

- Ochs, Elinor, and Bambi B. Schieffelin. 1984. Language acquisition and socialization: Three developmental stories. In *Culture theory: Essays on mind, self, and emotion*, ed. Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. LeVine, 276–320. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Platt, Martha. 1986. Social norms and lexical acquisition: A study of deictic verbs in Samoan child language. In *Language socialization across cultures*, ed. Bambi B. Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs, 127–151. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Poplack, Shana, David Sankoff, and Christopher Miller. 1988. The social correlates and linguistic processes of lexical borrowing and assimilation. *Linguistics* 26:47–104.
- Pouesi, Daniel. 1994. *An illustrated history of Samoans in California*. Carson, Calif.: Kin Publications.
- Reynolds, Jennifer. 1995. *Tautalaititi and Tags: A study of Samoan American child language socialization as syncretic practice*. Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles.
- Romaine, Suzanne. 1989. *Bilingualism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Shankman, Paul. 1993. The Samoan exodus. In *Contemporary Pacific societies: Studies in development and change*, ed. Victoria S. Lockwood, Thomas G. Harding, and Ben J. Wallace, 156–170. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Shore, Bradd. 1982. *Sala'ilua: A Samoan mystery*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Thomason, Sarah G., and Terrence Kaufman. 1988. *Language contact, creolization, and genetic linguistics*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Zentella, Ana Celia. 1997. *Growing up bilingual*. Oxford: Blackwell.

## What Do Bilinguals Do?

A Commentary

Asif Agha

Accounts of the social meaning of bilingualism are only as revealing as the picture of language they invoke. In “codeswitching” accounts, a language is a denotational “code” organized into grammatical units; persons “use” a code when they utter its units; and bilinguals mingle units of one code with units of another. When the mingling of codes is evaluated by criteria of grammatical constituency (whether phonological or lexical constituents are involved; whether forms of mingling cross sentence boundaries; whether constituent-types are deformed or preserved in mingled tokens) the activities of bilinguals can be classified into certain well-known types, such as code-“mixing,” “switching,” “assimilation,” “borrowing,” and others. Yet code-centric accounts of “what bilinguals do” reveal very little about the social significance of their doings.

Bilinguals may protest that they mingle in a fuller sense too, as persons do: that they orient to denotational units only in the course of orienting to each other as interactants; that the units through which they orient to each other have social-indexical values additional to their grammatical values; that these social-indexical values are linked to culture-specific models of appropriate conduct which, when juxtaposed with each other within bilingual encounters, are frequently reanalyzed and transformed into new registers of conduct.

The bilingual authors of the accompanying chapters certainly appear to protest in these ways. Through a common focus on geographically transposed populations—immigrants, their children, foreign students—they explore the ways in which the social-indexical values of speech-forms are reevaluated through the reflexive activities of speakers under conditions of linguistic and cultural contact. They are

particularly interested in how changes in the “social types” stereotypically indexed by speech are experienced and negotiated by speakers as aspects of their “identities” within bilingual encounters. The issues are best approached by asking how bilingual speech tokens are linked to linguistic and social types in the first place.

Bilingualism is a discursive practice where the *transposition* of speech-tokens across contexts of use (geographical locales, social settings, the “language” co-textually in use) influences their “type”-level construal, both at the level of grammar and social indexicality. It is well known that, in cases of “codemixing,” speech tokens routinely occur as phonological or morphosyntactic blends of matrix and source grammatical types; they are partially assimilated to *both* grammatical systems; they exhibit varying degrees of *fidelity-to-type* relative to both systems. Yet the question of whether similar considerations apply to the social indexical values of speech has been less fully explored in the literature. Do bilinguals have “hybrid” social voices in Bakhtin’s sense? Which interlocutors recognize these voices? How do they assign them to “social types”? How do persons inhabit or negotiate “social type”-assignments when they produce or encounter speech tokens?

The accompanying chapters show that bilinguals reanalyze not only the grammatical types but also the register models used to interpret transposed speech. The various register distinctions discussed in these chapters—“good versus bad speech” in Samoan (Duranti and Reynolds), registers of Korean address (Song), of self-reference in Japanese (Morita), the register values of disfluent English among Koreans (Park)—all undergo subtle transformations when their associated discursive forms, and the persons who use them, are transposed from their native countries to the United States. The resulting reanalyses yield various figurements of social types, such as contrasts of national belonging (Song), of degrees of foreignness and liminality (Park), of intergenerational difference (Morita), and of the stability versus variability of the self (Duranti and Reynolds). In exploring this range of phenomena, these studies engage with older approaches to bilingualism, including theories of “codeswitching” and “linguistic borrowing,” and attempt to move beyond them.

