DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 131 717 FL 008 202

AUTHOR Van Wyk, E. B.
TITLE Differential Intra-Language Tolerance of Bilingual Interference.
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the International Congress of the Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquee (4th, Stuttgart, Germany, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Afrikaans; *Bilingualism; Contrastive Linguistics; *English; *Interference (Language Learning); *Language Attitudes; *Language Proficiency; Language Research; Language Usage; Linguistic Theory; Oral Communication; Phonology; Second Languages; Sociolinguistics; Syntax; Vocabulary

ABSTRACT

Evaluation of a bilingual's proficiency in a second language (S) should consider the extent to which his performance is influenced by his competence in his native or primary language (P). An evaluation of proficiency in an S language should reflect the intuitions of S's native speakers. It is found that native speakers do not regard all instances of interference in S usage of their mother tongue as equally deviant from its P usage. This study looks at the nature and depth of interference in S Afrikaans usage by native English speakers, and the attitudes towards this interference. A differential tolerance of interference is described, applying to the phonological, syntactic, and lexical levels of Afrikaans. Cases of interference recognized as maximally deviant are of the low tolerance type, while minimally deviant cases are of the high tolerance type. Two principles underlie this differential tolerance: linguistic distance determines that the use of an element or rule not found in P usage will result in low tolerance interference, and vice-versa; stylistic connotation determines that interference coinciding with strongly marked stylistic or sociolinguistic variants in P usage will result in low tolerance, and vice-versa. The latter principle outweighs the former. (CLK)

Any attempt to evaluate a bilingual's proficiency in a second or foreign language S must, inter alia, take into account the extent to which his performance in S is influenced by his competence in his native or primary language P, i.e. the extent to which his use of S suffers interference from P.

Linguistic performance presupposes the two primary skills of speaking and listening, but frequently also encompasses the two derivative skills of writing and reading. Since these four skills involve different neurological strategies it is normal even for monolinguals and P users of a language to perform more efficiently in some of these than in the others. This applies even more to S usage: a bilingual's performance in S usually suffers more interference in some skills than in others.

In this paper I will be concerned with interference in speaking an S language. I cannot claim that what I have to say will also apply to the receptive skills, listening and reading, or even to the other productive skill, writing, although one would expect the conclusions to have at least some validity in the case of the latter.

If an evaluation of proficiency in an S language is to have psychological validity it must reflect or approximate the intuitions of native speakers on its S usage, i.e. it must approach as closely as possible the native speaker's intuitive judgments on how much a particular example of S usage of his language deviates from normal P usage. It is possible, in principle if not always in practice, to quantify the amount or degree of interference in a given sample of S speech. However, such a quantification will not necessarily correlate with the native speaker's intuitive evaluation of the same sample of speech, since not all instances of bilingual interference are felt to be equally deviant from P usage. The validity and usefulness of a proficiency test can therefore be questioned if it provides a mere quantitative measure of deviance which is not related to acceptability by native speakers.

That native speakers do not regard all instances of interference in S usage of their mother tongue as equally deviant form P usage became clear to me when I had the opportunity to

examine large number of tapes on which native speakers of various forms of English spoke Afrikaans. (These two languages are the official languages of the Republic of South Africa). My purpose was to study the nature and depth of interference in S Afrikaans usage by speakers of P English.

The tapes were first listened to with a view to determine how many instances of phonetic and phonological interference could be identified in a normal listening situation. This was followed by a contrastive analysis of English and Afrikaans phonology in an attempt to determine how many of these instances could be predicted. It was found that quite a few cases of interference predicted by the contrastive analysis and actually occurring in the corpus had not been detected in the listening situation. This could only mean that these cases were not felt by native users of Afrikaans to be significantly different from P usage. The question then arose how this phenomenon, which could be called differential tolerance of interference, could be accounted for.

The reactions of various native speakers of Afrikaans to interference by English were then tested and it was found that there was a surprising consistency in the way in which interference was evaluated as more or less deviant from P usage. It was found, moreover, that differential tolerance also applied to the levels of syntax and the lexicon.

I have not been able to make a systematic and exhaustive analysis of all cases of interference wich could be predicted on the basis of a contrastive analysis; only a few striking cases were investigated. The conclusions I have to offer are therefore of a preliminary nature and will have to be confirmed by a more comprehensive investigation, such as I hope to undertake in the near future.

