BILINGUAL ACQUISITION:

THE NEED FOR A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Child language acquisition has fascinated people for thousands of years. Sporadic accounts have appeared throughout history from the time of the Greeks and the Egyptians, reflected, for example, in writings by Aristotle, Herodotus, St. Augustine and King James VI of Scotland. Other accounts have arisen out of the bizarre tales of feral and wolf-children, reported as far back as pre-Roman days in the story of Romulus and Remos. Later cases were those of the Hessian wolf-boy in 1349; the Lithuanian bear-boy in 1661; Wild Peter of Hanover in 1721; and Victor the wild boy from Aveyron in 1797 (Brown, 1958). Even in the twentieth century similar stories were reported with the discoveries of Kamala and Amala in India in 1920, and two cases in the United States in the late thirties (Brown, 1958; Singh and Zingg, 1966). In all of these unusual cases, social isolation was a predominant factor underscoring the fact that children acquire language only when born into a linguistic community. Without human contact, there is little likelihood that the child will ever be capable of developing language on his own.

Exluding the bizarre accounts, however, reports of child language were usually only incidental to the main purpose of studies done by educators, physicians, and psychologists. This situation persisted until the beginning of the present century when Clara and William Stern devoted their entire attention to the problem (Stern, 1929). Others followed their example, and in the past few decades there have been a multitude of studies which have formed the basis for a new understanding of language and language acquisition.

Linguists, however, concerned themselves primarily and almost exclusively with linguistic data. their goal was to set down a linguistic description of the process, and depending upon the aspect of language they examined they wrote about phonology, morphology, and syntax, more rarely about lexical or semantic aspects. Concurrently with this newfound interest on the part of linguists, psychologists contributed their approaches and methods to those already in use. Yet something was still missing. If language emerges only when the human infant is in a social context - that is, in a community with other human beings - then the relevance of the social environment must also be considered in an account of linguistic development. More recently, the notion of a social and linguistic descrip-

tion has been advanced by Hymes who has termed this an "ethnography of speaking." According to Hymes, "...with this change the process that began with phonology and morphology will have come full circle linguistic description will find its own development to require... considerations from which at first it sought to be free." (Blount, A sociolinguistic approach to language seems timely and desirable, especially now that generative-transformational grammar has made such tremendous strides in the field of linguistics. Generative grammarians emphasized the distinction between language "competence" and language "performance" and chose to study competence, ignoring performative aspects almost entirely. However, the recent awareness that to understand language fully, linguistics cannot ignore the "speech act" itself (which involves the use of language in its social context) has encouraged the field of sociolinguistics. Some generative grammarians have now begun to take social aspects into account in writing their grammars, as increasing sociolinguistic data become available. This trend has demanded a shift in approach from one which studied language and society separately (a co-occurrence approach) to one which studies the interaction between language and its social and situational contexts (a covariation approach). The assumption is that much more can be learned about languages in this way than if language and society are treated independently. Hymes sums up this development by saying:

> Saussure is concerned with the word, Chomsky with the sentence, the ethnography of speaking with the act of speech...
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> The goal of the ethnography of speaking can be said to be to complete the discovery of the sphere of 'rule-governed creativity' with respect to language, and to characterize the abilities of persons in this regard... In extending the scope of linguistic rules beyond sentences to speech acts, and in seeking to relate language meaningfully to situations, this approach, although compatible with Chomsky's goals, does critically recast certain of his concepts. (Blount, 1974)

A team of scholars subsequently echoed this call for ethnographies of speaking in a manual they prepared for researchers, entitled A Field Manual for Cross-Cultural Study of the Acquisition of Communicative Competence, published in 1967. The writers listed three aspects of child language in which data are most needed:

> (1) We need information about the learning of languages which are structurally different from English... (in order to find) certain universals in terms of stages of development in children.

