DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 104 115 PL 004 383

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TITLE Toward a Phenomenological Psycholinguistics of Multilingualism.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 17p.; In "The MacLeod Symposium," Krech, David, ed. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Bilingualism; Contrastive Linguistics; Dialects; Emotional Experience; *Expressive Language; Idioms; Language Patterns; Languages; Language Styles; Language Typology; *Multilingualism; *Psycholinguistics; *Psychological Patterns

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that every language carries its own denotative, connotative, evaluative, and emotional implications. The impact of these aspects of language on a multilingual's use of languages is examined. Particular reference is made to connotative meanings of words; reference to the second person; the meaning of the term "multilingual"; dialects, subdialects and idiolects; psychological subtleties and emotional implications in the use of non-native languages; and phonological differences and patterns among languages. In addition, the following points are summarized: (1) One cannot translate anything perfectly from one language to another, due to the various implications mentioned above; (2) Everyone has his own idiolect, but everyone is also multilingual in that different linguistic rules are used in different social contexts; (3) Although every language is arbitrary, everyone feels that his native language is not. People can have strong emotional reactions to the slightest deviation from what is expected from other speakers in particular situations; and (4) At some phenomenological level, people seem to feel, erroneously, that language is absolute and unchanging. (AM)

TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLINGUISTICS OF MULTILINGUALISM

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I would like to explore with you today some generalizations about language use that may seem obvious if you stop to think about them. The most fundamental is that linguistic messages convey far more than just the primary denotative content of the message itself. Usage of particular languages, dialects, intrafamily communications and idiolects has rich connotative emotive and interpersonal implications. This is, of course, one reason why perfect translation is impossible.

As the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis implies, different languages cut up the world of human experience differently, and make different relations salient. How a person thinks, that is, his whole system for filtering--or synthesizing--input and output is radically different when he uses different languages. Different languages are not, subjectively, perfectly interchangeable. The details of the phenomena may be--in fact, as Hans Jaspe has shown in a beautiful analysis in the Psychological Bulletin, in all very likely are--quite different for different speakers of the same languages but the phenomenological fact remains unmistakable: different cognitive (and emotional) structures go with different languages. Leo Tolstoy, incidentally, demonstrated this in elegant detail in his 1861 manuscript on Love and Freude, which, in the tradition of Jost Trier and of Ferdinand de Saussure's synchronic linguistics, made clear how different the English and German cognitive "maps" are for the domain of the pleasurable emotions.

This is true not only of connotative meaning, but also of denotative. Even such a humdrum word as "table" is, strictly speaking, semantically

to translate accurately into other languages. True, bilingual dictionaries unhesitatingly provide such equivalents as "tisch" in German, "table" in French, "bord" in Swedish, and "mesa" in Spanish. But you can have a "table of numbers" in English, and not in most of the others, You can "go to table" in German in the sense of going to the dinner table, but this sounds archaic in English. You can call a raised flat piece of land a "table" in Spanish but not in German. An English action can be "tabled," but this doesn't make any sense in the other languages, and so on.

Or consider reference to the second person. In most languages, which form of the word 'you' is used has important implications. English is one of the few that does not have at least two different forms, a formal and an informal (Sie and du in German, vous and tu in French, etc.). A person being addressed finds out very important information--if the wrong form is used, instead of the right one, or inappropriate words and phrases are used--which can't occur at all when you have only the single form, 'you.' But you can't avoid referring to the social status of the person you want to or not, in a language that has several forms for the second person pronoun. The same is true of gender in many languages, whether relevant or not, you must mention the sex of the third person in objects

What is implied by use of different languages by a multilingual? Each language carries with it emotive, evaluative emotional tones that can pervade every interaction. Yiddish humorist Avi involved in a study some years ago which has become classic. The same bilingual speakers were evaluated less positively by natives of Montreal when they were speaking French than when they were speaking English. Different dialects and languages are, of course, typically used by at least somewhat identifiable subgroups of people.

Doubtless the details of the feeling tone associated with speaking various languages are primarily a matter of the context within which each language has been used. German was my native--and only--language, until I was six; it remains for me associated with strong, uncontrolled emotion, with the kinds of overwhelming feelings that tend to be all-engulfing in childhood. English is sort of matter-of-fact and nondescript, the routine everyday vehicle for most communication. Probably because I took French poetry and literature courses long ago, French is more a matter of euphony and concern with the sound of the flow of speech. Swedish has a quality of intimacy, mystery, and strong, warm emotion, partly because I am an Ingmar Bergman fan, and partly because my youngest son and I studied it intensively for two years, with daily class and daily homework which we did together. And so on.

