

ON BILINGUALISM IN THE DANELAW¹

1. Little can be known about those bilingual speakers of the language varieties related to Old English and Old Norse, who wandered in the Danelaw during the Viking Age, as no direct evidence has come down to us to support this argumentation. Nevertheless, scholars from Björkman (1969, firstly published in 1900) to Baugh and Cable (1994) have made use of this term, in providing a sociolinguistic perspective to the Scandinavian and English speech-community contact; true enough, only socio-historical and linguistic claims can be raised from written material of that time.

We agree with Haugen, when he writes that “These [bilingual speakers] are ... the carriers of interlingual contagion, and to them we must look for an understanding of the processes that must have operated in the distant past as well as in the present” (1950a: 271). All in all, this claim justifies the extrapolation of the bilingual speakers' linguistic behaviour from a modern speech-community contact to those which occurred in the past. Moreover, scholars often find it difficult to approach the notion of bilingualism for the lack of a general definition: everything depends on the working discipline. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is an attempt to fit the controversial description of the speech-community contact occurring in the Danelaw between the Scandinavian and English peoples within the lines provided by bilingualism studies, from both the sociolinguistic and psychological perspectives.

2. Scholars agree that speech-community contacts result in bilingualism (cf. Appel & Muysken, 1987; Hoffman, 1991), and this, in turn, explains the possible lexical re-structuration of one, or both, languages, for “All borrowing by one language from another is predicated on some minimum of bilingual mastery of the two languages” (Haugen, 1950b: 210). From this explanation of linguistic change, two main ideas can be extracted: the users of two languages are the ones responsible for the progressive grammatical adaptation of the innovations in the native language; and linguistic change is regarded as a non-stopping process. On the one hand, language does not change by itself, speakers rather tend to keep on making either conscious or unconscious variations from the norm, some of which will manage to spread and become part of the contemporary language use in the speech-community; this po-

¹ The aim of this paper is to offer a brief and condensed sketch of the general lines of my investigation; true enough it presents more problems than solutions to the topics in question, at this moment. Moreover, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dra Ma. Pilar Navarro and Dra. Ana Hornero from the Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana at Zaragoza University, Spain, for reading an earlier draft of this paper; also to Dr. Hans Frede Nielsen from the Center for Englesk, at Odense University, Denmark, for his valuable suggestions; nonetheless, I fully acknowledge all the views and opinions explained in the paper.

tential change may have a foreign source, if speakers use more than one language in their conversational interactions.

In addition to the question of whether a user of two languages, on the introduction of an innovation within the utterance, wishes to change the native language, this person will surely reject such an implication (example adapted from Keller, 1985: 213, where he writes that his grandmother would vigorously deny the fact that she personally changed the German language; she changed it along with all other Germans). Under these circumstances, language change can be explained as “the collective non-intended consequence of intentional individual acting” (*Ibid.* : 235). It is important to mention that, despite the linguistic competence criterion in two languages, a punctual instance of a bilingual speaker's code-switch bears great importance, because, if a given item from a foreign source is suitable for one speaker, why can it not be used by others? Therefore its use becomes extensive and its morpho-phonemic and syntactic configuration adapted.

On the other hand, language changes gradually: diachronic studies of language development show how the linguistic code differs from time to time. Some of these differences may be accounted for by taking into consideration a foreign source. In fact, regardless the reasons behind an intentional introduction of an innovation without an intended changing aim of the system, the presence of a neologism in a bilingual's speech string may be cumulative in the long term, if the tendency of collective acceptance is observed, resulting in the lexical enrichment of the native vocabulary.

3. These two levels of approaching language-change find their counterpart distinction in the study of bilingualism. One of the aspects to which most sociolinguists have devoted the first lines of their treatises on bilingualism is the problem of providing a definition that would work well in any discipline interested in bilingualism (cf. Hamers & Blanc, 1990). On the whole, definitions fall either into the sociological or into the psychological disciplines; on the one hand, he former supposes “the practice of alternatively using two languages...and the persons involved [are called] bilinguals” (Weinreich, 1969: 1), and corresponds to Appel and Muysken's *societal bilingualism*, which “occurs when in a given society two or more languages are spoken” (1987: 1).

