

2009 RISLUS Forum: Abstracts

L1 attrition in Bengali-English Speakers: L1 disuse or L2 interference?

Hia Datta, Loraine K. Obler, Mira Goral, Martin Gitterman and Valerie L. Shafer

First language attrition in bilinguals is the decline in the ability to access their native-language over their life-span. Whether first language (L1) attrition manifests as an effect of infrequent use of L1 itself (Paradis, 2001) or as a result of interference from the second language (L2) (Loftus 1980) is currently unresolved. This study investigates the underlying mechanisms of lexical attrition in L1 in Bengali (L1)-English (L2) speakers living in the U.S. We asked (1) Is L1 attrition an effect of L1-disuse or L2-interference? and (2) How is L1 lexical attrition related to (a) current language proficiency of L1 and L2? and (b) use of L1 ?

We employed two sets of lexical items (one that varies in familiarity across L1 and L2 and another that does not) to address the first question and language background questionnaires to answer the second. Results indicate that indeed attrition is apparent as early as five years of stay in the L2 environment if use of L1 is limited. Also, interference from L2 into L1 appears to influence L1 attrition more than L1 disuse does.

Spanish/English Codeswitching in Service Encounters: Accommodation to the Customer's Language Choice and Perceived Linguistic Affiliation

Laura Callahan

This paper reports on data collected in service encounters in New York and California. Assuming the role of customer, fieldworkers visited businesses and addressed service workers in Spanish. In a minority of instances the worker maintained English throughout the exchange. In other encounters, the worker engaged in codeswitching between Spanish and English. These are the cases examined here. It is shown that on most of these occasions the worker's codeswitches instantiate a form of accommodation. The worker accomplishes this by matching the customer's language choice, or by responding to his or her perceived linguistic affiliation or linguistic abilities.

The role of sociodemographic factors on Spanish subject pronoun placement in New York

Rocio Raña

This variationist sociolinguistic analysis of Spanish overt subject pronouns examines their placement either before or after verbs in a corpus of 133 interviews with Spanish-speaking New Yorkers. The variable placement of overt subject pronouns very likely responds to a number of linguistic and speaker variables which have not been defined for any dialect of Spanish. In New York, this variability seems to be additionally influenced by English and by the contact of different dialects of Spanish. By analyzing the role that the speakers' socio-demographic characteristics plays on pronoun placement, I observe the same processes of language and dialect contact documented in previous research with regard to the presence and absence of the pronoun, and I interpret them as supporting the hypothesis that a process of new speech community formation is taking place among Spanish-speakers in New York.

Crossing and mocking African American and Asian immigrant speech styles

Angela Reyes

This paper focuses on the social meanings achieved through the performance of African American and Asian immigrant speech styles by a Korean American comic, Dr. Ken. Analyzing excerpts from one of his stand-up comedy acts, I illustrate how his use of speech associated with African Americans emerges as a type of crossing that relies on a particular configuration of authentication, while his use of speech associated with Asian immigrants emerges as a type of mocking that both reinforces and denaturalizes stereotypes of foreignness and homogeneity. Crossing, mocking, and blending multiple styles in his comedy routine becomes a resource for creating a delicately calibrated social persona and interactional frame. This paper argues that the way in which the performance of these styles is constructed along racial, immigrant, and class lines results in several types of ideological incongruence that facilitate the interpretation of his practices as humorous.

From ELLs to Emergent Bilinguals: Educating for Equity

Ofelia García

This presentation makes the simple point that when policymakers and educators refer to language minority students who are developing English as English Language Learners or as Limited English proficient, they are ignoring an idea that is critical to educational equity -- bilingualism. Through school and through acquiring English, these students are becoming bilingual. But when bilingualism is not named, the home languages of these students are ignored, assuming that their educational needs are the same as those of monolingual students.

The central idea in this presentation is that today there is a growing dissonance between research on the education of emergent bilinguals and policy enacted to educate them. As a result, emergent bilinguals are faced with greater inequity in their education. Five sources of inequity resulting from the exclusion of bilingualism in education will be explored – 1) inadequate educational programs; 2) unfair assessments; 3) inadequate curricular opportunities, 4) poor resources; 5) exclusion of parents and communities.

Developing Literacy in English-language Learners: Guidelines for Effective Practice

Diane August

This presentation presents eight guidelines for effective literacy instruction for ELLs. The guidelines are based on a synthesis of research on developing literacy in ELLs conducted by the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth.