Introduction to Sociolinguistics

Unit 3

3. Code choice

Most people are bidialectal, speaking a regional variety of their language and its standard variety as well.

1. The topic of this unit:

This unit discusses, on the individual level, what choices people have when they want to speak, what factors guide those choices, and what limitations exist to those choices. On the societal level, it discusses the facts that the world is a multilingual place, that a society can be bilingual either *de facto* or *de jure*, and that the outcome of societal (group level) bilingualism is either language maintenance or language choice. The common bilingual practice of codeswitching (i.e. the use of more than one language in a conversation or even in the same sentence) is also touched upon from various angles.

Questions to think about:

1. Do you ever use more than one language during a conversation? And within the same sentence? What do you think about this practice: is it a positive or negative or neutral phenomenon? Do you know people who have an opinion strikingly different from yours?

2. When two people bilingual in the same languages talk, how (i.e. on the basis of what) do they decide what language to speak in? Do you think they might ever choose the other language at their disposal? If so, what motivates their decision?

2. Code choice

When people speak, they always have and make a choice of how to speak, even though that choice is usually unconscious, that is, people do not normally think about their choices every time they speak to somebody. Two people who are bilingual in the same two languages have those languages to choose from. But even monolingual people have choices, between different dialects of the same language or between styles (formal vs. informal): a student would normally choose to speak the standard variety with a teacher at school and their vernacular at home with a family member; colleagues at a workplace might choose a formal style to speak in when they are at a meeting but an informal style over coffee or lunch after the meeting. In all of these cases, people are making a code choice. Code in this sense is a different way of speaking, be it a choice between languages, dialects of the same language, or styles.

A bilingual person usually has lots of options when speaking to another person of the same language background: the choice between languages, the choice between different dialects of either language, and the choice between styles. Plus, bilinguals also have the choice of using both of their languages, using codeswitching. A similar choice of dialect mixing or of style mixing is also available as a monolingual choice, but it is probably less frequent and is much less studied than codeswitching.

Code choice is influenced by many factors. On the societal level, it is influenced by what language is dominant and/or official. On the individual level, it depends on what the speaker is talking about (topic), with whom (what language the interlocutors usually speak in, what relationship they are in etc.), in what situation (what is the location, the setting, whether there are others present etc.), and the function of the interaction (to stress solidarity, to create distance etc.).

Questions to think about

1. What codes do you have available in your own linguistic repertoire? Think of the languages and dialects you speak and the styles you use.

2. Regarding the languages you speak, think of situations in which societal restrictions operate on your choice of one or another language.

3. Bi- and multilingualism in the world

The world is a multilingual place, with more than 7,000 languages spoken in 206 countries. In virtually every country more than one language is spoken by the people living there. There are highly multilingual places in the world: Papua New Guinea, the country with probably the highest level of multilingualism, has over 800 indigenous languages spoken, India has 30 languages spoken by more than a million native speakers and 122 by more than 10,000 native speakers, Australia has about 250 indigenous languages and several dozen immigrant languages spoken. On the individual level, it is estimated that well over half of the population of the world is bi- or multilingual, that is, composed of people who use more than one language in their everyday life – some estimates put their rate at 80%.

As you can see in Figure 1, the populations of the countries of the European Union are bi- and multilingual in varying proportions: in some countries the majority of the population speak at least two languages (in Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and Slovenia more than two-thirds of the people do), whereas in other countries less than a fifth of the population does (in Portugal, Hungary, the UK, Greece, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, and France). These proportions of bilinguals include both minority populations (who speak their own mother tongue in addition to the majority language of their country) and second language speakers of languages taught in school such as English, German, French etc., as both of these kind of people qualify as bilinguals.

LU	84%	
NL	77%	
SI	67%	
MT	59%	
DK	58%	
LV	54%	
LT	52%	
EE	52%	
BE	50%	
FI	48%	
SE	44%	
SK	43%	
DE	28%	
AT	27%	
EU	25%	
RO	22%	
PL	22%	
IT	22%	
CZ	22%	
CY	20%	
FR	19%	
BG	19%	
ES	18%	
IE	18%	
EL	15%	
UK	14%	
HU	13%	
PT	13%	

Question: D48T2. Languages that you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation - TOTAL

