

OVERVIEW

Language is in constant change, as evidenced by the field of historical linguistics. Such is the case among monolingual as well as bilingual/multilingual communities. In monolingual communities, linguistic change might come about due to child language acquisition, since children do not simply copy the input they receive; in a sense they reinvent their native language(s), basing themselves on biological constraints, or perhaps Universal Grammar and the input in their environment. Change may also come about due to speaker innovations and divergence from linguistic norms.

The situation of change in a bilingual context is more complex, however. Change due to language acquisition could come about in different ways depending on the dynamics of the two languages. For example, some degree of cross-linguistic influence may occur normally during simultaneous bilingual language acquisition (see Döpke, 2000). However, in cases of community bilingualism in minority languages, the status of the minority language versus the dominant language is key (see Fishman, 2001a and b). It is possibly due to cases of contact and bilingualism that the minority language will not be passed on completely to the children. This leads to incomplete acquisition of the family or immigrant language. In cases in which there is a shift of language use across domains, there are typically fewer opportunities to use the minority language, and the subsequent reduction in functions of language may lead to speakers “forgetting”

linguistic norms. In cases of attrition, this is especially the case, as individual members of the speech community forget their language.

It is interesting to notice that certain linguistic phenomena that occur as processes of forgetting (either due to language shift or attrition) are also present during the learning of an additional language. Therefore, it is important to see whether a psycholinguistic process that is common among L2 learners is also occurring as a mechanism of minority language change.

The bilingual group that has been studied is a community of Veneto and Spanish speakers found in Chipilo, Puebla, a rural and primarily agricultural town approximately 12 kilometers from Puebla, Puebla. Using MacKay (1991, 1992, and 1999) as evidence that Chipilo is undergoing increased contact with the Spanish language, a valid assumption is that convergence toward Spanish is occurring, and that this may be evidenced as changes to the Veneto lexicon.

The primary motivation for this study was to describe lexical changes in a language which has received very little attention from linguists: Veneto. A secondary motivation was to study the Spanish-Veneto language pair. By doing so, the researcher continued previous linguistic studies in this community and studied the dynamics between Spanish as a majority language and Veneto, a non-indigenous minority language. A second goal of this investigation was to ascertain the extent to which a model of the bilingual mental lexicon (the Parasitic Model) that had been applied exclusively to explain the inter-lexical influence of incipient bilinguals can be used to explain linguistic phenomena occurring in a situation of community bilingualism.

The study itself was primarily quantitative in nature and involved interactive sessions carried out among four groups of bilingual speakers distributed according to age and contact with Spanish. To elicit linguistic data during these sessions, the researcher used the technique of oral translations. The analysis called for the coding of linguistic data to uncover the presence and degree of a parasitic relationship between syntactic frames.