Cultural Messaging and the Interpretation of Contact in Bilingual Individuals: A Study of Cultural Impact

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Introduction

The presented framework proposes a departure from the conventional concept of language and the associated inquiry into whether it has undergone changes due to contact. Instead, the framework concentrates on speakers and the linguistic outcomes arising from interpersonal contact. In contact scenarios, speakers are not endeavoring to convey the same content as in non-contact situations while veering from a language's norm; rather, they are effectively conveying distinct content. When individuals arrive in contact settings, they encounter significant disparities in how referents are conceptualized compared to their original setting.

Description

These disparities in conceptualization lead to numerous alterations in what speakers articulate. In most instances, these novel expressions are indeed fresh forms of speech or messaging, with no alterations in grammar. Nevertheless, in a minority of cases, the new messaging does entail linguistic consequences, namely, changes in grammar. Thus, modifications in the grammatical structure of individuals in contact arise not solely, and perhaps not primarily, from formal imitation or modeling, but are responses to novel conceptualizations prevailing in the new environment. This distinction between expressions reflecting solely new conceptualizations and those signifying both new conceptualizations and novel grammar bears both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretical implications concern how linguists perceive the grammatical systems of bilingual individuals. Practical implications pertain to educators' considerations of the linguistic performance of bilingual students, particularly in social environments where they may be marginalized (Cohen, 1997). The data presented are drawn from the discourse of Latin Americans and their descendants in locales such as New York City and other regions of the United States. Throughout the preceding explanations, readers may have noted the absence of terms like "English" and "Spanish." This absence aligns with the overarching assertion that the notion of a designated language does not effectively serve linguists when investigating the linguistic outcomes of interpersonal contact (Aquilina, 1988). In contexts of interaction, the extensive use of designated language terms complicates distinguishing differences in messaging (resulting from differences in conceptualization) from systemic linguistic

differences in encoded meaning. Relying solely on designated languages would lead to an erroneous conclusion that expressions like "cuando vuelve" (in Spanish) and "conociendo a mi abuela" (in Spanish) are equivalent, despite them being grammatically distinct (Akkademja, 1998). The speaker-centered framework is thus particularly suited for the study of the idiolects of the encounter. It provides a direct role to the user of the language who can adopt new conceptualizations using existing meanings, thus, limiting cases of grammatical difference between encounter and precursor settings to instances where precursor meanings cannot account for encounter usages, as in Roberto's case (Sciriha, 1990). This approach impedes understanding contact speakers and how they fulfill their communicative needs. In contrast, the proposed speaker-centered framework simplifies the separation between language structure and language usage. Here, language usage is not a supplementary component, often referred to as pragmatics, but rather an integral element of the grammatical analysis process (Giugni, 2004).

Conclusion

The speaker-centered framework is particularly apt for studying the idiolects of encounters. It empowers language users to adopt new conceptualizations while using existing meanings, thereby attributing grammatical disparities between encounter and precursor settings to situations where precursor meanings cannot account for encounter-based usages, as exemplified in the case of Roberto.

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Conflict of Interest

None

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