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To be or not to be . . . a plurilingual speaker

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The bi/plurilingual person is a unique speaker-hearer who should be studied as such and not always in comparison with the monolingual. As such, unilingual linguistic models and perspectives based on the idea that bilingualism is a duplication of competences in two languages (or more) are unsuitable to describe plural practices in multilingual societies. This is a criticism we formulated over the years (Lüdi & Py, 1986, 2003). The contribution discusses the relevance of alternative models, concepts and theoretical frameworks in the study of multi/plurilingualism and their potential in language studies and the understanding of second and third-language acquisition. We also discuss how these models and concepts find their way into classroom practice and language policies.

Keywords: language transfer; interference; code-switching; linguistic competence; bilingualism; plurilingualism

A critical journey through monolingual models of language

The majority of twentieth century models – at least in synchronic linguistics – are based on studies of individual languages considered on their own terms. From this perspective, the boundaries of each language seem clear, allowing organised forms to be brought together within one homogenous system. In addition, each unit of each given language is defined by its insertion into a unique system. Both French and Spanish use the sound \( a \); however, French has more vowels than Spanish, and notably has nasals. The distribution of the vowel \( a \) is by no means the same in both languages; therefore, the \( a \) of French does not coincide with the \( a \) of Spanish. This reasoning can also be applied to syntax and other constituents of language. As such, utterances of the type SV + SN subject (the typologists’ VS order) are found in many languages, as seen in the Spanish example Se ha enfadado el jefe and in its French translation Il s’est fâché, le chef. In spite of their apparent syntactic identity, these two forms still belong to radically different systems; the Spanish form is the result of a general avoidance of sentence final verb syntagms, where a rightward dislocation employed for stylistic effect creates the French form. Subject inversion is also possible in German, as in French, but in both it is dependent on the fulfilment of certain – but not the same – criteria.

Yet, learners sometimes do not perceive these differences between languages. This interpretation theorises the notions of transfer and interference (well-known amongst teachers). It brings a paradox to light: transfer is an important part of all learning. In
the case of languages, transfer is a psychological operation, which consists of using an element of one language in another. At the same time, all interference detracts from an essential aspect of the language being acquired. In other words, this theory gives a very ambiguous status to transfer and to its observable result, interference.

On a didactic level, these reflections correspond more or less directly to a certain pedagogical philosophy. In effect, their adherents affirm, presuppose or take as given that any detraction from language specificity is by definition erroneous and must be resisted. In other words, language contact and its effects (interference, code-switchings, etc.) are devoid of all theoretical legitimacy. Instances of contact themselves mean that a part of learning escapes the school’s official control. Their manifestations in discourse are considered bastard forms – unfortunately inevitable stages which must be overcome as quickly as possible as obstacles to acquisition that they are. It is this view that contrastive analysis from 1950 to 1960 is based on.

By extension, this conception was also applied to the linguistic behaviour of bilingual people. With this logic, translinguistic marks in bilingual discourse are lumped together with learners’ errors, and chalked up to a deficient competence in one, the other or – worse yet – both languages.

The ideological background of these constructs is a very distant one. It is founded on the received wisdom that monolingualism represents an original state, intended by God and/or politically legitimised by human beings. To an extent, this stereotype can be seen in the Bible – that is to say, in the belief that multilingualism, resulting from ‘confusion’, has encumbered men like a divine curse ever since the construction of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11, 6–7). It is again found in Greek philosophy, starting with Aristotle; the Renaissance in turn acquired it from medieval scholasticism. From the French Revolution (Barère, 1794; Grégoire, 1794) to the First World War, national sentiments start to be treated as religious affairs are, under the influence of Romantic ideas (Fichte, 1808; Herder, 1794); they are discussed with metaphors borrowed from religious history, and build the myth of the ‘nation’ as reflected in a common language.

Within this framework, individual bilingualism is perceived as dangerous, in many ways: a menace to the command of the singular language which must yield somewhat to its competitor, as well as a menace to the singular culture attached to that language, and to discourse-transmitted knowledge of all varieties. In summary, bilinguals, particularly early bilinguals, would have their cognitive and social identity threatened. With prudent measures in learning a new language arising as a result, ‘successful’ multilingualism would become increasingly rare. The learning of new languages therefore had to be limited to gifted students. Similarly, language contact was mistrusted, even in regions known for their bilingualism.

