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Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Contact linguistics: Gibraltar as a case study.

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ABSTRACT

The complex linguistic situation of Gibraltar is the result of linguistic evolution throughout the relatively short history of the community and its small geographical area. Even though, the situation could still be described as diglossic where an autochthonous variety of Spanish, known as Yanito to its speakers, acts as the low variety whereas the low variety represents the higher and prestigious one. Through recent studies on Gibraltar's linguistic context it can be stated that a new process called code-switching, whereby languages are mixed and negotiated within a conversation, has emerged. This event, which takes place only in informal situations, shows the expansion of English to spheres where it was not present previously. Thus, it could be stated that although Yanito is still being regarded as a low variety relegated only to informal use, the once exclusive diglossic situation in the Rock is evolving into a more open one based in the phenomenon of code-switching due to English being introduced into informal contexts. In this paper it will be demonstrated that while Yanito is reducing its usage spectrum in favour of the English language, it will not face linguistic death as it is an essential source of communitarian identity in Gibraltar

KEYWORDS: Gibraltar, Yanito, languages in contact, bilingualism, diglossia, code-switching.

RESUMEN

La compleja situación lingüística de Gibraltar es el resultado de una evolución lingüística a través de una relativamente corta historia de la comunidad y en un territorio cuyo espacio es muy limitado. Esta situación, sin embargo, puede aún denominarse diglósica donde una variedad autóctona evolucionada del español, conocida por sus hablantes como Yanito, actúa como la variedad baja mientras que el inglés representa la

variedad alta y prestigiosa. A través de los recientes estudios acerca del actual contexto lingüístico en Gibraltar, cabe señalar que un proceso lingüístico conocido como ‘code-switching’ (cambio de código) por el cual los hablantes cambian de idioma en un plano conversacional ha surgido en la zona. Este evento, que en el caso de Gibraltar toma lugar únicamente en contextos informales responde a la expansión que el inglés está llevando a cabo hacia otras esferas que previamente no le correspondían. Es por ello que se puede señalar que aunque el Yanito es todavía considerada por sus hablantes como la variedad ‘baja’ relegada únicamente al uso informal, la previamente única situación diglósica del Peñón está evolucionando hacia otra más abierta basada en la conducta del code-switching, debido principalmente a la extensión del uso del inglés a contextos más informales. En este ensayo quedará demostrado que aunque el Yanito está viendo reducido su espectro de uso a favor del inglés, este no se enfrentara a su extinción ya que representa una fuente esencial de identidad comunitaria en Gibraltar.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gibraltar, Yanito, lenguas en contacto, bilingüismo, diglosia, ‘code-switching’.

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Introduction

Gibraltar represents a highly interesting case study for the field of contact linguistics. Its status as the only English speaking community within the Spanish mainland territory, its negligible population, the small geographical area it is settled in, its proximity to the closest Spanish speaking areas, and its historical background make it one of the most relevant examples of the possible outcomes for languages in contact. This concern for the case of Gibraltar is strengthened when taking in consideration the importance of the two languages in contact. Being English the lingua franca of the 21th century and most widespread with the highest number of speakers of it as L2 all over the globe and Spanish the second most spoken language according to the number of native speakers –according to *Ethnologue*- it is understandable the interest that such a community creates within the field of sociolinguistics.

Although English has status ‘de facto’ on the territory, it is not the only language spoken on the Rock. Despite coexisting with the oppressive linguistic force of English, which still holds the importance and usage typical of its status, Yanito, an autochthonous variety of Spanish, emerged during years of British occupation. In this paper I will discuss that the linguistic situation in Gibraltar is, indeed, a bilingual setting evolved from a previous diglossic one where English and ‘Yanito’, as the variety is known to its speakers, coexist with some lasting traces of that diglossia. Furthermore, and using as source previous sociolinguistic studies on multilingualism I will prove that Yanito, although certainly problematic in its classification as a code due to its similarities with Spanish, is indeed a variety evolved from the regional dialect of Andalusian Spanish that presents some linguistic features product of the contact of languages. This phenomena and code-switching in particular, apart from relating Yanito to some other creole or semi-creole languages could predict the variety’s extinction.

