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A Case Study on the Processes of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing in the Speech of Hungarian Canadians

The present paper serves the aim of introducing real-life examples of bilingual speech manifestations and providing background information about the bilingual development of people under examination. This study is largely based on the account my Hungarian relatives in Canada gave me of their own bilingualism. Besides, I will also rely on my experiences with the language use of other Hungarian Canadians. However, within this broad topic I will most importantly concentrate on the primary features of bilingual speech production, i.e. switching between two languages (code switching), and frequently mixing elements of one code with that of the other (code mixing).

As a start, however, it is essential to define the notion of *bilingualism* and agree on a commonly accepted criterion for people to be called bilingual speakers of two languages.

1.1. What Does „Bilingualism” Mean?

The title may seem more or less self-explanatory. That is to say, one is not expected to be a linguist in order to find out what the above mentioned term covers. The answer, at least for the layman, is obvious: a bilingual is someone who speaks two languages. However, similarly vague definitions to the phenomenon of bilingualism may easily be coined by anyone stopped in the street at random. On the one hand, it does not allow for those who make an irregular use of one or another language, or those who have not used the language at all for many years. They are the so-called „dormant bilinguals”. On the other hand, nor does it allow for the many people who have developed a considerable skill in comprehending a foreign language, but who do not speak it. What about the individuals, for instance, who have learnt to read a language but were not made by necessity to acquire speaking or writing skills? Above all, this definition says nothing about the level of proficiency that has to be attained before speakers can legitimately claim to be bilinguals.

People with great linguistic interest, including students of linguistic studies, wish to find out more about the phenomenon. A possible means of experimentation is to examine relevant communicative situations performed by speakers of two or – in the case of multilingualism – more languages. Is there at all a valid criterion for someone to be safely regarded as a bilingual speaker? To be honest, even scholars with profound knowledge of and experience in linguistic phenomena cannot agree on an all-inclusive, unquestionably correct definition for the term ‘bilingualism’. How far, for instance, does the notion of ‘bilingual’ extend? Let me take the example of a scientist who can perfectly read and write academic studies in English. However, he has almost no ability to speak the language. Or that of an African tribe member with high competence in making himself understood through the medium of speech, though totally ignorant of how to write the language. Which one is then a better bilingual? What about the linguistic abilities of a child whose parents have different mother tongues, thus making him acquire competence in both languages, but he eventually comes to be more proficient in one than in the other? Can competence at all be measured by taking into consideration those numerous factors and circumstances that are inseparable from language manifestations and language learning? These are obviously complex questions that usually emerge in someone planning to dispel the myth that surrounds bilingualism. Answers are, not wholly unexpectedly, rather ambiguous.

By extending the scope of the definition to include requirements on proficiency, we tend to arrive at the conclusion that a bilingual is a person who speaks two languages, having achieved native-like fluency in each one. However, this criterion is far too strong. People who have perfect fluency in two languages do exist, but they are the exception, not the rule. The vast majority of bilinguals do not have an equal command of their two languages: for most of the time one of them is more fluent than the other, interferes with and imposes its accent on the other, or simply is the preferred language in certain situations.

However, accuracy requires one to rely on definitions provided by various dictionaries of linguistics. One such definition terms bilingualism in the following way: bilingualism is „the use of at least two languages either by an individual or by a group of speakers, such as the inhabitants of a particular region or a nation.”¹

1.2. Code-Mixing and Code-Switching

Extremely complex and not well understood are the numerous examples for a bilingual having a conversation with another bilingual – who has exactly the same language background – yet changing from one language to another in the course of a conversation. This linguistic behaviour is widely known as ‘language-switching’ or ‘*code-switching*’ and may frequently be observed in multilingual situations.² The act of changing from one language to another takes many forms associated with a certain mood of the speaker, circumstances of speech production or the interlocutors being present. As a sentence produced by a bilingual may begin in one language and finish in another, phrases from both tongues often succeed in an apparently random order.