Of course, in this epistemological and didactic context, studies in multi/plurilingualism had already been undertaken. Nevertheless, as we will see, they depended on a monolingual theoretical infrastructure. Plurilingualism represented, so to say, a duplication of monolingualism, with varying degrees of success.

Emergence of new perspectives

Although language contact between languages plays a very important and recognised role in language history as a source of creativity and enrichment (Weinreich, 1953), synchronic models – often normative and purist – thus saw in contact a source of deterioration. Yet in fact languages seem particularly receptive to their linguistic
environments; this receptiveness must be described and explained, going beyond simple, local ‘official stories’. Furthermore, studies of the receptiveness of one language to the influences of another must be part of the objective of descriptive grammar and linguistic theory in general. However, for instance, can one explain why, amongst Spanish-speaking immigrants in Francophone countries, the choice between al centro and en el centro resists pressure from French more successfully than the choice between escuchar al niño and escuchar el viento does? (Grosjean & Py, 1991).

Put differently, it seems wise for the study of language to treat those phenomena typically considered peripheral – or, pathological – as central. This conclusion is also valid for studies which try to illuminate the workings of a language by way of its ‘misworkings’ – as in particular Frei (1929/2002) did some years after the diffusion of Saussure’s theories, using corpora built of ‘deviant’ forms (letters from French prisoners of war and their families after the 1914–1918 war).4

Of course, bi or multi/plurilingualism was itself seen as a marginal phenomenon. Yet the intensification of international and interregional contact, migration and sociolinguistic research has shown that hundreds of millions use two or more languages without any particular difficulties. In Europe, multilingualism in nations, regions, institutions and individuals (which we prefer, for the last case, to refer to as plurilingualism) is increasingly frequently seen as an emblem of identity – an essential component of European culture.5 This is not just in the spirit of protecting minorities; well-planned multi/plurilingualism and multi/pluriculturalism are surefire economic assets for society as well as the individual.6

For its part, linguistics has started to transcend the well-regarded ‘homoglossic’ – that is, monolingual – vision, which has so long been predominant. This is in part thanks to the notion of variation: language variation under the influence of social factors (Hymes, Fishman, Labov, Blanche Benveniste, Lagarde, etc.); or inherent variation within the language itself (Berrendonner, Gadet, Mondada, etc.) as revealed by written and oral discourses garnered from various social situations and recorded in large corpora. Yet, if all languages display variation, knowledge of a single language is in some way an opening on plurilingualism: the production of an utterance belonging to another language does not differ widely from the production of a variant from the same language, as both acts illustrate the notion of polylectalism.7 Increasing interest in verbal interaction is the second factor which favours going beyond the ‘Garden of Eden’ vision of language. In effect, it leads away from emphasis on the accomplished linguistic system (competence) and towards its situated mobilisation by the participants (performance) – in the case of discourse analysis (for instance, Coulthard, 1992; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1990–1994), interactive sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982) or ethnomethodologically inspired conversational analysis (for example, Gülich & Mondada’s, 2004 presentation). This evolution is not without consequences for studies of multi/plurilingualism.

From linguistic competence in particular languages to the notion of situated multilingual resources

Few linguistic themes have been subject to political debate to the degree that multilingualism is. Currently, questions such as those of learning a new language, maintenance, abandonment or transformation of the linguistic identity of millions of members of the European Union and of immigrant communities, language contact resulting from tourism, economic globalisation and life in society in general attract
the interest of researchers as well as decision makers. They engender diverse forms of individual plurilingualism. We will see later that this latter notion is defined here very functionally (Grosjean, 1982; Lüdi & Py, 1984; Oksaar, 1980; Conseil de l’Europe (Common European Framework of References for Languages, CEFR), 2001).

However, the notion of ‘plurilingual competence’ raises other problems. Language is a perceptible ‘object’ not just in traditional linguistic models, from Saussurianism to Generative Grammar, but also – and in particular – in the general public’s representations. Even the CEFR scales, above all those termed ‘global’, risk contributing to the reification of communicative competence and obscuring their essentially unstable and dynamic nature. A language competence will never be ‘reached’: it develops throughout life. Its development is characterised by the diversity and complexity of the contexts in which it is mobilised by the specialisation of the resources used, and by the increasingly demanding expectations it engenders. As such, a young woman might be able to prove her excellent competence in L2 (for example, Level C2 (on the Common European Framework of Reference)), but her performance will seem poor in relation to that of an older woman with more communicative and professional experience.