The term tolerance as used in this paper refers to latitudes of acceptability in the S usage of a language by speakers of the same P language, and not to attitudes to interference in S usage by speakers of different P languages. Tolerance in the sense that some forms of S usage of a language are tolerated more than others is, of course, also a sociolinguistic phenomenon which has to be accounted for. Native speakers of Afrikaans for example, tend to find interference of their language by the closely related Dutch to be less pleasing, more irritating as it

were, than interference by the more distant English or the totally unrelated Bantu languages. Again, interference of Afrikaans by an African tongue is found less disturbing than interference by English. Clearly, this kind of tolerance, which I will call inter-language tolerance, is conditioned by such factors as inter-group attitudes, frequency of occurrence, familiarity, cultural distance, etc.

Intra-language tolerance, as the subject under discussion may be called, is clearly a matter of degree, and it can be spread over a continuous scale ranging from cases of interference which are not recognized as deviant to cases which are regarded as maximally deviant. For practical purposes, however, it seems sufficient to distinguisch between, on the one hand, interference tending towards the minimum or zero end of the scale and, on the other, interference which clusters around the maximum end. The former may be said to be of the high tolerance type and the latter of the low tolerance type. "High" and "low" are relative terms, and a particular case of interference can therefore only be said to have high or low tolerance relative to other cases of tolerance.

It seems possible to relate differential tolerance of bilingual interference to two underlying principles. The first is the purely linguistic principle of linguistic distance. It determines that the use of an element or the application of a rule which is not found, or has no analogue, in P usage will result in interference of the low tolerance type.

Speakers of South African English, for example, tend to use a fricative or sonorant [ɹ] instead of a trilled [r] when speaking Afrikaans. This is felt by native speakers of Afrikaans to be typical of a "heavy English accent", obviously because it is never heard in P usage. If, for example, the word drie 'three' is pronounced as [dɹi] instead of [dri] it will unhesitatingly and consistently be recognized as deviant.

Another example is the tendency of certain English speakers to carry over into Afrikaans a word final r-reduction rule:

(1) $\emptyset \rightarrow$ ɹ / ə ___ # V

This rule causes expressions such as die mense is 'the people are' to be pronounced as [di mɛnsəɹ əs] instead of [di mɛ̃:sə ʔəs]. This is felt to be highly deviant since no analoguous

rule operates in P usage of Afrikaans.

On the other hand, when S usage is interfered by rules which have counterparts in P usage but which differ from the latter in details such contextual specifications the resulting interference will be of the high tolerance type. Afrikaans usage of English speakers is frequently characterized by the lengthening of a stressed final /i/ according to the rule:

(2) $i \longrightarrow [+long] / \underline{[+stress]} \#$

Long /i:/ never occurs in word final position in P Afrikaans, but the language has a related rule which lengthens /i/ before /r/ and before morphemes with initial vowels, i.e.:

(3) $i \longrightarrow [+long] / \underline{\quad} \{^{+}_{r}\ V\}$

When a word like drie 'three' is pronounced as [dri:] instead of [dri] in S usage the interference is consequently hardly noticed and the pronunciation often passes as acceptable Afrikaans. This is obviously due to the occurrence of forms like vier [fi:r] 'four' and drieë [dri:ə] in accordance with Rule (3).

Another example is the affrication or aspiration of /t/ in word initial stressed position in S Afrikaans. The relevant rule, well-known in English, may be formalized as follows:

(4) $t \longrightarrow [+affr] / \# \underline{\quad} V$

Certain dialects of Afrikaans have a related rule with a different contextual specification:

(5) $t \longrightarrow [+affr] / \# \underline{\quad} i$

If the Afrikaans word tafel 'table' is therefore pronounced as [tʰa:fəl] in S usage instead of the regular [ta:fəl] the interference is hardly recognized by speakers of the relevant dialects. The reason seems to be that affrication is normal in words like tien 'ten' [tʰin] according to Rule (5).

That tolerance is a matter of degree rather than of absolute values is borne out by the fact that lengthening of the vowel /ə/ before /r/ in words such as vir 'for', which is frequently pronounced as [fə:ɹ] or [fə:] instead of [fər], is felt to be more deviant than the lengthening of /i/ in drie. This can be explained by the fact that lengthening of /ə/ in P Afrikaans occurs only before morphemes with initial vowels, i.e.:

(6) $\emptyset \longrightarrow$ [+long] / ____ + V

This rule is clearly related to Rule (3) but has a more restricted context of application, which explains why [dri:] is found more acceptable than [fø:r]. On the other hand, however, lengthening of /ə/ is found to be more acceptable than the use of a fricative or sonorant /ɹ/ or the application of Rule (1). This is because the latter two have no counterparts in P Afrikaans.

