Chapter 1

Orthographical, Phonological, and Morphological Challenges in Language Processing: The Case of Bilingual Turkish–English Speakers

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ABSTRACT

The chapter examines the relationship between orthography, phonology, and morphology in Turkish and what this means for Turkish-English bilingual language processing. Turkish offers a unique language medium in pitching theoretical perspectives both in linguistics and psycholinguistics against each other because of its properties. Empirical and theoretical considerations are employed from both domains in order to shed light on some of the current challenges. In line with contemporary thought, this chapter is written with the view that bilingual speakers engage a singular language or lexical system characterized by fluid and dynamic processes. Particular focus will be given to English-Turkish speaking bilinguals in the UK, which includes heritage (HL) and non-heritage language speakers. Evidence from monolingual developmental research as well as neuropsychology will be examined to confirm findings of previous studies in other European contexts, and also to raise attention to various challenges which need to be addressed across all contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The ability of the human cognitive system to store and organize language and knowledge about words (phonological, semantic and orthographic representations), and to be able to retrieve those representations on demand require multifaceted, interlinked, and complicated mental processes. Put simply, semantic representations represent meaning of words while lexical representations (phonological and orthographic) refer to auditory and visual forms of words respectively (Kroll & de Groot, 1997). From an evolutionary perspective, bilingualism presents complex and multi-layered cognitive processes that involve the interaction of cultures, expression of social experience, and history of a particular people as well as the mechanism of interaction of languages (Roberts, 2013). Historically, the ability to speak more than one language because of contact with other communities, immigration and trade has been reported dating back to the Sumerians (Woods, 2006).

In this respect, a widely accepted definition of bilingualism is ‘both regular use and communicative competence’ in native language (L1) and non-native language (L2) (Francis, 1999, p. 194). Some of the common linguistic consequences of language contact, specifically individual and societal synchronic bilingualism, include language learning and revitalization, linguistic creativity, code-switching, language shift and attrition, and translanguaging. As an emerging concept, translanguaging has been used to differentiate the simple shift between two languages (i.e., code-switching) versus flexible or dynamic bilingualism. In this respect, translanguaging refers to the ‘speakers’ construction and use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that cannot be easily assigned to one or another traditional definition of a language, but that comprise the speakers’ complete language repertoire’ (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 22).

The theory of translanguaging posits that all speakers have a singular linguistic repertoire composed of features that are selected and deployed in different contexts (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). This supposition is in line with cognitive models of bilingualism especially where a bilingual’s two languages are assumed to share a single memory store or lexicon. In line with current thought, this chapter is written with the view that bilingual speakers possess one language system in their minds (e.g., Grosjean, 1985; Cook, 1999; Cummins, 2007; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Li, 2011) and the properties of this system are fluid and dynamic. Cook’s Multi-Competence Theory (1991) also holds the view that the knowledge of two or more languages in a bilingual mind is processed via the same capacity. Therefore, the knowledge of these languages must form a super-system and they affect each other rather than being completely isolated (Cook, 2003).

The aim of this chapter is multifold and can be categorised as follows: i) To draw on the foundational theories and models of language contact and morphological
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