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Linguistic and pragmatic influence of English: Does Esperanto resist it?

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ABSTRACT

Using English has become the dominant means of international communication in domains like science, politics, business, and the media (Crystal 2006). Due to its role as a lingua franca, it is a major source of language influence worldwide (Görlach, 2001; Furiassi et al., 2012). The enormous impact of English on other languages can be felt across all levels of linguistic systems. This article addresses the question of whether the character of a language and its speakers' attitudes have a bearing on the influence that English may exert. Specifically, the article explores the impact of English on Esperanto, a planned (or constructed) language, by focusing on a process that is indicative of speakers' inclination to incorporate other-language material in their language use: language alternation, or code-switching. The article is the first to have explored code-switching in a planned language. It is based on a corpus of authentic spoken data that were obtained in a variety of communicative settings (including speech events such as spontaneous everyday conversations, panel and working-group discussions, interviews and outings). Code-switching, including the insertion of English words and phrases, is shown to be used in a limited variety of pragmatic functions and to a considerably lesser degree than in other languages. This can be attributed to the speakers' developed metalinguistic consciousness, attitudes such as linguistic loyalty and shared community norms. The findings suggest similarities between Esperanto and minority or endangered languages.

1. Introduction

Due to its status as a lingua franca of international communication (cf. Crystal, 2006), English is a major source of language influence worldwide. As Busse (2010) points out, “the process of anglicization has developed in similar ways in several European languages, although with varying degrees of English impact”. English influence on other languages can be felt across all levels of linguistic systems: in morphology, syntax, as well as in the field of text and genre.[1] The most widespread type of influence from English on other languages, however, is lexical borrowing (Pulcini et al., 2012). Dictionaries and comparative studies show that it is often even the same linguistic items and structures that are imported from English into several languages (cf. Görlach, 2001; Furiassi and Pulcini, 2012; Fiedler, 2017). Among the most frequent pragmatic-functional reasons for the use of words and phrases influenced by English is the intention to add flavour to the message, to sound modern, trendy, cool and educated, and to be part of a globalizing world (Šabec, 2005; Busse, 2005; Androutsopoulos, 2007; Fiedler, 2014). It is hard to imagine that the same pragmatic-functional motivation will be found in a speech community that

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[1] For a literature review and an overview of these influences, using the example of the German language, see Fiedler (2014).

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is proud of having at its disposal a complete and readymade means of communication and that, focusing on the equality of languages, takes a critical stance towards the dominance of English (Rašić, 1994; Puškar, 2015). Against the backdrop of these characteristics of the Esperanto speech community, which Section 2 will elaborate on further, this paper explores the intriguing question of whether the linguistic and pragmatic outcomes of contact with English are relevant in the same way to the planned language as to other languages.

The study aims to provide answers to the question of whether the character of a language and its speakers' attitudes have a bearing on the influence that English exercises on this language. In line with this goal, it addresses the impact of English on Esperanto by focusing on a process that is indicative of speakers' inclination to incorporate other-language material in their language use – language alternation (i.e., code-switching). The research hypothesis is that due to speaker attitudes and shared community norms, Esperanto exhibits resistance to code-switching.

Research into this topic should be undertaken with the peculiar character of this language – as fundamentally a product of language planning – in mind. Esperanto represents a planned language of a-posteriori character, which means it is based on the stock of language material found in ethnic languages, including English (cf. 2.2). This must be taken into account when comparing the impact of English on Esperanto to its impact on other (i.e. ethnic) languages.

The study begins with a short introduction to Esperanto (with a special focus on the creation of new words and terms) and its speech community (Section 2). It then presents the data and methods that are used (Section 3) and presents the results of an empirical study on code-switching in Esperanto (Section 4). The findings are discussed in Section 5, and the article concludes with a summary of the main results.

2. Esperanto: main characteristics of the language and its speech community

Despite more than one hundred years of continuous use in everyday conversation, as a language for special purposes and as a medium of original and translated literature, Esperanto has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. Therefore, a preface consisting of a short primer on the language and its users seems to be useful. It includes a brief overview of the phenomenon of planned (or constructed) languages (2.1), the main linguistic features of Esperanto (2.2) and the most notable characteristics of the speech community (2.3).

2.1. Planned languages: definition and classifications

Planned languages (also called 'universal languages', 'artificial languages', or 'constructed languages') are "language systems which have been consciously created according to definite criteria by an individual or a group of individuals for the purpose of making international communication easier" (Blanke, 1989: 63; cf. Wüster, 1931). Their number has probably reached almost 1000 already. The language inventors' intentions are very diverse with one group of motives based on language philosophy. For example, in the seventeenth century, Gottfried W. Leibniz and René Descartes sketched ideas for an ideal, logically constructed language that would promote rational thinking. The most important group of motives, however, includes the humanistic aims of promoting pacifism and international understanding. The language creators hoped that a common language could eliminate conflicts and wars between peoples and races. With this idea in mind, Johann Martin Schleyer initiated Volapük in 1879, as Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof did with Esperanto in 1887.

The traditional classification of planned languages by Couturat and Leau (1903, 1903+1907/2001) is based on the relationship of planned language systems to ethnic languages, especially with regard to the lexical material that a project includes. The authors distinguish between (a) *a priori* systems, (b) *a posteriori* systems, and (c) mixed systems. Whereas the majority of *a priori* languages form their phonological and lexical systems on the basis of philosophically motivated classifications of human knowledge, as for example in John Wilkins' (1668) Analytical Language (cf. Hüllen, 1984; Okrent, 2009), an *a posteriori* system borrows lexical material from specific ethnic languages and adapts it to its structure.

The mixed systems combine both *a priori* and *a posteriori* traits. As regards Volapük, a classic representative of this type, the mixed character can already be seen in the name of the language: Its vocabulary is mainly based on English. For instance, *vol* and *pük* are derived from the English words *world* and *speak*, but the ethnolinguistic material was so heavily modified that it became hardly recognizable.

The group of *a posteriori* planned languages can be subdivided into three subtypes. First, there is a special type of project called modified ethnic languages (or minimal languages). Their most prominent representative is Basic English by Charles K. Ogden (1930). Basic (which stands for British American Scientific International Commercial) consists of a reduced English vocabulary of 850 basic words and of attempts to express other words by means of circumlocutions (e.g. to wander = to go from place to place without aim; coin = a bit of metal money).

The main distinction within the group of *a posteriori* planned languages, however, is to be drawn between the naturalistic subgroup (with members such as Occidental-Interlingue [1922] and Interlingua [1951]), which is characterized by the imitation of (Romance) ethnic languages by incorporating their arbitrary nature and irregularities, and the autonomous subgroup (with Esperanto as a representative) with a high degree of regularity in inflections and word formation. The difference between these two subgroups of *a posteriori* projects can be illustrated by using two examples of linguistic expressions that are internationally known (and that, luckily, designate historical phenomena). In the naturalistic *a posteriori* Interlingua, the expressions are *Guerra Frigide* ("Panorama en Interlingua" July/Aug. 1993, p. 9) and *cortina de ferro* ("Panorama in Interlingua" Sept./Oct. 1995, p. 5). Due to the similarities with expressions in other, above all, Romance languages (Ital.

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