Current representations of individual plurilingualism have not accounted for all of the consequences of this evolution – that bilingual people find themselves stuck in a web of contradictions between consciousness of social environment and the modelisation of multilingualism (Cavalli & Coletta, 2003). These contradictions manifest themselves, for example, in an aversion to accounting for the consequences of the introduction of multilingual teaching. Effectively, attempts to create truly multilingual teaching by introducing the teaching of a new language are insufficient. At first, one must stop considering the languages practised by a sole plurilingual speaker as the simple addition of languages learnt on their own terms, from a monolingual perspective, and replace the classical notion of competence with that of linguistic repertoire (Gumperz, etc.) or even verbal resources.

This term resources, as we understand it here, lends numerous advantages:

- It outlines an indefinite and open set of grammatical and syntactic (and of course mimogestual) microsystems, partially stabilised and available to the speaker as well as the interlocutor. These microsystems can stem from different varieties of a language from various languages, as well as from diverse discourse experiences.
- It presupposes the existence of a free and active subject who has amassed a repertoire of resources and who activates this repertoire according to his/her need, knowledge or whims, modifying or combining them where necessary.
- At the same time, these resources are often mobilised during interaction, in collaboration with (a) partner(s); as such, one can speak of shared resources.
- Resources do not boil down to a dictionary of prefabricated expressions, as one finds in tourist phrasebooks. They are shaped like semi-organised sets of often heteroclite means, similar to a handyman’s toolbox. Some are prefabricated and memorised; others are procedures which create previously unheard utterances, amongst which one also finds heuristic means for the reinforcement of already available utterance resources, or for the development of hypotheses relating to the interpretation of the other language (Lüdi & Py, 1986, 63–68). In other words, they allow one to create and to play – to lead verbal activity in specific contexts, and therefore to take risks.
These four features play an important role in the theoretical modelisation of plurilingualism, and also in practical terms – amongst other areas, in the conception of teaching claimed to be multilingual.

The first conveys lightness and manageability; the microsystem opposes the macrosystem, which embraces vast sets of units organised according to the presuppositions of the systemic linguistics. A microsystem organises a small number of units relatively autonomously. In such a model, units are learnt with their immediate environments (formal, semantic and pragmatic). This feature also allows the learner to play on shifts in contextualisation and decontextualisation.

The second feature casts the speaker and/or learner as a pivot of language in action, and as a social actor enjoying a significant ‘free space’ favouring code-switching or idiosyncratic utterances.

The third feature opens the window to ‘grammar in interaction’ as conceived by, for example, Mondada (2001, 141):

If one considers that social interaction is the fundamental domain in which social links and the use of language develop, so can one hypothesise that linguistic resources are configured in an adequately compatible way – that is, adequate in comparison with formal and organisational constraints of interaction. As such, the description of grammar – a term here employed in a general way denoting language resources, considered (conforming to a Wittgensteinian perspective of grammar) from situated usage relevance – must take account of interactional dynamics, considered as structuring all levels of linguistic analysis.

The fourth feature allows for combinations of different learning paths: simple memorisation, memorisation mediated by a partial structuring of lexical units, grammaticalisation of clauses, etc.

It was Hymes (1972) who, as one of the first, situated communicative competence in the practical use of language, as an ability for use: ‘what speakers need to know to communicate efficiently in culturally significant settings’. Since this era, competence consists not only of the disposal of formal linguistic methods, but also of knowing how to enact them in an appropriate manner in a given situation. The current state of thought in the Francophone world is represented by, amongst others, Pekarek Doehler (2005), which for its part makes much of the situated, dynamic and contingent nature of language competences. Following these works, we consider multilingual repertoires to be resources mobilised to find local responses to practical problems, amongst them the sequential organisation of interaction, the definition of context, and the arrangement of multiple activities, linguistic and non-linguistic.