Answers: At least 2

Map Legend
- 55% - 100%
- 40% - 54%
- 20% - 39%
- 0% - 19%
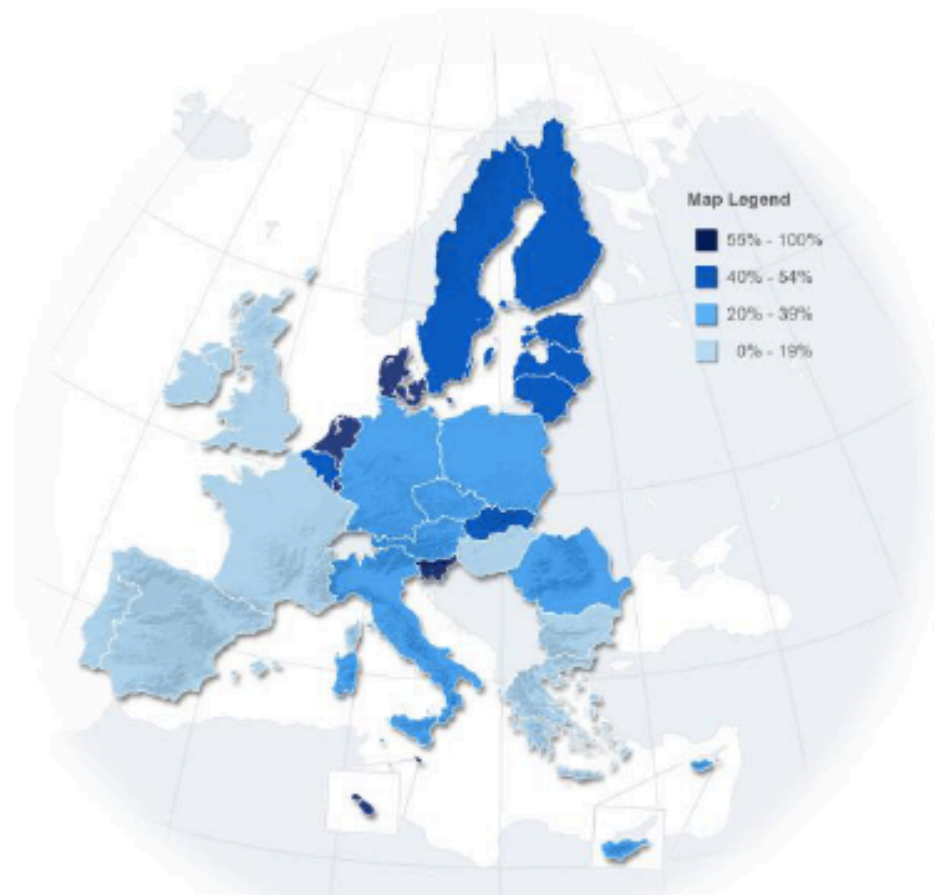
Figure 1. Proportion of bi- and multilingual people in the countries of the European Union, 2013.
Source: Eurobarometer 386: Europeans and their languages, http:/ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.html/

On the societal level, a "bilingual country" or "multilingual country" can be understood in two ways: a country is *de facto* (i.e. factually) bi- or multilingual if not everyone's native language is the same, and it is *de jure* (i.e. legally) bilingual or multilingual if it has two or more official languages.

As has been mentioned already, virtually every country is *de facto* bilingual, and it is very hard to find a de facto monolingual country. In Europe Iceland was for a long time a country like this, with its entire population speaking Icelandic, but in today's globalized world there are many people of other language backgrounds living there as well and Icelandic is native to about 91%. In the European Union there are several countries whose populations are composed of the same language group at well over 90%, Greece (99%), Hungary (99%), the Czech Republic (99%), and Bulgaria (95%) among them (see Figure 2).

A country is *de jure* bi- or multilingual if it has two or more official languages. Such counties in Europe are, for instance, Finland (with Finnish and Swedish), Ireland (with Irish and English), Malta (with Maltese and English), Belgium (with Dutch, French, and German). Making a language which is spoken in a country official has important implications for its speakers in that country: it provides them with language rights and the opportunity to use their language in public and official ways, educate their children in schools where that language is the medium of instruction, etc. Denying the status of official language to a large group of speakers in a country has symbolic implications as well as practical ones: it signals that that language has a subordinate position (and its speakers do not have full language rights) and it is likely to be impossible to use it in officially dealing with the administration (even for simple things like filling out forms to apply for a passport or a driver's license) and harder to find schools with that language as a language of instruction.

