

STRATEGIES OF CODE NEGOTIATION IN INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Eva Codó i Olsina

UNIVERSITAT AUTÒNOMA DE BARCELONA

The aim of this paper is to analyse the local strategies implemented by speakers in a multilingual setting to establish a base language for their interactions. Conversational language negotiation processes have long been neglected as a topic of research within bilingualism studies. Auer attributes this neglect to the pervasive influence of the macro-sociolinguistic paradigm. Studies carried out under this paradigm consider the selection of a language for a given interactional episode to be determined by situational factors. However, in an increasing number of situations, language choice cannot be anticipated on the basis of conversation-external parameters. This is also the case in the multilingual setting analysed here. In the absence of a shared language norm, participants need to locally negotiate a language of interaction. A conversation-analytical approach to language alternation is adopted here (Auer 1984, 1995, 1998). Only by undertaking a detailed, turn-by-turn analysis of speakers' choices, can we throw some light into how conversational language negotiation processes work.

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the conversational means through which participants in a goal-oriented speech activity negotiate and eventually agree upon a *language of interaction* (Auer 1984). Data comes from a corpus of 332 audio-recorded service encounters gathered at the main Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Barcelona.

The establishment of a common language of interaction is a matter of utmost concern for participants in these encounters. Service interactions are goal-oriented activities (Levinson 1992). The fundamental means through which speakers' goals can be accomplished is *talk-in-interaction*. However, what language to employ is not evident to speakers in this setting. The TIC is a multilingual place.

Participants come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. In addition, the majority of encounters are first-time exchanges. Speakers have no expectations as to the *language preferences* (Auer 1984) of their co-participants based on previous interactional experiences (Torras 1998). The process of language selection must be a local one. Language choice is brought to the foreground of the conversation by the absence of a shared language norm.

In this paper, a sequential approach to the study of bilingual conversations (Auer 1984, 1995, 1998) is adopted. More specifically, we build upon Auer's notions of *preference-related* language alternation and *language negotiation sequences* to account for the language negotiation patterns encountered in the data.

2. A sequential approach to language alternation

The goal of Auer's sequential approach to bilingual interactions is to account for the *procedures* bilingual participants employ to interpret the situated meaning of language alternation practices in conversation (1984, 3). According to Auer, this meaning can only be captured by examining language alternation practices in the sequential context in which they occur.

Auer identifies two functions language alternation can serve in conversation. First, it can be employed to provide participants with clues about the organisation of the ongoing interaction (*discourse-related* alternation). Secondly, it can be used as a display of *preference* (*participant-related* alternation). This is the type of alternation most frequently associated with language negotiation processes. Auer's notion of preference is not a psychological concept but it refers to the actual displays in conversation of speakers' linguistic choices (1984, 7). The following two patterns (Auer 1995) can result from participant-related alternation:

(1)

Pattern IIa: A1 B2 A1 B2 A1 B2 A1 B2

Pattern IIb: A1 B2 A1 B2 // A2 A1 A2 A1

A/B: languages 1/2: speakers

The first pattern (IIa) is one in which each speaker sticks to his/her preferred language. The second pattern (IIb) contains what Auer terms a *language negotiation sequence*. This is defined as a sequence "which begins with a disagreement as between two or more parties about what language to use for interaction and ends as soon as one of them 'gives in' to the other's preferred code" (1984, 21). Once convergence is achieved, the conversation is resumed in the new language.

3. Implicit and explicit negotiations: Accounting for strategies of language negotiation in TIC encounters

Auer's notion of a *language negotiation sequence* accounts for processes of negotiation which take place "implicitly", that is in addition to "whatever else speakers may do" (1984, 47). Even though Auer himself states that it is possible for participants to go about settling the language choice issue either explicitly and implicitly (1984, 46), he concentrates exclusively on negotiations of the implicit kind.

Not all language negotiation processes in the Barcelona TIC encounters are dealt with by participants in an implicit way. In a large number of encounters, interactants formulate their linguistic wants explicitly, i.e. at a metalinguistic level. In this study, therefore, we will use the term *implicit* to refer to what Auer calls a *language negotiation sequence*, that is to designate those negotiation processes in which participants use language choice for individual turns as displays of preference. The term *explicit* will be employed in those cases in which the negotiation of the language of interaction is accomplished through metalinguistic talk.

