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Language Separation in Translators and Interpreters

1 Introduction

The internal representation and organization of the languages in multilingual speakers cannot yet be considered fully understood (e.g. independence vs. interdependence hypotheses) and conflicting claims have been made about them.¹ For example, with respect to syntactic organization, Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) suggest that L2 learners initially transfer structures of their L1 to their L2 (e.g. OV and VO sequences) although Möhring (2005) fails to observe any transfer of OV structures from L1 to L2. In contrast to this, bilingual speakers with simultaneous acquisition of two L1s are assumed to create two independent systems, one for each language (cf. Meisel 2000: 27). In addition to debates about fusion, dependence or independence of the different language systems, a broader examination of language separation in interpreters and translators relates to the organization of individual components (e.g. organization of the multilingual lexicon, cf. de Bot et al. 1995) and factors which might favor or inhibit language separation in a particular situation and are thus more likely related to performance than language competence (cf. Ehrensberger-Dow/Jekat 2005).

In this paper, we discuss recent research that has implications for understanding language separation in translators and interpreters. Although not typically mentioned in discussions of translation universals (cf. Baker 1993, Mauranen/Kujamäki eds 2004), the potential influence of one language on another within multilinguals must be considered a factor in all interlingual phenomena. The distinction we make between translationese and transfer argues that the former is triggered by a translation process whereas the latter can simply reflect competence gaps in one of the languages of a bilingual speaker. Section 2 of the paper deals with the theoretical foundations of our research and provides examples to illustrate the key concepts. In section 3 we present findings from two empirical studies that shed some light on the relationship between language representation in multilinguals and their translation performance.

2 Language Separation in Multilingual Speakers

There are various hypotheses about the organization of languages in multilingual speakers. In terms of how multilinguals acquire their languages, two modes of acquisition can be distinguished:

¹ We would like to express our sincere thanks to the reviewers for their comments and suggestions, which improved this paper. Any errors or omissions remain our responsibility.

- simultaneous acquisition of more than one first language (so-called “compound” acquisition, referred to here as 2L1)
- successive acquisition of language(s) after L1 (so-called “consecutive” acquisition, referred to here as L1L2)

Consequently, two contrastive positions concerning the organization of the languages of multilingual speakers have emerged: the independence hypothesis and the interdependence hypothesis or, in Meisel’s (2000) terms, the debate about fusion, differentiation or interdependence.

2.1 Starting Position: Independence vs. Interdependence Hypothesis

In discussions of the dependence or independence of languages in a multilingual speaker it is presumed either that languages function partly or entirely separately (independent) or that they interact (interdependent). This dependence or independence is assumed to be related to the respective speaker’s language competence (Chomsky 1965: 4). Another picture emerges when assessing performance in the sense of actual language use. Depending on the position one takes, assumptions can be made about mechanisms of multilingual language production and comprehension, which can be observed in the performance of multilingual speakers. In the investigations reported in the present paper, such observations of performance are presented and evaluated; the degree to which these reflect competence can only be inferred in certain cases. The relationship between language acquisition mode and (in)dependence of languages will be reviewed briefly at this point, since it can yield important predictions about the performance of multilingual speakers.

2.1.1 Independence Hypothesis

The acquisition of two first languages (2L1) may result in full competence in both languages and in a separation of both *systems* if the conditions are favorable. One such favorable condition might be strict application of Ronjat’s (1913) principle of “une personne – une langue”, for example when parents who speak different languages keep strictly to one language when speaking to their child (e.g. the father speaking only French and the mother only English). Under ideal conditions, the child would also be in regular contact with other speakers of both languages.

The notion that language systems are separate is based on the assumption of a biologically-driven so-called “language acquisition device” (Chomsky 1965: 32) that would result in the above-mentioned L1 competence in both languages. Therefore, 2L1 language acquisition mode predicts independence of the respective language systems. We can assume that speakers with 2L1 would show little or no influence of one language on another. We have to qualify this prediction, however, in that the assumed separation with 2L1 refers to the language systems themselves and that the multilingual lexicon(s) might be affected (cf. de Bot et al. 1995).

The phenomenon of cross-linguistic influence has been referred to in much of the language acquisition literature as transfer, which in Odlin’s view can be defined as:

[...] the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired. (Odlin 1989: 27)

Furthermore, a distinction can be drawn between positive transfer, which facilitates the acquisition and/or use of a target language (cf. Ringbom 2007), and negative transfer or interference (cf. Bussmann 2002: 709, Jarvis/Pavlenko 2008: 25). Although transfer is often considered in the context of foreign language learning and has traditionally assumed to involve L1 influence on L2 (the classic "interference" discussion), it has recently been convincingly argued that transfer can be bi-directional and that an L2 can also influence the L1 (e.g. Cook 2003).