Becoming plurilingual – being plurilingual

Even amongst specialists, the question of knowing what characterisation as ‘bilingual’ or ‘plurilingual’ means is not answered uniformly. For some, only the product of double (or multiple) first-language acquisition and/or perfect mastery – itself perfectly balanced – of two languages merits this label. Others, like us, prefer a functional definition of bilingualism: each individual currently practising two (or more) languages, and able, where necessary, to switch from one language to the other without major difficulty, is bilingual (or plurilingual); by contrast, the distance between languages, the method of acquisition and the degree of symmetry between the two levels of competence, can vary considerably (see also Lüdi & Py 2003; following Oksaar, 1980). As such, the ‘ideal’ bilingual with his/her ‘native-like control
of two of more languages’, following Bloomfield’s (1933) definition, is nothing more than one figure amongst many. Some even speak of ‘incipient bilingualism’ in early learners (Diebold, 1964).

Plurilingual competence thus results in varied and multiple processes of acquisition and learning. The distinction can be made between simultaneous (two L1s before the age of three years in a bilingual environment) and successive (after the three-year threshold) acquisition on one hand; the latter of these can be early (pre-adolescent) or late (during or following adolescence). For successive acquisition, one can, on the other hand, again distinguish unguided modes of acquisition (also termed ‘acquisition in natural or social environments’) from guided modes of acquisition (in a scholastic environment). The resulting bilingualism can be stable, and reinforce itself with age; L2 can also remain in a state of approximate competence and become fossilised; at the other extreme, it replaces L1 as the dominant language (for instance, under the influence of a scholastic setting). If many people become bilingual by one and/or the other system, they will not be bilingual to the same degree – without asserting that one goes further than the other. Their bilingualism, in other words, can be more or less symmetrical or balanced. The difference is not traced back to the fact that certain learners will not be sufficiently gifted. Reasons for imbalances are found in the conditions of acquisition and use of languages rather than in their value on the respective language market. This explains why research into bi/plurilingual competence often intersects with second – that is, foreign – language acquisition.

It is true that linguistic diversity is often seen as a barrier to the free circulation of people and ideas. The European Commission, the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the majority of European countries have reacted to this state of affairs with an offensive which favours foreign language teaching/learning. The official objective is that each European citizen becomes trilingual (two European languages in addition to the official local language). We add that, where researchers are directed towards the value of linguistic competences, notably relations between plurilingual competences and earnings, the correlations are often positive (for example, in Switzerland a German–French–English trilingual earns more on average, given equal education, than a German–English bilingual; the same difference holds between bilingualism and monolingualism (Grin, 1999)). Such research confirms the idea that individual and/or collective investment in language teaching/learning can bring economic or symbolic benefits. At the same time, they show that no two languages have equal ‘value’ on the job market. The politics of language teaching must take account for this fact insofar as the classroom culture – whether foreign language or bilingual – is ‘(…) connected to the wider sociocultural background, allowing participants to organise themselves, give meaning to their activities and identify themselves within the group’ (Cambra Gine & Cavalli, 2008).

In effect, our observations on multi/plurilingualism have important didactic consequences for the way in which two or more languages can – or must – coexist in one scholastic institution. Didactically, there is a very widely disseminated principle according to which the class must, so far as possible, simulate authentic situations in order to confront pupils with problems which they will encounter after their education.10 Notably, this means that, in a multilingual curriculum, the taught language(s) are not treated as objects so much as resources. For example, a second language is called upon in the consultation of a historic document in the case of a history course given in the first language. So, this documentary objective can have the status of an authentic situation. By the same token, a functional relation between
relevant languages is created. Stated differently, the principal issue resides in this functionality, and not for example in grammatical correction, which will have a secondary status attributed to it.

From the moment that a plurilingual individual’s competences are not perfect by definition, the question of how to measure them arises. At first, classic language tests intended for monolinguals or learners of foreign languages were simply applied to bilinguals. Too often, it was believed that ‘double semilingualism’ could be detected. However, a further point arises: that bilingual competence is not simply the addition of two monolingual competences, but instead represents a whole, which can only be evaluated with specific tools. Types of task a person is able to perform in each of his/her languages (as seen in Cummins, 1984) have been distinguished as such. This process is most useful in the evaluation of bilingual children’s competences – migrants or those belonging to regional minorities – at school, to avoid scholastic failure caused by the overestimation of their real competences from good performances in contextualised and cognitively unchallenging tasks.