On the other hand, the latter, referred to by Appel and Muysken *individual bilingualism* (1987: 2) or *bilinguality* by Hamers and Blanc (1990: 6), provides the criteria by which individual bilingual speakers' linguistic behaviour can be approached. Bloomfield characterizes a bilingual speaker as one with a “native-like control of two languages” (1965: 56 firstly published in 1933); however, voices have soon been raised against this absolute proficient state, due to the difficulties in settling a general norm or standard for linguistic proficiency (Appel & Muysken, 1987: 3). Bearing this train of thought in mind, individual bilingualism should be regarded as a process rather than as a state, which “begins when a speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language” (Haugen, 1953; in Romaine, 1989: 10). Moreover, Mackey believes that the point at which a speaker can be con-

sidered bilingual is impossible to establish in a two language-usage continuum: "It seems obvious that if we are to study the phenomenon of bilingualism we are forced to consider it as something entirely relative" (1972: 555).

The question becomes one of characterizing the ideal bilingual speaker: not only should a user of two languages know the grammatical rules of two linguistic systems within a bilingual speech-community, but he must also be aware of the rules of linguistic use of both languages, such as "what counts as a coherent sentence, request, statement requiring an answer, situation requiring a greeting, or making a greeting anomalous, requisite or forbidden topic, marking of emphasis or irony, normal duration of silence, normal level of voice..." (examples taken from Hymes, 1977: 49). Hence linguistic competence and a bilingual speech-community should not only be the sole requisites for the final bilingual condition, but communicative competence is also expected. It should be added here that this characterization does not differ much from that of the acceptable monolingual speaker, whose communicative competence at his mother tongue is also a desirable state.

It is important to mention that the degree of bilingual competence determines the grammatical shape in which a bilingual speaker will introduce an innovation in his speech-strug. Instances of nonce-borrowing and code-switch are distinguished in relation to either the grammatical integration into the L1 patterns or the preservation of the foreign original shape, respectively. Romaine (1991: 63) believes, in this respect, that:

these [proficient bilingual] speakers rely heavily on nonce-borrowing. In principle, the whole lexicon of the two languages is at [their] disposal...Every word from English theoretically has the potential to become an established loanword in French [or in any other modern language], but few may ever achieve more than nonce status. Through their introduction of such items into a general lexical pool, they provide a source of potentially integratable items for other less proficient bilingual and monolingual members to draw on.

Therefore, the individual hands of these less fluent bilinguals and monolinguals should be thought of in relation to the configuration of the grammatical shape with which a given innovation will progressively increase the frequency of its use. We can therefore claim that fluent bilinguals are those responsible for the introduction of innovations, in the strict sense of the word, whereas the less fluent bilinguals and monolinguals are the agents for the lexical spreading within the speech-community. Obviously, along the description of the process of integration not only should purely linguistic criteria be taken into account, but also sociological considerations should be taken into account for deciding the fate of a word usage.

It becomes pertinent to add that societal bilingualism sets the framework for the description of what is the degree and form of bilingualism found in a speech-community. A general typology is provided by Appel and Muysken (1987: 2), in which relatively stable speech-community contacts are depicted. By taking a long term approach to these balanced situations, we would like to add that bilingualism in the community should also take as a requisite

the long-term permanence due to the use of both languages for social purposes. If this situation is not balanced, where one does not find a functional compartmentalisation of both languages, the future of one of the languages is not guaranteed, owing to the lack of a diglossic relationship between both systems (Romaine, 1991: 36). This claim is supported by the generalization related to language-death, which “occurs in unstable bilingual or multilingual speech communities as a result of language shift from a regressive minority language to a dominant majority language” (Dressler, 1988: 184).

4. Scholars such as Björkman (1969: 6, footnote 1- firstly published in 1900), Sergeantson (1935: 62), Sawyer (1971: 170), Hansen (1984: 66), Ureland and Broderick (1991: 27) and Baugh and Cable (1994: 94) among others, have all included the notion of bilingualism within their explanations of the Scandinavian influence on the Anglo-Saxon speech-community. For these historical linguists, bilingualism is the sociolinguistic notion with which conclusions of a linguistic nature have been put forward; moreover, bilingualism is regarded as the direct consequence of continuous living side-by-side of the two speech-communities, being boosted by the similarities of both classical languages (Ureland & Broderick, 1991: 28); however, little is explained in their treatises on how bilingualism is approached.