During acquisition at least, transfer between two L1s has also been observed to occur. This is shown, for example, in Jekat (1994): in a relatively early stage of language acquisition, two children from two different families but both raised bilingually with French and German go through a phase of using German modal verbs to create a version of the French *Futur Proche* (which expresses the near future with *aller* 'to go' + the infinitive) in German. After this phase, both children return to using the German modal verbs correctly.

The discussion of this point cannot be expanded upon here since it would exceed the scope of this paper. However, many studies have supported Meisel's position:

Much of the research on early bilingualism, over the past 25 years, e.g. work on early language differentiation, investigated whether it is possible to develop a competence and a proficiency in use in each of the languages qualitatively equivalent to that in the respective monolinguals. These studies have demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt, I contend, that this is indeed possible [...]. (Meisel 2000: 27)

With respect to the (in)dependence of languages, either individual aspects or the whole language systems, including the lexicon, might be involved. De Bot et al. (1995), for example, assume that the multilingual lexicon is represented by one semantic memory containing language specific "tags", which would imply at least a degree of interdependence of the language systems concerned.

2.1.2 Interdependence Hypothesis

At least in the early L2 acquisition or learning phases, interdependence between languages has to be assumed for many cases of the L1L2 acquisition mode (when the L1 system already exists). If contact with the second language(s) is made at a stage when acquisition of the first language has already progressed significantly (anytime after the age of 4 in successive language acquisition), the L2 can be influenced by the L1 (see Edmondson/House 1993/2000: 222). This position is again based on the above-mentioned assumption of a biologically-driven language acquisition device (Chomsky 1965: 32) which might no longer be accessible in later childhood (for example, after the age of about 5; cf. Lieven 2006 or Newport 2002 for reviews). The consequence would be that the second language(s) can only be *learned* but not *acquired* after a certain age (which cannot be precisely specified here). If a language is learned later in life, an influence can be assumed of the first, previously acquired language on the second (cf. Jarvis/Pavlenko 2008: 204-205). In contrast, simultaneous acquisition of two first languages is subject to the same biological mechanisms as

language acquisition in monolingual children. Thus it is assumed for the present discussion that native speaker competence can be attained in both languages and that a separation of the two language systems is possible (cf. Meisel 2000).

We can therefore infer a (perhaps temporary) interdependence of the two language systems in L1L2 language acquisition mode. It might be assumed that L1L2 speakers transfer from L1 to L2 at least in the initial stages of L2 learning. However, this prediction is debatable: Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) find evidence for it in the area of syntax whereas Möhring (2005) does not (see section 1).

With respect to language acquisition mode (2L1 or L1L2), language separation can be assumed to be more probable in the case of simultaneous bilingual or multilingual acquisition than in the case of consecutive language acquisition (or second or third language learning). This assumption also relates to the competence of multilingual speakers. Consequently, the linguistic performance of 2L1 speakers should be "better" than the performance of L1L2 speakers with the same language versions and education. The same prediction could also be made for the translation and interpreting process, since language separation is considered an important prerequisite for the development of translation skills (Koller 1979/2004: 224).

2.2 Transfer, Borrowing and Translationese

A well-known example of transfer during second language learning is provided by Selinker, Swain and Dumas (1975) with the English child learning French who produces *Il est trois ans* (corresponding to the English construction *He's three years old*) instead of the correct French structure *Il a trois ans*. With respect to the linguistic performance of highly proficient multilinguals, presumably no longer considered language learners in the usual sense, it is not clear which factors promote language separation or trigger transfer. In the sub-sections below, we distinguish three different types of cross-linguistic influence in such multilinguals: transfer of structures, borrowing of lexis, and translationese.

2.2.1 Transfer

Two cases of transfer of structure are demonstrated in the examples (1 and 2) below. Example (1) shows how the gender of the term BOOK is transferred from Spanish into German: in Spanish, 'book' is masculine (*el libro*) whereas in German it is neutral (*das Buch*). In example (2), the transfer of syntax and word order from L1 German is apparent in the L2 English.²

(1) Transfer (Spanish to German)

Maria, L1Spanish, L2German: *VIELEN DANK NOCH FÜR DER BUCH*.³

² Language examples that are not explicitly assigned to a source are taken from the IUED/ZHAW language database, comprising data from multilingual speakers collected by members of the IUED Institute of Translation and Interpreting and available for other linguistic studies within the institute.