3.1. General patterns

The overall pattern emerging from the data is that processes of language negotiation in the TIC corpus usually take place during the early stages of the conversation. Since language negotiations are largely motivated by reasons of linguistic (in)competence, they must be settled before any substantial talk takes place. Alternatively, a communication breakdown would be likely to ensue.

Another feature of language negotiation processes in this corpus is that they are by and large initiated by the enquiring party. This is to be attributed to the structure of service interactions, to the discursive roles adopted by participants and to their asymmetrical linguistic abilities.

3.2. Implicit language negotiations

Implicit negotiations unfold at the same time as participants carry out the service interaction. Since they start with divergence, at least two turns must be present. The second turn in these encounters is normally provided by the enquirer. When language choice in this turn does not coincide with language choice in the first turn, an implicit language negotiation sequence starts. These sequences are very short in our corpus. Most of them span over two turns only. They begin in the second turn — with the enquirer's display of preference— and terminate in the third turn —with the service person's convergence to the enquirer's preferred language. When the TIC employee is not competent in the new code, language negotiations are settled explicitly. Long periods of divergence are avoided, since mutual comprehensibility is not evident.

As we have just said, implicit negotiations usually start in the second turn. A closer examination of these sequences reveals two distinct patterns, which have also been identified by Torras (1998) in a corpus of Catalan-Castilian service encounter data. Divergence from the first turn can start immediately, as in Example 1, or it can be delayed, as in Example 2.

Example 1:

- 01* *AS6: *hola*.
 02* *ENQ: *hello*.
 03* *AS6: *hello*.
 04 *ENQ: *erm # when can we go see the illuminated fountains?*
 ...

In line 02, ENQ produces a second pair part to the greeting sequence opened by AS6. The two parts of the greeting sequence are in different languages. An implicit negotiation sequence has started. There is an interesting point to be noted here. The other-languageness of the second part of the greeting is noticed and oriented to by AS6 in line 03. The lexical item in line 02 seems to function as a repair-initiator. The *interactional character of conversation* forces participants to display in each conversational move their understanding of the previous turn.

Thus, through his self-repair, which marks the end of the negotiation sequence, AS6 shows that he has understood ENQ's divergence as a display of preference for a new language and he shows his *alignment* with the new code.

In contrast with the previous two examples, in Example 2 the introduction of the new code is delayed. The second turn, where most implicit negotiation sequences were said to start, is itself a code-switched turn. The enquirer initially converges by answering the service person's greeting turn in the same language, i.e. Spanish (line 02), but immediately after formulates his service request in the new language.

Example 2:

- 01 *AS4: *hola*.
 02* *EN1: *hola can we have two maps please?*
 03 *AS4: *two maps*.
 ...

3.3. Explicit language negotiations

Explicit language negotiation processes have received very little attention in the literature on language choice. They have only been documented by Heller (1982) in Québec (Canada). Auer (1984) acknowledges the existence of explicit negotiations in certain bi/multilingual contexts, but he does not explore them. He claims that they seem to be "typical of special occasions" (1984, 46), such as first meetings between strangers. As we have seen, these two conditions are also met in the Barcelona TIC encounters.

If we define service encounters as an *activity type* (Levinson 1992) with a specific structural configuration, we can consider explicit negotiations a separate episode within that structure. We will term this episode the *language negotiation episode*. In the following section the conversational organisation of this episode will be discussed.

3.3.1. The structure of explicit language negotiations

Explicit language negotiations have a recurrent structure. They begin with an utterance with rising intonation in which one of the parties (usually the enquirer) asks about the other party's language ability. The action that utterance performs in the sequential environment where it occurs is a request for some kind of action, i.e. the adoption of a specific language of interaction, as evidenced by the interlocutor's reaction to it. Indeed, in those cases where the interlocutor is competent in the language proposed, the response to the initial question is always in the new code, even when this entails diverging from the previous turn. This is precisely what happens in the following example.

Example 3:

- 01 *ENQ: hola.
 02 *AS1: +^ hola.
 03* *ENQ: hablas inglés?
 04* *AS1: yes.
 05 *ENQ: **I'd like to know some addresses like International House.**
 06 *AS1: **International House.**
 ...

As we can see, participants in this encounter do not deal with language choice in addition to whatever else they may do in the conversation but devote a whole conversational episode to settling it. The first turn in the negotiation sequence is in line 03. Referentially, it is a demand of information (in English) about the linguistic abilities of AS1. The ensuing turn is in Spanish. The conversation-analytical approach adopted in this paper holds that any turn is heard as being directly related to the preceding turn and its producer as displaying understanding of that prior turn. Thus, AS1's move in line 04 displays that she has understood ENQ's turn as a request to adopt a new language of interaction and that she has acted accordingly.