In order to evaluate functional plurilinguals’ competences, other scales have developed based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of 2001. They have essentially served as tools to make the plurilingual competences of the European Language Portfolio visible – evidently a possible and legitimate goal. But again, it is important to keep the basic principle in sight: to never measure a plurilingual as a monolingual, but to appreciate plurilingual competence to the same extent as any other. In the absence of a sufficiently balanced lexical repertoire, a bilingual person might not be good at translation, but might in contrast be perfectly capable of making his/her own way in those domains in which s/he uses one or the other language.

It can be added that plurilingualism is often (but not always) accompanied by pluriculturalism, i.e. sets of knowledge relevant to different sociocultural communities. Yet once again an ‘additionist’ view is not apt; most likely, the two ‘cultures’ become integrated into one whole. Experiences of such a mix can be harmonious, but can also be painful. Numerous bilinguals do not feel fully accepted by either of the cultures in question. There again, the cause is often not bilingualism/biculturalism so much as ‘monolingualist’ and ‘ monoculturalist’ ideologies dominant in one–or both–of the communities. In addition, different ways of ‘multilingual speech’ (see, for example, Lüdi & Py, 2003) or of ‘ethnolects’ (see Danesi, 1984) show numerous migrant communities’ responses to the challenge of defining one’s own identity (see for example Lagarde, 1996).

A majority of people naively imagines that separate linguistic competences are clearly locatable in the brain. Yet neurolinguists have shown that an individual’s different languages exploit numerous sectors of the brain – and largely the same ones. As Fabbro (2001) states: ‘Different languages mostly share the same areas in the brain’. Nevertheless, some research seems to indicate that early bilingual competence is represented differently in the brain to monolingual or late bilingual competences – partially because neural networks would be in some way shared by the two languages (Dehaene et al., 1997; Kim, Relkin, Lee, & Hirsch, 1997; Wattendorf et al., 2001), and partially because bilinguals would develop an inhibitory mechanism enabling them to better select pertinent information and repress any ‘distractions’ stemming from the language unused at the time in question (e.g. De Groot & Nas, 1991; Rodriguez-Fornells, Rotte, Heinze, Nösselt, & Mün te, 2002), amongst other sources.
Speaking plurilingually

In what follows, we would like to focus on one particular characteristic of the management of plurilingual repertoires: the simultaneous use of numerous varieties, or ‘bilingual speech’.

For a long time, it has been known that the plurilingual’s selection of the appropriate variety is not arbitrary, but governed by rules (Grosjean, 1982, p. 145). Microsociolinguistic models make a great deal of the constitutive role of actors in interaction, who use their linguistic resources in as beneficial a way as is possible (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Contingent on the actors’ linguistic profiles (that is, the configuration of their mutual competences, cf. Council of Europe) and on shared knowledge of the action schemata governing this or that task, one finds a choice of language which is rigid or variable, according to social rules, participant resources, habits and the degree of control, as well as to the forms of monolingual or plurilingual speech (as seen in Lüdi, 1984).

Yet, often none of the languages intrudes: interlocutors locally negotiate the appropriateness of a ‘bilingual mode’ (Grosjean, 1985) – that is, ‘bilingual speech’ (Lüdi & Py, 2003) – in which the entire repertoire is activated. In the bilingual mode, language choice is far less stable and ‘translinguistic marks’ are multiplied and generalised. There is a tacit, spontaneous alternation from the basic or ‘matrix language’ to the ‘embedded language’, and vice versa (Myers-Scotton, 1997).

The following example was produced between Spanish migrants in Neuchâtel, in the Francophone part of Switzerland (see Lüdi & Py, 2003, for further details):

Vamos a la gare. (we are going to the train station)

As the matrix language, Spanish provides the syntactic framework and the grammatical morphemes. The code-switching to French ‘gare’ (train station) possibly occurs because the French lemma is perfectly compatible with the gap left by the Spanish grammar. Code-switching has a deictic function; in using the French word at the expense of Spanish ‘estación’, the speaker indicates that she is not referring to the Spanish institution but to the Swiss station at Neuchâtel, with all its functions particular to the migrant community (a meeting point, a point of departure when returning to Spain, etc.). As MacSwan (1999) states:

that lexical items may be drawn from the lexicon of either language to introduce features into the numeration which must be checked for convergence in just the same way as monolingual features must be checked (or must not ‘mismatch’), with no special mechanisms permitted. (...) No ‘control structure’ is required to mediate contradictory requirements of the mixed systems. The requirements are simply carried along with the lexical items of the respective systems.

