Conversational Communicative Competence in a Non-Native Language

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Abstract

In this study, the communicative competence of native female speakers of French was compared to the communicative competence of native female speakers of English, all of whom are bilingual in French and English. Because each pair of women spoke in both French and English at separate, distinct times, the manifestations of communicative competence in each language revealed the importance of discourse and strategic competence in the social context of conversation.

The methodology consisted of recording the conversations of four pairs of women. Two of these groups were native speakers of French, and the other two were native speakers of English. Each pair of women were given a list of questions written in both languages concerning their personal ideas of cultural identity and bilingualism. They were instructed to converse for at least 30 minutes in their native language, discussing one set of questions and then another 30 minutes in their acquired language, discussing a different list of questions. In keeping with the sociological aspect of this analysis, the conversations were played for the participants in order to solicit their spontaneous interpretations and reactions.

Bilingual speakers, much like any speakers, draw upon their own native socio-cultural norms and values when communicating in a second language, as well as using their own personal communicative strategies. Whereas cross-cultural conversation provides the setting for miscommunication and misinterpretation on a socio-cultural basis, mono-cultural interaction in a foreign tongue (that is, speakers from the same culture speaking a foreign language) would allow for qualitative evaluation of discursive and strategic competence in a social context.

The theory of interactional sociolinguistics, popularised by Gumperz(1972), analyzes language use in its original context and takes into account the factors mentioned above when conducting this analysis. Speech acts are acknowledged as specific instances of language use that relate to strategic and socio-cultural competence. Discourse competence is unfortunately not factored into the analysis, due to the socio-cultural focus of the studies. The theoretical model of communicative competence created by Canale and Swain(1981) for primarily second
language learning, posits the three subcategories of grammatical, strategic, and sociolinguistic competence, which are used to measure the communicative competence of the individual. This model must be modified by assuming that the two divisions of sociolinguistic competence, i.e. socio-cultural and discourse, are significant enough to become separate categories, along with strategic competence. Grammatical competence is presupposed in the social context of conversation and not a viable category of evaluation.
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Introduction

Interest in discourse analysis and sociology of language has prompted many varied paradigms of sociolinguistic theory, including study concerned with conversation and language use. The study of speech acts, in particular, has been the basis for a variety of interpretations dealing mainly with the general aspects of language use in society and how this usage can be accounted for in a scientific sense. The outcome of this sort of analysis is then generalized into abstract theory, regardless of personal, psychological, sociological, and/or cultural concerns.

The norms and values that constitute the personal and social linguistic background of an individual are a facet of the total communicative competence, and they can be labeled as socio-cultural competence. They are acquired through language use in society, and ultimately reflect cultural and/or social interpretation. Strategic competence is the manner in which individuals use verbal and nonverbal strategies in order to communicate effectively. The problems associated with the cohesive construction of strings of utterances fall under the heading of discourse competence. Therefore, it follows that bilingual speakers would draw upon their own native socio-cultural norms and values when communicating in a second language, as well as using their own personal communicative strategies. Whereas cross-cultural conversation provides the setting for miscommunication and misinterpretation on a socio-cultural basis, mono-cultural interaction in a foreign tongue (that is, speakers from the same culture speaking a foreign language) would allow for qualitative evaluation of discursive and strategic competence in a social context.

In this study I compared the communicative competence of native female speakers of French and native female speakers of English, all of whom are bilingual in French and English. Because each pair of women spoke in both French and English at separate, distinct times, the manifestations of communicative competence in each language should reveal the importance of discourse and strategic competence in the social context of
conversation. I chose to study only women’s conversational competence simply because of time constraints and the fact that, as a woman, I have a marked interest in this topic.

The methodology consisted of recording the conversations of four pairs of women. Two of these groups were native speakers of French, and the other two were native speakers of English. (For the purposes of this study, I used only American women as native English speakers.) A list of questions was given to each group; it was written in both languages and dealt with ideas of cultural identity and bilingualism. Each pair of women conversed for at least 30 minutes in their native language, discussing one set of questions and then another 30 minutes in their acquired language, discussing a different list of questions.

The purpose of collecting two sets of data on linguistic performance (one native, one acquired) was to compare the performance of individuals in their native tongue to performance in a second language in which they are near-native speakers. The participants were allowed to listen to the conversations in order to solicit their spontaneous interpretations and reactions. As the researcher, I also proposed my own interpretations to the participants, so as to gain as much objective insight as possible.

My hypotheses were based on my earlier studies of speech interaction in which societal and personal constructs played a major role in conversational dominance and coherence. Conversational analysis in a sociolinguistic context can be utilized as a qualitative evaluation of communicative competence in a second language. It was evident in the conversational analysis that the participants found significant difficulty in adequately expressing themselves in a foreign language, primarily because of the numerous facets of communicative competence.
Sociolinguistics

Any analysis of speech or conversation must take into account the aspect of context if it is to be entirely credible. Though texts document the usage of language within a certain context, they are not a living testimony of interaction. They are premeditated and constructed uses of words and grammar and must be analyzed as such. It is unlikely that naturally occurring speech would correctly conform to standards of textbook grammar, essentially because of the interactional and dynamic qualities that constrain its use.

Linguists have attempted to construct a theory of universal grammar for decades, basing their theories upon broad generalizations. Their data consists of abstracted forms of language that is ordinarily constructed without means of a context. This sort of analysis is necessary for the development of a formal grammatical system, but somewhat inadequate for studying actual language use. People follow internalized rules of grammar but do not construct perfect sentences when they speak. They mutter, jumble word order, fragment sentences and often words, and literally leave thoughts hanging without resolution. In the course of a conversation, grammar is a firm, yet narrow guideline for communication.