		State language(s), official languages that have an official status in the EU
	BE	Dutch 55%, French 38%, German 0.4%
	BG	95%
	CZ	98%
	DK	96%
	DE	87%
	EE	80%
	IE	English 93%, Irish 3%
	EL	99%
	ES	Spanish 82%, Catalan 8%, Galician 5%, Basque 1%
	FR	93%
	IT	97%
	CY	95%
	LV	71%
	LT	92%
	LU	Luxembourgish 52%, French 16%, German 2%
	HU	99%
	MT	Maltese 97%, English 4%
	NL	94%
	AT	93%
	PL	95%
	PT	95%
	RO	93%
	SI	93%
	SK	88%
	FI	Finnish 94%, Swedish 5%
	SE	93%
	UK	88%

Figure 2. Proportion of the population of EU countries whose mother tongue is official in that country.
Source: Source: Eurobarometer 386: Europeans and their languages, http:/ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.html/

In addition to being an official language, a language can have other legal statuses in a country as well, for instance, it can be a co-official language in some parts of it (like Hungarian, which is co-official in some areas of the Austrian province of Burgenland), or it can be a legally recognized minority language. Sometimes even numerically and proportionally large languages do not have any official status in a country: for instance, Hungarian is spoken by over 1.2 million people in Romania (6.1% of the population), but it does not have any legal recognition. In Hungary, there are 13 legally recognized minority languages (Armenian, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Romanian, Rusyn, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, Ukrainian, and "Gypsy", that is, Romani and Boyash). The members of these minorities enjoy individual and collective rights spelled out in Hungary's 1993 law on minorities.

Question to think about

1. What are the reasons why it is impossible to arrive at a precise estimate about the proportion of bi- or multilingual people in the world? Think about the means in which such information could be collected.

2. What do you think are the reasons why so relatively few countries have more than one official language, even though virtually all countries have linguistic minorities.

Research tasks:

1. Using Wikipedia, collect information on which European countries are de jure bi- or multilingual on the national level, that is, throughout its territory.

2. Using Wikipedia, find more countries that have a dominant language spoken by more than 90% of their populations, and others that fall into the 50-80% range.

3.1. Minority languages

All languages spoken natively by large groups of people in a country where another language is dominant are minority languages. Minority languages are spoken typically by a smaller group than the majority language speakers, that is, they are minority languages in numerical terms, but also, importantly, they are also minority languages in terms of power: they are subordinated in status to the majority or dominant language.

Minority languages can have anywhere from a few hundred to millions of speakers: a Siberian Finno-Ugric language Mansi in Russia has only about 900 speakers, whereas Hungarian in Romania is spoken by more than a million. Minority languages are typically spoken over a definable geographical area within a country and are spoken by a community of speakers. Membership in a minority language community does not usually depend on just language but also only shared social, ethnic, cultural, and/or religious characteristics.

There are several types of minority languages. Indigenous languages are native to the area where they are spoken and are not spoken outside it: Native American languages in the US (such as Navajo or Kutenai) or Mexico (such as Nahuatl or Zapotec), aboriginal languages in Australia (such as Luritja or Duwal), many dozens of languages in Russia (such as Khanty, Udmurt, and Ket) are examples. Autochthonous languages are also long settled languages in the area where they are spoken, but they tend have a majority country as well, usually in a neighboring country: Hungarians in the countries neighboring Hungary (Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria) are autochthonous, as are Germans in Belgium and Italians in Switzerland. Catalan, Basque and Aragonese are autochthonous languages in Spain, although without a majority country elsewhere.

Immigrant and migrant languages are spoken by groups that resettled away from their original countries, with the difference between the two being in the intention for the resettlement to be permanent or temporary. The United States, Canada and Australia are countries of immigrants, where the ancestors of everybody except the indigenous groups were from somewhere else. The dividing line between immigrants and migrants is rather fluid: people who aimed to resettle temporarily may stay permanently, like Turkish "guest workers" of the 1970s and 1980s in Germany, where there is a third generation of Turkish speakers growing up now, who had never lived anywhere but in Germany, or like some of the Hungarian immigrants to the United States in the early 20th century, who originally wanted to make enough money in the US to buy land in Hungary but decided to stay after all after WWI and the Treaty of Trianon (which placed many of their native towns or villages outside of Hungary).

Look at the shirt slide presentation about minority languages in the United States and listen to the audio that is included in it.