> (2) ...language acquisition studies (should) be broadened to include not only the traditional formal core of language, but competence in the use of language. Not only do children learn the phonology, grammar and vocabulary which permit us to identify a language, but they learn when to speak, when to be quiet, when to use polite forms, and when to shift language in a multilingual community. We know nothing about the relation between these aspects of learning and the learning of the basic code...
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> (3) There has been considerable controversy over the role of the social milieu in language development... The controversy turns on the degree to which a strong maturational component in language development may make linguistic competence relatively impervious to acceleration through changes in the milieu. The linguistic repertoire of the community clearly must influence the context of the child's learning, but it is not clear whether the order of acquisition of grammatical or sociolinguistic rules might be altered either by their place in the adult system or by specific values and practices of the child's caretakers. (Slobin et al, 1967).

In all three areas, the need for a sociolinguistic approach to language acquisition studies is clearly underscored.

Studies of Infant Bilingualism

Werner Leopold noted that although numerous studies have been done on the topic of child language acquisition, there were few, indeed, which dealt with the learning of two languages simultaneously by small children (Leopold, 1939-49). Others have also deplored the paucity of records dealing with child bilingualism, and called specifically for investigation in this area (Bar-Adon and Leopold, 1971). Vildomec's book on Multilingualism (1963), cited only three important works on preschool children who acquired two languages simultaneously from the beginning of their speech, those by Ronjat (1913), Pavlovitch (1920), and Leopold (1939-49). Slobin's Field Manual 1967), listed seven reports of bilingual children, of which only three were general longitudinal case studies - the same three referred to by Vildomec. And although approximately fifty studies were mentioned in Slobin's updated publication of Leopold's Bibliography of Child Language (Slobin, 1972), closer inspection reveals that the same three works stood out as the only full case reports; the others, by and large, were particularist descriptions of specific aspects, or reports of acquisition at a specific stage of development.

The first of the three general descriptions - that by Ronjat - dealt with

a case of complete bilingualism up to age 4;10. Ronjat's son, Louis, learned German from his mother and French from his father while they lived in France (Ronjat, 1913). Pavlovitch likewise recorded the simultaneous speech development of his son, Douchan, in both Serbian and French. However, since his records only went up to the child's second year, they were considerably less useful in discerning much about the child's bilingual ability (Pavlovitch, 1920).

Geissler, who lived among Germans in Yugoslavia, also reported on infant bilingualism in a study of the bilingual development of German children in Belgrade in 1938. His is the only book aside from Ronjat's work which treated the linguistic development of children from the point of view of bilingualism. However, Geissler was not a linguist and his work was criticized for poor recording and too many vague generalizations (Bar-Adon and Leopold, 1971). A more recent account of bilingualism, but hardly with the depth of those mentioned above, was that of Robbins Burling, whose son learned Garo and English at the same time (Bar-Adon and Leopold, 1971).

Of all of these, Leopold's work, Speech Development of a Bilingual Child, published in four volumes between 1939 and 1949, remains one of the classic studies in this area. It was definitely the most thorough study of the speech of an individual bilingual child, and probably of any child. Leopold recorded his first daughter's speech from her birth to age 15;7 with emphasis on the first two years. The child, Hildegard, learned German and English; however, her ability with both languages was not nearly as complete as that of Ronjat's son. Her bilingualism was important in her first two years, after which her German fell into almost total disuse (Leopold, 1939-49).

Besides studies dealing with infant bilingualism, both Slobin's Field Manual and Leopold's Bibliography of Child Language point to the need for works involving languages other than English. In Spanish, for example, the bibliography records only seven studies, four of which are listed as on-going research as of the date of printing, in March 1972; whereas the Field Manual lists only one study of Spanish acquisition. Later in 1972, one work appeared in Spain which compiled earlier studies by Samuel Gili Gaya, under the title Estudios de lenguaje infantil 1972).

All in all, one is amazed by the paucity of works on the acquisition of Spanish in that it is one of the major tongues of the world. Consequently, it is not surprising that case studies of dual acquisition number even fewer, not to mention the lack of published works on bilingual English and Spanish children. However, as the phenomenon of bilingualism increasingly attracts attention, some writers of doctoral dissertations have begun to devote their efforts to researching limited aspects of the speech of Spanish-English bilingual children. Similarly, articles

have begun to appear with increasing frequency in professional journals summarizing works in progress, such as those by Brisk, and Padilla and Leibman. Even so, most works have failed to devote attention to the interrelationship of children's speech and their environments. The use of language - especially by bilingual children - remains a relatively unexplored area in all of the studies dealing with infant bilingualism.

