Distinguishing between Code-switching and Borrowing: evaluating the criteria on the basis of Polish-Russian data

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The aim of this poster is to assess the criteria that have been proposed for distinguishing between the processes of code-switching and borrowing on the basis of the Polish-Russian data, collected in the Polish community in Lithuania. Virtually all members of the Polish community are bilingual in the local variety of Polish (L1) and Russian (L2). The extensive use of several languages led to the emergence of two closely-related phenomena: extensive code-switching and borrowing. However, as the existing research suggests, separating the two processes can be problematic.

One of the most common criteria for distinguishing between borrowing and switching is that of morphosyntactic integration into the recipient language (Poplack & Meechan 1998). According to this criterion, for a lexical item to be classified as a switch, it must retain the morphology, syntax and phonology of the donor language; if the lexical item assumes the morpho-syntactic, and often phonological identity of the recipient language, it must be a borrowing.

The Polish-Russian data reveal that some Russian lexical items behave like single switches, i.e. they retain their original morphology, while others become integrated into the Polish base. However, the existing research suggests that ad-hoc integration of code-switched items is also possible. As the present data demonstrate, what matters is the degree of morphological integration of a given lexical item. If integration appears only at the surface level, e.g. assignment of a Polish inflectional suffix (‘sukharik’-ów – [of] biscuits [Gen]), the lexical item is likely to be a single switch. However, when integration involves multiple layers, e.g. change of several morphemes accompanied by a change of stress, a lexical item should be treated as a borrowing (e.g.: Polish ’przetwarza263; si281;’ from Russian ’pritvorjat’sja’).

Additional criteria, such as regularity and frequency of use are also taken into account where data exist.

Keywords: Polish, code-switching, borrowing.