³ Instead of: *das Buch*.

(2) Transfer (German to English)

Thomas, L1German, L2English: *WE ARE THE FIRST TIME HERE*,⁴ corresponding to the German construction *Wir sind zum ersten Mal hier*.

The term transfer itself can be defined in a broad and in a narrow sense. For example, Bussmann's (2002: 709) definition of transfer is the transposition of linguistic characteristics from the native language to a foreign language, meaning that the directionality of transfer is one-way. As the linguistic repertoire of a multilingual speaker increases and improves, transfer can presumably also occur between L2 and L3 and in both directions, including from the L2 (or L3) to the L1. This process depends on various factors and will not be discussed any further here (see Odlin 1989 or Jarvis/Pavlenko 2008 for an overview). The transferred features can be from different components of the language, for example syntax, morphology or lexicon. We will therefore distinguish transfer from two other forms of cross-linguistic influence and use transfer here in a narrow sense to refer only to the transfer of syntactic or morphological structures from one language to another. As long as such transfer happens in the early stages of L2 learning, we can assume that the multilingual speaker's competence is involved since it most likely reflects recourse to L1 when knowledge of the appropriate L2 structure(s) is lacking. At later stages, this may no longer be the case. As already mentioned above, however, this will not be dealt with in detail here. Nevertheless a distinction can still be made between transfer and other forms of influence which do not necessarily reflect the multilingual speaker's competence. These other forms of cross-linguistic influence are referred to here as borrowing and translationese.

2.2.2 Borrowing

Borrowing refers to individual lexical entities from language A being used in utterances of language B. As Romaine (1989/1995) explains, borrowing can be motivated by different factors, some of which are listed here:

- lexical items are borrowed and conventionalized in a language community (e.g. the use of the word *Browser* in German)
- lexical items from language A are used deliberately in language B to preserve subtle nuances of meaning (e.g. the use of the French word *Bouclé* in English and German for a particular type of yarn)
- a lexical item from language A is used in language B because a speaker either does not know or temporarily cannot access the appropriate lexical item in language B.

The last case is the only one in which the internal organization of the multilingual lexicon alone can be said to trigger borrowing. Another reason borrowing should be distinguished from transfer and translationese (explained in 2.2.3) is that transfer and translationese refer to the transfer of linguistic structures whereas borrowing involves lexical items.

⁴ Instead of: *It's the first time we've been here*.

2.2.3 Translationese

The term *translationese* was originally used by Nida (1959) who referred to it as transpositions between languages which are apparently not triggered by insufficient competence in a language but by the process of translation or interpreting itself. Specified thus, translationese represents a concept related to transfer when it is considered that in the broader definition transfer from L2 to L1 is also possible. The triggering factor for transfer in translationese has already been specified, but for the broader definition of transfer, it has not yet been identified. Like transfer, translationese is distinguished from borrowing in order to do justice to the unique complexity of the (multilingual) lexicon. Examples (3) and (4) below, from Jekat (to appear), demonstrate borrowing and translationese during consecutive interpreting.

(3) **Borrowing** and Translationese

L1French speaker: *MAIS TRÈS BIEN. EST-CE QUE VOUS POURRIEZ ME DONNER UN PETIT <EHM> UN PETIT PAPIER SUR LEQUEL VOUS ME NOTEZ DONC L'HEURE <UH> DE LA VISITE?*⁵

German ↔ French interpreter: *JA, KÖNNEN SIE MIR EINEN KLEINEN – EIN PAPIER GEBEN, WO SIE MIR AUFSCHREIBEN, UM WIEVIEL UHR DIE BESICHTIGUNGEN SIND?*

In our view, example (3) clearly shows how the form of the utterance in the source language influences the interpretation. The underlined sections in the example mark a hesitation in the French utterance and the resulting hesitation in the interpretation as well as the similarity between phrases in the source and the target utterances. *Papier* is transferred into German as a lexical unit even though the word *Zettel* would have been appropriate in the target language in this context, which the interpreter most likely knows.⁶

The process of borrowing and translationese is demonstrated even more clearly in example (4). While in example (3) it can only be assumed that the hesitation in the target utterance is triggered by the hesitation in the source utterance, example (4) plainly shows that the structure in the first part of the target utterance corresponds to the structure of the source utterance rather than with structures that would be appropriate in the target language. At the lexical level, the word *discount* is borrowed directly from the source utterance into German.

(4) **Borrowing** and Translationese

L1English speaker: *AND IS THERE ANY WAY TO MAYBE GET A DISCOUNT SINCE I'LL [sic] STAYING IN HANOVER ABOUT A WEEK AND A HALF?*

German ↔ English interpreter: *UND <UHM> IST – IST ES KEINE MÖGLICHKEIT, EINEN DISCOUNT ZU BEKOMMEN, DA ICH UNGEFÄHR ANDERTHALB WOCHEN IN HANNOVER SEIN WERDE?*

The process of translationese assumed or suggested in the interpretations above (triggered by the source utterances) is illustrated by the interpreter's self-correction in the example below (from Jekat/Maleck/Prahl 1994: 23).

⁵ English translation: 'Fine. Could you please give me a piece of paper so I can write down what time the tours start?'

⁶ The expression "appropriate in the target language" does not refer to standards of written language, especially since an *evaluation* of linguistic skills is not the aim of this study. "Not appropriate in the target language" are utterances which a L1 speaker would not use in this context when asked but which they could understand and possibly accept.

(5) Translationese

L1English speaker: *JUST SOME GENERAL SOFTWARE TO <P> BEGIN BUILDING <P> MY PROGRAMS.*

German ↔ English interpreter: *NUR AN ALLGEMEINE <P> SOFTWARE, UM ANFA/ANZUFANGEN, PROGRAMME AUFZUBAUN.*

Here we can see how *begin building* triggers a direct mapping to *anfangen* which the interpreter then corrects in the middle to *anzufangen*, the appropriate infinitive structure in German.

We have provided several examples of translationese which seem to support a process in simultaneous and consecutive interpreting by which source language structures are carried over to the target utterance. These transpositions are assumed to be triggered by the processing of the source language text during the interpreting event. Such mapping of structures from one language to another, triggered by an interpreting or translation process (= translationese), can be distinguished from the influence of one of a multilingual's languages upon another outside a translation context, which might also reflect competence (= transfer).

The process of written translation can also provide convincing demonstrations of how translationese can arise (see example 6). During the translation process, structures are taken over from the source text directly into the target text (*recaudaba* to *verdient*; *cantando por la calle* word for word to *singend auf der Strasse*), but are then crossed out and replaced with more appropriate translations later on. In our view, this process supports the assumption that translationese is a concept related to transfer that is triggered primarily by the translation process itself and therefore justifies attributing this phenomenon to performance rather than to competence.

(6) Translationese

Spanish source text: *La familia sobrevivió a la penuria gracias a las pocas pesetas que recaudaba cantando por la calle con tan solo siete años⁷*

German target text, produced by a translator with L1German, L2Spanish: *Im Alter von gerade einmal sieben Jahren [verdient] hilft er [singend auf der Strasse] ...* (the segments in square brackets [...] were crossed out in the handwritten original)

In this section, we have tried to demonstrate that language separation of multilingual speakers can be influenced by many different factors and have explained two of them, language acquisition mode and the process of translation, in detail. The language acquisition mode factor must be viewed as more fundamental and also more linked to competence whereas the processes of translation and interpreting as evidenced by translationese only allow inferences to be made about performance. Presumably the entire multifactorial communication situation interacts with the multilingual speaker's competence during translation and interpreting.

⁷ English translation: 'The family survived their poverty with the help of the few pesetas which he, at the age of only seven, earned by singing in the street.'

3 Empirically Investigating Language Separation in Translators

In this section, two studies are briefly outlined that investigate the influence of language acquisition mode and of the present status of languages on language separation. Both were conducted within the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (IUED) at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences and involved current and former translation students, all of whom are highly proficient users of the languages they use professionally.

3.1 The Role of Language Separation on “Success” in Becoming a Translator

The first study is based on a survey of graduates from our translation program. Since some of the data are self-report, a certain degree of caution must be exercised in their interpretation but they do provide some insight into the influence of perceived language separation on performance in translation.

