Resumptive L_1 Bilinguals: A conceptual framework

1 Purpose

While attrition and acquisition continue to be studied in great detail, little has been done to understand the long-term processes and implications of waxing and waning languages in bilingualism. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss attrition dimension of this process but rather to present data and analysis on what occurs once the language interruption ceases and the latent language is resumed as the prominent language. The questions then to ask are if L_1 languages that are not used for a long time simply lost, written over by later acquired languages, or will they be maintained although unused? This paper introduces a conceptual model and definition to explain this phenomenon.

2 Results

2.1 Approach

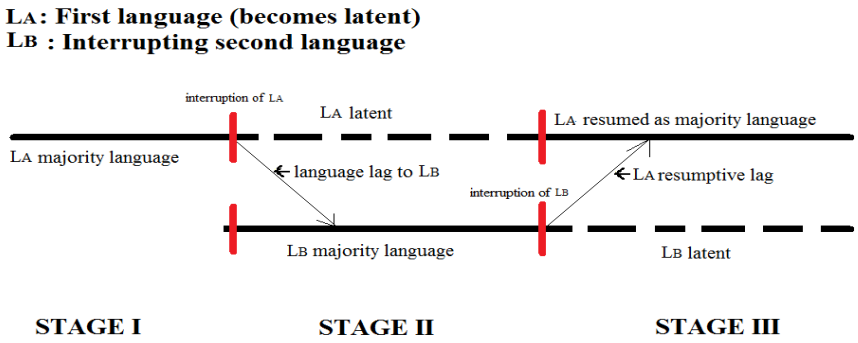
Case studies were the primary source of information. The terms used to search were "reactivate", "restart", "reversed attrition", and "relearn". Articles citing the case study by Berman (1979), the first known case study about a resumptive bilingual, were included in the review. The main questions guiding the review of the case studies were:

What are the key behaviors of resuming an L_1?
Are there differences between adults and children?
How can these behaviors be modeled?

2.2 Conceptual framework of resumptive L1 speakers, children and adults

Resumption is not an act of re-acquisition as the literature on attrition has suggested, because while certain skills are lost, linguistic competence is never totally erased.

Figure 1 Brixey resumptive bilingual conceptual framework



Code-switching is observed as the speaker first switches from the L_A to the LB, and also during the resumption lag back to the previously latent L_A. L_1 resumption will be directed by implicit learning, which suggests it is guided still by universal grammar. Adult speakers resuming an L_1 will have both learning systems available to them.

3 Results

It can be expected that a resuming bilingual will show attrited behaviors when first resuming, which will be reflected through difficulties in performance, not competence. A difference in performance was expected between resumptive L_1 bilingual adults and children. Age is a factor in changes of competence, as a fully matured L_1 will not be as prone to attrition as opposed to a still developing L_1. For children, the resumption lag

is around nine weeks, with the use of peer-level competence and performance after six months of sustained input. Available studies provided no time table for L_1 resuming adults. Intervening variables evident in existing research literature are whether the language ceased in childhood before the critical period, the level of input of the latent L_A during Stage II, and the attained proficiency in the L_A before becoming latent. In addition, the L_B may have an interfering effect, as cognates tended to be more resistant to loss than noncognates, and the latent L_A will show signs of simplification, restructuring, and probable L_2 influence at the phonological level.

4 Future studies

This review of the literature was intended to lay the groundwork for identifying common behaviors observed in resumptive bilingual studies for resuming L_1 bilinguals. Further research will assist in refining the conceptual model for both L_1 and L_2 resumptive bilinguals and the definition of this linguistic phenomenon.

Selected References

Berman, R. (1979). "The re-emergence of the bilingual; a case study of a Hebrew-English child", *Working papers on bilingualism,* **19.** 157-179.

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