# FEATURES OF BILINGUAL COMMUNICATION

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Bilingual communication is defined by the alternative use of two languages and it should be studied, at the same time, by linguistics, sociology and psychology:

a) the linguist is interested in the source of the language mistakes, of contamination and of interferences;

b) the psychologist studies the phenomenon from the point of view of the individual reactions;

c) the sociologist takes into account the social prestige of a certain language in connection with the prestige of the group.

The linguistic competence of the speakers in the two languages may present different degrees: some of them can use both of the languages at the same level, others use only one of the languages fluently and the other one in a superficial way.

The interference phenomenon may occur when the language rule of the two languages in contact is not taken into account. Bilingual speakers usually generate this kind of deviation because they use, frequently, both languages[1].

The interference, a specific effect of the contact between languages[2,] was thoroughly analyzed by Uriel Weinreich who

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[1] Uriel Weinreich, *Contact lingvistic şi contact sociocultural,* apud Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Dumitru Chiţoran, *Sociolingvistică*., EDP, Bucureşti, 1975, p. 40.

[2] Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Dumitru Chiţoran, *op. cit*., p. 24.



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defined it as a deviation from the rules of one of the languages used in a bilingual (or multilingual) community. The deviation may occur because of the influence exerted by the rule of the other language involved in the language contact.

J. Fishman defines bilingual communication as the linguistic competence of speaking two languages which may be or not related from a genealogic point of view[3].

Bilingual communication is a complex phenomenon. It is generally accepted that a bilingual speaker may use the two different languages at the same level. In fact, these bilingual speakers seldom prove the same ability concerning the two languages.

There are many forms of bilingual communication. Some of the bilingual speakers can speak both languages well, but others speak one of the languages with a strong foreign accent. Some of them can read in both languages very well, but there are speakers who can read well only in one of the languages. There are situations in which they can write in one of the languages, but they can speak only the other one.

In many communities, each of the languages involved in the language contact has a functional specialization, it is used to discuss certain matters, in certain aims and by certain persons.

The bilingual speakers are raising bridges between the language communities. There are researchers who have identified similarities between the bilingual speakers and "the marginal man"[4] as called by the sociolinguists.

Bilingual speakers represent "bridge communities" (Ch. Hockett) with the role of mediating the relationship between the implied communities[5].

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[3] J.A. Fischman, *Sociolinguistics. A Brief Introduction*, Rowley, Moss, 1971, p.5.

[4] Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Dumitru Chiţoran, *op. cit*., p. 115.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 17.



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There are no a priori reasons that force us to reduce the definition of the language community to that of a community in which all the members speak the same language.

Bilingual or multilingual communication represents the rule rather than the exception, in very different societies, including the 19th century Russian choice of the society, the leader groups of many modern Asian or African nations, the American groups of immigrants and many others.

In fact, Weinreich himself speaks about bilingual communities when he describes the Idish speakers of Eastern Europe. Moreover, from the point of view of the social function, the distinction between bilingual communication and the existence of two distinct dialects has no significance[6] in most of the cases. The societies that change rapidly present, in a typical way, the gradual transition of the speaking styles or, when the community is bilingual, a series of intermediate varieties that undergo the transition between the extreme points.

The real effect of bilingual communication upon the speech of a certain person may vary according to different factors and some of these factors are not related to the language system, because they are placed beyond the structural differences existed between languages or even beyond their lexical shortage.

The speaker`s ability in verbal communication and also the ability to maintain the two languages as distinctive ones, the intermediate competence in each language and the attitude towards these, are only a few relevant factors for the interference study, of course, factors that are not of a linguistic type.

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[6] Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Dumitru Chiţoran, *op. cit.*, p. 115.



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Bilingual communication contributes to the successful learning of another language. Learning a third language is facilitated if the second one is known.

Bilingual speakers take advantage of the thinking process. In many fields of precocious cognitive development, bilingual speakers make serious progress much faster than monolingual speakers and they show creativity in their linguistic competence.

Bilingual communication facilitates the communication with persons who belong to different cultures. Bilingual speakers communicate more easily, having the ability to overtake the cultural barriers and to establish connections in the society. A potential economic advantage is that bilingual speakers have the opportunity to choose from several job alternatives. Also, multilingual companies have much more advantages than monolingual ones.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Europe has become a multilingual continent because of the immigrants` influence and that of the refugees from all over the world.

According to the recent soundings, on the average, half of Europe`s population is already multilingual and 44% of the European citizens can communicate in a different language besides the mother tongue.

The advantages of bilingual communication may be classified in three types:

a) from a linguistic point of view: bilingual speakers are necessary as translators in their jobs, in different social contacts and bilingual communication represents a link to a different culture;

b) from a psychological point of view, the bilingual speaker has a greater intellectual flexibility and he can reorganize the data of the problem;



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c) from a pedagogical point of view (after investigations, researchers found out that bilingual speakers had scored better results in the general intelligence test, they are more flexible, more creative, more confident in themselves, because they, also, have a stronger sense of their own value and they can use abstract thinking in a more efficient way than monolingual speakers can).

Bilingual communication, as a concept, with its general meaning, represents a concept that is used very frequently. The learning of many languages develops the human personality, but there are circumstances in which the situation of bilingual communication may generate doubts, emotions and even inhibition. Absolute bilingual communication is a myth, because, in general, one of the languages dominates the other one.

There are linguistic differences in each nation, differences that could appear in the same language or because they coexist, at the same time, in different language communities.

Communication is one of the most important processes that involve all the levels of our existence and the way in which it functions and develops indicates the progress of human being, in general.

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## TRĂSĂTURI ALE BILINGVISMULUI

*Rezumat*

Prezentul articol punctează trăsăturile bilingvismului, un fenomen circumscris unei problematici mult mai ample, cea a contactului dintre limbi. Astfel, bilingvismul este corelat cu multilingvismul, un alt fenomen extrem de actual, care marchează categoric politica lingvistică europeană. Am prezentat anumite trăsături ale bilingvismului pentru a evidenţia deschiderea pe care o manifestă anumiţi vorbitori bilingvi spre a-şi însuşi o a treia limbă, de obicei de circulaţie internaţională. De asemenea, abordând subiectul din perspectivă sociolingvistică, am punctat reflexul acestor fenomene lingvistice în plan economic şi financiar, referindu-ne la avantajul companiilor multilingve faţă de cele monolingve.



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