Nevertheless, in this paper it will be stated that code-switching does not suppose in fact the death of this code as Yanito represents an essential element of cohesion and identity among Gibraltarians.

In the following pages, the linguistic situation in Gibraltar will be discussed firstly through the presentation of the historical and geographical background of the territory in order to give some light into the emergence of a bilingual situation in Gibraltar. Secondly the focus will be set onto the autochthonous variety, 'Yanito' in order to explain its origin and discuss it as a autochthonous variety evolved from Spanish rather than a proper language, something that will be done attending to scholarly classifications of codes, such as the one made by Paul B. Garrett (2006). Moreover, the current bilingual situation in Gibraltar will be conceptualized attending to the progressive encroachment of English in informal domains in order to prove Yanito's usage progressive reduction. Finally the process of code-switching in Gibraltar will be studied attending to Moyer's article "Bilingual conversation strategies in Gibraltar" and the level classification of Peter Auer (1998) and Kathryn Woolard (2006).

1. Geographical and Historical Background in Gibraltar.

The study of the linguistic situation of Gibraltar has to be considered as distinctive and unique and the result of its characteristic geographical, historical and social context. Being the last and still disputed colony of the British Empire in European mainland and most importantly, the last dominion within the territory of the former world power, Spain, Gibraltar holds a great consideration in contrast to other British overseas territories. It is mostly regarded as David Lambert points out, as "an important place in the mythology of the British Empire as a symbol of military glory, resilience, steadfastness and strength" (211).

Gibraltar, “situated on the southern tip of the Iberian peninsula [. . .] measuring just 6 km² in all, and stretching just 4.8 km from North to South, is a territory whose habitable space is limited” (Levey, 1), especially taking in mind that much of this land is occupied by the characteristic Rock or ‘Peñón’. It is considered a British colony, nowadays ‘British territory overseas’, since 1705 when Great Britain took control of it after signing the Utrecht treaty. Since then, the Rock has served as a maritime harbour and strategic geographic point for England through the period of the British Empire. In the time of British control, most of the Spanish population occupying previously the territory left the colony, leading to consequent immigration waves that left the Rock with a heterogeneous and multicultural population of Spanish, Portuguese, Genoese, Moroccan, Sephardic and British origin..

During the WWII, many Gibraltarians were evacuated to different crown territories, such as Great Britain, Madeira or Jamaica. There, Gibraltarians contacted other British communities, realising their linguistic and cultural differences and the influence that Spain had on them. Despite this momentary approach towards Spain also favoured by influence of Spanish radio and television, Franco’s government decision of closing the gate in 1969 marked a huge setback to the process of cultural and linguistic rapprochement. This event was consequently traumatic for the economy, both for Gibraltar, who suffered a severe economic crisis, and also for the adjacent municipalities of the Campo de Gibraltar, as several thousands of Spaniards worked in the colony, thus causing a radical separation between Gibraltar and Spain, reflected particularly among the inhabitants of the Rock, who changed the image that Gibraltarians had of Spain, of course, deteriorating.

The gates of ‘la verja’ as the border is known to the inhabitants of the territory were finally reopened in 1982 after the Spanish adhesion to the European Union. This

event reunited families separated for decades and thus represents an essential event in the history of Gibraltar. Nevertheless, it didn't completely translate into a change of perspective from the people of the Rock towards their Spanish neighbours. Incidents between the authorities in both sides of the disputed land continued until present times. Furthermore, in the referendum called in 2002 suggesting a British-Spanish shared sovereignty over the territory a 99% of the voters rejected it.