Research task:

1. Using Wikipedia, collect information on a European country and on a country outside Europe as far as the minority languages spoken in that country are concerned. Categorize them into the types of minority languages discussed above (indigenous, autochthonous, immigrant, and migrant).

2. Find out about the status and situation of the Irish language, spoken by a minority population in Ireland, and of the Welsh language in Wales, in a similar situation, using Wikipedia. What is the best way to categorize them? Do they lend themselves to categorization in the four categories above?

3.2. The origins of bilingualism

The reasons for why so many individuals and groups of people are bilingual are manifold. The simplest is that speakers of different languages have always co-existed in the same geographical areas and had to communicate with each other, so many speakers have learned each other's languages, especially in border areas.

Military conquests and subsequent colonization have also resulted in numerous cases of group level bilingualism in all historical eras, i.e. in Alexander the Great's empire (4th century BC), the Ottoman Empire in Central and Eastern Europe (14-19th centuries), the Russian Empire (16-20th century), etc. In such cases the language of the conquerors/colonizers becomes the dominant language of the empire, and there is more or less pressure on the subordinated people to learn it and become bilingual. Bilingualism in such cases (and everywhere where there is a dominant group and subordinated groups) is asymmetrical: the subordinated groups are likely to become bilingual, while the dominant group stays monolingual.

The movement of groups of people results in new language contacts and bilingualism. Immigrants and migrants tend to learn the language of the country they move to.

Religion can be a cause of bilingualism: in the United States, Muslims typically know some Arabic. Economic development may indirectly trigger bilingualism if, for instance, indigenous people move into cities and take jobs there, leaving their rural settlements and lifestyle behind.

3.3. Language maintenance and shift

Whether a subordinated group can maintain its original language (language maintenance) or after a few generations of bilingualism adopts the dominant language as their new native language (language shift) is influenced by many social and economic factors and their combinations. Whether a minority group has moved to be where they are or not is the most powerful predictor of shift or maintenance: immigrants and migrants shift much more quickly than indigenous and autochthonous groups. In the United States, most immigrant groups go through a 3-generation language shift: the immigrants learn some English but remain dominant in their first language, their children become bilingual and possibly dominant in English, whereas the immigrants' grandchildren are typically monolingual English speakers who might know some token words and phrases of the original language of the immigrants.

The larger a group is and the more compactly it lives (in neighborhoods, villages or towns where they constitute a majority locally), and the wealthier it is (being able to afford to build their schools and churches), the more chance they usually have to maintain their language. If "getting ahead in life", that is, getting a good education, a good job, a higher salary, is tied to the use of the dominant language, that in itself pushes the users of minority languages towards language shift. And, in addition to these, factors such as religion, institutional support, social networks, and other factors also usually play a role.

Questions to think about

1. What kind of things make a difference in immigrant and migrant groups' lives that make them more likely to shift than indigenous and autochthonous groups?

2. From what you know about the United States, what factors contribute to immigrant groups' shifting to English in 3 generations? Do you know of any groups who do not shift at all? Or groups who shift in more generations?

3. Why do you think education plays such an important role in language maintenance? Can you think of examples where the lack of availability of education in a group's native language clearly contributes to their shift?

3.4. Domains of language use

In trying to detect language shift in a community, linguists look at people of different generations and compare their patterns of language use, and for all speakers they also look at what language speakers use with particular people and in particular situations, that is, in various domains of language use.

In Table 1 below, you can see language use data as summarized by Susan Gal regarding the bilingual Hungarian and German speaking women she studied in Oberwart/Felsőőr, Austria. The tables show what language, Hungarian (H) or German (G), people use in what situations. As you can see, the older a person is, the more situations they use Hungarian in, and the less they use German in. The younger a speaker in this community is, the more German they use.

Number of speaker	Age of speaker	Interlocutors											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	14	H	GH		G	G	G	G			G		G
2	15	H	GH		G	G	G	G			G		G
3	25	H	GH	GH	GH	G	G	G	G	G	G		G
4	27	H	H		GH	G	G	G			G		G
5	17	H	H		H	GH	G	G			G		G
6	13	H	H		GH	GH	GH	GH			G		G
7	43	H	H		GH	GH		G	GH	GH	G		G
8	39	H	H		H	GH	GH	G	G	G	G		G
9	23	H	H		H	GH	H	G		GH	G		G
10	40	H	H		H	GH		GH	G	G	G		G
11	50	H	H		H	H	GH	GH	GH	G	G	G	G
12	52	H	H	H	GH	H		H	GH	G	G	G	G
13	60	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	GH	GH	G	G	H
14	40	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	GH	GH	GH		G
15	35	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	GH	H		G
16	61	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	GH	H		G
17	50	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		G
18	66	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	GH	G
19	60	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	GH	G
20	53	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	GH	H	GH	G
21	71	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	GH	G
22	54	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		G
23	69	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	GH	H
24	63	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	GH	H
25	59	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		H
26	60	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H		H
27	64	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
28	71	H	H		H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H