According to linguistic investigations into the field of code-switching, factors that bring about the phenomenon are numerous and extremely varied. Here, it is only possible to list a few cases when code switching regularly takes place. For instance, the speaker cannot express himself adequately in one language and therefore switches to the other to make good the deficiency. This may trigger the speaker to continue in the other language for a while. Experiments have proved that code-switching of this type tends to happen a great deal when the speaker is upset, tired, or otherwise distracted. However, if the switch takes place into a minority language, it is usually thought of as a means of solidarity with a social group. In this case the majority language speaker’s change into the minority tongue signals to the listener that a good rapport is going to be established. There are certain examples, though, when the same change between languages may occur to exclude other people from the conversation who do not know the language. A further possibility is when the switch from one language to another signals the speaker’s attitude towards the listener – whether friendly, irritated, ironic or jocular. Monolinguals can communicate these effects to some extent by varying the level of formality, the intonation or tone of their speech. If two bilinguals normally talk to each other in language A, the choice of B is bound to create a special effect. A common example is a mother telling her child to do something in one language, and then, if the child fails to obey, to switch to the other language, thereby showing her stronger emphasis or displeasure. The interesting point here is that some issues may be discussed in either code, but the choice of code adds a distinct flavour to what is said about the topic. The phenomenon is evidently a subtle and complex one, with speakers usually being totally unaware of the extent to which they have been

¹ Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, J.C. RICHARDS, J. PLATT, H. PLATT: p 36

² Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, J.C. RICHARDS, J. PLATT, H. PLATT: p 58

switching in a conversation. If interrupted, they may even be unable to say which language they were using in their last sentence.

These are, as I have already stated, only some of the sociolinguistic functions that language switching can perform. Beside conveying solidarity, exhaustion, and a given attitude of the speaker towards the listener, language shift is able to express a great deal more about the intention, needs etc. of the speaker, which are too many to be covered here. In either case, it may be claimed that the motivation of the speaker is an important factor in the choice of the code.

The other phenomenon closely related to code-switching is „*code-mixing*“. It usually occurs when conversants use both languages together – switch between them – to the extent that they change from one tongue to the other in the course of a single utterance. Code mixing takes place without a change of topic and can involve various levels of language, e.g., phonology, morphology, grammatical structures or lexical items.³ Therefore, it is not really possible to say at any given time which language they are speaking. Sociolinguistic explanations for this behaviour normally concentrate on the possibility of projecting two identities at once.

Monolinguals are likely to be very critical of code-mixing. They may even use pejorative, derogatory terms to describe the perceived results of mixing two languages, e.g. ‘Franglais’ (French and English in Quebec), ‘Hunglisch’ (Hungarian and English, virtually anywhere where the two languages may coincide), and ‘Tex-Mex’ (English and Mexican Spanish in Texas). Perhaps because of this kind of criticism, many bilingual people come to be very self-conscious about their language change and try to avoid it in talking to strangers or on formal occasions. Such dismissal of the phenomenon demonstrates serious misunderstanding. Conversational code-mixing is not just the mixing of two languages brought about by laziness or ignorance, or some combination of these. Rather, it requires conversants to have a sophisticated knowledge of both languages and to be aware of community norms.

Indeed, code-mixing and code-switching should be seen as normal and powerful communicative features of informal bilingual interactions, which present linguists with part of their most fascinating analytical challenges.

1.3. Bilingualism in a Canadian Context

Examining the phenomenon of bilingualism from a general perspective is only half of the story. That is to say, the main objective of the present paper is to give a thorough analysis of how the term ‘bilingualism’ relates to the situation in Canada. The issue of bilingualism, when reflected upon within the scope of Canada, is likely to bring into the mind of the layman that this country recognises two different languages – English and French – as its official tongues and guarantees equal rights in all fields of life for both.

Undoubtedly, if dual (or multiple) language competence is characteristic of an ethnic group, it rarely happens that both (or all) of the languages which are in daily use achieve official status. The majority of the world’s societies accept only one language as the official means of communication, while other tongues that are spoken by a considerable part of the country’s population remain the primary medium of interaction between the members of merely certain ethnic groups. Consequently, as it is demonstrated by the example of Canada, the enormous amount of bilingualism does not necessarily signal that the state provides for the equality of each language spoken by its citizens. The same is true the other way around: that Canada is officially bilingual in English and French should not lead

³ Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, J.C. RICHARDS, J. PLATT, H. PLATT: p 57

anyone to think that every single member of the population is a fluent speaker of both languages. Therefore, when handling the topic of bilingualism, one must be careful to make it clear in which sense the attribute 'bilingual' is applied to a given country.