Sociolinguistics is a discipline that has attempted to bridge this gap between formal linguistic theory and functional language use. (Figueroa, 1994) Many researchers acknowledge the degree to which human interaction interferes with and modifies existing grammars. Hymes(1974) believes in the ethnographic characteristics of conversation, i.e. how language is used in conjunction with cultural and/or social customs and practices. He posits that these social norms affect the usage of communicative resources and believes that the “foundations of language, if partly in the human mind, are equally in social life.”(Hymes 1974, p146)

The ethnography of communication theory embraces the social and/or cultural aspects of language use at the expense of specific personal and group involvement. The speech community is not solely responsible for the communicative strategies of individuals. The context of the situation and the participants’ background knowledge are important
factors in face to face communication. If an individual uses the conversational convention of topic switching to control the conversation, it would be inadequate to superimpose a social or cultural ideal on that particular strategy if there were no common ideal such as that in the community. A socially and individually accurate interpretation could be to say that the individual felt that his/her ideas would be better expressed in the context of a different topic. The interpretation depends on the context and the individual, not necessarily the society or culture of the surrounding community.

**Interactional Sociolinguistics**

The interaction of the participants is of vital concern for the coordination of conversation. The principal theory involves an analysis of conversation in which language is approached from the vantage point of context. Context is viewed as a theoretical construct in which naturally occurring speech is permanently grounded. The factors involving communicative competence are part of the context, and therefore cannot be ignored or reduced if proper analysis is to be conducted. These factors include things such as discursive, socio-cultural, and strategic competence, which constantly affect the interpretation of communicative events. (Canale & Swain, 1980)

Interactional sociolinguistics advocates the importance of the dynamic quality of conversation. In order to fully participate in a conversation, it is necessary to continually make judgments based on interaction. There is a constant flux of interpretations due to the nature of naturally occurring speech; there are socially and personally imposed restrictions that force participants to re-evaluate the situation and re-interpret the flow of utterances. “The context of situation is therefore neither absolutely relative nor absolutely determined.” (Figueroa 1994; 169) Generalizations cannot be made on items outside of context, since they are only significant within that context and no two contexts are exactly similar. The fault of the ethnography of communication and discourse analysis is that too much emphasis is placed on universals, as if it is necessary to find common themes in order to
place significance in a recurring language feature. The ethnography of communication is too culture-oriented in that it ignores the conversational strategy of the individual in favor of completely socio-cultural explanations. The discourse of analysis can be placed at the theoretical end of the spectrum because of its strictly linguistic interpretation of sequences of utterances.

Utterances are the functional units of discursive interpretation in sociolinguistics, and thus they are completely contextualized. They are defined in relation to other utterances and often can be considered particulars of context. No two utterances are the same because of personal experience and context, however, “given that utterance takes place within time, space, and dialogic social traditions, utterances are particulars which can be placed within a comparative context.” (Figueroa, 1994; 169) Even though language cannot be analyzed outside of context, it can be compared to similar situational incidents. “One is therefore able to relate one particular to another without necessarily having to derive the particular from a universal or having to decontextualize the particular to reflect essential universal properties.” (Figueroa, ibid.)

Interactional sociolinguistics is a linguistics of particularity in that it values individual and social conversational strategy more than broadly based generalizations. Interaction is personalized instead of generalized. Meaning, structures and order evolve throughout the course of the conversation due to the socio-cultural backgrounds of the participants and their resulting frames of interpretation. Gumperz believes that there is an aspect of intentionality within every communicative exchange, otherwise communication would not occur. He defines communication as the “coordinated efforts of two or more people,” and the “elicitation of response.” (Gumperz, 1972; 131) The whole act of conversation thus becomes goal-oriented at the level of the individual. The frame of context will define the strategy employed to attain the goal of communication.
Communicative Competence

Gumperz defines communicative competence as "the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to create and sustain conversational cooperation." (172; 209) These communicative conventions, when used during the course of second language conversation, can be categorized into three equal sections. Socio-cultural competence involves the rules of situation-appropriate sentences and conventions. (Canale & Swain, 1980) It is grounded in the concept of a system of socio-cultural norms and ideals, on which Hymes elaborates in his ethnographic studies. Specific cultures predicate the adherence to certain situational rules which govern suitable conduct according to class, race, gender, etc. Socio-cultural competence is reflective of the awareness of these norms when speaking in the social context. Discourse competence applies to the rules governing accurate formation of syntactic and semantic utterances and the cohesion and coherence of utterances. Strategic competence refers to the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal strategies employed when communication breaks down due to deficiencies in the other two categories. (Canale & Swain, ibid.) In an ideal situation, speakers employ any number of conversational strategies in order to fully communicate their ideas. Canale and Swain posit that strategic competence is utilized as a result of deficiencies in other competences.

The activity type that the participants engage in "constrains interpretations by channeling inferences so as to foreground or make relevant certain aspects of background knowledge and to underplay others." (Gumperz, 1972; 131) This essentially means that an initial interpretation of the speech activity is formed and provides a framework for which the conversation will initially follow. As was stated previously, many changes occur within speech that make it nearly impossible to follow one set of expectations. For example, speaker 1 may believe speaker 2 to be fluent in Italian because of his Italian heritage, but upon starting a conversation with him in Italian, speaker 1 realizes this is not the case, and adjusts her preconceptions accordingly. Re-evaluation of the speech activity
or event necessitates various quick appraisals of the situation in order to keep conversation flowing smoothly. These quick appraisals are aided by the use of contextualization conventions, which are surface features that serve as signals for semantic content and the relation of one utterance to another. (Gumperz, 1972) The meanings of contextualization conventions are implicit within the framework and language. They could appear as a sharp pitch increase, code-switching, or a lapse in talk that directly proceeds an exchange. In any context, they are implicit and if not acknowledged, could lead to miscommunication.