Interlocutors: (1) God; (2) grandparents and their generation; (3) black market clients; (4) parents and their generation; (5) age-mate pals, neighbors; (6) brothers and sisters; (7) salespeople; (8) spouse; (9) children and that generation; (10) government officials; (11) grandchildren and their generation; (12) doctor. Scalability = 96%.

Table 1. Choice of language by women (Gal 1979: 121).

4. Diglossia

Diglossia is a situation where two varieties of the same language are used by a whole society in a functional distribution: in formal situations they use one variety, termed High variety, and in informal situations they use the other, the Low variety. Arabic is a language used in a diglossic way: Classical Arabic is the language of formal discourse, and local varieties of Arabic in the various countries where it is spoken are used in informal communication. Similarly, the German speakers of Switzerland use Standard German as a High variety, and Swiss German as a Low variety.

The High variety and the Low variety may be different in their pronunciation (as in the Swiss case), and is always different in some vocabulary and grammar. In a diglossic society, all speakers learn the Low variety as their vernacular and have special emotional attachment to it (as everyone does to their vernacular), and learn the High variety in school, through formal instruction.

The Hungarian linguist from Slovakia István Lanstyák proposed in the 1990s that Hungarian functions as a diglossic language in the communities of Hungarian speakers in countries neighboring Hungary such as Slovakia and Romania, where speakers typically learn a contact variety of Hungarian (Hungarian with significant contact effects from the dominant language Slovak and Romanian, respectively) as their Low variety, and Standard Hungarian as their high variety. This analysis has significantly contributed to the inclusion of words from varieties of Hungarian spoken in countries neighboring Hungary in dictionaries of Hungarian beginning with the 2000s, and to the growing acceptance of these varieties as legitimate varieties (rather than just "bad Hungarian", as they were once labeled by many).

Research tasks:

1. If your native language is Hungarian, find a monolingual dictionary of Hungarian published in the 21st century and:

- (1) find some words in it that are marked as words from varieties of Hungarian;

- (2) look up the following words and find their origin and meaning: *majica, szokk, pix, slag, blokk, rajon, zsuviz, nanuk*;

- (3) look up the following words and find their origin and meaning: *alapiskola, betegkönyv, víberliszt, kenő, hajtási, félinvalid*.

2. Using Wikipedia, find other cases of diglossia in addition to the Swiss and Arabic cases.

5. Codeswitching

Bilingual people sometimes use both of their languages in the same conversation or even the same sentence. In a way, this is their "bilingual choice" if they do not want to stick to just one language. Contrary to what many monolingual people think, bilinguals do not codeswitch because they do not know either of their languages well enough – codeswitching happens for a variety of social reasons.

Bilinguals sometimes feel that they do not want to commit to using either language with somebody: in one study, young people in Montreal, in francophone Canada, were found to address strangers in a mixture of French and English, thus wanting to avoid signaling their francophone or anglophone status and to signal their intention to rise above the conflictual nature of such a choice. Sometimes using a word or phrase from the other language is just easier in a conversation between two bilinguals than finding an equivalent (or overcoming its absence in the language), especially if it designates an institution, culturally or socially embedded food, phenomenon, or notion. Hungarian students majoring in English in Hungary often switch into English when talking about their studies to refer to names of their classes or things they learned in them. Sometimes bilinguals codeswitch to use a joke or quotation that does not exist in the other language, or for a "distinct flavor" associated with a word that they want to convey.

Listen to Dani bácsi ("Uncle Dani"), an American Hungarian man, speak about his life. In this interview, which is conducted in Hungarian, he switches into English several times. You can follow what he says in the transcript, which also has the English translation of what he is saying.