There is no need to emphasise that moving into a foreign country generally means adapting to the life-style and culture of that given community, a process which is inseparable from giving up part of an individual's identity, including his or her mother tongue. Thus language is frequently viewed as a flexible, unstable system which is altered by outer factors and circumstances. As a result of Canada being one of the most popular destinations for those who decide on moving into a different language community – and therefore exposing their own mother tongue to novel influences –, the country has become a major interest for linguists. They wish to know more about the processes of language change and language choice related to the phenomenon of bilingualism.

Different states require their citizens to follow the majority's way of life and to assimilate into the dominant culture to varying degrees. As far as Canada is concerned, it has always practised a policy which favoured the development of a multicultural and multilingual society by providing its citizens with more possibilities for the maintenance of their own language and culture than any other country largely in the whole world.

It is not different today either. My relatives moved to the country after the Revolution of 1956 and soon became equal citizens of Canada, having been allowed to practise every right – including the right of speaking their mother tongue and emphasising their Hungarian nationality – which people born in Canada had. They have never experienced any kind of negative discrimination. On the contrary, all Hungarians are encouraged to be proud of their own language and ethnicity.

1.3.1. The Characteristics of My Aunt's and Uncle's Language Use

During their stay of 44 years in Canada, neither my aunt nor my uncle succeeded fully in learning the English language, although they have been – and are still – exposed to its influence from day to day. The most evident reason explaining this situation is that when they moved to a different language community both of them were over the critical age of language learning. Since they were brought up under the influence of the Hungarian language – which evidently meant an emotional and factual education in Hungarian – their way of thinking and system of expressing their thoughts and feelings were closely related to, in fact inseparable from, the mother tongue even if they spoke English.

Both my aunt and uncle have been living in Canada under circumstances which did not stimulate the acquisition of a perfect competence in English. That is to say, after leaving Hungary my uncle used to work for quite a long time with immigrants from all parts of the world and had no formal schooling in English. Therefore, he picked up English words and learnt its grammar predominantly on the bases of how he heard it from his fellow workers who already had a weak (though mostly incorrect and deficient) knowledge of the English language.

As far as my aunt is concerned, she was not compelled by necessity to find a job and work outside their home. She has gained the major part of her skills in English by reading newspapers, watching television and dealing with the miscellaneous problems of every – day life – a kind of knowledge which is again only enough to express basic needs and to convey simple meaning. She differentiates at least three categories of immigrants to Canada according to the opportunities they have for acquiring the official language.

Housewives like my aunt are mostly engaged with taking care of their ethnic heritage as well as with managing the effective working of certain Hungarian organisations and institutions, like the Hungarian Church in Calgary. They are the

ones who put a great emphasis on the continuous use of their mother tongue and the maintenance of ethnic traditions. Therefore, housewives are most likely to lag behind in the acquisition of the country's official language(s).

The other category includes immigrants who are mostly professionals and consequently have a better chance to work among native speakers of English with a more sophisticated knowledge of the language.

Mixed couples, where the husband or the wife is from the majority language community, are exposed to the impact of two languages more intensively and therefore will become bilingual speakers (though frequently to different degrees) of the two languages. Nevertheless, every-day life and linguistic research have proved that children who emigrate to a different language community at the age of ten or twelve have the best prospects for acquiring a native-like competence and equal control of both languages.

My relatives frequently face difficulty in trying to put their feelings into words when they are having a conversation with their daughter's or son's spouses who are, as it might have been expected, native speakers of English. That is, emotions are so intimately tied to one's ethnic identity and mother tongue that it is hardly possible to transfer them to any other language learnt, especially if they come unconsciously or are deeply rooted. Therefore, my relatives often complain that family conversations at Christmas time or on any other special occasions that are intended to be friendly and personal, often end up around a neutral, every-day topic and become formal. It is true both for my aunt and uncle that while they can understand virtually anything, be it on TV or part of every-day activities such as doing the shopping or answering a telephone call, they frequently face problems in producing the English language. There is no wonder it is so. We know it from our studies in first and second language acquisition that the stage of perception always precedes that of production not only in the case of a baby acquiring his or her first language, but also in situations where a second or third language is being learnt.