The reliability of contextualization conventions is subject to the sharedness of socio-cultural norms and backgrounds. They rely on the discursive competence of the participants, and in most situations, their strategic competence as well. The participants must have a general, shared set of social presuppositions to follow the framework and possess a competence in the spoken language. This does not mean that they all must share the same history or culture or the same degree of fluency. Participants must be able to understand the social norms of the situation they find themselves within and understand the use of strategic conventions in order for conversational synchrony to occur. Gumperz posits that interethnic communication can and does result in miscommunication and misinterpretation, because "individuals reared in [different] traditions often learn the clause level of another language, but in using it they rely on their own native discourse conventions." (Gumperz, 1972; 152)

Conversational inference then becomes ineffectual for both participants. Inference involves the assessment of intentions and response based upon factors such as personal background knowledge, attitudes, socio-cultural assumptions about role and status relationships, and social values associated with message components. (Gumperz, 1972) Discourse conventions like turn-taking, semantic interpretation, and style shift may be interpreted as unnecessary, rude, or completely bizarre. In mono-cultural situations, however, significant presuppositions and assumptions are shared, and sociolinguistic
competence is reflected in the absence of misconstrued or socially unacceptable usages of utterances.

Though Gumperz uses interethnic situations in most of his examples, it is interesting to question whether bilingualism (outside of the context of code-switching) can be analyzed in these terms. The communicative competence of a bilingual may be compromised in one or both languages because of deficiencies in either discursive or strategic ability. Because of the nature of language interdependence and interaction, bilinguals speaking in a foreign tongue may confuse languages and thus be unable to utilize proper discourse conventions. This may result in a poor performance in terms of conversational coordination within a foreign language, because of inadequate constructions of discourse or absences of strategy. Communication might be achieved, but at a notable qualitative decrease when compared to native language communicative competence.

Bilingualism

The age and setting of second language acquisition play a major role in the degree to which a speaker becomes comfortable within another language. There are social, psychological, and purely linguistic factors that affect the learning and use of a non-native language. Most psycholinguists and linguists concern themselves with the quantitative measurement and analysis of second language acquisition and performance, but very little study has been conducted on second language performance and competence in the social context of conversation. The disagreement among scholars over the specifics of the learning or acquisition of a second language bears no consequence on the results of this study. It is simply important to understand some of the more significant elements that factor into the acquisition and performance of a second language.

Many psycholinguists posit a sensitive period during childhood in which a child develops innate language-learning capabilities that allow for the rapid internalization of universal grammar rules. (Oyama, 1979) The early stages of linguistic development in a
child are far better suited for language assimilation than the language faculties of an adult. The results of learning a second language as a child are often reflected in a child's near-native like pronunciation and fluency in an acquired tongue. (Fathman, 1975; Seliger, Krashen & Ladefoged, 1975) There are studies, however, which document the ease in which older learners acquire proficient use of syntactic and morphological constructions. (Fathman, 1975) It is useful to note that the language classroom is often not as ideal a setting as society at large.

There is "strong evidence that shows that in natural settings early L2 acquisition is more likely to lead in the long run to native like competence in all language skills." (Hamers & Blanc, 1995: 223 from Seliger, Krashen & Ladefoged, 1975; Oyama, 1976)

Thus a child may find second language learning easier than an adult, and the acquisition of that second language in a social setting, such as a community or home, would be even more optimal for balanced bilingualism. A balanced bilingual has "equivalent competence in both languages," whereas in a dominant bilingual, competence in one language is superior to that of the other. (Hamers & Blanc, 1995:8) Linguists posit that there is a linguistic equilibrium on which bilingual competence can be located. It is not a measurement device; it functions as a description of the cognitive aspect of bilingualism. There are many different ways in which to outline the state of bilinguality, as it is a state of linguistic development with varying dimensions.

Conversation would not occur in any context if grammatical competence were not presupposed. It is not necessary to evaluate the production or knowledge of the grammars of a bilingual speaker, though many studies have been devised to produce such results. Tests to measure discourse competence have yet to be undertaken, and even with data, conclusions would be far from quantitatively or qualitatively definitive. For the purposes of this study, the participant's self evaluations of their own discourse competence and value judgments from speakers of the languages are sufficient.
Table 3.1 Summary Table of Psychological Dimensions of Bilinguality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. According to competence in both languages</td>
<td>1. balanced bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. dominant bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI1}$ competence = $L_{AI2}$ competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI1}$ competence &gt; or &lt; $L_{AI2}$ competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. According to cognitive organization</td>
<td>1. compound bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. coordinate bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI1}$ unit equivalent to $L_{AI2}$ unit = one conceptual unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI1}$ unit = conceptual unit 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI2}$ equivalent = conceptual unit 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. According to age of acquisition</td>
<td>1. childhood bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) simultaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) consecutive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. adolescent bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. adult bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI2}$ acquired before age 10/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI}$ and $L_{AI2}$ = mother tongues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI}$ = mother tongue; $L_{AI2}$ acquired before 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI2}$ acquired between 11 and 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI2}$ acquired after 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. According to presence of $L_{AI2}$</td>
<td>1. endogenous bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community in environment</td>
<td>2. exogenous bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>presence of $L_{AI2}$ community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>absence of $L_{AI2}$ community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. According to the relative status of the two</td>
<td>1. additive bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>languages</td>
<td>2. subtractive bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI1}$ and $L_{AI2}$ socially valorized $\rightarrow$ cognitive advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI2}$ valorized at expense $L_{AI1} \rightarrow$ cognitive disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. According to group membership and</td>
<td>1. bicultural bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural identity</td>
<td>2. $L_{AI}$ monocultural bilingualality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. $L_{AI2}$ acculturated bilingualality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. deculturated bilinguality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>double membership and bicultural identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI1}$ membership and cultural identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$L_{AI2}$ membership and cultural identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ambiguous membership and anomic identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(Hamers and Blanc, 1995; 9)
Methodology

