Lexical interferences of Kazakh-Russian bilingual children of preschool age: A sociolinguistic survey

Aidyn Aldaberdikeyzy a *

a al-Farabi Kazakh National University, al-Farabi street 71, Almaty, 050040, Kazakhstan

Abstract

After gaining its independence, Kazakhstan, like any other post-soviet republics, gained a range of new characteristic features one of which is a Kazakh (autochthon) and Russian bilingual society. The article deals with the problems closely connected with sociolinguistic aspects of child speech formation and its development in bilingual society of modern Kazakhstan. During the process of the scientific work, being a teacher of English, the author of the article has been observing the verbal behaviour of children of pre-schools for the last six years. As a result of the data gained, reasons of lexical interferences’ formation of child speech were cleared out; and the source language/languages of linguistic interferences was identified.

Keywords: child bilingualism; child speech; lexical interferences; linguistic competences.

1. Introduction

The Kazakh-Russian bilingualism and, consequently, frequent use of interferences in child speech are among peculiarities of the modern Kazakshtani society. Despite the fact that child speech is constantly controlled, corrected, even “installed” into a fake linguistic environment, lexical interferences, as a result of language contacts, are inevitable in child speech. Children, constantly imitating and repeating all happening around them, hardly ever ignore such sociolinguistic factors as language prestige, convenience and brevity of set expressions and alike.

2. Subject

The data was collected during observation applied by the author in pre-school educational state institutions (kindergartens); more than 80 Kazakh-Russian bilingual children ranging from two to six were observed.

3. Problems

The study examined when Kazakh-Russian bilingual children start producing lexical interferences, which language is used as a source of lexical interferences and what is the most frequently applied method of producing lexical interferences.

* Aidyn Aldaberdikeyzy, Tel.: +7-701-277-0875
E-mail address: aydyn9@gmail.com
4. Research context

This article deals with some problems closely connected to social aspects of child speech formation and development in bilingual society of contemporary Kazakhstan. During the process of the scientific work, being a teacher of English, the author of the article has been observing the speech behaviour of children of pre-schools for the last six years. As a result of the data gained, reasons of lexical interferences’ formation of child speech were cleared out; and the source language/languages of linguistic interferences was identified.

5. Key research questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the source of lexical and grammatical interferences in Kazakh-Russian bilingual children speech?
2. How are the most frequently used lexical and grammatical interferences produced?
3. At what age do Kazakh-Russian bilingual children start making lexical and grammatical interferences?

6. Recent research results

Primarily applied in acoustics and optics the term ‘interference’ is now widely used in linguistics and foreign language teaching methodology a lot. Combined from Latin words ‘inter’ and ‘ferentis’, it is now considered in two meanings: wide and narrow. Adherents of Prague linguistic school consider interference as all forms and possibilities of language contacts and mutual influence like borrowing, hybridization, mixing and etc. and explain it as aberrance of languages in contact. In this case, linguistic interference is regarded as mutual influence of two languages’ systems and invasion of norms of first language system into another one.

Another group of scientists regard this term in its narrow meaning and explain it as transmitting the norms of first language into a second one. This viewpoint is proper to foreign language teaching methodology and accepted as a negative phenomenon.

Thus, during observing types and peculiarities of interferences a learner takes for granted the norms of first two languages acquired before and apply them in learning a third one. For instance, in a Kazakh-Russian or national-Russian-Kazakh or, on the contrary, national-Kazakh-Russian language society of modern Kazakhstan several languages can serve as a source of interferences. Within the confines of this research work on the purpose of data limitation and attaining a precise sociolinguistic picture, only Kazakh-Russian bilingualism was taken as an object of investigation.

Sometimes opinions on interlingual transfers of foreign language teaching process in scientific literature may be opposite to each other. In 1957, G.P. Vuono and T.V. Lebedeva emphasized that positive and negative influence of second language is more than that of first language. Generalizing her experience on pronunciation in second language, N.I. Kiseleva sums that “… despite the fact that interferences basing on second foreign language are evident and of large quantity, first language influence is much greater anyway …”.

Before embarking upon the investigation of the notion of interference, it is of great importance to clear out such matters as verbal behavior production and perception, language acquisition. To be more specific, during child verbal behavior formation, a regularity common for many societies as naming a situation in short is observed. For instance, a child is able to express a number of situations with one word ‘ball’ as ‘where is my ball’, ‘I need a ball’, ‘take the ball’ and others. This regularity regards not only a child language, but also peculiarities of language formation in ontogenesis. It is based on the development of complete objects’ separation and differentiation. Therefore, at the beginning a language sign is not considered as an independent one, but a part of a linguistic system like measure or service.

The next stage of language acquisition can be named sign “capture”. At this stage a real language starts being formed. The specific feature of this stage is that undivided units continue being separated into several levels. As a result of this process, a whole system containing from several levels appear.
Scientists of this branch adhere to the viewpoint that during second language acquisition, an opposite process to that mentioned in the previous paragraph takes place. That is, second language is acquired starting from a separate language units towards a whole objects.

