

Introduction: Convergence as an emergent property in bilingual speech*

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In introducing this special issue of *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, we feel it is critical to clarify what we understand ‘linguistic convergence’ to mean in the context of bilingualism, since ‘convergence’ is a technical term more readily associated with the field of language contact than with the field of bilingualism (for recent discussions of the role of convergence in contact see Thomason and Kaufman, 1988; Thomason, 2001; Myers-Scotton, 2002; Clyne, 2003; Winford, 2003). Within the language contact literature, the term invites a variety of uses. Some researchers adopt a definition of convergence that requires that all languages in a contact situation change, sometimes to the extent that the source of a given linguistic feature cannot be determined (see April McMahon’s commentary in this issue). For others, convergence may be more broadly defined to also apply to situations in which one language has undergone structural incursions of various sorts from contact with another.

This issue represents our attempt to redefine convergence and to analyze its scope of application in bilingual contexts. We see convergence as the enhancement of inherent structural similarities found between two linguistic systems. In this way, convergence necessarily differs from interference and transfer, each of which implies the imposition of a structural property from a foreign source language. Here, the direction of influence between the languages is irrelevant; it may be mutual or unidirectional. Inherent in this definition is the fundamental notion that what distinguishes convergence from other cross-linguistic effects is that convergence is not necessarily externally induced.

Underlying most work in contact linguistics is the assumption that convergence, irrespective of the direction of influence between the contact languages, is only discernible after the fact; that is, convergence is an outcome (of borrowing or substratum influence, for instance) and not an observable process. Researchers on the linguistic correlates of bilingualism generally speak of interference or transfer effects in the language of different types of bilinguals – first and second language acquirers, heritage

language speakers, incomplete acquirers, and attrited speakers. In bilingual research, rarely are the observed disparities between a bilingual’s grammar and that of a monolingual native speaker interpreted as indicative of convergence. Perhaps scholars of bilingualism hesitate to speak of convergence in bilingual linguistic systems because the structural similarities observed between a bilingual’s two grammars are often ‘emergent’ rather than fixed properties and convergence is most readily recognizable as an end result, perhaps with systemic implications. The structural similarities that occur between a bilingual’s grammars may be variable rather than fixed realizations. In our view, though, it is appropriate to apply the notion of convergence to bilingual grammars as the structural congruencies surfacing from the contact between a bilingual’s two grammars can and do provide synchronic evidence of the processes that ultimately lead to linguistic convergence, even if those processes are incomplete or variable in their application. In sum, what happens in the grammars of contemporary bilinguals may provide insight on changes that affect languages in contact situations over time.

All of the papers that follow in this special issue depart from the assumption that convergence is synchronically observable in bilingual speech and each paper describes and analyzes a convergent change that has occurred in specific language pairings. In no case does an author assume that the emergent congruity between a bilingual’s linguistic systems is necessarily externally-induced. In order to explain more fully the distinction between an externally- or contact-induced change and convergence, it might be beneficial to anticipate the claims of Bullock and Gerfen, and Sánchez (this issue). These authors see convergence as the collapsing of differences in areas of the linguistic systems where the two languages already had similar features; that is, a bilingual’s two languages become uniform with respect to a property that was initially merely similar. Implicit here is the notion that external influence does not necessarily induce convergence, instead it may merely target an area of grammar that is inherently unstable and it may either accelerate or affect the outcome of a change that is already in process. The close study of convergence in bilingual speech may, in fact, focus in on precisely those areas of the grammatical system that are especially vulnerable to external interference. In the syntactic contributions

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to this issue (Sánchez; Montrul; Toribio), this is a topic that garners a great deal of attention and each author comes to the independent conclusion that the convergence of grammatical properties is either of a lexical nature or it occurs primarily at the interface of syntax and pragmatics/semantics. Within the domain of syntax, at least, only the peripheral features are affected by convergence, not the formal core. While syntax proper (i.e., the purely formal system) is arguably immune to convergence, there is evidence that the phonological system may be vulnerable to external influence. So, one important task that remains to be undertaken in future research is the documentation and accounting of the differential impact of convergence over various domains of the grammar.