In a sense I am a multilingual, and yet the only language in which I can really get along reasonably effortlessly is English--and I often have trouble even making English utterances convey precisely what I want them to. What does the term, "multilingual," mean?

While it could bring to mind an octopus-like creature with many tongues rather than tentacles, let us use it here to mean having at least a minimal level of competence in several different languages. But what does "different languages" mean? How should one classify the thousands--or, more accurately, tens of billions--of systems of verbal communication? Traditionally, two languages are considered different if the speakers of one cannot understand the speakers of another, so that Arabic, German, and Italian are said to be different languages. At a superordinate level, there are sufficient similarities among French, Spanish and Italian so that it makes sense to speak of a Romance <u>family</u> of languages; similarly, Swedish, German, and

Dutch have enough commonalities so that one can speak of a Germanic family. On the other hand, within every living language there are dialects, such as the version of American English spoken in parts of the U.S. South as against London cockney; it is confusing that such speakers of what are supposed to be dialects of the same language may have great difficulty understanding each other, while there are several groups of what are supposedly two different languages, such as Norwegian and Swedish, whose speakers typically don't have too much trouple understanding each other.

Particular dialects have very specific rules, and are used by specific subgroups of people. Roger Shuy, of the Center for Applied Linguistics, last year told me about a study in which the natural speech of some inner city dwellers was recorded on tape. Twenty-second excerpts from these tapes were played to another sample of people from the same cities, who were asked to identify the race of the speakers. They were able to do so with better than ninety percent accuracy.

Within most dialects a native speaker can detect particular subdialects, and many of these are in turn further divided, so that one could perhaps even speak of a subsubdialect. The pronunciation of the Swedish word for seven, "sju," (su, shu, chu, phu, hu, etc.) seems to be systematically somewhat different even from one island to the next in Stockholm. Particular usages also occur only in circumscribed groups, such as students at a particular college; perhaps such systems could be called "grouplects." Most families have some phrases or usages that are unique, and which are incomprehensible or at least sound odd to outsiders; maybe we could call these "familects." Finally, linguists use the term "idiolect" to refer to a particular individual's own idiosyncratic use of language, suggesting that every person in the world has a slightly different language (or <u>parole</u> as de Saussure called it),

with unique use of particular syntactic forms, morphemes, and lexical items with particular frequencies.

But this concept of "idiolect" appears to violate one of the most fundamental features, if not the most fundamental feature, of language: it is not an individual matter, but always an interactive process. Everyone has a variety of "idiolects," depending on whom he is talking with. My language--including my English--is quite different when I am speaking with one of my children than when I am speaking with a stranger. When I am lecturing my language is, of course, very different from the "idiolect" I use when speaking with my wife. Everybody speaks many different languages or "lects," depending upon whom he is speaking with, and the details of the relationship between his listener and himself. If you use an idiosyncratic utterance you readily use with individual A, who is an intimate friend, when speaking with individual B, a comparative stranger, your boss, your grandfather, or your grandchild, the reaction of the listener is apt to be one of incredulity, laughter, or anger. Deviations from intricate linguistic expectations can lead to confusion, annoyance, amusement, or consternation. In typical everyday English there are complex rules and restrictions that are, I am convinced, fully as intricate as those which are formalized in Japanese.

Everybody has many different names. I can think of at least twenty names for myself, names I have actually been called by various people in various circumstances, each with a particular set of connotations about the relationship of the user of the name to me, and with strong evaluative associations. They include Michael, Michael (German pronunciation), Mike, Mikey, Michel, Michelchen, Pa, P, Papa, Professor Wertheimer, Mr. Wertheimer, Mr. Wortheimer, Mr. Varetimer, Dr. Wertheimer, Professor, Doctor, Sir, Dad, Bub, Goomer, Hey you, and few other I'd rather not list. Examination of

the circumstances under which each one is used would require many pages. A particular one,which feels perfectly natural in a given situation, would, of course, feel quite inappropriat_ if used by a speaker who has a different relationship to me. I'm sure the same is true of everyone; there are some strong taboos associated with names. These taboos change; the implications of various titles like Professor, Doctor, or Mister, as well as Miss, Mrs., and Ms., are now changing rapidly.

