretical frame'.

SAT has two key concepts include: convergence and divergence. Convergence and divergence are two linguistics strategies which bilingual speakers applied in their interactions. They refer to the general direction which accommodation can occur in the speech interaction between interlocutors. Based on the the bilingual speakers' attitude towards each other, the shared social features or language varieties, accommodation may take the form of either divergence or convergence.

Convergence is one of the most extensively researched aspects of accommodation (Sachdev & Giles, 2004: 355) and it is described as the speaker's efforts to approximate their style of speech to that of their addressee (Bell, 1984: 162). Sachdev and Giles (2004: 356) mostly connect convergence to the speaker's 'desire to gain approval from a recipient' and mention that this motivation can be linked to the concept of 'similarity attraction' (Byrne, 1969). Similarity attraction relies upon the notion that the more similar a speaker is to their interlocutor, the more advantages and rewards will come out of the interaction for the speaker.

However, this idea may not be the only process underlying linguistic convergence. Delvaux and Soquet (2007: 2) claim that 'unintentional imitation is one of the main processes in which adult individuals smooth their social interactions' and they illustrate in two experiments which individuals automatically and unintentionally imitate the speech which immediately surrounds them. Delvaux and Soquet's (2007: 2) ideas are based on two small-scale experiments designed to look into the influence of ambient speech on speakers' single speech productions. Speakers of two dialects of Belgium participated in the experiments and were observed to modify their realizations of vowels to ambient speech produced by speakers. The results of this experiment should be considered with caution, since they have been obtained under experimental conditions that often do not always reflect real-life interactions between speakers. Furthermore, the limited number of samples used by

Delvaux and Soquet decreased the significance of their claim in regards to the automaticity of convergence. Although linguistic convergence does not necessarily result from speakers' conscious efforts to modify and adjust their style of speech to that of their interlocutor, its automatic nature continues to be debatable too.

Speakers who automatically converge quite often, however, under certain conditions they diverge from the speech of their interlocutors. It should be noted that the co-existence of convergence and divergence is possible because they are not mutually exclusive linguistic phenomena. If convergence is possibly unintentional and automatic in nature, it is very important to mention the reasons why individuals diverge from or do not converge to the speech of their interlocutors under particular situations.

Divergence can occur when speakers focus on differences between themselves and others (Giles et al., 1991: 8). Bell (1984: 185) defines divergence as an 'initiative shift' signalling a speaker's reaction against his/her interlocutor. Sachdev and Giles (2004: 356) give the example of the linguistically divergent behavior of some clients in a Welsh pub. The customers all switched from English to Welsh whenever a monolingual English-speaker entered the room. Linguistic divergence can compose of a method which enables speakers to maintain integrity or to create and to keep distance between themselves and their interlocutors (Giles et al., 1991: 10).

Another type of linguistic divergence, is 'disaccommodation' which introduced by Scotton (1985). Disaccommodation occurs if a speaker switches code or style whenever repeating something that their interlocutor has just said. Giles et al. (1991: 10) represent disaccommodation by giving the example of a young individual saying to an older interlocutor, "Okay mate let's get it together at my place around 3:30 tomorrow," and receiving the following reply from the older interlocutor: "Fine young man, we'll meet again, at 15:30, at your house tomorrow." During this conversation, the older speaker creates distance between himself/herself and his/her interlocutor by repeating the younger speaker's utterance in his/her preferred style.

Another significant distinction in Speech Accommodation includes whether the switch is upward or downward (Sachdev & Giles, 2004; Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). While the former comprises a shift towards a prestigious variety, the latter refers to socially stigmatized or less valued varieties. Sachdev & Giles (2004: 356) state that a French Canadian worker's linguistic accommodation to the prestigious language behavior of an English-speaking manager illustrates an instance of upward convergence. This particular example in addition highlights the 'power variable' which is based on the idea that speakers in lower positions of power are more inclined to adjust their speech so that it becomes more similar to that of their superior interlocutors (Sachdev & Giles, 2004; Giles et al., 1991).

4. Conclusion

Speech Accommodation Theory, to a great extent, has affected multilingual speech in interaction research. Its attention to language behavior in context and as well as the speakers' personal attitudes, attributes and motivations makes it possible for the researcher to obtain a better perception of the reasons for the employment of more than one language in a single interaction. On the other hand, because of the automaticity of convergence it will be really formidable for the researcher to depict with confidence and certainty whether a speaker has intentionally or automatically modified his/her language use and style to that of his/her interlocutor. SAT is recently known as CAT (Communication Accommodation Theory). Communication Accommodation Theory incorporates broader range of facets, since accommodation can take place at divers and varied levels such as variation in pronunciation, accent features, intonation, pauses, speech rate, utterance length and variation in the use of different types of prosodic, linguistics and non-verbal features.

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