The present project on convergence in contact speech comprises five articles, two grounded in phonetics/phonology (Bullock and Gerfen; Colantoni and Gurlekian) and three focused on morpho-syntax (Sánchez; Montrul; Toribio), each tracing a logical succession from linguistic theoretical treatments of convergence and particular language phenomena, to analyses of contextualized or elicited exemplars of bilingual speech, to contributions to existing approaches and larger research enterprises in linguistic and cognate areas. In "Phonological convergence in a contracting language variety", Bullock and Gerfen draw together theoretical investigations into phonology and sociolinguistic studies of language change and variation in presenting a core contribution to studies of convergence, namely, the observation that convergence may not be limited to phonetic replacement. This is demonstrated in the phonetic analysis of a moribund variety of French whose perceptual and acoustic similarity with English has had consequences in the realization of mid front vowels. In converging on a rhotic schwa, these speakers have not introduced a novel phonetic category into the French system, but have availed themselves of the perceptual space allotted to English.

Colantoni and Gurlekian also consider the extent and the limits of structural convergence in phonology, more specifically, intonation. In their contribution, "Convergence and intonation: Historical evidence from Buenos Aires Spanish", these authors submit the often-remarked descending intonation of broad focus declarative utterances in Argentine Spanish to experimental scrutiny (Malmberg, 1950; Kaisse, 2001). The unique alignments of pre-nuclear pitch accents and the down-stepped peaks that are revealed in the phonetic analysis of a reading corpus are then interpreted in view of diverse factors, among these, the historical expansion of Spanish and Italian and the emergence of bilingualism and related social dialects in language contact situations (Thomason, 2001).

The contributions by Sánchez and Montrul place the study of convergence squarely within the larger discip-

linary context of grammatical theory, by bringing the tools and concepts of generative grammar to bear on the analysis and interpretation of the variable and non-target nature of contact speech patterns. In the contribution by Sánchez, "Functional convergence in the tense, evidentiality and aspectual systems of Quechua-Spanish bilinguals", the convergence attendant to language contact is hypothesized to be determined by the availability of largely equivalent, though partially divergent, matrices of morphological features in the languages involved, as consonant with the Functional Convergence Hypothesis (Sánchez, 2003). The prediction is borne out: in a Spanish condition, Quechua-Spanish bilingual children are observed to produce past tense forms that are associated with mirative features not manifest in non-contact Spanish, and in a Quechua condition, the children evince discourse-oriented background/foreground distinctions analogous to those marked by aspectual morphology in Spanish. These patterns emerge from convergence in the shared functional category of Tense, which is differentially specified for features of Evidentiality in Quechua and for Aspect in Spanish.

Sánchez's findings are interpreted as corroborating the proposal that external influence will affect interpretable features rather than the purely syntactic domain. Montrul's contribution, "Subject and object expression in Spanish heritage speakers: A case of morphosyntactic convergence", further scrutinizes this self-same proposal. She hypothesizes that if convergence is restricted to the lexical-semantic and discourse-pragmatic interfaces, heritage speakers experiencing language attrition should present non-target Spanish-language patterns in the distribution of subject and object arguments and in the expression of semantically conditioned clitic-doubling, while at once displaying robust knowledge of null subjects and object clitics, forms that are motivated and licensed by features of the core syntax of the full monolingual variety. This piece is significant not only for its methodological rigor and firm conclusions, but for its careful consideration of the role of input in erosion and incomplete acquisition.

Finally, in "Convergence as an optimization strategy in bilingual speech: evidence from code-switching", Toribio demonstrates that the manifestation of convergent forms is additionally determined by psycholinguistic factors such as language mode (Grosjean, 1998) and factors of economy in bilingual speech processing (Muysken, 2002). When the two language are activated, as in code-switching, bilinguals tend to reduce the load of syntactic options (such as those available for expressing semantic and pragmatic differences) and fix on those structures that are most congruent across languages. Thus the convergence that is evidenced in bilingual Spanish may be further enhanced when Spanish and English are simultaneously activated.

As recognized in the commentary of several respondents, the research represented herein may be viewed as transitional in studies of convergence in that it advocates a shift from a diachronic- and corpora-based approach to a theoretically-based method that incorporates experimental techniques. As the respondents underline, there remains much work to be done in the consideration of synchronic change in bilingual grammars. It is hoped that this collection will inspire the studies essential in furthering the development of this new convergence research program.

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