3.1.1 Initial Hypothesis

As explained above (section 2.1.1), 2L1 speakers are assumed to have fewer problems with language separation than L1L2 speakers. Proceeding from the same assumption, Rossi (2003) claims that 2L1 speakers are also likely to be more successful in becoming a translator than L1L2 speakers since Koller (1979/2004: 224) suggests that language separation is an important requirement for developing good translation skills. By “successful” Rossi assumes that 2L1 speakers almost never encounter problems with language separation during their studies, that they attain good results in their translation exams, and that they work as translators or in the field of multilingualism after they graduate (see section 3.1.3 for a critical discussion of these assumptions).⁸

3.1.2 Survey

Under the guidance of the first author, Rossi (2003) asked graduates of the translation diploma course of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (formerly *Dolmetscherschule Zürich*) to fill in a questionnaire. Information on the following areas was collected:

- contact with languages in early childhood and compulsory schooling
- progress during undergraduate translation program (grades)
- subjective impression of language separation during the translation program
- professional career

Of the 49 respondents with the languages German, Italian, and Spanish, 42 were female and 7 were male. Thirteen of the respondents had acquired their second (third) language before the age of 5. These are referred to here as n(atural)L1L2 because they acquired their second (or third) language before they went to school (in a naturalistic rather than a formal setting). Only one respondent can be assumed to be 2L1 since she was confronted with two languages (Italian and German) from birth and

⁸ Although the relevance of some of Rossi's measures can be questioned (e.g. whether successful completion of a translation program is correlated with translation competence), they are directly related to “becoming a translator” in a formal sense.

provided with favorable conditions for bilingual first language acquisition, since her parents maintained the system of “une personne – une langue” described by Ronjat (1913) (see also section 2.1.1 of this paper).

The nL1L2 group is contrasted here with the so-called c(ontrolled)L1L2 group of 36 respondents who learned their second (third) language at school after the age of 10 under relatively controlled or formal circumstances.

3.1.3 Results

The respondents were divided into two subgroups related to whether they identified themselves as successful translators, using the criteria for success explained above. The ID+ group claimed that they had not had any problems with language separation during their studies, had graduated with an average grade of 4.6 or higher,⁹ and were professionally active in language-related work. By contrast, the ID- subgroups reported having had problems with language separation during their undergraduate program and/or graduated with an average grade lower than 4.6 and/or were not working in a language-related job. Figure 1 shows how the nL1L2 and cL1L2 respondents from Rossi’s survey distribute into ID+ and ID- self-report sub-groups.

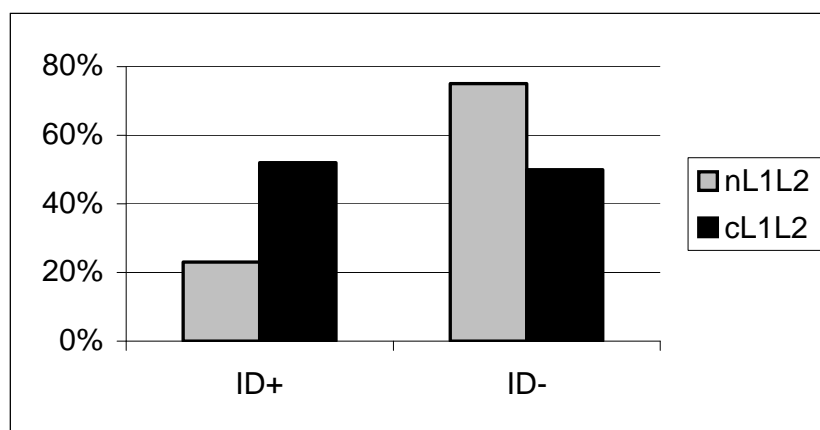


Figure 1: Natural and controlled multilingual language acquisition and self-reported “success” in an undergraduate translation program

The survey conducted by Rossi (2003) yielded some interesting findings. For example, the multilingual speakers who had learned their second language after the age of 10 (cL1L2) reported:

- better grades than the nL1L2 speakers (average of 4.93 vs. 4.70)
- fewer problems with regard to language separation during their undergraduate translation program

However, more speakers of the nL1L2 group (who had acquired their second language before the age of 5) worked in a language-related field after graduation compared with

⁹ The Swiss grading scale is from 1 to 6, with 6 the best and grades under 4 insufficient. A grade over 4.5 is generally considered solid performance and 6 is reserved for truly exceptional performance.

speakers of the cL1L2 group (92% vs. 83%), with 61% of the nL1L2 group working as translators vs. 55% of the cL1L2 group.