The original purpose of this study was to determine the effect of a second language on socio-cultural norms and ideals, and whether transfer of the ideals learned in one language and culture would occur in second language performance in the social context. After listening to a few conversations, it was decided that socio-cultural competence in a non-native language could not be analyzed, due to the shared background of each group of speakers. It was necessary to abandon the initial goal of a comparison of socio-cultural competences in two languages. Since all of the speakers were grammatically competent in both languages, a more appropriate goal of measuring and/or comparing discourse and strategic competence was constructed.

Each pair of speakers conversed for approximately 20-30 minutes in order to create sufficient and relevant data for analysis. These data were then transcribed and analyzed according to the characteristics of discourse and strategic competences. A comparison of linguistic performances in both languages allowed for a relative measurement of discourse and strategic competence in the non-native language. All of the participants were allowed to comment on their performance as well as on that of their partner, so as to shed objectivity on a seemingly subjective interpretation process.

The initial stage of the "experiment" involved the selection and grouping of eight women. These women spoke both French and English to some degree of fluency and had lived in each country for a substantial amount of time. Since the setting was a college community, the ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 22 years old. Two women were raised in African Francophone countries; one woman was raised in France; one woman was raised in America to a French mother and spoke only French in her formative years. The American woman spent a great deal of time in France and the others spent a considerable amount of time in the United States. The four women who spoke English natively were raised in the United States, and spent somewhat less time in France, but enough so that they fully experienced French culture. I paired the women in groups of two
according to their native language; the French woman and one of the African women constituted a group, as did the American woman who spoke French natively and the other African woman. The American students were grouped arbitrarily because they all had spent a semester or year abroad at a French university.

Although the African women were not paired together, they both grew up in reasonably French homes that encouraged French cultural values and norms. It was evident that they were not ignorant of the French culture, and indeed were raised within it. All of the native English speakers had similar experiences in France, and came from families which they described as espousing American values and norms. The speakers who were paired together were also significantly familiar with each other, and considered themselves to be good friends. This aspect was a factor in their shared social background. The sociolinguistic competence of the participants was the control in the conversational "experiments," because each speaker shared to a large degree the same socio-cultural background of her partner.

The second stage consisted of recording the conversations of four pairs of women, with one conversation being in English and one in French. They were not asked to avoid code switching. Only one group code switched and then quickly went back to the original language. Every group was given a cassette recorder, a tape, a questionnaire on their linguistic background and two envelopes, each with a set of questions that alternated between French and English. In other words, the questions were not first written in English and then French; the sentences varied between the two languages. The participants were given topics to discuss in order to approximate a similar context in each conversation, otherwise there could have been little comparison between the conversations of each group.

The participants were instructed to speak first in their native language on the set of questions dealing with cultural identity. After twenty minutes or when they were finished, they switched the tape to side B and spoke in their second language about the questions on bilingualism. They were asked not to open the envelopes until they began the
conversation. The purpose of instructing the participants to speak last in their adopted language was to observe whether they experienced difficulty switching from one language to another or speaking about language and their own linguistic performance. It is important to note that, as the researcher, I was not with the participants when they conducted this conversation. It was necessary to produce as comfortable a situation as possible so as to ensure naturally occurring speech.

The first stage of interpretation on my part was to listen to each tape and note where participants used strategic devices to communicate, or had difficulty in expressing exactly what they wanted to say. Some longer sections were transcribed so as to ensure proper interpretation. I also noted the particular speaking style of each speaker and factored that in to my interpretations. A few weeks after the initial conversation, I began the second stage of interpretation by contacting each participant individually and arranging a time for a short interview. In this interview, the conversation was played back for both the participant and myself. This playback was conducted in order to evoke opinions and comments from the participant on sections of the conversation and to elicit her comments on my interpretations of the conversational interaction. I would point out an interesting section of the conversation to the participant and ask her what her personal interpretation was before I told her my own ideas. In this fashion, it was possible to attain first impressions from the participant, without putting my own ideas into her head.

When all the interviews were conducted, I transcribed the pertinent sections of the conversations as noted by myself and the participants as the last step in the interpretation process. I compiled the information gathered into notes on each conversation and performed a comparative, qualitative evaluation of all of the conversations, French and English. This last stage consisted of my own analysis and synthesis of the conversational data.
Analysis and Interpretation

For the purposes of clarity and anonymity, I will refer to each participant by a letter of the alphabet, and each group with a number. Therefore, speaker A and speaker B will form group 1, speaker C and speaker D will form group 2, and so on. The native English speakers will be named A, B, C, and D, and will form groups 1 and 2. The four native French speakers will constitute groups 3 and 4, with group 3 being the African and French-American speakers, and group 4 being the other African and French speakers.