Of particular interest in this approach is the fact that it presupposes neither a ‘third grammar’ nor universal, specific principles governing code-switching. A theory of plurilingual competence would not, in the final analysis, be different to the theory of language in general.

The second example comes from a labwork session in a pharmaceutical company in Basel, in which the head of the laboratory, Doctor JH, of Moroccan origin, a laboratory worker MS of Hungarian origin, and three German-speaking colleagues, NS, ML and SG, all participated. Their competences are very unequal: JH has mastered German only poorly, and MS’s mastery of English is even worse; and
amongst the three others, German (that is, Swiss German) is dominant. The aim of
the session is to correct an experience protocol written in German.

NS: so i think we can write like this wir eh müssen mit einem faktor von ehm =
JH: (ein komma drei)
NS: (und eh eh) aufgerechnet ist kein deutsches wort multipliziert ((speaks a little more
quietly and notes the phrase down on her paper))
JH: mmh
NS: ja recources (??) is not for the calculation the right word aso multipliziert werden um
die gewünschte konzentration zu erreichen und dann würd ich den satz dazumachen
einfach um zu =
JH: =mmh =
NS: =erklären (..) wie es dann zu den auch verschiedenen abkürzungen hier kommt weisch
so nen correction factor das beinhaltet salzfaktor und substanzgehalt (.) und dann eben
dieser verdünnungsfaktor =
ML: =xxx jo salz git’s jo nüm
JH: maybe then =
NS: =and then (and then the calculation ya)
JH: [then here xxx that should be saying ya you say you explained between brackets it
takes eh (.) ya one thing you could do either you do this nullkommaf-fünfsechs milliliter
medium without s9 then we have one correction factor dilution factor (.) or you want to
keep with s9 difference or without s9 as we discussed (.) because if you want to do a
difference then you will have two correction factors one is =
NS: no it’s better to have only one (correction factor and not two otherwise it’s too
complicated)
JH: (ya then you have to add zero point fifty-six milliliter medium)
NS: ja =
JH: =without s9 =
NS: =ja =
JH: =and that’s what mara did for experiments c and d
SG: ja
MS: ja
NS mmh
JH: ((speaking to MS)) mh wir haben gleich
MS: ja
NS: ja
JH: eh den verdünnungsfaktor
NS: (ja)
JH: (ok?)
MS: ja
JH: is besser eigentlich ya?
NS: mmh
MS: mmh
JH: so we have one
NS: ja
JH: so i mean you add extra nullkomma sechsundfünfzig milliliter medium ((notes)) than we
have one one dilution factor
NS: ok =
JH: =ok?
NS: so i xxx
JH: so it is (??) good
NS: mmh
JH: so can you do that and then we can (..) do you have other:: =
Lines 1–4, NS and JH converse in English (preferential choice), but switch to German for the task of the written wording. The same phenomenon occurs in NS’s speech in Lines 6–7, but here she does not return to English, instead continuing in German (Lines 7–12). The participants had already converged upon the technical term ‘correction factor’ (1.11) as acceptable in German. Ratification of this content by ML in Swiss German (1.13). JH and NS continue in English (1.14ff.), with the intervention of German numbers, as dictated by JH’s protocol (1.17ff.). In Lines 32–41, JH explicitly addresses MS using a ‘participant related codeswitching’ to conclude in English (1.44) whilst the others confirm this non-verbally (1.40ff.) or in German (1.38, 43).

The analyses confirm the explanatory pertinence of the notion of plurilingual competence (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 1997), understood as a resource put to work in a situated manner, in endolinguistic as well as exolinguistic situations (Lüdi, 2003). The actors exploit these resources in a flexible and efficient way, depending on particular communicative situations, and this language use helps to shape activities.