Traditionally, accounts of “codeswitching” have approached bilingualism by taking the denotational-grammatical organization of discourse (viz., phonemic, lexical, and morphosyntactic units) as a point of departure: The idea that bilingual discourse involves two distinct “codes” is simply a way of restating the observation that “two distinct grammatical systems” are in play (Gumperz 1982, 66). The idea that each such code can be identified as having discrete boundaries, that the two codes are neatly bounded off against each other, relies on distinctions “taught in standard grammars” (Gumperz 1982, 99) and hence on Standard Language ideologies that normalize grammatical systems and specify their boundaries. Yet a grammar-centric approach to discourse and a Standard-centric approach to grammar tend to ignore other ideologies of language (such as norms of interaction) that invariably co-exist with ideologies of Standard, and further complicate the construal of utterances. As we move from the grammatical organization of bilingual discourse to its interpersonal organization, the question of just how many codes are involved, and how they can be tracked empirically, becomes problematic. And when the word “code” is used expansively—e.g., to include both norms of denotation and norms of interpersonal conduct—such a usage conflates the grammatical organization of linguistic units with the register appropriateness of using them in particular scenarios of interaction (Agha 2007).

Hence, to speak of bilingual discourse in terms simply of the “switching” or “mixing” of grammatical codes, or of “borrowings” from one discrete code to another, is to lose sight of the logic of type-fidelity through which its interpersonal significance emerges. It is not merely that various codes preexist as fully formed immiscible wholes, waiting to be switched between, mixed with each other, or borrowed as readymades; such a view uncritically accepts the neat partitions that Standard Language ideologies seek to enforce. It is rather that in particular phases or moments of speech production, specific text-segments are foregrounded as fractionally noncongruent with co-textual speech along one or more dimensions of categorial organization (viz., phonemic, lexical, etc.), yielding various kinds of blends and grammatically hybrid forms. Facts of noncongruence mark foregrounded text-segments as interpolations sourced from a language *distinct from* their surrounding co-text. Although such text tokens are merely diacritics of *otherness* to interlocutors acquainted only with the matrix language, they are also typifiable as tokens of a distinct, nameable language for those acquainted with the language from which they are formulated as sourced. And since such tokens occur at some threshold of fidelity-to-type to both matrix and source language, the manner in which bilingual interlocutors *formulate* fidelity-to-type itself constitutes a metacommunicative frame of performance through which the interpersonal significance of type-hybridized speech is negotiated over an extended stretch of multi-party discourse.

We can begin to appreciate the metacommunicative organization of bilingual discursive practice by noting that the practices that Joseph Sung-Yul Park (this volume) calls “disclaiming English” are a special case of what Bauman terms “disclaimers of performance” (Bauman 1992). When Korean speakers “disclaim” English (i.e., claim to lack competence in proper English usage) they formulate a metacommentary that sometimes *explicitly describes* this lack of competence, and sometimes, through utterances that exaggerate the assimilation of English forms to Korean grammatical structure, *implicitly performs* such lack of competence. By drawing a contrast between two degrees of phonological assimilation of the English place-name *Denver* to Korean pronunciation norms, Junho and Hyeju (both Koreans living as foreign students in the United States) draw a contrast between two degrees of cultural assimilation to the United States. In self-identifying with a pronunciation where *Denver* is fully assimilated to Korean phonology, they perform an emblem of non-Americanness; and in formulating the pronunciation of their absent friend as closer to American English phonology, they typify his speech as, by contrast, “an overwrought effort” to assimilate to U.S. cultural norms. We are not dealing with communicative acts that mix or switch between two discrete codes, but with acts whose metacommunicative organization treats the gradient fidelity of text tokens to phonological types as emblematic of degrees of allegiance of speakers to associated cultural identities.

All of the other papers deal with cases that involve—what might more traditionally be called—the “borrowing” of linguistic forms and practices across cultures. The question remains, however, of what exactly “borrowing” is as a linguistic and sociological phenomenon.

The idea that linguistic expressions get “borrowed” from one language to another falsely suggests an analogy with the notion that material possessions can be borrowed from one person by another and thereby undergo a temporary transposition across domains of “use.” Just as person A can borrow person B’s pencil (or T-shirt

or iPod) and use it for a while, so also language community A can borrow linguistic expressions from community B and “use” them for a while. Or so the analogy presents itself. Yet the transposability of linguistic expressions across domains of “use”—particularly in the oral contexts these papers explore—is entirely unlike that of durable commodities.