On the Nature of Bilingualism

In reviewing the case studies dealing with infant bilingualism, it becomes patently clear that the type and degree of bilingualism referred to is not always the same. Since Pavlovitch's work only went as far as the child's second year, there could not have been substantial speech in either language. The same was true of Burling's son, who was exposed to Garo and English. Even Leopold's daughter, who was initially bilingual, became increasingly monolingual after her second year. Only Ronjat's study spoke of complete bilingualism during the period observed. Yet all of the children in these studies were termed "bilingual" by their reporters, even though their abilities were not at all the same. The problem was that bilingualism was imprecisely defined. Today, of course, it is clear that the term bilingualism entails a range of possible abilities and that bilinguals may display varying degrees of skills in the two or more languages involved.

Furthermore, besides the imprecision of definition and the difficulty of measuring bilingualism, most scholars have studied it primarily from their own bias, within a linguistic, sociological, or psychological framework. Linguistics, for example, has examined linguistic interference; sociology has looked at languages in contact and their effects upon each other (primarily among adult populations); psychology has been concerned with such things as the relationship between bilingualism and intelligence, etc. Yet all of these are interrelated. For example, it is commonly recognized that the age and manner of acquisition, as well as the environment or environments in which the individual becomes bilingual, have definite psychological and linguistic consequences. Hence, the acknowledgment of the social milieu on the type of bilingual produced.

According to Fishman (Valdman, 1966), two major types of bilingual speakers are generally identified, the compound bilingual and the coordinate bilingual (although the validity of this dichotomy is now under scrutiny). Implicit in these types is the impact of social conditions (how, when, and where the languages are acquired) upon the psychological and neurological organization of the speaker as well as his resultant ability with the languages concerned. The degree of switching and interference manifest in his speech is apparently related to all of these factors as well as to the context of the speech event.

In 1960, scholars attending an International Seminar on Bilingualism

held in Wales had already recognized the need to include various components in a full bilingual description - the number of languages involved, the type of languages, the function of each, the degree of proficiency, the switching patterns, and the way in which the languages affect each other linguistically (Andersson and Boyer, 1970). A decade later, Mackey again emphasized the social domain as the perspective in which bilingualism can be understood by stating the following:

> Bilingualism is not a phenomenon of language; it is a characteristic of its use. It is not a feature of the code but of the message. It does not belong to the domain of 'langue' but of 'parole.' (Fishman, 1970).

Language and the Social Context

As Mackey and others cited the need to incorporate social information in bilingual descriptions, sociolinguistics proceeded on its own in precisely the same direction. Hymes, for example, commented on the relevance and importance of contextual information to linguistic studies:

> Discovery of structure in linguistics has proceeded mostly as if the function of language is reference alone. The common account of language as mediating merely between (vocal) sound and meaning manifests this assumption. It pictures language as structure between the two continua of possible meanings and possible sounds. The image of man implied is of an abstract, isolated individual, related only to a world of objects to be named and described. Ethnography of speaking proceeds on the hypothesis that an equally primary function of speech is 'address.' Speech... mediates between persons and their stituations...
>
> One must begin from speech as a mode of action, not from language as an unmotivated mechanism. (Blount, 1974).

Here it is recognized that language is never used in a social vacuum, and only a sociolinguistic approach brings out the extralinguistic influences on the acquisition of language and verbal behavior. Yet there is no sociolinguistic theory yet so explicit as the present theory of language. Linguists have studied the sentence, but what is needed, according to Hymes, is

> ...the extension of analysis beyond the sentence to sequences in discourse; beyond the single language to 'choices' among forms of speech; and beyond the referential function to functions that may be loosely

> grouped together as stylistic. Each of these can be seen as involving kinds of knowledge and ability (i.e., competence) on the part of members of a community (Blount, 1974).