Second language acquisition may differ according to authenticity and naturalness of conditions of learning environment. Its results vary as well. However, language acquisition is meant to attain the system of a language learned. Bilinguism and polylinguism are characterized as an ability to use several linguistic systems and to switch from one to another. Certainly, this ability is closely connected with stages and levels of a language acquisition. Final stage of language acquisition process depends on the psychophysical peculiarities of a learner, his ability, conditions of language acquisition process and personal terms.

Possibly, bilingual children have a single system of basic notions at “pre-speaking period”, while at “speaking period” they owe two ones. However, from a linguistic point of view it is difficult to assume that bilingualism would own one whole system.

Having observed children’s verbal behavior, the author could identify several terms of interferences formation and their identical forms. On the basis of these examples, such matters as formation of bilingual children’s consciousness, the mutual emphasis bilingualism on first/native and second languages, distinguishing features of monolingual consciousness formation from bilingual consciousness formation have been cleared out.

It is possible to predict phenomenon of grammatical interference while identifying similarities and differences of grammar forms. Despite the fact that observees’ first and second languages have much in common in morphological and syntactical levels, a number of differences occur in comparing cases, plurality forms and so on, for instance: ‘kop kitap – mnogo kniga’ or ‘kop kitap tar – mnogo knig’ (the correct forms are ‘mongo knig’ and ‘kop kitap’ relatively), koz – glaza, shash – volosa (the correct forms are ‘volosy’). The absence of gender category in the Kazakh language and the loads of that one in the Russian language lead to emergence of a plenty of grammatical interferences, for instance: ‘menin atym – moi kon’, ‘menin shelegim – moy v vedro’, (the correct variant is ‘moe vedro’), senin kuyrshagyn – tvoi kula (‘tvoya kula’) and others. Both for Kazakh-speaking and Russian-speaking children suffer difficulties in producing verb forms. Tense, mood and forms in Kazakh, tense, mood, form, gender and other grammar categories of verbs in Russian cause grammatical interferences, like ‘prygai - begai’ (the correct form is ‘begi’), ‘on hochet – my hochem (the correct form is ‘my hotim’) and others. By identifying interlingual equations, it is possible to predict grammar interferences and avoid their negative effects. The most unexpected fact is that both first and second languages are able to serve as a source of grammar interferences.

During the process of word formation, the most frequently met type of lexical interference is produced by the principle of analogy, that is, interfered word is changed according to peculiarities of former acquired word. For example, on the basis of former acquired colour adjective ‘rozovyi’ (pink) such interfered words are produces like ‘zelenovyi, zheltovyi’ (green, yellow). Those colour adjectives with the ending ‘yi’ as ‘korichnevyi, oranzhevyi, biryuzovyi’ cannot be the source of lexical interference in this case, as they are acquired after the interfered adjectives denoting colour.

Those bilingual children whose first/native language is Kazakh produce quite a lot of lexical interferences in their Kazakh speech. On the basis of examples ‘baramyn, zhatamyn’ (I go, I lie) the incorrect form of the verb ‘oqu’ (to read) in first person singular of simple present tense ‘oqamyn’ (I read) is formed (it is correct version is ‘oqimyn’). Indeed on the example of the verb forms ‘bara almaimyn, zhat a almaimyn’ (I cannot go, I cannot lie) such verb forms like ‘oina almaimyn, shaina almaimyn’ (I cannot play, I cannot chew) are produced (their correct variants are ‘oinai alamimyn, shainai almaimyn’).

In the result of the observation completed, it is possible to state that:

- In Kazakh-Russian child bilingualism, both the Kazakh and Russian languages can be a source of lexical and grammatical interferences;
- Lexical and grammatical interferences in bilingual child speech are mostly made by a method of analogy;

Kazakh-Russian bilingual children start producing lexical and grammatical interferences at the age of four-five when they are capable of understanding sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance, which corresponds to A1 level of common European framework.
7. Conclusion

In the case of contemporary Kazakhstani society, bilingual children use both the Kazakh and Russian language as a source of linguistic interferences, which demonstrates the evidence that either of them can be first language or even in most cases children have bilingual linguistic competence. A method of analogy is accepted to be the most applied way of producing lexical interferences, as children take for granted rules of a language without exceptions. Exceptions are usually ignored for some time until they are learned by heart at the age of five-six, when they get A2 level of common European framework.

In this very paper the author suggested some aspects of investigating child speech from sociological viewpoint as lexical interferences, sources of interferences and alike. A range of these aspects can be wider including influences of sociologic peculiarities of a family on child speech, ontogenetic peculiarities of language acquisition, common and private peculiarities of communicative competence formation and etc. The given study is useful in embarking upon the investigation of communicative competence formation of bilingual children.

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9. References


