

Language loyalty and language choice. Against the example of Russian Old Believers' community in Poland in the context of rational choice theory

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The phenomenon, when one speakers' speech contains elements in wider or narrower range of two languages is probably as old as the language contact in general. Two terms are used to describe this state (except of the borrowing phenomenon, which is of other nature): the CM (code-mixing) and CS (code-switching). After P. Auer we will use the term CS for "those cases in which the juxtaposition of two codes (languages) is perceived and interpreted as a locally meaningful event by participants" (Auer 1999: 309; 1991: 410). These are intersentential switches and functionally meaningful intrasentential switches, e.g. between clauses or phrases in a clause. The changes of code without functional meaning, observed in simpler units, word forms inclusive, are here considered as CM. However, switches between clauses and phrases (CS) and inside simpler units (CM) are only prototypes, and we can observe a wide range of phenomena on a continuum between these two poles.

The language choice in each turn of a conversation entails an expectation that the newly introduced language will be taken up by the interlocutor (Alfonzetti 1998; Jørgensen 1998; Meeuwis and Blommaert 1998). Language choice as well as the switching may be perceived by the interlocutors as marked or unmarked. According to the theory of rational choice (RCT) the participants of the language situation "consider" all advantages and disadvantages of their language behaviour which affects the process of language choice in bilingual conversation (cf. Myers-Scotton, Bolonyai 2001: 7-8). The speakers are aware of some consequences of their choices, but only under certain conditions they can take all of them into consideration; many choices are internalized through their experience and also affect the choices. Basing on the differentiation of conscious (CS) and unconscious (CM) choices I am going to precise to what extent the economy of bilingual speech may be a conscious behaviour. The examples of conversational CS and CM will be taken from the sociolinguistic material gathered in the Russian Old Believers' community in Poland. The informants represent several generations of speakers with various degree of knowledge of the languages in contact. The community in question represents unbalanced type of bilingualism – the heritage language (Central Russian dialect from the Pskov-Novgorod group) is weaker and the language of the environment (standard Polish) – dominant, which influences the calculations made by the speakers. The analysis of language choices will be presented on two levels: microsociolinguistic, taking into account individual choices in exemplary communicative situations, and macrosociolinguistic, including regularities occurring in the given group together with the variables determining their language behaviour (covert and overt prestige of both languages, diglossia, social attitudes towards CS and CM, tolerance to interference).

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