Hence, both language and language use are structured, and every utterance has both social and referential meaning. Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between linguistic and social facts. A sociolinguistic approach attempts to delineate both the social structure and linguistic structure inherent in the utterance, and to correlate the two. This is possible because linguistic choices are available to each speaker, and the choices he makes reflect the social factors present at the time of speech. Hence, linguistic alternates always convey social information, fairly well known to all members of a speech is not done randomly but in accordance with prescribed norms. Also, as Gumperz points out, these "...social markers occur in clusters such that the selection of one of a particular set of alternates in one part of an utterance restricts the freedom of selection among subsequent sets." (Slobin et al, 1967) That is, the style adopted in a particular circumstance is consistent.

What affects the speaker's choice of styles are factors in the setting. Some of the social factors affecting linguistic choices which have been identified by Ervin-Tripp are the following: (Fishman, 1970) (1) the setting; (2) the topic of discourse; (3) the form of communication; (4) the tone or mood of the act; (5) the function or norm of the interaction; and (6) the participants, which includes consideration of the status, sex, age, and occupation of the speakers as well as their roles in relationship to each other and in relation to the social situation at hand. Furthermore, Ervin-Tripp suggests that the social factors are arranged hierarchically as stages in the communicative process. Certain factors are primary considerations assuming more underlying importance in terms of their effects on the speaker's choice than others. Among these, social relationships seem to be the major determinants of verbal behavior.

As social factors present in the setting vary, so does the speaker's choice of style. No person speaks in exactly the same manner at all times in all places to all people. This holds true for everyone, whether monolingual or bilingual. However, whereas the speaker of only one language shifts styles within a single language system, the bilingual has even greater options - he can shift styles within each of the languages he speaks, and he can also shift from one language to another. Such code switching is also replete with social significance. This has been described by scholars such as Gumperz, Ferguson and Rubin. Gumperz, for example, distinguishes between vernacular speech (that used in the home and with peers) and other varieties which are learned after childhood and are used only in certain more socially definable communication situations (fishman, 1970). Ferguson identifies special types of high and low varieties of language which he dubbed di-

glossia (Word, 1959). And Rubin speaks more precisely of full code switching from one language to another in her work on the Spanish-Guaranf speakers of Paraguay (Fishman, 1970). Hence the bilingual shifts codes to mark contrast in the same way the monolingual shifts styles within a single language.

It is interesting to note that in spite of developments in sociolinguistics, most research performed has primarily involved adult speakers. Jakobson reminds us that for the person "...who is concerned with the fully developed structure of language, its acquisition...cannot fail to provide much that is instructive." (Jakobson, 1968) This must apply to linguistic acquisition as well as to the acquisition of the rules for language use. Yet investigators of child language - whether of bilingual or monolingual children - have almost totally ignored study of commmunicative competence as opposed to purely linguistic analyses.

Fascinating questions have yet to be asked and researched, especially as concerns dual language acquisition; for example,

(1) How and when does the process of language differentiation occur?

(2) What are some of the social factors which contribute to the child's growing awareness that he is, in fact, bilingual?

(3) How and when does the child begin to "behave" as a bilingual individual? What does bilingual behavior mean?

(4) What are some of the observable social factors which affect the child's choice of language (switching from one code to another)? How and when does the child begin to perceive these factors?

(5) Are some social factors more important than others in determining language choice? Is there any hierarchical order of importance of these factors?

(6) In addition to code switching, does the child posses linguistic styles and, if so, when do these become evident? What are some of the identifiable styles in children's speech?

(7) What are some of the factors which trigger differing styles of speech?

(8) What linguistic interference is noted in the speech of bilingual children? What effect do various social factors have upon the occurrence of interference and the type and direction

of interference in children's speech?

(9) How does the process of socialization affect linguistic abilities and language use, especially in the bilingual child?

(10) How does the process of acquiring two (or more) languages differ, if at all, from the process of learning only one?