Discourse Competence

In the course of the conversations, it was evident that discourse competence, i.e. the ability to form coherent utterances, greatly affected the course of the interaction. If this discourse competence was deficient in some way the participants were forced to rely on other means to communicate; these means are designated as strategic competence. It is necessary, however, to establish the relative discourse competence of the speakers before evaluating of their strategic competence.

All of the participants have spoken their second language for five years or more. Therefore it is apparent that the grammatical acquisition of the second language is complete. The learning of how to perform and use the language in the social context, i.e. the degree of fluency as directly related to communication in the social context, is far from complete in all except the most balanced of bilinguals. Three of the four native French speakers, F, G, and H, have spoken English for 16 years, and all of them except H have spent four years or more in an Anglophile community. The native English speakers, however, have an average of speaking the language for only seven years. A and B lived in France for a full year; C lived there for 5 months; D spent only 2 months in France. The native French speakers, on average, have had significantly more exposure to the language and culture of their second language.
Table 5.1 Number of Years of Speaking/Learning Non-Native Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKERS</th>
<th>NON-NATIVE LANGUAGE</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKERS</th>
<th>NON-NATIVE LANGUAGE</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>G</td>
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<td>H</td>
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The nature of conversation presupposes notions about degree of fluency in the language which are then adjusted accordingly as the conversation proceeds. The speakers of a second language who contributed less to the conversation or took longer to formulate coherent utterances did not necessarily have a lower discourse competence in general. They were simply less discursively competent in that language than their partner. Within the context of the conversations, speaker B was less discursively confident in her utterances. She was less comprehensible but not completely unintelligible, and she acknowledged this fact. Speaker C was also less discursively efficient, but speaker D still understood her meaning. Both speaker B and C had a working knowledge of the linguistic code of French, but admitted they were not well practiced or fluent in performance. This lower discourse competence might be a result of the smaller amount of time they spent in the culture or in actual study of the language. It may be necessary for certain individuals to spend more time studying a second language in order to become completely discursively competent, i.e. a balanced bilingual.

The native French speakers exhibited no problems with discourse in English. In all cases they were completely at ease with both languages, except in the case of F, who admitted that she might be more comfortable speaking in English, because she was raised in an Anglophile community. She was still discursively competent in French, though, having no problems with sentence and utterance production. She had no doubts as to whether she could easily express literal and implied meaning in each language. As was stated above, all of the native French speakers had spent a great deal more time studying and speaking English than native English speakers had spent with French. This fact could account for the relatively lower discourse competence of the native English speakers in French.
Strategic Competence

The contextualization conventions which Gumperz describes as "code, dialect and style switching processes...some prosodic phenomena...formulaic expressions, conversational openings, closings and sequencing strategies," can be grouped into the category of strategic competence. (Gumperz, 1972; 131) These conventions are used to communicate metalinguistically, to express meaning in a capacity other than that within strict grammar. Canale & Swain posit two general types of strategic competence, encompassing both grammar and sociolinguistic features, which occur when communication breaks down due to "performance variables or insufficient competence." (C&S, 1981, 33) Canale & Swain are vague about what constitutes "performance variables," in that they do not state whether a deficiency in competence or other such influences outside of context would predicate usage of strategic competence. They propose a theory which cites strategic competence as a default mechanism for communication.

The four types of strategic competence which appeared most often in the performance data were 1) overlap and interruption, 2) topic switching, 3) paraphrasing and pausing, and 4) trailing off and overt signaling. Overlap, interruption, and topic switching can often be the mark of a high involvement style speaker. (Tannen, 1985) In this context, however, I made a note if the speaker were high or low involvement and asked her partner whether that was a factor in who controlled or dominated the conversation. More often it was a reflection of personal flair and if high involvement occurred, it was within a language that the participant was comfortable.

All of the participants agreed that they made adjustments accordingly as soon as they realized the differences in utterance production between their partners and themselves, but that this adjustment did not negatively affect their communicative abilities. Strategies such as overlap and interruption can signal agreement, disagreement, or disinterest, according to context. Topic switching is a strategy used to control, either unconsciously or
consciously, the course of the conversation. Paraphrasing and pausing allow a speaker more time to collect and organize her thoughts, and trailing off and overt signaling are passive and active strategies to alert the listener to participate in the discussion. It is not important to determine the exact motives of the speakers when they employ a communicative strategy, nor is it necessary to ascertain the source of these strategies. The place and usage of strategies is the main focus of this analysis.

Overlap and Interruption

In the case of group 1, who are native English speakers, there is a notable decrease in overlap and interruption in the French conversation. In English, there are many instances in which one speaker would finish the sentence of the other or interrupt with her own thought, such as:

A: I think fluency also precludes a knowledge of the culture as well and being adequately fluent in the
B: exactly.
A: culture. And-
B: culture.
A: yeah. And you have to do that through the language, I think.
B: definitely.

Strategy such as this did not appear in their French conversations. They tended to interject each other with encouraging or agreeing remarks, rather than interrupt or overlap to signal the same meanings.
A: Je j'ai un neuf et une nièce qui vont j'espère être bilingues parce que leurs mère est allemande.

B: c'est doucette.

A: mais... ça dépend d'ou d'ou ils grondissent... si s'ils sont aux Etats Unis vont pas avoir tous les... tous

B: d'accord. tout a fait.

A: les éléments culturelles de l'allemande....

Speaker A performed the one instance of agreement overlap in the French conversation. As was noted above, speaker B admitted to a lower discourse competence than speaker A, thus providing one explanation for her lack of interruptions and overlaps in French. She also described herself as a polite speaker in that she allows the other speaker to finish her thoughts completely before speaking herself.