2. Linguistic Context: English-Spanish Bilingualism in Gibraltar and the emergence of 'Yanito'.

As mentioned previously, these elements of geography, history and society had led to a unique linguistic outcome that has to be regarded as special in the field of contact linguistics, not only for the importance of the languages 'per se' but also due to the previously commented facts. In fact, as Melissa G. Moyer (1998) points out:

“Gibraltarians, in spite of their multi-ethnic past, constitute a relatively homogeneous group. They share developed linguistic competence in both English and Spanish, as well as similar norms of language use. The language variety currently spoken in Gibraltar is referred as 'Yanito' [or Llanito]” (216)

This multilingual context has been favoured by the elements previously discussed in many characteristic ways. After the first British settlement in the Rock and despite the different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of that first inhabitants of the colony and the early established status of English as the language 'de facto', the vast majority of the population was only Spanish speaking, except for a minor elite of colonist. This situation, which remained unchanged in the territory until relatively recently, was also promoted by the fact that most immigrants and many of the women marrying those colonists were of Spanish background, especially from La Linea de la Concepción and

the neighbouring territories of Campo de Gibraltar. Due to the origin of the Spanish-speaking population of Gibraltar and the heterogeneous ethnic and linguistic background of the rest of inhabitants –of the lower classes especially- the original south-western Andalusian variety of Spanish developed into the territory.

This new variety, although sharing many similarities to that spoken in the closest regions, developed new features distancing itself from Spanish. This situation was further marked after the closure of the border in the mid-20th century, for English expanded to the majority of the population and abandoned the strictly higher variety with the status of ‘lingua de facto’, limited before to the authorities and elite. This expansion appeared as a result of the implementation of a monolingual educational system, the strengthening of English in wider domains and in formal and official situations, the incorporation of women at work, the spreading of British media and the cessation of Andalusian workers from the surrounding areas.

In consequence, a bilingual situation in the territory emerged with English coexisting with the autochthonous variety, Yanito, which remained in the colony as the domestic language still used in most informal contexts and by older generations. Thus, the autochthonous variety was definitely affected. As Moyer suggest, nowadays Yanito “consists of various patterns of code switching with a proportionally small lexical substratum from Italian, Hebrew, Arabic and local vernacular” (Moyer, 216). This negligible variety due to the low numbers of speakers it accounts and the small territory it is spoken in is ultimately the linguistic result of languages in contact.

2.1 ‘Yanito’ as the outcome of languages in contact.

Although scholars still argue on the forms of the possible outcomes for this process, it is generally accepted that Yanito doesn’t represent a fully constructed form

of a contact language. According to the specialized website *Ethnologue*, Yanito represents just a variety of Spanish, mainly due to its similarities with this language. Nevertheless, it could be stated that Yanito is indeed an autochthonous code derived from the south-western Andalusian variety of Spanish that, as a result of the process of contact with other languages, particularly English, has distanced itself from it. Thus, it is rather incorrect to consider Yanito a mere variety of Spanish. Statements such as the one made by Davies and Ramish in their review of Levey's *Language Change and Variation in Gibraltar* suggesting that "the history and geography of the Rock have made it a bilingual community, with English as its only official language but Spanish widely used" (708) are at the least erroneous and misleading. The question on how Yanito should be understood and whether or not it should be considered a distinctive language is still the source of many linguistic debates, not only among researchers and experts on the linguistic situation in Gibraltar, but also among the speakers of this variety.

Firstly, Yanito could be understood in terms of a fully formed language attending to some of its similarities with the commonly studied creole languages. Yanito, just as the rest of the codes in this classification appeared when "two or more human groups with different languages –and in most cases, different cultures [. . .] - encountered one another and attempted to engage in linguistic communication" (48). Furthermore, it is "of quite recent origin, having arisen no more than three to four centuries ago in context associated with European exploration and colonialism" (Garrett, 47). And finally, although some scholars such as Garrett (2006) suggest intelligibility as a main feature for the classification of a language saying that "the contact language is not fully mutually intelligible with any of these pre-existing languages" (47), Yanito could still be considered as a proper language due to the

debatable quality of this characteristic as a defining feature for language. In fact, some considered proper languages such as Swedish and Norwegian, in example, are mutually intelligible. As Li Wei (2008) points out “speakers of both codes “can easily communicate by speaking their own language” (4). Thus, intelligibility cannot be used in the conceptualization of language. Therefore, it could be admitted that attending to this factors, Yanito is a discrete and distinctive code.