The type of explicit language negotiation presented above, i.e. made up of a request and the granting of the request—although not necessarily in different languages—is the most frequent in the data. This sequence may also contain a third turn where the

speaker who has initiated the negotiation provides an assessment of the situation (*good, excellent, okay*, etc). There are, however, a few encounters in the corpus where, instead of one single code, a choice of codes is presented. In this type of sequences, which were also attested by Heller (1982) in Montréal, the party who calls the language of interaction to question does not want to be the one who determines it. Consider Example 4 below.

Example 4:

- 01 *AS6: hola.
 02* *ENQ: ehm # <I do> [I] **I don't know if**
pos parlare italiano o inglese?
 03* *AS6: *inglese xxx*.
 04* *ENQ: +^ *inglese*.
 05 *ENQ: **I'm looking for a [I] a museum of**
eh: drama and spettacolo.
 ...

ENQ proposes a choice of languages to AS6 (line 02). It is significant to note that the question which begins the negotiation phase and which proposes a choice of codes is in itself a code-switched utterance. This could be interpreted as a strategy of neutrality (Heller 1988) on ENQ's part to avoid committing himself with one of the two languages. Put in other words, ENQ seems to be encoding linguistically what he is proposing metalinguistically. Unlike Example 3 above, in this example AS6's response to ENQ's question is not in the new language. This is because the action the turn initiating the negotiation episode does is in this case a true demand for information. The choice of Italian in lines 03 and 04 is motivated for reasons of topical cohesion.

3.3.2. Language choice in explicit negotiation sequences

As we saw in section 3.2, language choice is a constitutive element of implicit language negotiation sequences. This is so, because as Auer says, in implicit negotiations 'language choice for individual turns is itself employed to do what metalinguistic talk may accomplish in other cases' (1984, 46).

Linguistic divergence from the previous turn is what signals the onset of an implicit negotiation episode.

In explicit language negotiation sequences, however, a different picture emerges. As conversationalists formulate their linguistic wants explicitly, the relationship between language choice and the beginning of the negotiation process is weakened. Thus, the opening turn of an explicit language negotiation sequence may or may not be in the new language proposed. The two patterns co-exist in our corpus.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have focused on the strategies employed by participants in a multilingual setting to establish a language of interaction. The data has shown that they may negotiate the choice of a base language implicitly, that is at the same time as they carry out the service encounter. Divergence from the previous turn marks the onset of the negotiation process. The negotiation ends as soon as one of the participants accommodates to the other's preferred language. When speakers negotiate a common language of interaction explicitly, they do this through metalinguistic talk. A whole episode, i.e. the language negotiation episode, is devoted to that end. In some explicit negotiation processes, however, a choice of languages is offered. Finally, we have noted that in explicit negotiations the beginning of the negotiation can no longer be equated with language divergence.

Works cited

- AUER, Peter. *Bilingual conversation*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1984.
- "The pragmatics of code-switching: a sequential approach". *One Speaker, Two Languages*. Leslie Milroy & Pieter MUYSKEN. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. 115-135.
- ed. *Code-Switching in Conversation*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- HELLER, Monica. "Negotiations of language choice in Montreal." *Language and Social Identity*. Ed. John Gumperz. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982. 108-118.
- "Strategic ambiguity: Code-switching in the management of conflict." *Code-switching. Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*. Ed. Monica Heller. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988. 77-98.
- LEVINSON, Stephen. "Activity types and language." *Talk at Work*. Eds. Paul Drew & John Heritage. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- LIPPS Group. *LIDES Coding Manual: A Document for Preparing and Analysing Language Interaction Data*, forthcoming.
- TORRAS, M. Carme. "Catalan, Castilian or Both? Code Negotiation in Bilingual Service Encounters." *Working Paper Series*, 96. Lancaster University, 1998.

Appendix: Transcription key

The tape-recorded materials used in this paper have been transcribed according to the guidelines set out in the LIDES Coding Manual (LIPPS Group, forthcoming). The following transcription conventions have been employed.

xxx	unintelligible material
+^	latching of previous utterance
[>] / [<]	overlap precedes / overlap follows
< >	scope symbols
#	pause
plain text	Spanish
bold	English
<i>italics</i>	Italian
<u>underlined</u>	Undecidable

