



Syntactic and pragmatic transfer effects in reported-speech constructions in three contact varieties of English influenced by Afrikaans



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ABSTRACT

Cross-linguistic influence (CLI) is investigated by various research traditions that examine language contact varieties. This article presents an analysis of syntactic and pragmatic effects of CLI in three corpora of published, written varieties of English influenced by contact with Afrikaans: native White South African English, English second-language writing by Afrikaans speakers, and texts translated from Afrikaans into English. These varieties differ in the strength of bilingual activation as well as in different sociocognitive conditions of production. Three related reported-speech constructions that exhibit syntactic and pragmatic similarities and differences are analysed, to determine how bilingual activation and sociocognitive factors interact with CLI. The findings indicate that overt syntactic transfer is almost completely absent in the language of highly proficient bilinguals, but covert syntactic transfer takes place where an Afrikaans construction corresponds to only one of two variants available to native varieties of English. Extensive evidence of covert pragmatic transfer is found across various registers. The cognitive strain associated with high levels of bilingual activation overrides syntactic and pragmatic CLI for one construction investigated, in favour of a consistent preference for the explicit and more formal variant. This effect is further enhanced by the selection of the more formal variant during the process of post-production editing.

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1. Introduction

Linguistic research on individual and societal bilingualism attempts to explain the psycholinguistic and/or sociolinguistic consequences of language contact. Studies in areas as diverse as translation, second-language acquisition (SLA), learner Englishes (also studied under the rubric of English as a foreign language or EFL), creole languages, English as a lingua franca (ELF) and non-native indigenised varieties of English (L2 varieties or New Englishes) all focus on the effects of the presence of two or more languages in individual psycholinguistic processing as much as in the social context more broadly. These areas are studied in largely independent research traditions; however, in the last decade there has been increased interest in

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investigating the shared as well as distinct features of these forms of bilingualism-influenced communication, and to seek explanations for their commonalities and singularities in the shared and distinct psycho- and sociolinguistic conditions of contact (see Baumgarten and Özçetin, 2008; Becher et al., 2009; Gilquin, 2014; Mukherjee and Hundt, 2011; Kortmann and Szendrői, 2012; Kranich, 2014; Kranich et al., 2011a; Lefer and Vogeeler, 2013; Schneider, 2012).

A key feature that these different forms of language use share is transfer or cross-linguistic influence (CLI).¹ The various languages of bilinguals and multilinguals are always cognitively activated and accessible to some degree, depending on the communicative context (Bialystok, 2008; Grosjean, 2013). As Treffers-Daller and Sakel (2012:3) point out, bilinguals are continuously engaged in a process of attentional control, directing attention and cognitive resources to one language and away from the other, as demanded by the context. This process is cognitively effortful, and the shifting attentional distribution may, amongst other effects, result in features of the language not in use finding their way into the active language, resulting in CLI.

CLI effects cover lexical, semantic, phonetic/phonological, prosodic, tonemic, graphemic, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic features (Clyne, 2003:76; Grosjean, 2013:20–21; Jarvis and Pavlenko, 2008:61–111). Since the locus of CLI is, in the first instance, individual language processing, the psycholinguistic dynamics of CLI are at the root of the further diffusion of contact features through language communities (see Clyne, 2003). In the psycholinguistic paradigm, CLI covers all cases of “deviations from the language being spoken (or written) due to the influence of the other language(s)” (Grosjean, 2013:20). Cases of CLI are distinguished as either transfer or interference. Transfer refers to static CLI effects, the consequences of permanent traces of one language (L1) on another (L2), which is related to the individual’s competence in the L2 (Grosjean, 2011:14). Interference, in contrast, refers to dynamic cases of CLI, which is an accidental, transient intrusion of an L1 feature in the L2 (Grosjean, 2011:15).

In moving from psycholinguistic views of contact effects in bilingual language processing to the broader linguistic and sociolinguistic effects of contact, a relationship is postulated between interference and entrenched transfer at the individual level, and the diffusion of such features by means of sociocognitive processes in the usage of a speech community more broadly – leading to language change (Croft, 2000:145–148). Matras (2009) argues that language change should not be seen as the result of contact between *language systems*. Rather, it is the consequence of “innovations that are introduced by individual speakers in the course of discourse interaction, and which find favourable conditions of propagation throughout a sector within the speech community, and on to the speech community as a whole” (Matras, 2009:310). For example, in the context of the development of indigenised non-native varieties of English, certain CLI features are transitional and disappear from the production of speakers after they have attained a certain level of proficiency, but some features remain as persistent features of a stabilised L2 variety and are transmitted to new generations of users (Gut, 2011:103). However, contact-induced language change does not occur exclusively in contexts of language shift or in contexts where the L1 affects the L2 through SLA processes of transfer; borrowing may also occur at various levels when speakers incorporate features of an L2 into their L1 in other situations of language contact (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988:37; see also Matras, 2009).

One of the key interests in investigating CLI effects is the factors that condition these effects, both psycholinguistically and in terms of social diffusion. The interaction between CLI and other factors that also contribute to shape varieties of language that are produced by bilingual speakers, and with that the constraints on transferability or borrowability (Matras, 2007, 2009; Treffers-Daller and Sakel, 2012:9; Gut, 2011:108–112), is an area where more research is required. This is true for all linguistic levels affected by CLI; however various researchers comment on the limited research on the factors that condition specifically syntactic and pragmatic (or discursive) CLI (see Clyne, 2003:97–98, 215–233; Jarvis and Pavlenko, 2008:96–111; Matras, 2007:61; Winford, 2003:97). Matras (2007:34) identifies three factors generally raised as affecting the likelihood of CLI: structural similarities between the two languages, the inherent semantic-pragmatic or structural categories of the two languages, and the intensity of contact (including factors such as language prestige).

Against this background, we propose that the effects of CLI are dependent on variable constraints in two dimensions in which bilingual communication takes place: (1) the psycholinguistic dimension (specifically, the nature and degree of bilingual language activation), and (2) the social context of communication. These two dimensions are interrelated, in that representations about the pragmatics of communication in particular contexts form part of speakers’ language knowledge and processing. In this, we build on accounts of language contact set out by, for example, Matras (2009), who identifies both these factors as crucial to the dynamics of language contact. Matras (2009:3) argues that “the relevant locus of contact is the language processing apparatus of the individual multilingual speaker and the employment of this apparatus in communicative interaction”. Multilingual speakers possess a complex multilingual repertoire of “linguistic schemas, word-forms, and constructions, accompanied by complex, context-sensitive social conventions on their appropriate selection” (Matras, 2009:99). CLI occurs when schemas, word-forms, and constructions from one language cross over into an utterance in the other language during communicative events. This occurs as a consequence of various triggers associated with the communicative event itself. These range on a continuum (Matras, 2009:310). At the one extreme, there are involuntary “failures” of the selection mechanism at points of high cognitive demand, according to Matras (2009) often associated with constructions linked to interpersonal coordination that involve increased

¹ The terminology used for phenomena related to cross-linguistic transfer varies within and across disciplines (see Gut, 2011:104; Treffers-Daller, 2011; Treffers-Daller and Sakel, 2012). In this article, we use the term “cross-linguistic influence” (CLI).

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