It was apparent in group 2 that overlap and interruption also decreased sharply in their second language. Whereas loud, quick exchanges occurred in English, relatively few overlaps occurred in French. Interruptions occurred only when speaker D felt that speaker C was finished with her utterance, and speaker C concurred with speaker D's opinion. In one section, speaker C attempted to interrupt but failed to follow through with her gesture:

D: les cultures... de l'autre culture...... mais peut-être on essaye de garder les choses. c'est pas nécessaire.

C: je crois-

D: comme ça marche... mais on essaye... quoi...

C: hmm... c'est difficile... en français, en français.

She even comments on the difficulty of speaking her thoughts in French, possibly expressing frustration with her lower discourse competence.

The questions that the participants were given did not seem to greatly affect interaction except in the case of group 3, in which the questions were used by speaker F as a means to unconsciously control the conversation. Instead of allowing entirely natural interaction, speaker F attempted to construct a strict turn-taking procedure that followed the topics set
by the questions. As a result, both the French and English conversations were controlled primarily by the context, although overlap and interruption occurred very infrequently. Both participants agreed that they also followed a politeness scheme when conversing in either language, allowing the other speaker to finish completely before taking their own turn.

Group 4 consisted of native French speaker H, who appeared to dominate both conversations with her quick interruptions and many overlaps:

G: tu tu...je me semble bloquer.... mais- j'en pas que-
H: hmm, je's d'accord.....mêmes les mots (toussant) quand tu veux dit, "i like you" en français. tu peux dire 'je t'aime, je t'aime bien', il y a quel que mots...

She also interrupted by finishing sentences:

G: exactly...it's the way I feel. I mean if one day I'm angry and...French is gonna be the word. French might be the language that will pop out and i might swear in French- but then...but then-
H: to swear but the next day i might swear in
English.
G: yeah. so it has..i dunno..it just...i think the fact- i think being bilingual is the fact that you forget that, you know..one is a language and the other is...you don't, like, separate them...it's like you
H: yeah.
G: combine the two and whichever one-
H: comes out, comes out.
G: comes out.

Both speaker G and H have high discourse competencies in their second language, indicated by the many number of years they have spoken English and their own admissions. Speaker H commented that she liked to talk and thought that she was a high involvement speaker. Speaker G defined herself as low-involvement, but also believed that though she was interrupted many times, she communicated her ideas well.
**Topic Switching**

The strategy of topic switching is a game of negotiating when and where the topic of the conversation can be changed so as to continue with the flow of talk and not to offend the listener. Although the context of the conversations was somewhat structured, none of the participants, aside from group 3, consciously allowed the questions to interfere with free speech or topic switches. They described the conversations as natural, and only resorted to the questions when there was a lapse in talk. In both groups 1 and 2, topics were switched during the French conversations mainly because of reference to the questions. None of the speakers switched topics much of their own accord in their second language, possibly out of respect for their partner's discourse competence, or because of their own discourse competence. In the few instances where it did occur in French, it was primarily to ease the embarrassment of the speaker with relatively lower discourse competence:

C: il y a des des identités strictement différentes, mais, ouais, j'n sais pas.(giggles) je'n peux parler de (??) ...
D: quand, quand je suis ici, il me faut changer la choix des mots...je pense quelquefois que sait un peur de perdre...de quelque chose dans moi-même. parce que moi je parle pas comme ca. je fait une façade pour parler comme tout le monde.

In English, however, it was evident that there was a speaker in each of the groups 1 and 2 who switched the topics much more often. Speaker A and speaker D, when listening to the conversations, admitted that they switched topics more in English, sometimes at the expense of the communication of their partner.

The native French speakers exhibited no differences in the frequency with which they switched topics. Group 3 continued to changed topics by the actions of speaker F, who would assume discussion was complete and then read another question off the paper. Speaker H of group 4 also continued to switch topics arbitrarily during both conversations, although speaker G managed to change the course of talk somewhat by asking questions:
H: ...je t'ai dit par jeunes en anglais. (??) en France (rise pitch)

G: Tas eu des jeune filles au pair?

H: oui.

G: (??) question

H: j'ai appris l'anglais avant du français. et puis j'ai appris français...

Neither speaker G nor speaker H seemed offended at the quick change of topic in either conversation as they would immediately follow the line of thought introduced by the topic switch.

Paraphrasing and Pausing

Paraphrasing and pausing are contextualization conventions that seem to preclude some desire on the speaker's part for the listener to pay close attention. It is a common situation in which the listener must listen carefully in order to understand the utterances among the paraphrases and pauses. Both speakers A and B of group 1 paraphrased and paused freely during the French conversation. Although neither of them interrupted as a politeness rule, the numerous pauses in sentence production slowed the pace of their French conversation but did not bother them:

A: if..fai-faire année fort on si parce que..point passer plusieurs de plus...beaucoup de temps la...sont vraiment être tout à fait à l'aise.

M: oui. non. tout à fait.

as opposed to the fast pace of their English conversation:

B:...how they dress, like the people from Aural, you how they dress. They have a very specific way -food!

A: yeah.

B: i mean food's a huge part of it- drink!

A: oh yeah. food is so important. and the way you eat. like the way French people are so,
Speaker C exhibited a great deal of paraphrasing and trouble with the grammatical aspect of discourse. She knew the correct way of forming words and sentences, but could not put that knowledge to efficient use in conversation:

C: um...elle m'a...elle m'a demande qu'est ce que...qu'avait vous fait- fait en France? eh...les questions
D: [giggles]

C: comme ca...et elle m'avait de-demande une question...j'ai...j'ai oublié...ce que c'était...j'ai re-j'ai...j'ai répondu en français. [laughs]
D: ah ouais.