Differential tolerance also operates on the level of syntax. Some types of negative sentences in Afrikaans require a duplication of the negative marker nie 'not' so that I have not seen him is rendered as ek het hom nie gesien nie. In other sentences a single marker is required, e.g. ek sien hom nie 'I do not see him'. S users of Afrikaans are inclined to leave out a second marker when it is required, so that ek het hom nie gesien nie is rendered as *ek het hom nie gesien. This is usually recognized as an error by native speakers, but it is not regarded as a serious one, obviously because the marker is not duplicated in all negative sentences in P usage.

Low tolerance interference results, however, when a similar mistake is made in the use of the past tense. Afrikaans has only one past tense which corresponds to the English present perfect in form, e.g.

ek	het	gehoor	=	I	have	heard
1	2	3		1	2	3

In use, however, it is the equivalent of the present perfect, the past and the pluperfect of English. English speakers are sometimes inclined to leave out the tense auxiliary in an attempt to render the equivalent of the English past tense, so that ek het gehoor becomes *ek gehoor. This is felt to be a serious error. The lower tolerance for this type of error is obviously due to the fact that the tense auxiliary is never left out in P Afrikaans.

The second principle underlying differential tolerance is stylistic connotation. It was found that low tolerance interference resulted whenever such interference coincided with strongly marked stylistic or sociolinguistic variants in P usage. In certain dialects of Afrikaans, different from those referred to above, affrication or aspiration of initial voiceless explosives

is heard only in highly affected speech which is considered to be unacceptably snobbish. If Rule (1) is applied in S usage of Afrikaans, i.e. if tafel 'table' is pronounced as [t'a:fəl] instead of [ta:fəl], it is felt to be highly deviant form "normal", i.e. unaffected, Afrikaans. In fact, the stylistic connotation of affrication is so strong for speakers of these dialects that they avoid it when speaking English for fear of sounding affected. Alternatively, they will affricate when speaking English in the presence of native speakers of English but not in the presence of fellow speakers of Afrikaans.

When the principles of linguistic distance and stylistic connotation lead to different results, the latter takes precedence over and cancels the former. A typical example is the deletion of /r/ after vowels in the S Afrikaans of English speakers according to a rule:

(7) $r \longrightarrow \emptyset \; / \; V \_\_\_\_$

which causes words like word 'become' to be pronounced as [vɔ:t] instead of [vɔ:rt]. One would expect a high tolerance for this type of interference since Afrikaans has a variable rule which has just this effect in the case of function words in relaxed, unselfconscious speech, i.e.:

(8) $r \longrightarrow \emptyset \; / \; V \_\_\_\_ \; \#]_{PRO,\ PREP,\ CONJ}$

Yet tolerance for /r/-deletion is very low. The explanation is probably that the dialect of coloured Afrikaners has an invariant rule identical with Rule 7 which is so typical of their speech that it is regarded as a linguistic stereotype.

It remains to be added that intuitions about degrees of deviation due to interference are not equally firm in all members of the native speech community. Various factors may blunt these intuitions or, on the other hand, reinforce them. Such factors may include frequency of contact with S usage, frequency of contact with the language causing the interference, proficiency in the language causing the interference, attitudes towards language purity, the number of languages known, linguistic sophistication, etc. Speakers who have grown up in bilingual homes and know the two languages equally well, for example, tend to be less sensitive to interference of one of their languages by the other than monolinguales or bilinguals who have a better command of the

one language than of the other. Where such differnces occur, however, they represent a shift over the total spectrum which leaves the essential relations unaffected. Differential tolerance amounts to a latitude in acceptability which may be greater for some speakers than for others but in which the relations between any two cases of interferenee remain remarkably constant.

****

In this paper I have tried to show:

(a) that not all instances of interference in the S usage of a language are felt to be equally serious deviations from P usage by native speakers;

(b) that differential tolerance in this sense is different from variable attitudes on S usage by speakers of different languages;

(3) that differential tolerance can be accounted for by two principles, those of linguistic distance and stylistic connotation; and

(4) that the principle of stylistic connotation takes precedence over linguistic distance.

Further research is needed to establish:

(a) whether other principles than the two discussed above operate in differential tolerance;

(b) whether tolerance can be predicted on the basis of such principles; and

(c) whether these principles have universal validity.

Finally, I would like to believe that a better insight into differential tolerance of interference will not only lead to a better understanding of linguistic intuitions in general but also to the design of more efficient courses in second language teaching.

PROF E B VAN WYK

Rand Afrikaans University
P O Box 524
JOHANNESBURG
Republic of South Africa