It is almost entirely sure that my aunt and uncle, who had their first encounter with the English language in their twenties and have since been surrounded by a stimuli-weak environment, despite living in the target country will never acquire a native-like competence in English. That is, there is a substantial number of Hungarian ethnicity in Calgary – the hometown of my relatives – and keeping close links with the community and working on the maintenance of Hungarian traditions are what especially hinder complete assimilation into the mainstream society.

Even if one may succeed in building up an extended vocabulary and employing grammatical rules correctly, foreign accent is extremely difficult to get rid of. It is likely to be a distinctive feature, by means of which we can easily tell apart a fluent second language speaker from the native speaker of a given language. The influence of the mother tongue's accent, its intonation, rising and falling pitch etc. can be so powerful on second language use that my relatives, for instance, are still apt to utter English sentences with typical Hungarian intonation. There are even certain words that they cannot pronounce at all. These are mostly the ones containing sounds that are not parts of the Hungarian sound system, such as the 'th' letter combination standing for [θ] or [ð], e.g., *think* or *though*₂ sounding like [tink] or [dou] in their pronunciation. As for grammar rules, they frequently do not make a distinction between simple past and present perfect, and it is usually the former that they tend to use to convey the meaning of both tenses. Such tenses as past perfect or future perfect almost never occur in their speech. Also, sometimes they make mistakes like forgetting about subject-verb agreement or irregular plurals, such as *Ildikó liked sheeps when she was very young*. Nevertheless, these mistakes do not impede understanding in essence. Native Canadians – here I mean people who were born in Canada – do not make a fuss about incorrect language use, neither do they embarrass anyone for poor pronunciation. They even show

enthusiasm for foreign tongues, thereby providing a positive, friendly, and promoting atmosphere for second language learners to become bilinguals. It well explains why my relatives have never had a negative experience resulting from their bilingualism, other than self-induced feelings of being inferior to those Canadians who are native speakers of the English language. Canadians of English and French origin (still the majority) have no objection to hearing Hungarian, Ukrainian, Chinese etc. speech in public places, consequently these ethnicities do not feel excluded from the bigger collectivity and are helped to endure the initial pains of living in a foreign country.

I asked my relatives about the question of mother tongue, to which the answer was fairly unambiguous: my aunt and uncle consider Hungarian to be their mother tongue, as this is the language they first learned and by which they still cover a major part of their communicative needs. Counting, dreaming, thinking takes place predominantly in Hungarian, just like praying, speaking to oneself, keeping a diary and almost all kinds of activities of daily life. Nevertheless, while it is inevitable that certain situations be associated with the exclusive use of English (e.g., shopping, applying for jobs, or seeing the doctor), family life and conversations with other Hungarian immigrants are 'invaded' to a small extent by the influence of the English language. It is indeed very difficult for them to separate completely the two languages as there are certain words and expressions that normally emerge in English even if my relatives speak Hungarian to other members of the Hungarian ethnicity in family circles or in the church. Examples for such words and expressions include *garbage* (AmE, BrE=rubbish); the name of certain foods, like *jelly* (AmE, BrE=jam); words frequently used in sports games, such as *touchdown* in rugby, the favourite ball game of my uncle; names of electrical appliances my relatives could not have heard in Hungary in the 1950's as they were available only in western welfare states e.g., *microwave oven*, *computer*, *video player*; names of certain animals typically existing in Canada, such as *moose*, *coyote*, *polar bear* or *golfer*. Some other nouns connected to the work of their children are also mentioned by them predominantly in English, e.g., *office*, *secretary*, *boss*. Once my aunt praised my fit looks, which she expressed in the following way: *Juditka, hogy te milyen jó shape-ben vagy!*, meaning: *Juditka, you are in a very good shape!*. On other occasions, she informed her husband that *Ildikó secretary-je telefonált.*, wishing to convey that *Ildikó's secretary has phoned..* As it is demonstrated by the above mentioned examples, these words tend to be provided with Hungarian suffixes in Hungarian sentences. However, this kind of mixture of the two languages within one word does not take place the other way round (at least not consciously), i.e., the influence of their mother tongue on the way they speak English only manifests itself in incorrect intonation, pronunciation and sentences formed according to Hungarian grammar rules. My relatives, similarly to other members of linguistic minorities, are acutely aware that e.g., in a shop they cannot ask for 'a pair of blue farmer in size nyolc', as almost certainly it will not be understood by the shop assistant. On the other hand, virtually anyone in the Hungarian communities in Canada will know what 'moose' means when the word forms part of a Hungarian sentence.