Some "lects" are created intentionally by small groups. In his later teens, one of my boys developed a special "language" together with a close peer. Called "Burgle," it changed rapidly during its short life; indeed one of its chief characteristics was that a new utterance should be a pun or an innovative syntactic form which should nevertheless be comprehensible to the listener. Communication in it was primarily about feelings, with particular lexemes referring to very large semantic fields, and with meanings often reversed relative to English, German, French or Spanish cognates, with which it was riddled. Not unexpectedly in boys of that age, many of the terms referred to actions or anatomy that are taboo in polite "standard English." Use of this tongue implied a special, exclusive intimacy between the speakers, each of whom called the other, "Topo."

My children have turned out to be very good at learning some other, more widely spoken, lects, too. Use of a particular dialect carries with it, of course, implications about common perceptions and evaluations with the other speakers, and about in and outgroup memberships. When we spent an academic year in Washington, D.C., the boys went to local schools which had a large proportion of Blacks in the student population. At first they had some trouble interacting in informal settings, and even in understanding what their fellow students were saying. Within a couple of months, they had learned

what really was a new language for them, and were able to communicate, complete with the more complex morphological, intonational and syntactic changes, as well as the simpler lexical ones, in ways that made them perfectly comfortable in the Black subcultures at the school. The clincher was in the use of the word "nigger" as a form of address, which in the local lect implied particular intimacy when used among Blacks; one evening at supper the older boy reported with pleasure and pride that the Blacks with whom he played football after school now called him "nigger" just as readily as they used that name with each other.

A familect is, as I mentioned before, a kind of microdialect. Most families have one; failure to use it in family settings implies that something is wrong somewhere, that the speaker is upset, or the like. And, of course, such a lect would never be used with someone outside the family. The idiosyncratic lexical items and usages may become so automatic that it is hard even to think of them in other contexts; they sound odd to outsiders but of course seem perfectly natural inside the family. Here are a few examples from the Wertheimer familect. The coffee pot doesn't percolate or perk; it blups. When we change our clothes, either from nighttime to daytime, or vice versa, or from formal street clothes to comfortable at-home clothes, (referred to as "decent" clothes), we don't change our clothes, but we "get chung." When you are cold, you are "fruz" (frozen). The past participle of "to shave" is "shuv"; and devices for scraping the face are collectively called "shuvery." A spading fork, used to dig the garden in the spring, is a "spork." There are occasional reversals; people sometimes ride by on a noisy soda-Michael, you carry papers and books in a kiefbrase, and in the winter the road may be scraped by a ple-snough; appropriately enough, by this rule, a butterfly becomes a "flutter-by." Ground beef is "humbug,"

English muffins are "ingles," and milk is kept, appropriately enough, in the frigidmaker. When the poodle needs a haircut, it's time she "got mowed."

Much pleasure is provided in our family by puns, especially multilingual ones. Many of the usages that have crept into the familect originated as puns. One reason that puns may be satisfying is that a successful pun, of course, points out relations that previously were not evident. A few recent ones: While sailing, after one corner of the sail has been tightened, the captain tells his crew to tighten the other corner, because the sail is still not tight enough. What he says to his crew is, Toulouse-Lautrec: Too loose: L'autre (the other, in French) Eck (corner, in German). Or: what military training facility is this: pomus est? Answer, this is Latin for "apple is," or "an apple is," or "Annapolis." A few months ago my older boy "proved" that no equals yes. No in German is "nein," which sound in English is the numeral nine. The number nine in modern French is "neuf," which is a word for "new" in old French, which means us, or "we"; this same sound is spelled "oui" in French, which, of course, means "yes." Another: when with a young American girl by the name of Kathy, we looked at a cathedral in Salzburg, someone said that if Kathy speaks slowly and with a Southern accent, we could describe her speech as a Kathy-drawl. This led my younger boy, shortly before George Wallace was shot, to come up with the thought that dis man Wallace invented a real good system that he's got goin' for him: every tahme that somebody dials a phone call to his headquarters, that's automatically registered as a vote for Wallace. That way he's sure to get elected. The system is called "dialect."

