

Bilingual identity transformations in developing bilingualism

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the development of a young bilingual's strategic language use and her identity formation in the dual language acquisition process. A functional analysis of her oral language production drawing on naturally-occurring discourse and her metalinguistic comments reveal manifestations of her multiple personality. While analysing the dataset, patterns are identified in her self-regulation process to have a better understanding of how her sense of self is modified and diversified in a dual linguistic environment.

1. Introduction

The present paper is a part of a longitudinal study, which is to investigate and analyze my third child's, Sarah's development in English as a second language (L2) between the ages of one and eleven. At present she is seventeen years old. Sarah has been raised in a dual Hungarian-English context: she has acquired and used these two languages at a time from birth but regarding English she had a limited community support for the simple reason that we are Hungarians and live in Hungary. English is mediated by her parents, primarily by me, her mother, and other native and non-native speakers of English who belong to the family's social network. In order to create favourable conditions for her second language acquisition we try to observe a carefully established language boundary pattern and a clear labour division and language separation between Hungarian and English. It means the use of English and Hungarian is systematically related to certain situations, places and people. My investigation focuses on (1) Sarah's interlanguage development at different levels of language analysis (2) the development of her strategic language use and (3) her identity formation in the dual language acquisition process. I conducted a functional analysis of her oral and some of her written language production (personal letters), drawing on her L1-L2

and L2-L1 language shift and on her narratives retrieved from semistructured retrospective interviews I conducted with her to find evidence of her motives of using L2. To find traces of directly unobservable internal cognitive and psychological processes such as strategies for learning and communication I investigated the communicative intentions in my participant's language choice and metalinguistic comments. While analysing the dataset I tried to identify patterns in her appropriating linguistic forms to functions and also in her self-regulation processes in the dual linguistic environment.

My research is to document (1) how my participant applies code-switching as a strategy to mediate a range of communicative intentions; (2) how her sense of self is reflected in her language alternation and metalinguistic comments; (3) how her language use strategies and her sense of self are modified and diversified in the dual linguistic environment; (4) how her bilingual identity changes across time and situations.

II. The aim of the study

My research aims at understanding my daughter's identity development as it is displayed in language-related episodes of her free and spontaneous interactional exchanges. I present manifestations of her multiple personality and attempt to find important patterns in the data. The excerpts below are to explore how Sarah's interactional practices and orientations to bilingualism are utilized by her as a resource for constituting social relations and identities (Cekaite/ Björk-Willén [2:177]) and how bilingualism becomes a 'significant aspect of self perception and interpretations of developing bilingual life' (Gafaranga [8:510]).

In the present paper the following central research question is addressed:

- 1) How do Sarah's language-related free conversations, code-switches, appeals and orientations to L2 reflect her bilingual identity transformations in her developing bilingualism?

In my category system I rely on the categorization and typology of scholarly research (Baker [1]; Cekaite/Björk-Willén [2]; Cromdal [6]; Gafaranga [8]; Pavlenko [11]). The data presented as excerpts in my dissertation are organized according to the following categories:

1. Social identity development in interaction
2. Self-defence – coping with negative feedback and peer criticism – Asking for justification and reinforcement
3. Highlighting deficiencies and asymmetries in second language knowledge
4. Defining group boundaries – Preserving alliance and privacy
5. Finding ways to enhance learning

III .Research design - Theoretical background

My research falls into the category of qualitative research and involves one person, my own child. It is a single case study conducted longitudinally with a time-span of ten years aiming at understanding a bounded phenomenon:in a marginalized linguistic environment. I focus on the study of language from the point of view of the individual user, putting a special focus on the choices she makes, on, the constraints she encounters when using language in social interaction and the effects her use of language has on other participants in the act of communication (Crystal [5]). I approached my data from a purely qualitative perspective, and analysed them with the help of qualitative methods. Interpretive research (Chaudron [3]) is appropriate as I focus on how my participant makes sense of her experiences and also how the researcher in turn makes sense of the data obtained from interviews, observations, narratives, and other sources.