It is usually at the beginning of second language learning that humorous situations come about as a result of incorrect language use. Since there are some English words that sound nearly the same, it is not rare with speakers of elementary level that they have trouble to tell the meanings of these words apart and may use them in an inappropriate context. For instance, one of my aunt's friends, who had already spent two weeks in Canada, insisted on finding the 'washroom' in the supermarket, while supposedly he must have been looking for some 'mushroom'.

It has already been stated above that the intonation of the mother tongue is likely to make its impact on the way a second language is spoken. It is not different the opposite way either. If two languages interact with one another, it is impossible to avoid that each of them influences the lexis, pronunciation etc. of the other. Therefore, my aunt and uncle feel they have got to the stage of not being able to speak either Hungarian or English correctly, the result being 'Hunglish', a sort of interlanguage. Their Hungarian vocabulary is fading as newer and newer English words are learnt and also they tend to make serious mistakes in spelling which (according to their own opinion) did not occur earlier at all.

1.3.2. The Bilingualism of Tibor and Ildikó, Children of My Aunt and Uncle

Tibor and Ildikó, now young adults, are native-born citizens of Canada. Language acquisition for them, be it in English or Hungarian, took place in an entirely different way than that of their parents. They belong to the group of those lucky individuals in Canada who, as second generation immigrants, have acquired both Hungarian and English without any difficulty. That is, they have parallelly experienced the influence of two languages almost from the beginning of their lives, thus acquisition was inclined to be a natural process related to their every-day activities. The language of the home was Hungarian, consequently neither Tibor nor Ildikó spoke English when they were under the age of 4, that is, before going to kindergarten. For instance Tibor, having been a shy and slightly introverted child, entirely refused to speak for months after he was enrolled in kindergarten. It was only later that he began to produce words in English. In the second year of primary school my aunt and uncle decided to have Tibor educated in Hungarian. The course was held in the church on Saturday mornings, with the primary aim of teaching children of Hungarian immigrants how to read and write the language. For the first time, learning Hungarian proved to exercise fairly adverse effects on Tibor's schooling in English. After a while, however, this process became reversed as a consequence of spending more and more time away from the family circle. Nowadays he is a fluent speaker of English, with an almost perfect competence in understanding, and a slightly weaker ability to speak the Hungarian language.

Ildikó, similarly to Tibor, had her first language experience in Hungarian. In addition, at the age of four her best friend was a German boy with whom she did not share any common language, consequently both of them were compelled to speak their own mother tongue without any barrier to understanding. It was the kindergarten and later on school that made both Ildikó and the German boy to develop proficiency in the English language. However, Ildikó was facing a significantly easier job when acquiring the official tongue of the country than Tibor in his childhood. That is, being the younger one, she was able to benefit from the then more experienced language use of her brother. It was the parents' conviction not to speak English to their children so that neither Tibor nor Ildikó would pick up a foreign accent or learn certain words and grammar rules incorrectly. Instead, my aunt read out Hungarian fairy tales and tried to provide a stimulating atmosphere for acquiring correct Hungarian as a first language. It is especially important to put more emphasis on teaching the heritage language at an early stage, as with the beginning of school years and work later on society necessitates members of ethnic minorities to use the dominant language in the course of every-day activities. If not treated properly, knowledge of the mother tongue (or first language) can easily be lost.

At the age of six, Ildikó had still just a partial command of English. It was due to this 'deficiency' that sometimes she could only guess the meanings of certain unknown words. For instance, once she imagined 'liver' to be something extraordinary after hearing the word but finally it turned out to be the food she most hated. During her university studies it sometimes happened that Ildikó

inserted words or phrases that were predominantly used in the family in Hungarian into her English sentences. However, she had not been aware of changing into another code until peers asked her what she really meant. This type of heterogeneous language use, frequently referred to as code-switching, is a common characteristic of bilingual speech production. Here, using the Hungarian form to convey a meaning is so strongly reinforced in the mind of Ildikó that lack of concentration or fast speech may result in the alternating use of two languages. It has also occurred that Ildikó was hoeing in the garden for a while when she phoned her mother to ask the English name of that garden tool. It was only then that she realised not having come across so far the English equivalent of the word 'kapa'. Nevertheless, it is indeed very rare that Ildikó or Tibor cannot express something in English given the fact that it is their dominant language.