Nevertheless, Rossi's (2003) results must be viewed somewhat critically. The concept of "success" and the classification into ID+ and ID- groups (based on a combination of subjective impressions, grades, and professional career) must be more subtly differentiated and specified. In addition, a survey based on written questionnaires alone cannot capture all of the information relevant to such complex questions. Furthermore, more research should be conducted on prototypical 2L1 speakers (i.e. those who experienced favorable conditions for simultaneous multilingual acquisition, such as a bilingual situation inside the family from birth onwards along with regular contact with both languages outside the family). However Rossi (2003) does provide initial insights into the relation between controlled second language acquisition and language separation in the translation process that suggests directions for further research. If more evidence is found to support the hypothesis that L1L2 speakers have fewer problems with language separation, this could have an impact on admission procedures and education programs for translation and interpreting studies as well as have implications for research on first and second language acquisition (independence or interdependence of the language systems).

3.2 Language Separation Depending on the Current Communication Situation

Multilingual speakers and interpreters report that their performance in a particular language (i.e. also in their L1) sometimes depends on the language they have been speaking immediately previously. In example (7), a speaker of Finnish and German refers to this phenomenon when she reports that she "gets back into German" more quickly when she is surrounded by German but that she has some problems to do so when she has been in Finland for a week or so.

(7) Language separation in the current communication situation

Sanna L1 Finnish L2 German: *SO WENN ICH IN DIESEN <UHM> JA DIESE DEUTSCHE KONTEXT UM HERUM HABE [...] DANN DANN KOMM ICH SCHNELLER ZURÜCK INS DEUTSCHE ABER WENN ICH ZUM BEISPIEL JA SO 'NE WOCHE ODER SO IN FINNLAND GEWESEN BIN DANN HAB ICH SCHON 'NE KLEINE SCHWIERIGKEIT.*

The model developed by Grosjean (1997, 1998, 2001) and presented in section 3.2.1 is based on exactly such observations and findings.

3.2.1 Language Mode

Grosjean (2001) uses the term "language mode" to describe the current state of activation of each of a multilingual's languages involved in a particular situation. The various states of activation of the languages are shown in the following figure, reproduced from Grosjean (2001).

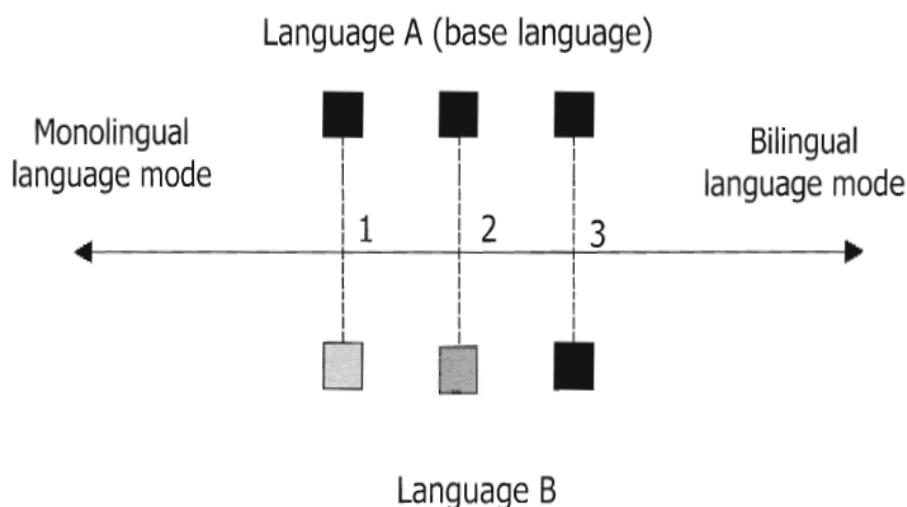


Figure 2: Language mode according to Grosjean (2001: 3)

Grosjean explains language mode with reference to this representation (figure 1.1 in the original article) as follows:

Language mode is the state of activation of the bilingual's languages and language processing mechanisms at a given point in time. Given that activation is a continuous variable ranging from no activation to total activation and that two languages are concerned, language mode is best visualized in a two-dimensional representation such as that in figure 1.1. The bilingual's languages (A and B) are depicted on the vertical axis by a square located at the top and bottom parts of the figure, their level of activation is represented by the degree of darkness of the square (black for a highly active language and white for a deactivated language) and the ensuing language mode is depicted by the position of the two squares (linked by a discontinuous line) on the horizontal axis which ranges from a monolingual mode to a bilingual mode. Three hypothetical positions are presented in the figure, numbered 1 to 3. In all positions it is language A that is the most active (it is the base language, i.e. the main language being produced or perceived at a particular point in time) and it is language B that is activated to lesser degrees. [...]. Note that in all three positions, the base language (language A) is fully active as it is the language that governs language processing. (Grosjean 2001: 3-4)