[insert the file "An American Hungarian man speaks.pptx"]

[insert the file "Dani bácsi talks about his life.pdf"]

Monolinguals, who do not have the opportunity to codeswitch by definition, often regard codeswitching negatively, because they think the bilinguals are careless, lazy, ignorant, or are showing off. Such opinions belong to the realm of language attitudes and should not discourage bilinguals from codeswitching. Codeswitching is a normal practice, neither good nor bad, it just is, like so many other things in language.

Questions to think about

1. In some minority language communities, codeswitching into the dominant language is regarded very negatively. What can be the reasons for this, social or linguistic?

2. Think about a situation or setting that you participate in where you know a lot of codeswitching happens. What is/are the reason(s) for codeswitching usually?

Research task:

1. Choose a suitable occasion to observe how you and people you know codeswitch. Keeping field notes, try to note down during the conversation what words or phrases you codeswitch for, and later find the reason why you do.

6. Factors of language choice in bilinguals

What language two bilinguals choose in talking to each other is dependent on several factors. They are likely to choose the language they are used to using with each other – this is called history of interaction. This is a simple but important factor: speaking the language they are not used to speaking with each other may feel very odd to them. Their choice might also be influenced by what they are talking about: if they both use one language at work, they might switch to that language when talking about work, or at least codeswitch words and phrases when discussing work related matters. The situation or setting they are in might influence their choice of language: if they are speaking in a formal setting they might choose one language, while in an informal setting they might choose another. Whether there are other people, especially monolinguals, around them may have an influence: if they want to include them, they would speak the language the monolinguals would understand. However, if they want to exclude them (in order to speak more privately, for instance), then of course they would choose the language the monolinguals do not speak.

Questions to think about

1. Think about a person you know who speaks the same languages you do. What does it depend on which language you speak? Think about different topics, situations, the presence or absence of others.

Research task:

1. Interview two bilingual persons about the factors of language choice in their life. Ask them to describe different situations and settings, whether there are topics they would only discuss in one language or the other. Compare the results: are there any differences in the factors that influence their choices?

7. Summary

In this unit, the main focus has been on the language choices of bi- and multilingual people between languages, dialects, or styles, when to use them, and how to choose between them. The world is a bilingual place, where more than half of the population is bi- or multilingual. Most countries of the world have speakers of more than one language living there, which is referred to as de facto bilingualism. (Sometimes the number of the languages spoken in a country can be in the hundreds.) A country can be bilingual in another sense too: if it has more than one official language, it is de jure bilingual. People living in close proximity to speakers of other language may be bilingual, especially if they are dominated by speakers of the other language. The reasons for bilingualism are numerous: the proximity of other speakers, but also, historically, military conquests and subsequent colonization, economic pressure, social advancement, etc. The outcomes of long-term societal bilingualism are either language maintenance or language shift. Diglossia is a different kind of situation than bilingualism, it is the use of two varieties of the same language in a functional distribution by the whole of society. Codeswitching is a practice most bilinguals engage in: they use two languages in the same sentence or conversation for a variety of social reasons.

Review questions:

1. What is code choice? What codes do you have available in your own linguistic repertoire?

2. What does it mean that virtually all countries of the world are de facto bilingual? What does it mean that relatively few countries of the world are de jure bilingual?

3. What are the factors that have a positive or negative effect on language maintenance vs. language shift?

4. What is diglossia? How is it different from bilingualism?

5. What is codeswitching? How is it different from using loanwords?

Glossary of terms:

Codeswitching: the use of more than one language in a conversation or even in the same sentence.

Diglossia: the situation where two varieties of the same language, a High variety and a Low variety, are used in a functional distribution in the same way by everyone in a society. The High variety is used for formal purposes and in writing, while the Low variety is used informally.

Minority language: a language spoken in a country or region where another language is dominant (and/or official). Speakers of a minority language are usually fewer than the dominant language speakers in the same country or area and less powerful than them as well. Minority languages are typically given more limited rights: they often cannot be used in many areas of public life, and there might be limitations on education using them as a language of instruction.

Language maintenance: in a situation of bilingualism, a group of bilingual speakers keeping their first language rather than adopting, over the course of the lifetime of a few generations, the dominant language.

Language shift: the adoption, by a group of speakers, of a new native language, usually after a period of bilingualism. The newly adopted language is typically a language dominant in the country or area where the group of speakers in question live. (If the group does not adopt the dominant language as their native language but stay bilingual, they are said to maintain their original native language. See language maintenance.) Language shift is

Linguistic minority: a group of people speaking a language other than the dominant or official language in a country or region.

Quizzes:
see separate documents

Further reading:

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