Let us return to the question of a multilingual using various languages. Phenomenologically the native language is apt to be seen as neutral, "grey," matter-of-fact; it is rather taken for granted--except on rare occasions of

poetic awareness. Usually, the metaphorical implications or origins of expressions are lost; little thought is given to the form of the communication. Instead there is an automatic concern with the cognitive referents of the communication rather than with the process of communication itself. But a language not known quite as well as the primary language may appear richer and more colorful, with greater awareness of such things as the metaphorical implications of particular words and usages. This may be one factor contributing to the success of novelists who wrote in a non-native language--such as Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov, and Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), all of whom are known for their felicitous style in English, though English was native for none of them. Possibly the freshness provided by looking at usage in a particular language from the perspective of a different language keeps words and usages more "alive" than they typically are in native usage.

Another observation may be related to this apparent greater emotional "openness" connected with use of a non-native language. A feeling of direct, intense emotional relating with an acquaintance seems to be stronger if at least one of the members of the communicating dyad is speaking a language other than his native one. If this is indeed true, how does it come about? Quite aside from the greater effort involved in speaking the unaccustomed tongue, perhaps it is associated with the inadvertent exaggeration of feelings, brought about because the metaphorical meaning of the relatively strange words is more salient than is true of words in the native language; the forms of polite discourse are not just empty rituals but are interpreted to mean what they say. Alternatively, perhaps the member of the pair who is speaking his native language might unconsciously respond to the other as he does to other people who use his language imperfectly--namely, children. Do people who have an especially warm reaction to children also tend to have

such a response to non-native speakers of their language? Still another possibility is that the non-native speaker is the master of fewer circumlocutions than the native. Whether he wishes to or not, he may end up speaking more frankly; he may not yet have learned how to imply things subtly, and is still restricted to relatively open, direct utterances.

Choice of language in small groups of multilinguals has very rich implications. The primary language of communication in my family, when my mother is present, has always been German. If she initiates communication in such an intra-family group in English, it means that she is distraught, or upset; it is as though a red flag goes up immediately if she speaks English rather than German.

Because such different cognitive and emotional states--as well as different degrees of competence--are associated with the different languages in which I can get along, I have relatively little difficulty in recalling whether I was just speaking or hearing German, French, English, or Swedish. I can even usually recall in which language various parts of conversations or letters in communications with some of my friends were. Part of what makes me aware of the fact that a given communication is in Swedish, for example, is the implied flattery that my Swedish is good enough for me to understand what is being said or written. If a native Swede speaks English with me, this implies my recognition of his competence in what is to him a foreign language. The use of a language like German by a Swede speaking with me implies subtle, very idiosyncratic things, such as the knowledge that German is my native language, that the speaker is married to a Swiss (whose native language was also German), and so on.

At the opposite extreme is Fritz Heider, who some years ago mentioned that his competence in English, German, and French is about the same. He

claimed that he often could not remember in which language a particular article or monograph he had recently read was written, but that he would have to think back about the author and his institutional affiliation, as well as the circumstances of the publication, to figure out again in which of the three languages the item must have been written. Clearly, for him these three languages must be cognitively and emotionally indistinguishable--coordinate in the Ervin-Tripp and Osgood sense--while for me they have strikingly different psychological states associated with them. For that matter, Paul Kolers recently performed some ingenious experiments with French-English bilinguals, with a finding that suggests that the "Heider syndrome" may be quite common: while they may remember the semantic content of a message quite well, they often don't remember whether it had been in English or in French.

How do you tell what language someone else is speaking? If he has a strong foreign accent, you may not even recognize for a while that he is speaking your own language, and even after you do, you may have trouble understanding him. I experienced this with a distinguished African sculptor who recently visited Colorado, and whose otherwise excellent English was so tinged with Yoruba intonation as to make him very hard to understand. Most Americans have had similar difficulties in understanding Orientals or Africans or Indians, whose written English may be impeccable, but whose native intonation patterns, very different from those of English, may creep into their spoken English and make it close to incomprehensible to native American speakers of English.

One day while I was riding a bus in Washington, D.C., two young Black men in working clothes, animatedly speaking a foreign language, got on the bus. At first I caught nothing. Then it sounded vaguely familiar. It

must have been at least a full minute before I realized suddenly that they were talking French, and immediately I began to understand what they were saying, even though before their conversation had been totally incomprehensible to me. Somehow the right coding system had to be switched on before decoding could occur. Their conversation soon made it clear that they had recently come from the Cameroons; the context doubtless played a role in the difficulty I had in recognizing the language they were speaking. I hadn't expected to hear French spoken by Black people I would run across in a bus in Washington. The majority of Black people I heard speaking in Washington used a version of the standard Washington Black dialect, some spoke so-called standard English, and a few spoke languages that were totally unfamiliar to me, presumably some African tongues.