As is clear in the quote above, Grosjean proceeds from the assumption that one language of a speaker is the base language (language A) and has a higher level of activation than all the other languages involved (B languages). The term A language, however, relates only to the current communication situation; in a different situation one of the other languages can be activated to the A mode. According to Grosjean (2001: 4), a French-English bilingual speaking to a monolingual French speaker would be in monolingual French mode, so English would be correspondingly deactivated. In a monolingual English communication situation, the same bilingual speaker would have French deactivated and English activated.

Therefore, according to Grosjean, activation of a language depends more on the current situation and less on the language acquisition mode (L1, L2), although he also acknowledges that:

[...], dynamic interferences may still take place, that is speaker-specific deviations from the language being spoken. (Grosjean 2001:6)

In the following section, we present two experiments from a larger study which investigates the influence of activation of one of the two languages involved in the translation process.

3.2.2 The Role of Language Separation on Translation Performance

The study discussed in this section is part of a series of experiments that have been conducted in our institute over the last few years (Ehrensberger-Dow/Jekat 2005, 2007, Jekat/Ehrensberger-Dow 2006).¹⁰ Since this study has brought some aspects to light which need further clarification (cf. section 3.2.3) and is described in more detail elsewhere, only a brief overview is presented here.

Based on the idea of highly activating one of the two languages involved in the translation process, experiments were carried out with two groups of translation students:

Group 1: translation from English into German

12 students with L1German and L2English¹¹

Group 2: translation from Spanish into German

12 students with L1German and L2Spanish

Over a period of two weeks, both groups took part in two experiments each. In the first week, the target language of the translation, the students' L1 (or their A* language, respectively) was highly activated before they translated the first part of a non-fictional text from English into German or from Spanish into German.

The term A* language is introduced in this paper to distinguish it from Grosjean's (2001) concept (see 3.2.1) of an A language. With regard to the language status of the participants in these experiments, some additional information is required. Since translation students are highly proficient users of more than one language, it is not always easy to identify which is their L1 and which is their L2. For study purposes, they have to choose their dominant language as their A* language (and pass the corresponding entrance exam). To simplify the presentation here, we will refer to their A* language as L1 although in reality it does not always correspond with the first language they acquired.

In the experiments in the second week, the source language of the translation, the student's L2 (or their B* language, respectively) was highly activated before the second part of the non-fictional text was translated from English into German or from Spanish into German.

¹⁰ We thank our colleagues Barbara Brändli, Marcel Eggler, Gertrud Hofer and Sibylla Laemmel for their support in carrying out these experiments.

¹¹ It must be mentioned here that many of the L1German speakers involved in this study acquired one of the Swiss-German dialects in early childhood and use it for everyday conversation. Depending on their family situation and education, contact with Standard German may have occurred sooner or later, but certainly in kindergarten at the latest. The influence of this diglossia has not been taken into consideration here, since the comprehensive admission tests in our institute ensure that all students with German as an A* language have very high competence in Standard German.

The activation took place at the beginning of translation classes by L1 speakers of the language being activated. Besides listening to presentations and taking part in discussions in the context of the subject of the text, the students were encouraged to speak the activated language during the break between the activation phase and the translation task. The activation phases took about 20 minutes each and were conducted as described above for Group 1 and 2 in German in the first week and in English and Spanish, respectively, in the second week.

The translations were analyzed for sub-optimal features according to 4 categories (each of them with several subcategories).¹²

- 1 Expression (both lexical and morphological errors: 11 subcategories)
e.g. *She forgot to charge her **handy**.*
- 2 Syntax
e.g. *The **latter one** associates with rock music and **the former** with hip-hop.*
- 3 Text level (5 subcategories, such as monotonous repetition of structure not found in the source text)
e.g. *The huts vary in height. **They measure** from ten to fifteen feet in diameter. **They contain** no modern conveniences.*
- 4 Translation level (4 subcategories)
e.g. translating the German *Ein ungebremster Aufschlag mit dem Kopf* with *Hitting the head on something without stopping*

3.2.3 Results

The average translation performance for both groups was better in the second week, when the L2/source language was activated, than in the first week, when the L1/target language was activated. In the English-German group, 9 of the 12 students improved and 10 of the 12 students in the Spanish-German group demonstrated better translation performance in the second week.