The child acquires not only the phonology and grammar of language, but also a tremendous amount of information about social context in which he lives if he is ultimately to use language appropriately. His language is judged for its grammaticality as well as for its appropriateness, and it is in this second area where information is most lacking. In the case of the bilingual child, who often moves within two cultural communities, each of the communities in which he participates provides him with models of language, verbal behavior, attitudes, values, etc. As the child develops, his linguistic ability and language use, as well as his total behavior, are viewed and judged, however, from the limited perspective of each of the monolingual (and often monocultural) persons with whom he has contact. The bilingual child is expected to measure up to the norms of each of the cultural communities in which he operates, and normally to the same degree as the monolingual-monocultural child. It is these linguistic and cultural expectations which often produce the first sense of harmony or conflict within the child. The "problem" of bilingualism, therefore, cannot be viewed as an intrinsically linguistic or psychological phenomenon alone, but as one which has its roots deeply set in the social milieu and in the attitudes of persons who surround the child. The child is both linguist and ethnographer, and he is incredibly sensitive and expert as both.

A Sociolinguistic Case Study in Progress

The writer's interest in developmental sociolinguistics grew to a large degree out of an attempt to produce a case study of one bilingual child, the author's son. From the time of the child's birth a little over seven years ago, data have been systematically collected in a speech diary based on observation, recordings of the child's utterances and occasional video tapes. As with most other researchers, the writer's initial interest was in compiling linguistic data, however it soon became apparent that a fuller sociolinguistic description was not only more fascinating, but also capable of providing new insights into the acquisition of communicative competence. The limitations inherent in the study of a single child were readily acknowledged, especially because the social variables naturally differ from each individual. However, even the study of one individual can shed light on bilingual behavior, and the relationship between speech acquisition and the social context. Following is a capsule description of some of the salient aspects of the case study which have emerged thus far.

Background: The Child and His Caretakers

Mario was the name chosen for the child, born in Vermont on July 27, 1968. Because it was anticipated that he would eventually have contact with three cultures and three languages in that his father was Italian-American, his mother Bolivian, and his birthplace the United States, "Mario" seemed a good choice, requiring no translations into any of the languages concerned. The child's father spoke English and Italian as native tongues; his mother was a native speaker of Spanish. Both parents, however, were fluent speakers of Spanish, Italian, and English. Both parents had also lived and traveled extensively in various countries in which each of these languages was spoken, and they both had a high regard and appreciation of all three languages and cultural areas.

Language Contact and Exposure

In Mario's case, Spanish was the language of the home, and the language used with him from his birth. By contrast, his contact with English was limited at first to that provided by occasional visitors, television and radio, and the environment outside the home. His first prolonged and intensive contact with English during his pre-school years occurred between ages 2;2 to 2;4 when he attended a nursery with English-speaking children. Consequently, English was a somewhat tardy development which manifested itself as a productive skill beginning about 2;8. Periods of English alternated intermittently with periods of almost exclusive contact with Spanish during occasional but lengthy trips to Bolivia and Mexico. Exposure to both languages to age five was uneven, with probably more exposure to Spanish than English. By five, however, when Mario began kindergarten, exposure to both languages was more nearly equal from that point on. His formal education, however, was conducted entirely in English.

Language Performance at Age Five

Between his fifth and sixth year, Mario might be described as a coordinate bilingual, having acquired each of his languages from separate speakers and under quite separate circumstances. This was reflected as well in his use of his languages, each of which he clearly reserved for the appropriate situation.

Various tests were used on occasions to ascertain Mario's proficiency in Spanish and English. The tests showed that Mario was an individual who controlled Spanish and English on about the same level as the monolingual child of the same age in each of these languages. On a phonological level

he did not have complete control of all of the allophonic variations of English phonemes, although he did differentiate all the phonemes of both languages. He produced those phonemes common in the speech of his monolingual peers, having some difficualty, as is common, with the distinction. He appeared slightly stronger in his knowledge of Spanish vocabulary than in English, and had a fairly good command of the grammar of both languages. He was probably more advanced in Spanish morphology than his Spanish-speaking peers; however, the same did not seem to be true in English, where he lacked certain tense markers and the possessive forms common to the speech of five-year-old English-speaking children.