On the whole, claims in relation to the numbers and extent of the Scandinavian settlement (Ekwall, 1937; Davis, 1954; Sawyer, 1971), the treatment given to onomastic material (Fellows-Jensen, 1980, 1991), the typology of Norse neologisms (Baugh & Cable, 1994), the long survival of the Old Norse language on British soil (Ekwall, 1930; Page, 1971) all have been proposed within the relationship between Norse influence on the native language and the numbers of speakers required to exert this influence; but Lund has already warned us that “it is misleading to arrange ‘numbers’, ‘influence’, and ‘permanent effects’: the latter two are the premises, the first is the conclusion drawn from these” (1981: 167). Under these circumstances, we believe that those claims are open to revision in the light of the new insights provided by the topic of bilingualism. However, for reasons of space, our attention will be focused on accounting for the mutual intelligibility, insofar as it offers the frame in which bilingualism could be fitted within the picture of the contact.

5. Here we resume Werner’s (1991: 380) train of thought where he states that:

At the time of the contact the two languages were (later) OE (Mercian, Northumbrian) on the one hand and Proto-Nordic (‘Runic Nordic’) on the other. These languages were thus not ME proper and classical ON [Old Norse], neither of which is testified before 1150, although the standard reference books and the practical work in this area of language contact research may give this misleading impression.

Hence, speakers of the dialects of Northumbrian and Mercian met with those speakers of “Proto-Nordic” in the Danelaw for almost two centuries. A mismatch has been deliberately introduced in this previous line, for “Proto-Nordic” or “Runic Nordic” is considered as the

actual ancestor of that variety of language which was to be written in the following two centuries in Scandinavia. We would agree with the designation of “Proto-”, as this was not yet extensively written except on a few rune-stones, but Nordic as a language was not to be spoken on the continent (and Iceland), nor in the British Isles (things are not the same if the written register is taken into account); consequently, settlers coming from modern Danish and Swedish territories each spoke the variety of East Scandinavian from their homeland.

Gordon (1990: 165) suggests that manuscript writing in Danish territories began approximately in 1150, but in the Latin language, and later in Danish, in reference to the *Chronicle of the Kings of Lejre*, incorporated in the fourteenth century *Annals of Lund*. The language used in these records is termed Old Danish, as opposed to Old Swedish (not East Scandinavian anymore), but little differences can be traced between both neighbouring languages for the scanty written material (Haugen, 1982); in any case, these written extracts should provide evidence for the direct ancestor language spoken by those Scandinavians during the Viking period in the British Isles.

In addition, it is generally agreed that speakers of both varieties of the languages in contact could mutually understand, as a large number of vocabulary items were identical in both classical languages (Old English and Old Norse). However, let us have a look at the following ten examples, chosen at random: Old English (OE) *hus* / hu:s /, Old Norse (ON) *hús* / hu:s / (“house”); (OE) *man(n)* / mān /, (ON) *maðr* / maðr / (“man”); (OE) *wif* / wif /, (ON) *víf* / Bi:v / (“wife”); (OE) *cuman* / kuman /, (ON) *koma* / koma / (“to come”); (OE) *hieran* / hieran /, (ON) *heyra* / heyra / (“to hear”); (OE) *metan* / metan /, (ON) *mæta* / mōta / (“to meet”); (OE) *seon* / seon /, (ON) *sjá* / sja: / (“to see”); (OE) *ofer* / over /, (ON) *of* / ov / (“over”); (OE) *well* / wel /, (ON) *vel* / Bel / (“well”); (OE) *wis* / wis /, (ON) *víss* / Bi:s / (“wise”).

An interesting conclusion can be drawn from this list. Due to genetic links (both have developed from the same Germanic language family) both languages share related morphological shapes for the same semantic content. But out of 10 examples, only 1 item has the same phonological configuration in both languages, namely “house”, although the rest present a similar phonological shape. It becomes important to mention that this argumentation leads us to argue about the condemnation to a failure of those communicative interactions between individual speakers from the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon speech-communities, until bilingualism appeared in the Danelaw.

6. Although not recorded in *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle*, the Treaty of Wedmore, signed in 878 (Baugh & Cable, 1994: 91) by the English king Alfred the Great and the Scandinavian king Guthrum proposed the division of the land under Saxon and Danish law. It is generally agreed that the boundary ran up the Thames, and then up the Lea and along the Lea to its source, then in a straight line to Bedford, then up the Ouse to Watling Street. By this time Scandinavians had already been making incursions, making peace, breaking it... Moreover, our historical source mentioned above tells us that the lands of Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia had already been shared out since the years 876, 877 and 880, respectively. Roughly

speaking, these are the areas where the Scandinavians had settled down. i. e. in the Danelaw, had been making a living for themselves, and after 878 were under Danish law.