Data for the research were drawn from multiple sources, collected with the help of (1) participant observation and field notes, (2) semi-structured retrospective interviews conducted with the child, and (3) other documents such as the child’s writings e.g. personal letters and drawings. The pragmatic analysis gives opportunity to reveal Sarah’s orientations to bilingualism and allows for knowing more about (1) motives of language alternation and (2) transformations of her identity in her developing bilingualism.

IV. Discussion

I base my discussion on two Gricean assumptions that: (1) communication is a joint activity of the speaker and hearer, which involves the exchange of communicative intentions; (2) a single utterance can convey a range of meanings depending on to whom it is directed and in what context (Grice, [9:50]).

The table below shows the categories as the main organizing principle in grouping the selected discourse pieces of Sarah’s talk.

Table 1. Categories of language-related episodes to reveal Sarah’s multiple identities

Category	Description
1) Social identity development	Affiliation efforts and adjustment to the local norms. Ways of regulating, identifying and redefining herself in the cultural group depending on her personal needs and interests. Orientations to bilingualism at different points of developing bilingualism. Reference to natives’ approval makes a distinction in the local social order.
2) Self-defence –coping with negative feedback - asking for justification and reinforcement	Orientations to peer-initiated criticism, discussions of peer pressure cases. Sarah’s socializing into appropriate ways of regaining entitlement to use a language, which normally does not belong to her monolingual peer group members, her perception of the relative nature of L2 competence, her sense of self in the language learning process.
3) Highlighting deficiencies and asymmetries in second language knowledge	Struggles to reach the respectful position of a sufficiently competent speaker of English. The impact of peers’ comments mean further motivation to use and

	improve her L2. L1 is often used as reference points to assess proficiency in L2 and is a tool to construct knowledge in that language. There is a geographical and social-interactive separation between L1 and L2.
4) Defining group boundaries - Preserving alliance and privacy	Peer group negotiations as social sites for building local social order, values and norms that regulate one another's conduct and group-belonging.
5) Finding ways to enhance learning	Manifestations of Sarah's justification of the importance of L2 knowledge. Her understanding that her English knowledge is an additional asset, which is acknowledged by legitimate, authorized and competent users of L2, such as native peers and school teachers.

1.Social identity development in interaction

The example below reveals Sarah's perception of her L2 competence and that of her position in the local social group.

Excerpt 1

I don't know 'hörghurut' in English, we say only 'ill And even Brandy says so'. (7;2)

The excerpt is suggestive of Sarah's alignment with the L2 language community. The fact that identifying herself with native speakers represented by Brandon authorizes her to be treated as a legitimate L2 speaker (Norton [10]) who is knowledgeable enough to make valid statements

about the target language. Her inferences about her group affiliation betray that in the interaction she had developed a powerful subject position. References to shared language use habits with fully authorized native speakers of L2 like Brendy increases her self-esteem and self-confidence. Building collective identity gives her power and authority.

2.Self-defence – handling negative feedback

Excerpt 2

'Szandra says especially grammar can be learnt only from a teacher, one cannot learn it from one's mother.Then I said that it is possible, I also know it from you, and Kasia is learning from her mother too.' (8;4)

Peers' questioning the relevance of a language learning environment where one's own mother is the mediator of a foreign language and learning occurs in home settings without organized and institutional framework is a recurring topic of Sarah's discourse. The peers' concept of language competence represents a general view of those who base their ideas on institutional learning at school. According to this general view English is identified with the language of schooling, where firm knowledge of words and grammar is the strongest predictor of one's good results in the English lesson. High level of language competence is guaranteed only by institutional learning supported and controlled by an authorized person, preferably a teacher. Sarah's dilemma generated by peer pressure is reflected in her contesting for the position of the competent L2 user (Ricento [12]). She justifies the relevance of learning English at home with her mother arguing that it is as realistic as learning at school with a teacher.