First, linguistic expressions can be transposed across domains of use and categories of users only through acts of token (re)production. Once manufactured, a pencil can have a complex social life—it can be purchased, possessed, loaned, and borrowed, for instance—without needing to be remanufactured. But linguistic expressions have a social life only insofar as, and as long as, they are reproduced in the utterances of speakers, each event reproducing a token of the type. To speak of *linguistic* borrowing is to speak of recurrent events of token production. Second, since linguistic expressions are category clusters that simultaneously instantiate several dimensions of categorial structure (e.g., phonological, morphosyntactic, deictic, and social-indexical category-types), acts of token reproduction are fraught with multiple possibilities of nonfidelity to type. Any linguistic sign-type may be deployed as a text-token in ways that are canonical with respect to one categorial dimension but defective with respect to others. Such *gradations* of categorial assimilation can diagram differences among users, as we have seen, whether implicitly, or through the mediation of explicitly articulated social classifications. Third, whereas person A’s act of borrowing a pencil from person B may result in A’s using the expropriated item only in the sphere of personal (even effectively “private”) use, the kinds of transpositions we call “linguistic borrowings” are typically manifest only in the interpersonal matrix of discursive interaction. Social processes of linguistic borrowing do not merely consist of acts of token reproduction variably anchored in fidelity-to-type, they are tied to interactional frameworks in a variety of ways: Nonfidelity to grammatical type can mediate forms of denotational footing (the symmetric or asymmetric use of denotational units across speaking turns) yielding positive or negative social alignments among interlocutors, whether among individuals in occasion-specific ways, or among social groups through group-differentiating norms of register appropriateness (Agha 2007, 132–142). Only by attending to the interpersonal matrix of acts of language use—analyzed both discursively and metadiscursively—can we begin to approach the question of how such borrowings diagram social roles and relationships, and for whom they do so.

Juyoung Song (this volume) discusses English-to-Korean “borrowings” of address practices where differences in the type-fidelity of transpositions mediate subtle contrasts of interpersonal alignment among interlocutors. In Korean, registers of address normatively draw on a repertoire of nominal expressions larger than in English, and choices among these expressions finely discriminate social relations among interlocutors. Children are socialized to norms of register-appropriate address by caregivers through a variety of metadiscursive practices (including explicit prescription, implicit speech modeling, recasting the child’s utterances, using normative forms when the child is within earshot, and others). Korean caregivers dutifully engage in such efforts in the United States, just as in Korea. However, Korean American children engage in only some of these practices, switching in other cases to more culturally hybrid forms that show the influence of English norms (e.g., a more anglicized pronunciation of names, a greater resistance to fictive kin term usage); and their metapragmatic com-

mentary describes *these usages of Korean as*—interpersonally—*more “American,”* as exhibiting greater type-fidelity to nonhierarchical registers of American address.

Acts of alignment to matrix or source language practices can themselves be construed as having a more or less elaborate *social range* (i.e., the range of identities and social relations indexed by the act); minimally, a speaker’s choices may index self as non-in-group vis-à-vis interlocutor; or both speaker and interlocutor may jointly align as a sub-group (e.g., as both non-in-group vis-à-vis a Standard Language community); speech conduct may be linked to standards of proper and improper conduct enforced by sanctions; and explicit role designations and classifications (“bilingual,” “trans-national,” “foreigner,” “cosmopolitan,” etc.) may be available to describe specific discursive practices and those who engage in them. In the Japanese case discussed by Emi Morita, the use of English *me* in place of a Japanese first-person pronoun allows speakers a way out of the intricate web of social-indexical contrasts linked to the more elaborate paradigm available in Japanese. But the choice also seems “indiscriminate” or under-differentiating to Japanese interlocutors; and insofar as it avoids Japanese norms of deference and demeanor the usage is potentially indexical of “not-fully-Japanese” identity (despite other signs to the contrary, such as speaker’s native competence in all other linguistic and cultural norms). Morita shows that, by contrast, in Japanese American usage, a context where speakers are acquainted not only with two different grammatical codes (English and Japanese) but with two different registers of person reference, and thus with two different *n*<sup>th</sup>-order frameworks of appropriate *self*-reference (use of English *me* vs. any of several Japanese pronouns, all differing in social indexicality), the use of English *me* is in the process of being transformed in register valence into “an *n*+1<sup>st</sup>-order register for indexing a specifically Japanese-American identity.”