Nevertheless, it has to be stated, as most scholars suggest, that this variety of the area of the Rock should not be considered a proper language, mainly due to its similarities with Spanish but also to the use of code-switching. Attending to its similarities to Spanish, it could be said, using Paul B. Garret’s words that Yanito is not “sufficiently distinct form its source languages to be regarded [. . .] –on structural, historical, and ethnographic grounds, if not necessarily on political and ideological grounds- as a discrete code” (Garrett, 48). Linguists and researchers specialized on the linguistic situation in Gibraltar also suggest this status for Yanito. This is the case of David Levey, who states that “its [Yanito’s] proximity to Spanish gives it, to use Haugen’s terminology, heteronomous status in that it is a language variety which is socially or culturally dependent on an autonomous one” (Levey, 3). In general, Yanito shares too many features with its closest variety of Spanish to be considered a language as such.

In addition, Yanito has developed the phenomenon known within contact linguistics as code-switching. This process, essential part in the usage of Yanito, consists in the variation of language among bilingual speakers attending to the context where the discourse event is produced –informal situations normally-. Although some advocates use this effect to defend Yanito’s status as a language, code-switching is not necessarily a defining element for the distinctiveness of a code. In fact, Paul B. Garret

distinguishes three types of possible outcomes in cases of languages in contact: Pidgins and Creoles, Semi-creoles and “other outcomes of language contact [. . .] too dynamic to be reified as codes at all and must be conceptualized as processes or practices, such as code-switching” (49). Thus, the variety of Gibraltar needs to be classified within the last group and merely considered as a complex linguistic variety based on the process of code-switching.

2.2 Bilingual outcome after the prior diglossic situation in Gibraltar.

If there is one characteristic that distinguishes Gibraltar’s linguistic situation from other multilingual areas is that, although code-switching is a central process in the Rock’s speech, it only takes place in certain situations. Kathryn A. Woolard suggests that “communities also vary in the degree to which they mix their languages together or in contrast, keep them strictly compartmentalized” (73). In her words Woolard suggests the incompatibility of code-switching and diglossia. However, Gibraltar’s situation represents a special case of linguistic transition where some features of the diglossic communities and code-switching still coexist.

Being Gibraltar’s current situation the evolution of a former diglossic context, since the closure of ‘la verja’ it is suffering a process whereby it is becoming a bilingual one where diglossia has become ultimately diluted. The process of code-switching between English and Yanito taking place only in informal contexts shows the extension of the English language even to informal settings previously assigned only to Yanito, thus demonstrating the emergence of a bilingual behaviour with some lasting diglossic elements. Therefore, diglossia, although still present in Gibraltar due to the lasting presence of Yanito, is being recently minimalized by the extension of English. In the current linguistic context, English, which previously was limited only to the authorities

as the official language and ‘lingua de facto’, encroached to the more informal context as a result of the closing of the border whereas Yanito remained limited to that status and became progressively substituted by English in that field too. It is in those informal situations where languages enter in contact and thus code-switching appears.

Diglossia is an element that has been rather important in the recent sociolinguistic studies for languages in contact. One of the most relevant research was made by C.A. Ferguson, who stated that a precise diglossic situation “exists in a society when it has two distinct codes which show clear functional separation; that is, one code is employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entire different set” (qtd. in Wardhaugh, 90). In this line, Ferguson distinguished two different varieties: “the superposed variety in diglossias will be called the high variety or simply H, and the regional dialects will be called low varieties, or simply L” (Ferguson, 234). Thus, there can be distinguished at least two different varieties which hold opposed status and are used distinctively.