Speaker C also admitted that she was a slow speaker in general, which would explain her numerous pauses in both languages. Speaker D paraphrased to some degree, but not as extensively as speaker C.

Speaker F exhibited some paraphrasing strategies in French, but much fewer than found in groups 1 and 2. In fact, her paraphrasing does not occur enough to warrant a comparison to normal speech, in which infrequent paraphrasing is reasonable:

F: Alors, donc, qu'est que ça veut dire point de vue d'identité culturelle que c'est quelquechose...qui complètement...ça ca dépend de des expériences...oui, c'est pas quelquechose (??) de la née...ou les...
E: l'hmmm, je pense que c'est sous collections de d'expérience.

Speaker E also admitted to being a relatively slow speaker, which could account for her slowly paced yet consistent production of utterances.

Group 4 rarely experienced any paraphrasing or pausing, except within the narratives or monologues by speaker H, or when speaker G was dissatisfied with speaker H's explanations and tried to paraphrase speaker H herself. Both speakers agreed that most of the paraphrases were a result of rambling and were mainly intended as space fillers, not communicative devices.
Trailing Off and Overt Signaling

Both speakers in group 1 trailed off at the end of most of their utterances in French, thus preventing any comparison. Speaker B did utilize the strategy of overt signaling, where she would state her failure at self-expression or issue a disclaimer that she didn't have to elaborate because her message was understood.

B: ...mais bon..mais..mais comme même il faut il faut (??) il faut éprouver ex- fin..la culture. elle-même..
A: tout à fait.
B: et premièrement ..parce que si juste on l'apprend...on voyons les films, on regardons les livres, c'est...on a plupart de la culture. tu vois la vraie culture...eh...ah...tu vois c'que je veux dire...
A: oui. ouais, ouais.

In group 2, speaker C tended to mumble the ends of some of her utterances:

C: est-ce qu'on devient un peu...moins américaine... quand on parle français...parce qu'il faut adopter
D: peut-être
C: un certain identité française..même si on on n'a...(mumbles)
D: laughs oui, ...un peu les personnes qui...qui ont grondi avec deux langues...

Speaker D did not immediately pick up on the cues, sometimes leaving dead air hanging before she came in to agree or disagree with speaker C's comments. Speaker C also overtly signalled some of her failures at expression:

C: ...mais il y a un mot qui est qui est semblable d'un autre mais il faut..trouver l'expression complètement différente.. pour...
D: ouais
C: éviter ce mot ou.....(laughs) tu sais ce que je dis.
D: oui, bah oui. (begins to read question after a long pause)
Groups 3 and 4 never experienced trailing off or overt signalling. They were completely capable of expressing their ideas in both languages, and only mumbled together in order to agree with each other.
Conclusions

The performance data that was gathered demonstrated a definite correlation between discourse competence and strategic competence. The first two types of strategic competence, overlap and interruption and topic switching, were overtly manifest in first language performance in the case of groups 1 and 2, and in both language performances in the case of group 4. Group 3 allowed the questions to govern the use of strategy, and thus they forego inclusion in the final analysis. It is evident in the relatively high occurrence of overlap and interruption in first language performances in all groups except group 3. In group 1, especially, the occurrence of overlap, interruption, and topic switching evened out in first language performance, as compared to the dominance of speaker A in the second language conversation. (Table 6.1)

The discourse competence of groups 1 and 2 in their native tongue is certainly higher than of their second language, and it was previously established that group 4 have a high discourse competence in both languages. The comparison of the usage of these particular types of strategic competence leads to the conclusion that, in this very small sample of bilingual speakers, high discourse competence predicates the use of overlap and interruption and topic switching. These strategies involve high levels of performance in conversation, as well as strong utterance manipulation and production.

The last two types of strategic competence, paraphrasing, pausing, trailing off, and overt signaling, occurred significantly in situations of second language performance. Both speakers of group 1, one speaker of group 2, and one instance of a speaker in group 3 used one or more of these types of strategy. It is interesting to note that speakers B and C call upon specific strategic competences a great deal in order to communicate effectively. There were virtually no examples of this type of strategic competence in either conversation of groups 3 or 4.

All of the speakers in groups 1 and 2 have relatively lower discourse competence or manifest characteristics of lower discourse competence in some sections. This leads to the
conclusion that, within this study, lower discourse competence predicates usage of paraphrasing, pausing, trailing off, and overt signaling. It seems natural that speakers would utilise these passive strategies when searching for an expression of ideas with something other than strict grammar.
Table 6.1  Occurrences of Conversational Strategy in French and English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF CONVERSATIONAL STRATEGY</th>
<th>Overlap &amp; Interruption</th>
<th>Topic Switching</th>
<th>Paraphrasing &amp; Pausing</th>
<th>Trailing &amp; Overt</th>
<th>Off &amp; Signalling</th>
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Implications

All of the strategies mentioned above are examples of contextualization conventions, and are thus signalling cues within context. The message behind these conventions is still subject to further study, but the overall result is clear. When speakers employ any of these strategies, they are attempting to communicate information such as agreement, discourse help, disagreement, plea for response, and so on. Gumperz states that communication is the combined efforts of speaker and listener and the elicitation of a response. (1972; 131) When speakers are at a loss for words, cannot communicate through discourse alone, or simply desire the aid of non-discursive conventions, they call upon their strategic competence and employ strategy as necessary. If listeners perceive and understand these contextualization clues, then the coordination of both participants is effectively produced, and response is elicited accordingly.