How does a totally foreign language sound or look, to someone who does not know it at all? I overheard one inadvertent honest description a few months ago from an American tourist looking at the menu of a resturant in Germany at which a tour bus had stopped: "German is so funny--they just throw it all together, vowels and consonants, and call it a word." After my older boy had heard a fair bit of French, but still could understand none, he was able to imitate the phonology and intonation quite well; he commented that "All Frenchmen have big noses." After a few days' exposure to Norwegian, that language was unceremoniously called "Swedish with hiccups" by my daughter.

In general, when a stranger gets exposed to a completely new language, the first impression is, of course, one of total meaningless opacity. There is none of the taken-for-granted clarity and ease that is characteristic of communications in a well-known language; instead, overheard conversations seem to be nothing but incomprehensible gibberish. As exposure to the

language in its natural use increases, certain regularities gradually begin to emerge from the murk, and one starts to notice that certain patterns of sound are made more frequently in certain situations than in others. This must be the kind of process an anthropologist goes through when, as a participant observer, he studies an unfamiliar language with the intent of getting to know it well enough so that he can provide a scientific description of it. I have gone through the beginning stages of the transition from total opacity to beginning to see some regularities, when I was in Finnish speaking settings for several days on two different occasions, and derived much pleasure from being able to puzzle out some meanings.

The discovery of links in languages can be tremendously gratifying. The German word "Schnee" is the English "snow," with Swedish a kind of pun between the two: "snö." But on the other hand, the Romance root seems to be entirely different: French "neige" and Spanish "nueve." Originally I had assumed that these must be two unrelated, different groups of roots. While I was casually chatting about this with someone who knows Russian, she mentioned that the Russian word for snow is "sneg." This elegantly relates the Romance and Germanic roots; take the first few sounds, and you have the Germanic one, while if you take the last ones, you have the Romance root. Such cross-linguistic ties can even occur in languages which are totally unrelated, and are, therefore, historically quite unjustifiable. Yet one can still be amused to learn that in the Ga language, spoken in southeastern Ghana, a word for "songs" is "lala."

In some words, there is a peculiarly appropriate "fit" between sound and meaning; such phonetic symbolism can also be a source of pleasure. While chatting with a Swede about the different words for snow in English, and the Whorfian notion that an experienced skier has a much larger lexicon

for snow than does the non-skier, I was amused to learn that a perfectly good Swedish word for heavy, wet, large-flaked snow is "snöglop."

Two devices, lengthening a vowel and reduplication, seem to be used by a wide variety of languages for the purposes of strengthening the meaning of a word. Both of them seem to occur spontaneously in the speech of young children and in informal speech. In Hawaiian pidgin, "wiki" means "fast," and "wikiwiki" means "very fast." "Very, very" is stronger than just a single "very," and the same is true of "très, très" in French, "sehr, sehr" in German, and "mycket, mycket" in Swedish. Each of these words can also be intensified simply by lengthening the first vowel: "veeery," "treeees," "seeehr," and "myyyycket."

In conclusion, let me state a few antinomies that summarize at least some of the rather disjointed things I've tried to say. First, while according to the linguists it is possible to express just about any idea in any language, you can't translate anything perfectly from one language into another.

Second, everyone has a single (probably unique) set of symbol-referent relations, that is, his own communicative competence (or idiolect); to put it still another way, everyone speaks a language; yet everyone is also a multilingual, in the sense that different linguistic rules are used in different social contexts.

Third, ultimately every language is arbitrary--this is perhaps the most useful universal feature of language according to many linguists--and yet everyone feels that his native language is anything but arbitrary. It feels natural and right and inevitable, and people can have strong emotional reactions to even the slightest phonological, lexical, semantic or syntactic deviation from what is expected from other speakers in particular situations, with an extremely intricate set of determinants of what is "correct" or

"acceptable" or taken for granted. The slightest deviation can [illegible] distract the interaction from communication about something other than the communicative process itself to a glaring focus on the [illegible] than the content of communication.

Fourth, at some phenomenological level, everyone seems to feel that language is absolute and "correct" and unchanging, and yet all [illegible] are constantly undergoing changes.

Fifth, and finally, words and utterances have fairly [illegible] referents; yet they also carry with them a wealth of [illegible] and emotional implications concerning the relationship between [illegible] object and listener.

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