From other indicators as well, it was clear that Mario was bilingual and bicultural by five, and that he was quite aware of his own bilinguality. He used each language appropriately in the proper situation with an amazingly low degree of interference. All in all, Mario controlled Spanish and English on about the same level as the average monolingual child of the same age in each of these languages; and, in addition, he had a passive knowledge of Italian.

Language and Socialization

In most cases, the child's caretakers are largely responsible for his socialization during his pre-school years, serving as models of behavior, giving direction, and providing input. Much of this is accomplished through language, as well as through example. The language adults use with the child often varies with the child's age. The infant who has not yet acquired language is not addressed in the same manner as the two or five-year-old. The way in which adults talk to children often reveals a variety of things: it reflects something about their own beliefs about the child and their expectations concerning youngsters of varying ages, and it embodies their attempts to socialize the child in ways appropriate to their world view. Since adult language varies with the age of the child, it is clearly not a vast corpus of undifferentiated speech. Consequently, their language serves as the first source of differing speech styles and usage which the child will eventually acquire. In Mario's case there was also continued contact with a monolingual Spanish-speaking individual who lived with the family and who had primary responsibility for the child's care. As the child matured and began to interact with other persons outside the home, linguistic and cultural inputs affecting his verbal behavior also broadened.

Both parents, and in particular his mother, had strong attitudes which supported the maintenance and sole use of Spanish in the home. This attitude obviously affected Mario in his exclusive use of Spanish with all family members; in the few cases when Mario deviated from this pattern by incorporating English lexical items in his speech, he was reminded of this fact. English then was the language which became associated with the world outside the home and usually with less intimately related persons.

When Mario was still an infant, his caretakers used language with him primarily to establish contact and to elicit signs of recognition. They also used language to quiet the child or to amuse him. The language they addressed to the infant was marked by higher frequency of voice and the use of repetitious syllables usually formed by consonant and vowel combinations. When the child began to move about, language was used to establish limits, to point out dangers, and to express aproval or disapproval. When he learned his first words attempts were made to point out things and provide labels. His caretakers also used language to direct the child and shape his behavior.

From the second to fifth years, Mario's behaviour came under increasing control. As he himself acquired language, he was obliged to use it increasingly in place of other forms of expression; i.e., speaking, instead of screaming, jumping, or tantrums. Mario was required to modulate his voice and lower his volume in certain situations, in church, at the doctor's office, and so forth. For the first time he was taught that it was inappropriate to say certain words which became taboo in certain settings ("pis, caca"). This prohibition provided him with verbal ammunition, which he used when angry. He learned that by merely saying these words he produced specific reactions in others. His parents also began to direct his interaction with other persons and to define his relationship to them. Social relationships were often clarified through his parents' insistence on the use of titles and proper etiquette terms for greeting, addressing people, leave-taking, and thanking.

By five, increasing demands were placed on the child. There was little tolerance for inappropriate language or behavior. Commands were frequent and direct. These were sometimes followed by verbal or physical punishment. There was some alternation between direct commands and attempts to reason with the child. There was increased emphasis on the structure and form of conversation, the give and take of dialog, and the use of etiquette and courtesy terms. There was also less tolerance for aberrant language, and grammatical errors were usually pointed out by subtle or direct means. Most importantly, code switching with the same interlocutor was not permitted in normal conversation, although it was allowed when quoting, in roleplay, or when a phrase was untranslatable.

The five-year-old child had acquired the language of his parents, and through it, their view of the world, in as far as he was able to grasp it. However, Mario had just begun to enter more fully another world, that of kindergarten and that of an English-speaking peer group. These divergent environments are just beginning to produce effects on the child. In the ensuing years, Mario will be subjected to other areas of socialization and sometimes differing views; and, as a bilingual/bicultural individual, he will probably face his most challenging moments.

Part II will appear in the next issue.