Although no historical evidence has survived on the existence of bilingual speakers in the area of the Scandinavian settlement, we are certainly assured of the following facts: (1) the northern area of the Danelaw shows “a typically Scandinavian sound change in process in the twelfth century and first completed in thirteenth century spellings” (Samuels, 1985: 277); (2) Norse innovations appeared by the thousand in the mid twelfth century, being adapted to the native linguistic system and with extensive use in the written register; in addition “the oldest ME manuscripts showing strong N [Norse] influence are not from Northumbria, where the contact had probably been closest and longest, but from the neighbouring Southern areas” (Werner, 1991: 381); (3) the anglicizing process of the Southern lands under Danish law began already in the tenth century, interpreting literally *The Chronicle* poem from the year 942 (Garmonsway, 1967: 111, Ms. D)

If these three circumstances are analyzed integratedly, the area of the Danelaw can be regarded as a Scandinavianizing milieu, explained from two complementing axes: the geographical one and the chronological one. By the time Nordic innovations began to appear in medieval written records, onomastic material was still following typically Norse sound changes; hence we can claim that monolingual speakers were still present in the Danelaw (though restricted to the northern lands or Samuels' “focal area” (1985: 269)); whereas in the anglicized southern Danelaw, the notion of societal bilingualism (developing into a language-shift situation) accounts for the Nordic influence on the native language. So, the further south we jointly travel in the Danelaw and in time, the more probable it is that bilingual communities co-existed in the same area, and that the earlier foreign speakers gave up their mother tongue. Likewise, the further north in the Danelaw and in time, the more probable monolingual communities lived side by side, and the later Scandinavians gave up their Norse speech.

Mere hypothetical claims can be put forward on the rise of individual bilingual speakers in both varieties of the languages spoken. However, it will not be wrong to claim that bilingual interlocutors from both speech-communities began to introduce innovations within the speech-strings in order to fulfil their communicative needs. As instances of code-switch provide evidence for the existence of the two languages spoken within the same speech-community, we see that this typical bilinguals' linguistic behaviour has had long-term cumulative effects, after bilinguals and monolinguals had conformed a collective acceptance tendency with regards to the integration of innovations (Mancho-Barés, 1995).

On the whole to become bilingual, to give up one's mother tongue and influence another language is a matter of social process, in which every individual speaker contributes to a different extent, depending on their bilingual competence. In fact, the use of, e. g. *to die* should be thought of in accordance to the introduction of innovations within individual bilinguals' utterances. An analysis of Norse *deyja*, together with its native counterpart (indistinctively *stefan* and *sweltan* in Old English) offers more light on the semantic differences of the two

types of items (Mancho-Barés, 1994), something which influenced individual speakers in their choice of one word or another.

The process of linguistic change should be regarded as a gradual phenomenon with a beginning difficult to identify, but with a clearly describable end; in this state of affairs, though the appearance of an innovation in the written register of the late Old English period does not by any means imply that this lexical item had replaced the native item for the same semantic content, this appearance is symptomatic of, on the one hand, a potential re-structuring of the lexicon in the long term, and, on the other hand, the continuous presence of innovations in the oral register, something which should be thought of as the actual linguistic state of affairs in the Danelaw.

7. All in all, we believe that individual bilingual speakers from an Anglo-Saxon origin introduced Norse innovations in their every-day communicative acts. This variation of the norm had structural consequences in the long-term, as present-day English well testifies. A layout of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. literary works written in the Danelaw will provide synchronic evidence of the process of integration in the innovations into the native system, namely the extension of use, and morpho-phonemic and syntactic adaptation. Nevertheless, these new items would not have penetrated into the written register, unless they had previously been current in oral interactions; therefore, attention should be paid to those users of two languages who, for whatever reason, decided to introduce foreign innovations in their utterances.

In tackling the topic from the individual bilingualism perspective and the causes that brought a specific speaker to code-switch, the approach is of another nature, as the working hypotheses are based on the knowledge of modern-contact situations. On the whole, we believe that speakers of any language at any time (therefore including the Anglo-Saxons) have used their tongues for every-day communication, produced innovations, and unsurprisingly, spoken other languages if there was a need for it.

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