The bilingual terminology in Canada refers not only to being fluent in both the English and the French languages, but also to having a native like competence in any other two languages. Therefore, Ildikó and Tibor think of themselves as being bilinguals because they fluently speak English and Hungarian. They can express virtually anything in Hungarian—which is their mother tongue in the sense that Hungarian was the first language spoken—, though what they speak is the version of the language their parents and some Hungarian acquaintances 'imported' to Canada in the 1950's and 1960's. Economic developments, changes in the socio-political and educational system as well as the growing impact of globalisation have contributed to the slight transformation of the Hungarian language. Certain words or expressions are now outdated and rarely if ever used in Hungary, while others – usually loan words or newly coined ones – are continuously adding to our vocabulary. However much my relatives try to maintain their heritage (the weekly paper 'Nóklapja' is delivered to them even to Canada), the absence of a modern, present-day Hungarian language community environment bar them from keeping pace with changes that take place in the official language in Hungary. During my short stay in Canada, I happened to greet my mother on the phone saying *Cső, anya!* (=Hi, mom!). After I had finished the conversation, Tibor expressed his astonishment at my using the Hungarian equivalent of the word 'pipe' to say hello to my mum. Tibor insisted that when he had been in Hungary in the 1980's there was no such fashion among Hungarian people for greeting each other.

Ildikó and Tibor have slight deficiencies in producing the Hungarian language as all their major education has been in English similarly to other day to day activities. Several days may pass before they have anyone to speak to in Hungarian. As for Ildikó, she finds reading the easiest of the four major skills, which she was able to learn by just speaking the language. However, there is not much that either Ildikó or Tibor cannot express in Hungarian, other than technical words that are used at work. Examples in Ildikó's case include *electromagnetic fields*, *neutrons*, or body muscles like *biceps*, etc. These expressions are almost never used with anyone who speaks Hungarian.

To their parents' Hungarian friends Ildikó and Tibor always speak Hungarian, while to people who belong to their own generation conversations almost ever take place in English even if they know Hungarian. However, if someone is not proficient in the English language they will speak to them in Hungarian (for instance, if he or she was born in Hungary and still prefers to speak that language). The language of the home (their parents' place) is Hungarian, but Tibor and Ildikó are inclined to speak English to one another. For instance, sentences like the following one are indeed very common in their speech when they are in family circle: *Mum, hol van a táskám? Have you seen it, Tibor?* There is, however, one further type of situation where the usage of the Hungarian language is preferred to that of English. When my relatives, similarly to other members of the Hungarian community in Calgary,

do not want other people or strangers in a public place to understand what they are talking about, the knowledge of a second language may always be very useful.

The two languages sometimes intervene, though Ildikó feels it is easy to separate English from Hungarian. It may occur now and then that she can remember a word in English or Hungarian, but not the other way round. She and Tibor do almost everything in English, be it thinking, dreaming, counting or speech to oneself (*Jesus!, Holy Cow!*), as they spend most of their time in that environment. However, depending on the situation their dreams or thoughts may be in Hungarian, too. For instance, when they are thinking about something relating to Hungary or dreaming about their parents or other Hungarian people, they would speak Hungarian to them. Nevertheless, both of them have a tendency towards English.

1.3.3. The Grandmother's Bilingualism

A further interesting phenomenon is the language use of the grandmother in the family under examination. Having been well over the critical age of language learning when she moved for a permanent stay to an utterly different language community, her chances to acquire the official tongue(s) of the country were extremely low. Still, she has developed a fairly high competence in understanding, and a slightly weaker ability to speak or write the English language.

Ida, the grandma, makes a good use of her knowledge of English when listening to the radio or to other people's conversations, as well as when watching TV or reading newspapers. The above mentioned example is well illustrated by a case which was rather frequent in Ildikó's adolescence. Accepting telephone calls from boyfriends was almost an every-day phenomenon, which made it possible for the grandmother to pick up phrases commonly used in the course of such conversations. Ildikó's frequently repeated answer, i.e. *So do I* let her arrive at the conclusion that the above mentioned phrase cannot be else than a reply to *I love you*. However, Ida had not completely been precise in her inference, as for quite a long time she was convinced that *So do I* bears the only meaning *I love you, too*. It is a serious misunderstanding to which similar ones are rather frequent and highly unavoidable in the course of language acquisition and learning. The absence of a formal education in English makes it almost impossible for her to get rid of falsely conditioned phrases, pronunciation, spelling or any other lexical or grammatical features or rules.

