Bilingualism in Action

Bilingual language behaviour is driven by numerous factors that are usually studied in isolation, even though individual factors never operate alone. Bringing together key insights from psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, Luna Filipović presents a new model of bilingual language processing that captures bilingualism within and across minds. The model enables readers to explain traditional puzzles in the field, and accounts for some apparently contradictory reports in different studies. It shows how theory can be applied in practice and how practice feeds back into theory, with mutual benefits. Bilinguals are studied in action, when they interact with other bilinguals or monolinguals, when they recall witnessed events in real life and in the lab and when they translate and interpret for the benefit of monolinguals. This interdisciplinary take on bilingualism in action will lead to new research on bilingualism itself, and will lend itself to applications in forensic linguistics and translation studies.

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Theory and Practice

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To the loves of my life, Luzzi, Aria, Jack and mama Marina, who made it possible, and at times almost impossible, to write this book.

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Preface

Bilingualism in action is about how and why bilinguals use their languages in the many ways they do. This book is not 'everything you need to know about bilingualism', but it offers something you will want to know and that you will find fascinating if you are a bilingual, or if you study bilinguals or work or live around them. It offers a holistic view of *bilingualism within minds and across minds* and provides a uniform account of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors that shape bilingual behaviours in individuals and societies. Its primary intended audience is academic; more precisely, professional researchers of bilingualism and university teachers of language-related disciplines, such as theoretical and applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, forensic linguistics, cognitive science and translation studies. The book also offers novel insights of relevance to language professionals more generally, such as teachers of foreign languages, interpreters, translators and communication consultants.

Human communication itself is complex and bilingual human communication has an additional layer of complexity, whereby multiple factors interact but the product of their interaction is not always the same. We often get disparate research results in the literature precisely because there are many factors involved and some play a more prominent role than others in different circumstances. Mapping the patterns of this interaction and being in a position to predict outcomes based on the interplay of different factors in different circumstances will enable us to provide a more unified account of bilingual language use. We will take a novel and interdisciplinary approach here to some traditional puzzles and point out some new challenges as well as provide suggestions about how to approach and overcome them in the future.

It is well known that bilinguals differ with respect to how proficient they are in each of the two languages. They are also known to adjust their linguistic behaviour and behave differently depending on who they are talking to. For instance, I am a very proficient L2 English speaker whose first language is Serbian. I keep my Serbian in check very well when I am just speaking English to other English speakers. But if I know that my interlocutor is another Serbian–English bilingual I may switch to Serbian occasionally, which is not something

I would do with interlocutors who are monolingual in English. My linguistic behaviour is therefore different in these two situations. Yet another different situation is when I am at my dinner table at home, surrounded by my friends or family, who range from monolingual speakers (e.g. of either English or Serbian) to multilingual speakers (of two or more languages). Then I will speak to my mother in Serbian, to my husband in English and to my elder daughter in Serbian or English (and occasionally also Italian, when we want to keep something super-private). When I do this, I find myself less able to monitor my use of each language successfully than when I speak just one in a single conversation. This is precisely when I would tend to use more of the words or structures that English and Serbian share. I would try to bring my English and my Serbian as close together as possible without making mistakes and creating misunderstandings in either (at least that is what I hope for!). For example, I have noticed that, when using both languages in a single communicative situation, I use many more so-called 'overt subjects' in my Serbian sentences even though Serbian is what is known as a 'pro-drop language' and it allows subjects not to be expressed (because other parts of the sentence make it clear who or what the subject is). In contrast, I do habitually 'drop my subjects' when I am speaking only Serbian. I have also noticed that even when I am using just one language, English, I tend to insist on disambiguating the past simple tense. When my husband says 'the baby ate the food you left for her', I always ask 'Did she it eat all up?' This difference is all-important if you are trying to feed a reluctant baby! Saying just 'ate the food' could have either a perfective-complete interpretation (i.e. the baby ate the whole thing) or an imperfective-incomplete one (i.e. the baby ate some but not all of it). The English past simple tense does not strictly specify each meaning, but Serbian does: you must always decide if the whole thing was consumed or not because different verb forms signal one or the other meaning (this is called 'aspect' in language). My Serbian (and, on this occasion, my motherly care) urges me to seek a resolution for even the slightest possible ambiguity between perfective and imperfective that the English past simple tense does not give me. I do not insist on this distinction in English all of the time, but I am much more aware of it and use it whenever it matters to me. And I am sure that every bilingual speaker on the planet has similar stories to tell. In this book I want to capture what lies behind such stories, and what all bilinguals share as well as what makes them different from each other. Different languages, different personal linguistic narratives and different circumstances under which they use their languages all have a role to play, and here we analyse these roles separately and also, more importantly, together.

These multilingual dinner-table struggles of mine actually inspired me to write this book. They gave me the basic insight that *bilingualism in action* is characterised by malleability, conditioned by who the interlocutors are and

what the purpose of the communication is (e.g. multilingual dinner-table chat vs. monolingual international boardroom meeting).

In spite of the increased interest in bilingualism as a phenomenon and the growth of bilingual research, there has not yet been **a holistic account** of both the psychology of bilingualism, i.e. the knowledge and representation of more than one language within minds, and the social and communicative use of that knowledge across minds in different contexts of use. Moreover, the field of bilingualism research seems to be addressing a myriad of different issues under different conditions and coming up with an overwhelming variety of outcomes. The aim of this book is to provide a unifying framework that can enable us to make predictions about, and find explanations for, the different outcomes when different types of languages are used by different kinds of bilingual speakers in different contexts. It is about all bilinguals, and it is for all bilinguals.

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I am profoundly grateful to my kids, Lucrezia and Aria, for teaching me a lot about bilingualism first-hand and for filling our dinner-table conversations with insights about bilingual minds, in addition to revelations about their wonderful, happy worlds. And a big thank you to Jack, for loving me the right way.

I was also incredibly fortunate to have had an excellent education, both in my motherland, Serbia, and in my adopted homeland, England. My first steps in linguistics were made under the supervision of Ranko Bugarski, at the University of Belgrade, who introduced me to his novel ideas in linguistics, which would later turn into important subfields (such as cognitive linguistics) and in which Ranko was a pioneer as early as the 1960s. It was an honour to be his student and it is to him that I owe my preparedness for PhD research at the University of Cambridge. I got lucky again in having Peter Matthews as my PhD supervisor; Peter taught me how to think critically, to scratch below the surface of nicely phrased claims and see what, if anything, lay underneath before I got too excited about them. My interest in typology in general and motion events in particular was inspired by Dan Slobin, and led to my specialisation in psycholinguistics. I feel privileged to have been able to think and talk about motion, and all things language, with Dan, and to call him my friend. And this segues nicely into thanking all my friends. This book would not have been here without them because they helped me arrive at a place where I was able to write it; so thank you Macki, Vlada, Mara, Ivan Mica, Gaga, Aca, Vesna, Ljuba, Cica, Duško, Mina, Ana, Nigel, Debs, Tom, Sharon, Mario, Matt, Tomoko, Lena and Diane.

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Finally, *Bilingualism in Action* started as an intriguing idea about bilingual linguistic behaviour that came to me during one of those exuberant conversations at my multilingual family dinner table, and it was not long before I realised that I had actually figured out a way to capture the multifaceted nature of bilingual language representation and use. I hope this work inspires further research into bilingual and multilingual communication at dinner tables across the world, as well as in other situations and with many different language combinations.