3. Highlighting deficiencies and asymmetries in second language knowledge

Excerpt 3

I didn't know what 'melléknév' in English. I asked Brendy, and he didn't know either, he said if his mother doesn't know something she also looks it up in the dictionary, though she is English. I also said we never say such grammar stuffs, just talk. (9;5)

As academic terms do not constitute the lexicon of the routinely discussed topics in home settings, Sarah has the opportunity to acquire English for only the communicative function but has insufficient knowledge of the language of schooling. Her awareness of the functional differentiation of language use is displayed by her insisting that discrete testing for words is unusual in naturally occurring discourse. Similarly she questions the relevance of word-for-word translation being the primary predictor of one's foreign language proficiency. However, she argues that she has

developed a good level of proficiency regarding the vocabulary of those topics that are involved in naturally-occurring conversations, loose conversations and informal discussions.

4. Defining group boundaries – Preserving alliance and privacy

Excerpt 4

'I don't speak to mummy in the school. Because there we didn't use to. And everybody would stare at me. I don't want to boast.' (9;10)

Sarah's utterance implies that not all of her Hungarian peers belong to the well-informed and initiated circles of her bilingual environment. As a consequence, she judges L2 usage as an insult and disrespect in the L1 environment. She identifies such disrespectful behaviour with boasting, which would entail ousting her from the community. The instance depicts her alignment to the norms of L1 community, where L1 use is the local preference, whereas the use of L2 would be considered as inappropriate.

5. Finding ways to enhance learning

Excerpt 5

Good, but in the test paper it is not enough to write about what I did today. There one must know the material of the lesson! Let's start to learn grammar' (10;7)

The metalinguistic comment in the excerpt above implies that using the target language at home and in other informal frameworks does not allow for success in the language of schooling. There are two distinct functions of language: the communicative and the cognitive function. In free conversations either in formal or informal settings we rely on the communicative function, whereas using the language for academic purposes in particular knowledge areas emphasizes the cognitive function of language. Apparently academic functioning goes beyond naturally occurring free conversational topics and claims for specialized terminology, which requires instructed learning and directed attention.

V. Conclusions

Viewing identity I reported on how Sarah experiences her linguistic and personal identities through the process of her second language acquisition. I attempted to explore what influence bilingualism has on these perceptions, identified and analysed my participant's feelings associated with language alteration. Recurring patterns were studied and evaluated in the silhouettes according to the types of her feelings and self-perceptions.

In terms of her self-perception and identity formulation the applied categories of her bilingual usage shown how she

- (1) consults and involves more competent language users and other authorities of knowledge to determine her linguistic identity and tolerate her imbalances in L2 learning process
- (2) interprets, evaluates and integrates peer pressure and criticism (Cekaite & Björk-Willén [2])
- (3) monitors and evaluates her learning process in terms of L2 in response to her social environment's feedback, and finds opportunities to identify deficiencies and asymmetries in terms of her L2 knowledge
- (4) uses L2 to align with the community to form alliance and privacy or, on the contrary, distances herself from it
- (5) builds distinctions via L2 expertise (Cromdal [6]; Gafaranga [8]) and how L2 expertise reformulates local social order
- (6) seeks and finds opportunities to practise and enhance L2 learning in natural interactions, handles discomfort by finding ways to avert inferior status in terms of L2 (Cekaite & Björk-Willén [2])
- (7) appeals for help and reinforcement to cope with an emerging communication problem

In the investigation of Sarah's communicative intentions and identity transformations I intend to create awareness in my readers that in her language use the indicated categories are not separable. Sarah's language use shows a complex picture where different intentions are interwoven and manifest themselves in a variety of combinations and complement each other. For this reason it is typical that I relate a particular utterance and discourse sample to several communicative intentions and identity perceptions as a consequence, a particular analytical category is exemplified with a number of excerpts. However, if one excerpt is justified to represent more than one type, I followed a twofold principle: (1) I presented that particular excerpt only once, in the most relevant case, or (2) doubledrew on the same excerpt to find underpinnings for two possible categories. Thus certain categories and development stages are exemplified and represented less than others. The reason for such asymmetry is explained by the fact that: (1) I failed to document all the relevant samples during data collection; (2) the representative examples of the analytical categories emerge unevenly and asymmetrically in authentic speech. Such overlaps and disproportions have caused analytical difficulty and my data do not allow for symmetrical and proportionate demonstration of the selected analytical categories. I used unchanged, original data for my analysis to fulfill reliability and validity obligations of qualitative research.

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