

Module: Sociolinguistics

Lecture 05: Varieties in Contact (Mixture of Varieties)

Whenever two languages or two language varieties exist in the same speech community side by side, many important matters related to their functions, their relation to each other, to their separation or mixture evolve; which involve the topics of diglossia, bilingualism, code switching, pidgins and creoles.

1- Diglossia:

Diglossia is a situation where, in a given society, there are two (often) closely-related languages, one of **high prestige**, which is generally used by the government and in formal texts, and one of **low prestige**, which is usually the spoken vernacular tongue, (vernacular refers to the native language of a country or locality, it is used to describe local languages). Therefore, a **diglossic situation** exists in a society when it has two distinct codes which show clear functional separation; i.e. one code is employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set.

The term was coined by **Charles Ferguson (1969)** who defined it as follows:

“DIGLOSSIA is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards) , there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superimposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation”.

Diglossia is a characteristic of speech communities rather than individuals. Individuals may be bilingual. Societies or communities are diglossic. In other words, the term diglossia describes societal or institutional bilingualism, where two varieties are required to cover all the community's domains.

The best example of diglossia is the linguistic situation in the Arab world. In these countries, there are two **FORMS OF THE SAME LANGUAGE** (conventionally called “High” and “Low”). In each Arab-speaking community, there are two varieties of Arabic in use: **Modern Standard Arabic** is normally used in **FORMAL** situations such as writing, political speeches, university lectures, television news, etc. and **a spoken colloquial** (The “Low” form also referred to as *dialects*) is used in **INFORMAL** situations, such as conversations, etc. At the end of this continuum is the “High” form, i.e., Modern Standard Arabic, and at the other lies the “Low” form, i.e., the various dialects.

2- Bilingualism and Multilingualism:

The term bilingualism (sometimes also referred to as multilingualism) can refer to phenomena regarding an individual speaker who uses two or more languages, a community of speakers where two or more languages are used, or between speakers of different languages.

Multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers (**monoglottism** from Greek *monos* which means ‘alone’ + *glotta* which means ‘tongue or language’) or, more commonly, **monolingualism** or **unilingualism** is the condition of being able to speak only a single language.

A multilingual person, in the broadest definition, is anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading). More specifically, the terms **bilingual** and **trilingual** are used to describe comparable situations in which two or three languages are involved, respectively.

Multilingual speakers have acquired and maintained at least one language during childhood, the so-called first language (L1). First languages (sometimes also referred to as mother tongue) are acquired without formal education, by mechanisms heavily disputed. Children acquiring two first languages since birth are called simultaneous bilinguals. Even in the case of simultaneous bilinguals one language usually dominates over the other. This kind of bilingualism is most likely to occur when a child is raised by bilingual parents in a predominantly monolingual environment.

3- Code-switching/Code-mixing:

Speakers of more than one language (e.g., bilinguals) are known for their ability to code-switch or mix their languages during communication. This phenomenon occurs when bilinguals substitute a word or phrase from one language with a phrase or word from another language. To illustrate, consider the sentence (*I want a motorcycle VERDE*). In this sentence, the English

word “green” is replaced with its Spanish equivalent. A noteworthy aspect of this sentence is that the Spanish adjective “verde” follows a grammatical rule that is observed by most bilingual speakers that code-switch. Thus, according to the specific grammatical rule-governing the following sentence (*I want a VERDE motorcycle*) would be incorrect because language switching can occur between an adjective and a noun, only if the adjective is placed according to the rules of the language of the adjective. In this case, the adjective is in Spanish; therefore, the adjective must follow the Spanish grammatical rule that states that the noun must precede the adjective.

4- Borrowing:

There is a difference between code-switching and borrowing though on the surface they seem to include the use of “foreign words” in a conversation that is conducted in another language. the difference lies in the existence and the use of one or more language system in the mind of the speaker. Borrowing usually occurs when the speaker is unable to find or ignores an appropriate equivalent for the borrowed word in the first language.

The borrowed elements are usually single words and are modified so as to conform to the first language rules. In code switching, however, speakers switch codes not because they do not know an item/s in one of the codes, rather they do for necessary social considerations.

End of Lecture Five!