Canale & Swain proposed that strategic competence is only utilized when there are deficiencies in other competencies.(1981) The results of this study indicate that this concept is not applicable to the social context of conversation. Strategy is employed at all levels of discourse competence, not only relatively lower ones. This could be due to the interactive and social nature of conversation. This study does not intend to presume that strategic types associated with higher discourse competence are not available to speakers of lower discourse competence, or vice versa. There appears to be a trend surfacing in the performance data that presupposes a certain level of discourse competence when a certain strategic type is used. More experimentation will have to be performed to confirm these results.
Improvements and Further Study

In order to fully evaluate the communicative competence of bilinguals in conversation, it is necessary to gather performance data from monolinguals in both languages to use for comparison. With French in particular, closer attention should be paid to the role of semio-linguistic cues in conversation. (Ager, 1994) In this study, comparison is qualitative and relative to controlled context, so that no generalizations are posited about bilingual communicative competence. Communicative competence is not a concept that should be measured in absolute terms. There will always be a reference point from which to judge, whether it be native language discourse performance, second language strategic performance, etc. If tests can be devised to accurately evaluate discourse competence, or if a definitive relation between grammatical competence and discourse competence could be established, then the evaluation of total communicative competence would become more definitive as a result.

In addition, the nature of strategic competence should be defined so as to sufficiently understand the meanings and messages behind the employment of strategy. Is strategic competence culturally specific? Are the individual types of strategy directly related to culture? These questions could shed light onto an essentially shadowy and unexplored area of conversational analysis and bilingualism. Eventually, as with many social scientific fields of study, generalizations could be posited concerning the overall outcome and framework of a specific context. This study has only scratched the surface of a relatively new domain which assimilates these two well-established domains of research into a field in which further study and research will not only be necessary but exciting as well.
S'il vous plaît, remplissez le questionnaire. Répondez aux questions complètement, et ajoutez les remarques en bas de la page. Merci beaucoup.

1. Nom/Name__________________________________________________________

2. L'adresse à l'école/School Address_______________________________________

3. Numéro de téléphone/Telephone Number___________________________________

4. First language/Langue natale____________________________________________

5. Where did you learn this language?/Où est-ce que vous avez appris cette langue?
_____________________________________________________________________

6. With whom did you speak this language?/Avec qui est-ce que vous avez parlé cette langue?
_____________________________________________________________________

7. What was the dominant language in your community?/Quelle était la langue dominante dans votre communauté?
_____________________________________________________________________

8. If you didn't live in a community where your first language was dominant, how much time have you spent in a community where your first language was dominant? Si vous n'habitiez pas dans une communauté dans laquelle votre langue natale était dominante, combien de temps est-ce que vous avez passé dans une communauté dans laquelle votre langue natale était dominante?
_____________________________________________________________________

9. Quelle est votre deuxième langue?/What is your second language?________________

10. Quand et où est-ce vous avez appris cette langue? Quel âge aviez-vous? When and where did you learn this language? How old were you?
_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

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11. La deuxième langue, était-elle une langue dominante ou secondaire dans la communauté?/ Was it the dominant or secondary language in the community?

12. Où est-ce que vous avez parlé la deuxième langue?/ Where did you speak your second language?

13. Avez-vous jamais habité dans une communauté dans laquelle cette langue était dominante?/ Have you ever lived in a community where this language is dominant?

14. Combien de temps?/ How long?

15. Combien d'autres langues est-ce que vous parlez?/ How many other languages do you speak?

Additional comments/ Les remarques supplémentaires:
Dear Conversationalists,

Directions: Turn on the tape recorder, making sure the tape is on side A. Open the envelope marked "en français" first, read the paper, and discuss with each other in french each question in turn. Do not open the other envelope before you are finished the first conversation. After 30 minutes (or when you have finished) switch the tape to side B and do the same with the envelope marked "in english," speaking in english this time.

When you have finished the conversation, fill out the questionnaire completely and put all the stuff, including the tape, into the manilla envelope. Call me at 526-7678 and I'll come by and pick up everything. Thanks for participating, and I'll be sure to get the analysis to you as soon as its written.

Steph
1. Qu'est-ce que l'identité culturelle? (cultural identity) Est-elle semblable à l'identité ethnique ou linguistique? Définissez-la. Quelle est votre identité culturelle personnelle?

2. With which group do you identify the most? Why?
   French
   Franco-Americans
   Africans
   African-Americans
   Americans
   Franco-Africans

3. Quelle est la différence entre la langue et le langage?

4. How do culture and language interact? Are they separate, equal, or both? In what way do characteristics like setting, social context, and mood affect language?
Les questions suivantes traitent du concept de la langue. Discuss each question or statement so as to adequately cover the topic, as it relates to you. La conversation est plus importante. N'adoptez pas les rôles de l'interrogatrice ou de la personne interviewée. Speak to each other as if this were a normal, everyday conversation. Ne pensez pas au magnétophone pendant la conversation!

1. Qu'est-ce que le bilinguisme? Définissez-le. Comment est-ce qu'il affectera l'identité culturelle si la langue et la culture sont inséparables?

2. What is the difference between bilingual and bicultural? How is speech or thought affected if you know more than one language and/or culture?

3. Est-il nécessaire que l'on apprenne une deuxième langue dans la culture de cette langue? Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas?

4. Is French or English the "language of love"? How do you communicate strong emotions in a second language?
Bibliography


