

Script choice as an indicator of loanword status in bilingual writing

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The use of multiple writing systems within the same community has been the subject of some sociolinguistic research (Bright 1996, Smith and Schmidt 1996, Grivelet 2001, Fishman 2001), but generally not in the context of language contact (a notable exception being Ladousa 2002). However, the association between languages and writing systems makes script variation a valuable resource for the analysis of linguistic items whose attribution to a particular language is ambiguous. In particular, the distinction between single-item codeswitching and borrowing in bilingual speech has been the subject of much debate (Sankoff and Poplack 1984, Myers-Scotton 1993, Poplack and Meechan 1998, Muysken 2000) and remains controversial, particularly where the two are phonologically indistinguishable. In bilingual writing however, if the two languages in question are commonly written in different scripts, then script choice may provide the researcher with an additional piece of evidence. Where authors attempt to integrate elements from both languages within one text, they may either alternate between writing systems, or they may transliterate words from one language into the writing system of the other language. Transliteration would seem to pattern with borrowing and script alternation with codeswitching. Russian-English bilingualism provides an example of language contact involving different writing systems.

In this paper, I analyze script variation in the writing of Russian-speaking immigrants in New York City. My analysis is based on a data set of 1,263 English lexical NPs occurring in Russian sentences. The data were taken from classified advertisements and local news articles in Russian-language newspapers published in New York, thus texts of varying degrees of formality that can be assumed to have been written by Russian speakers residing in the city. The Roman and Cyrillic alphabets are nearly equally represented in the data set, but the variation between them is constrained by a variety of linguistic and social factors. Where Russian syntax requires overt case-marking, it never shows up on English nouns that are written in Roman script (0/225) but is almost always present on those written in Cyrillic script (367/379), a finding clearly reminiscent of Poplack's (1980) "free morpheme constraint."

To determine additional constraints on script choice, I carried out a multivariate analysis using Goldvarb on a subset of the data, specifically, tokens where overt case-marking was not required. After removing frequently occurring invariant types, 514 tokens remained. The linguistic factors found to condition script choice to a statistically significant degree (type frequency and the NP's internal constituency) suggest further parallels between transliteration and borrowing. In addition, more formal environments favor transliteration. Overall, the analysis confirms the usefulness of the distinction between borrowing and codeswitching, and it assesses the diagnostic criteria for

loanword status that have been proposed in the sociolinguistic literature. The paper demonstrates the value of written data for linguists working on language contact.

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