**Perspectives**

If plurilingualism is no longer considered a marginal phenomenon only of interest to specialists, but instead as a characteristic of the majority of human beings, there are various consequences for theory and linguistic research. In other words, a linguistics must be developed in which plurilingual linguistic repertoires are the norm, at both individual and social levels, a linguistics in which the choice of a language or an appropriate variety is necessarily part of a model of language in action, a linguistics which necessarily includes the management of plurilingualism – early as well as late – in all language-treating models. Stated otherwise, any theory of language would have – to be useful – to take account of plurilingual repertoires and the way in which plurilingual speakers exploit their resources in different forms of bilingual speech. We cite the example of De Bot, who has adapted Levelt’s (1989) well-known language production model to explain specific operations in bilingual production (De Bot, 1992). In the same way, not only must all general lexical theories take account of recent research on the bi/plurilingual mental lexicon (e.g. Cenoz, Hufeisen, & Jessner, 2003; De Groot & Nas, 1991), but they will also have to be evaluated on the basis of their capacity to explain the workings of plurilingual speech, normal for a great number of speakers (see Lüdi, 2004, 2006). When will there be linguistics in which the case of reference, the ‘prototype’, is no longer the monolingual ideal speaker–hearer but the real, plurilingual speaker–hearer?

**Notes**

1. Where they are observable, we have collectively termed such effects *translinguistic marks* (*marques transcodiques*). See Lüdi (1987).
2. A study carried out in Bienne some years ago showed that bilingual inhabitants of that city, which is officially bilingual, learnt the other language not at school but in other circumstances (professional settings, sports clubs, within the neighbourhood, etc.) Elmiger and Conrad (2005).
3. We have spoken about *monolingual identity* as including the ordinary representations of the language.
4. See also Reichler-Béguelin (1993).
5. As in Beacco’s (2004) rule: ‘Educational linguistic politics in European institutions is founded on multilingualism (…). Multilingualism is to be considered as having two aspects: a conception of the speaker as being fundamentally plural; and a value, insomuch as it is one of the cornerstones of the acceptance of difference, education which is definitively intercultural at its core. Below these headlines lies one of the possible foundations for a European sense of belonging (…). If Europeans do not have a common language to identify with, to perceive their “belonging” within one space, they dispose – effectively or potentially – of the same multilingual competence (compétence plurilingue), ebbing away in thousand of different repertoires, which is the true common vector of a shared “linguistic identity” which does not fall back upon itself’.

6. Such is, in any case, the opinion of the European Union authorities for whom the preservation of heritage is a declared objective (see the declaration of the Council of Cannes, 26–27 July 1995). For its part, the Council of Europe adopted the European charter of regional or minority languages in 1992 to promote and support less widely spoken languages.

7. Berrendonner (1983) characterises the grammar of all languages as polylectal.

8. This term appears quite often in specialised literature, but to our knowledge it has no meaning which is widely converged upon. Cf. Boulea and Jeanneret (2007) for a propedeutic reflection on the concepts of competence and resources. ‘The notion is often used in conversational analysis, dating from classic works (e.g. Jefferson, 1974), returning to the fact that linguistic elements, signs and actions are used to accomplish or structure activities (establishing lists, organising turns, starting or finishing a conversation): they therefore constitute resources for the organisation of interaction. The notion of resource seems to have some interest here as it focalises the actor’s point of view (it is speakers who serve as resources) and foregrounds the potentiality of these resources, not stable form-function couplings (as often associated with the notion of function). The idea is always that the significance of resources is local, depending on sequential placement (see also Goodwin, 1986). Since the seminal work of Ochs, Schegloff, and Thompson (1996) in interactional linguistics, the notion is very often summoned within this line of work to return the linguistic system (lexicon, morphology, syntax as well as prosody) to a resource which acts on and structures social interaction’. (Simona Pekarek Doehler, personal communication).

9. This notion was introduced into linguistics by Gentilhomme (1985).

10. This principle must be discussed, as the notions of authenticity and problem are far from evident.

11. ‘The use of Italian in the ethnic community – especially within family structures – reveals an interesting case of how a “transplanted” language can come to fulfil a basic practical need to express a new psycholinguistic experience. The Canadian version of Italian (and its dialects) constitutes a case of what linguists commonly refer to as an “ethnic dialect”, or ethnolect, of the mother tongue. This can be defined generally to be a version of the language of origin which, primarily as a consequence of the frequent borrowing and adoption of words from the culturally dominant language, has come to characterise the speech habits of the immigrant community’ (Danesi, 1984, pp. 110–113).

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