At first glance, this result might be interpreted to suggest that L1 as a possible trigger for transfer is partly "counteracted" by the activation of L2 or that such activation has a positive influence on the translation performance of multilinguals. However, the results of these experiments have to be interpreted much more cautiously for a number of reasons.

- 1 Since the students translated the first part of the respective source texts in week 1 and the second part of the texts in week 2, the text style and subject matter were familiar to the students in week 2, and the task may therefore have been easier in week 2 than in week 1. Comments to this effect about the level of difficulty of the task in week 2 were made by some of the students.
- 2 The categorization of sub-optimal features outlined above, which was used in those translation courses, has proven unreliable in post-tests, when different judges independently evaluated translations and categorized "errors".

¹² For the clarity's sake here, the categories are illustrated with English examples rather than with German examples from the students' texts.

- 3 The above-mentioned categorization scheme does not consistently distinguish between translation problems related to translationese and borrowing and problems related to style and loyalty to the source text.
- 4 No data are yet available from comparison groups for Groups 1 and 2. Such comparison groups would have to have the converse language combinations (L1English, L2German and L1Spanish, L2German, respectively) and take part in similar experiments. In addition, experiments without prior activation of one of the two languages would have to be conducted and evaluated with control groups who have all of these language combinations.
- 5 A post-test carried out with a control group with the same language combination of L1German and L2English with the order of language activation reversed (i.e., L2English in the first week and L1German in the second week) also revealed a slight improvement in performance in the second week.¹³

The result mentioned in point 5, above, supports the reservation outlined in point 1: if a translator is familiar with the subject of a text or the style of a text, it is possible that fewer problems occur during the translation process.

With respect to the influence of activating either of the two languages involved on the translation process, the results above can be very cautiously interpreted as suggesting that the L1 does not necessarily have to be the most activated language, which corresponds to Grosjean's (2001) prediction. Thus, it is also not necessarily the language that triggers translationese (or transfer). However, the reservations outlined above suggest that further investigation must be carried out to support this interpretation.

4 Conclusion

When it comes to translators, interpreters, and multilinguals in general, language separation in performance depends on many different factors. Language acquisition mode seems to be a theoretically easier factor to determine, and in the early stages of L2 acquisition or learning (depending on the age of the learner, see section 2.1.2) is certainly a factor that allows clear hypotheses to be formed about the occurrence of transfer and the separation of language *systems*. For translators and interpreters, however, the concept of transfer, which allows inferences about multilingual competence, might be less relevant than the concept of translationese. Translationese, as has been discussed and illustrated in this paper, can be assumed to be the result of transfer from the source language to the target language that is triggered by the process of translation and the source text itself. As such, it can be considered a characteristic feature of the translation process, similar in quality to other features that have been deemed translation universals. The self-corrections in examples (5) and (6) suggest that only performance and not the underlying language competence is involved in translationese.

¹³ Discussed in more detail in Ehrensberger-Dow/Jekat (2007).

At the same time, it is not always easy to clearly identify the language acquisition mode of translators and interpreters (e.g. if it can no longer be determined whether bilingual language acquisition occurred under favorable conditions). Accordingly, early second (third) language acquisition is classified as n(atural)L1L2 in Rossi's (2003) study rather than as 2L1 or 3L1 and the term A* language is introduced in section 3.2.2 to refer to the language perceived most dominant in a translator's repertoire. This term corresponds to the classification of A, B, and C languages that is usually used in translation and interpreting studies and professional organizations. It differs from the A and B languages in Grosjean's (2001) model, where the status of a language can vary according to its current activation level.

The influence of early L2 or L3 acquisition or late L2 or L3 learning on the quality of performance in translation and interpreting needs further investigation, since it might have significant implications (as mentioned in 3.1.3). The studies presented here provide initial support for interconnections which could not have been predicted. The results in Rossi (2003) suggest that 2L1 speakers might have more problems with language separation than speakers who learn their second and third languages at school or in a later context. The experiments on activation and language mode show that L2 activation, in addition to increased familiarity with the text in the second session, might help improve the quality of a translation. However, the results from the control group need further examination and more experiments need to be carried out with additional control groups. Certain theoretical and methodological constraints must also be introduced to allow hypotheses of interest to be reliably tested. Despite these reservations, the results of the two studies presented above have provided impetus for further research that should allow clearer inferences to be drawn about the influence of language acquisition mode and about how translators and interpreters manage to access two languages at once while keeping them as separate as necessary.

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