In sociological terms, cross-linguistic “borrowings” exhibit all of the dimensions of organization linked to officially “monolingual” speech registers (many of which are, of course, differentiated from the rest of the language through borrowings from neighboring languages (Errington 1988; Haviland 1979; Irvine 1998) or from sociolects within the same language (Agha 2007, 136–139, 174–177), and only ideologically stabilized as monolingual varieties). For instance, the social construal of a borrowing can vary in *social domain* (i.e., how many—and what kinds of—persons construe usage in this way; see Agha 2007, chap. 3) and, indeed, can grow or shrink in social domain over time through social processes mediated by the logic of interpersonal footing and alignment in events of language use (Agha 2005). Morita shows that precisely such a logic appears to shape the continued use or non-use of the Japanese American register of English *me* by a Japanese American boy, Jack, who uses this form at age five (even in the face of challenges by individual Japanese kids) but ceases to use the form in favor of Japanese pronouns by age seven, soon after his immersion in a Japanese school (where “Standard Japanese” ideologies lead to more institutionally pervasive forms of nonratification).

Alessandro Duranti and Jennifer F. Reynolds discuss several kinds of speech transpositions. The meaning assigned to some of these is relatively clear, though their interpretation of one subset of their data remains speculative. They note that U.S.-born Samoan American children living in California tend to treat the Samoan words they use in English as phonological islands, uncorrupted by English phonological

influence; they appear thereby to pay "partial tribute to their [Samoan] heritage." Conversely, two sets of English lexemes are most resistant to assimilation to Samoan norms: English proper names, which are treated as phonological islands, and the English kinship terms *mom* and *dad*. Tokens of the latter not only violate Samoan phonology, they violate cultural norms of parental address too. In replacing Samoan forms of parental address with *mom* and *dad*, Samoan American children indexically project a "private" or "nuclear family" alignment to parents; in Samoa, by contrast, children's parental address is formulated as "impersonal" and "societal" through allocentric patterns of address (i.e., addressing parents with proper names and titles, as others do). This, then, is a register of parental address distinctive to Samoan American children, in whose speech habits, its social meaning is clearly transformed by type-fidelity to American interpersonal norms.

The social meaning of a second pattern, which occurs in the speech of Samoan American adults, is not, however, entirely clear. Although adults in Samoa vary the pronunciation of names when they switch across "good" versus "bad" phonolexical registers, some names remain phonologically invariant in the speech of Samoan American parents, particularly names of children born in the United States or brought there soon after birth. Duranti and Reynolds offer two hypotheses: Either this parental practice is designed to make it easier for such children (who are generally English-dominant) to recognize their Samoan names, or the invariant pronunciation of names here indexes a commitment to American models of a contextually invariant "self." This question cannot be resolved without considering further metadiscursive data, since, as we have seen in all of the other studies, the question of the social meaning of transposed speech is susceptible to competing logics of type-fidelity, including fidelity to competing assumptions about the cultural selves of speakers. Bilinguals do not merely transpose speech tokens in ways that foreground their type-hybridity, nor simply acquire "social type" characteristics always already given by register construals of hybrid speech. The activity of negotiating register models for type-hybridized practices with the persons with whom they engage through such practices, is itself a central, ongoing feature of what bilinguals do.

#### REFERENCES

- Agha, Asif. 2005. Voice, footing, enregisterment. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15:38–59.
- . 2007. *Language and social relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauman, Richard. 1992. Disclaimers of performance. In *Responsibility and evidence in oral discourse*, ed. Jane H. Hill and Judith T. Irvine, 182–196. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Errington, J. Joseph. 1988. *Structure and style in Javanese: A semiotic view of linguistic etiquette*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gumperz, John J. 1982. *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haviland, John. 1979. How to talk to your brother-in-law in Guugu Yimidhirr. In *Languages and their speakers*, ed. Timothy Shopen, 161–239. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop.
- Irvine, Judith T. 1998. Ideologies of honorific language. In *Language ideologies: Practice and theory*, ed. Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity, 51–67. New York: Oxford University Press.

## IV

### Linguistic Practices in Media Contexts

OXFORD STUDIES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

General Editors  
Nikolas Coupland  
Adam Jaworski  
*Cardiff University*

Recently Published in the Series:

*A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working-Class Bar*  
Julie Lindquist

*Sociolinguistics Variation: Critical Reflections*  
Edited by Carmen Fought

*Prescribing under Pressure: Parent-Physician Conversations and Antibiotics*  
Tanya Stivers

*Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*  
Theo van Leeuwen

*Beyond Yellow English: Toward a Linguistic Anthropology of Asian Pacific America*  
Edited by Angela Reyes and Adrienne Lo

---

## Beyond Yellow English

---

*Toward a Linguistic Anthropology  
of Asian Pacific America*

Edited by  
Angela Reyes  
Adrienne Lo

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2009