Given that a significant part of her stay in Canada has been spent with family members and in the company of other Hungarian immigrants, acquiring a fairly acceptable command of the English language through mistake correction was only possible when she could rely on the proficiency of her grandchildren. Watching television as well as following the daily programmes of the media are only passive ways of language acquisition. There is no feedback, no positive reinforcement that may be of central importance in the processes of learning a second language as well as during first language acquisition. The grandmother seems to be proficient in understanding the language and the message of soap operas, evening shows, though she is not fully able to reproduce correctly what has just been said.

Once that she summarised the major events of a series so as to make me familiar with the contents. Needless to say, what she performed was a chain of Hungarian sentences, now and then sprinkled with English words and expressions. There was a sentence that especially stuck in my mind: *Aztán John bezárta a feleségét, mert jealous volt rá*, with the meaning: *Then John locked up his wife because he was jealous of her*. On other occasions when I spoke to her on the phone she did not fail to inform me about her grandchildren in the following way: *Juditkám, ha tudnád, Ildiko és Tibor milyen busy-k! Ildikónak nem jut ideje még a boyfriendjére sem*, wishing to convey: *My dear Juditka, you cannot imagine how busy Ildikó and Tibor are! Ildikó is not able to spare a little time even for her*

boyfriend. For the first time sentences like these sound very strange but after a while it is easy to get used to such an interlanguage.

Instances of code-switching, i.e. when speakers of two or more languages change code in order to cover their communicational needs with the language appropriate to the message or to their linguistic abilities, are much more rare in Ida's speech. The simple reason to explain this situation is that she does not have a high competence in English that would enable her to select between languages at random. If she does, it is to make good for the deficiency in her second language by the inevitable use of the mother tongue. Code switching in Ida's speech is likely to take place when she gets involved in a conversation with a Croatian neighbour of the family. The essence of linguistic interaction is in English, though there are some cases when a gap in their common knowledge of the language emerges. As a result, they are compelled to rely on those few Hungarian words that are shared by both my relative and the Croatian neighbour, or simply on body language and miming.

1.4. Conclusion

Drawing a conclusion from all that has been said, this study has to emphasise that code-switching and code-mixing, are unique features of bilingual speech production. To varying degrees, every person who is a speaker of two or more languages makes mixed use of the elements of distinct languages and changes code according to his or her needs. However proficient a bilingual may be in language comprehension and production, from time to time it seems rather unaccomplishable to separate completely the underlying structure and actual manifestation of one language from that of the other.

The aim of the present study has been to support theoretical statements concerning the phenomena of code-switching and -mixing by providing actual manifestations of bilingual speech production. Apparently none of my relatives in Canada are able to handle the English and Hungarian languages as two separate systems. From time to time, elements of one language occur when operating with the other code in the course of a conversation or a single utterance.

The extent to which my relatives make a mixed use of the two languages allows us to categorise these people, whether they are code switchers or code mixers. Considering the illustrating examples in the empirical part of this study, one may arrive at a final conclusion. That is to say, since Ildikó and Tibor, young adults are able to operate with two languages according to their needs and switch into the other language only when the situation requires it, they are termed as code-switchers. However, the language use of my aunt, uncle and the grandma is dominated by elements of both languages, consequently it is hardly possible to tell in the course of a single utterance which language they are using currently. Therefore, the elder generation is considered to be code-mixers of Hungarian and English.

In the western part of Canada English is spoken everywhere, there is no need for Hungarian in the work or school environments. However, knowledge of a second or third language is always to the advantage of the individual. It is a treasure, it is profitable, we can improve it or lose it. It is part of our identity. Immigrants like my relatives are indeed special and valuable members of the Canadian society, considering the unique nature of every bilingual's communicative abilities. That is, their varied language use may serve as a major field of research for linguistics and allow experts of the present discipline to explore new trends in multiple language acquisition.