Language Contact: The State of the Art

Organized by the Linguistic Association of Finland (SKY), Helsinki Area & Language Studies and the CROSSLING research network

Helsinki, August 28-30, 2014

Carter, Diana, Broersma, Mirjam, Donnelly, Kevin and Konopka, Angieszka
University of British Columbia
Radboud University
Bangor University
Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics

Corpus Evidence of the Triggering Effect of Cognates on Codeswitching from Welsh-English Bilinguals

This paper provides evidence of the triggering effect of cognates on codeswitching from a large corpus of Welsh-English spontaneous bilingual speech. The triggering hypothesis was first put forth by Clyne (1967, 2003). The hypothesis proposes that cognates may facilitate codeswitching due to a shift in the activations of two languages in the mental lexicon (Broersma, 2009; Broersma & De Bot, 2006). Cognates are strongly connected in the mental lexicon and their conceptual representations are more closely connected than those of non-cognates. Therefore, the activation of a word that is shared by two languages may lead to a change in activation of both languages at the lexical level. This in turn may 'boost' the least active language to the extent that the next time a lemma is selected it may be one from the boosted language instead of the previously spoken language.

Prior evidence of the triggering hypothesis was found in small corpora of natural speech (Broersma, 2009; Broersma & De Bot, 2006); however, several questions were raised that could not be addressed due to the number of bilingual clauses available for analysis. Our study addresses these questions, among others. First, does the length of the cognate, the length of the clause or the number of cognates within a clause have any affect on codeswitching? Second, is there an effect of the proportion of cognates per speaker? Third, to what extent does the grammatical class of the cognate affect whether it can facilitate codeswitching? For example, do nouns have more of an effect than verbs or modifiers?

In order to answer these questions, our study utilized a corpus that is over fifty times larger than any of the previously used corpora. The corpus consists of informal conversations recorded from 151 Welsh-English balanced bilinguals who were primarily recruited from northern Wales. All of the participants are highly proficient in both Welsh and English and live in bilingual regions.

A combination of Innovative and automated methods and tools were used to prepare the data for analysis (Carter et al, in press). We used *logit* mixed models to analyze the 65 000 clauses of Welsh-English bilingual spontaneous speech.

We present strong evidence that cognates facilitate both internal and external codeswitching. Specifically, the findings showed that the presence and number of cognates in a clause had an effect on the occurrence of codeswitching. There was a relationship between the clause length and the effects of the cognates. We also found that the word class of the cognate affected internal and external codeswitching differently. Overall, codeswitching occurred most frequently when the cognate was a noun, leading us to question the specific properties of nouns that may cause this effect. We conclude our paper with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

References

Broersma, M. (2009). Triggered codeswitching between cognate languages. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 12, 447-462.

Broersma, M. & De Bot, K. (2006). Triggered codeswitching: a corpus-based evaluation of the original triggering hypothesis and a new alternative. *Bilingualism:Language and Cognition*, 9, 1-13.

Carter, D., Broersma, M., & Donnelly, K. (in press). Applying computing innovations to bilingual corpus analysis. In … [Festschrift].

Clyne, M. (2003). *Dynamics of Language Contact: English and Immigrant Languages. Cambridge: CUP.*

Clyne, M. (1967). Transference and triggering: Observations on the language assimilation of postwar German-speaking migrants in Australia. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.