The ideal situation studied by Ferguson (1959) in the first place would represent to a great extent the linguistic situation present in the Rock in the times prior to the closure of the ‘verja’. In this line diglossia in Gibraltar would refer to the situation of Yanito with respect to English, where English would hold the high (H) variety as it is the official language and ‘lingua de facto’ whereas Yanito represents the low (L) one limited only to an informal and ‘domestic use’. According to the scholar, the characterization of the diglossic situation needs to reflect a separation attending several factors: Function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon, phonology. In fact Yanito, prior to the closure of the border, responded as the L variety to all the characteristics established by Ferguson. Currently, in contrast, this situation has been altered and, although Yanito has remained limited to

the L variety in all the previous features, English broke with the previous stability by extending itself to the field of the L variety, mostly in terms of function and acquisition.

2.3 Code Switching in the current linguistic context of Gibraltar.

As noted above, Yanito, understood as the autochthonous variety derived from the neighbouring Andalusian Spanish, has experienced recently a form of code-switching with the official language in the area, English. Code-switching “can be defined as an individual’s use of two or more language varieties in the same speech event or exchange” (Woolard, 74). Although early studies on code-switching found it ungrammatical and lacking meaning and “rather indicative of a speaker’s incomplete control of the language” (74), later research has uplifted it, being since the early 1970 considered “systematic, skilled and socially meaningful” (74). In the case of this study, it also shows a progressive encroachment of one language over the other.

In her study of code-switching in Gibraltar made between 1987 and 1992, the scholar Melissa G. Moyer, collected data “from various social interactions” (215) attempting to classify and define the phenomenon taking place in the area. In order to support her statements on this process, Moyer turns to a corpus of fictional conversations extracted from the *Panorama* newspaper in Gibraltar. Through the presentation of a conversational example within the ones found in the article, the features of Gibraltarian code-switching will be discussed. In this excerpt two women have an informal conversation on the topic of the remodelling of the airport of Gibraltar with which they show discomfort.

“[1] – *Y quién fue el Séneca* que decided to put the arrivals waiting area outside the main concourse? (WHO WAS THE SMARTY WHO)

[2] – *Como que hace falta un concurso para enterarse.* (WE NEED A COMPETITION TO FIND OUT)

[3] – *Y dicen,* it can handle one million passengers! (AND THEY SAY)

[4] – *Qué comedia.* Do you know there is room for a single immigration officer to check all departures? *Imagínate* if one person had to check a million passports a year. You don't say... (WHAT A COMEDY/ IMAGINE)" (219).

Through the negotiation of codes visible in the example and attending to the Woolard's and Peter Auer's level distinction in code-switching, an analysis of the levels for language choice in common speech can be done. The first most noticeable lack is Woolard's situational switch. The fact that the speech is made in an informal context avoids a shift "involving changes in the definition of the speech [. . .] and the participants' rights and obligations" (Woolard, 75). Thus, to use Auer's terms there is no change in the highest level –suprasententially- which would most likely happen only in formal contexts. Nevertheless, it does appear Woolard's metaphorical or conversational switching, the middle and low levels for Auer. That is to say that there are indeed code changes both inter and intrasententially as can be seen in the intersentential code switch in 2 and the use of short Yanito Spanish structures in 1, 3 and 4.

It is interesting to see that as Moyer points out, while *Panorama* is mostly written in English with a serious tone, it is this humoristic columns that contain the only lines in Spanish. This situation suggests acknowledgement of the diglossic situation in their area and the progressive encroachment of English to other domains. However, it is the "frequent switching of codes that acts as a deliberate strategy to reinforce local identity and avoid association with the Spanish or British one" (221).

Conclusion

As stated through this essay, Gibraltar's complex linguistic context is a consequence of its own geography, society and especially history, something that makes it a rather important case of study for contact linguistics. However, through this study, it has been demonstrated that some linguistic sense can be found. Thus, it should be stated that although a precise diglossic context in Gibraltar between the autochthonous variety evolved from Andalusian Spanish and English existed, this situation has already turned into a bilingual one with traits of diglossia where English has suffered and encroachment to more informal fields through processes such as code-switching, while Yanito fights to remain as the autochthonous but low variety. Nevertheless, it is this phenomenon that has turned Yanito into a much more appreciated variety, which nowadays stands for an essential value for the identity of the Gibraltarian community. And this symbolic function in the community could save Yanito from extinction.

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