

LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRE IN THE CONTEXT OF RESEARCH ON MULTILINGUALISM

REPERTOIRE LINGUISTIQUE DANS LE CONTEXTE DE LA RECHERCHE SUR LE PLURILINGUISME

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Abstract

The speaker's linguistic repertoire is one of the determining factors of linguistic communication. It is also an important starting point for research on communicative behaviour in situations characterised by the presence of language contact. The linguistic repertoire represents the equipment speakers bring to their communicative activity. Thanks to it they can cope with even difficult situations of misunderstanding. The linguistic repertoire is the sum of knowledge about languages and the sum of linguistic competences related to all the languages spoken. The paper defines the concept from a theoretical perspective and points out the potential of research on language repertoires, especially in relation to research on multilingualism. In the analytical section, the results of a research task on oral multilingual communication are presented. It is highlighted how they relate to the mapping of language repertoires. Using the example of two speakers with multilingual competence but with different linguistic repertoires, the authors show what strategies these speakers choose to avoid misunderstanding in verbal interaction. The aim is to highlight the necessity of understanding linguistic repertoires and choosing an adequate methodology for mapping them.

Keywords

linguistic repertoire, multilingualism, sociolinguistics, communication

Introduction

The aim of this study is to introduce the concept of linguistic repertoire as a factor determining language communication between speakers, but also as an important starting point for research on communicative behaviour in situations characterised by the presence of language contact. The linguistic repertoire represents speakers' equipment that they carry when they enter communicative events, and which enables them to communicate in accordance with their goals and intentions. The linguistic repertoire can be imagined as a set of knowledge about languages and a set of linguistic competences that are formed in contact with the multicultural world. We will first look at linguistic repertoires from a sociolinguistic perspective, presenting the available theoretical perspectives on the issue. We will then highlight the potential of research on linguistic repertoires and the contribution of mapping them to multilingualism research. In the analytical section, we will focus on contextualizing the results of two research probes involving the mapping of linguistic repertoires. It will be pointed out that mapping repertoires through self-evaluation is by no means sufficient. Repertoires show better in practical communication activity where they link with specific types of communicative behaviour.

1 Definition of linguistic repertoire

Gumperz (1960) defines linguistic repertoire as one of the basic sociolinguistic concepts. He defines it first as a set of linguistic forms regularly used in socially significant interaction, then as a set of linguistic resources available to members of a linguistic community. According to Gumperz, the linguistic repertoire is thus a matter of an essentially monolithic and bounded language community.

Gal (2006, pp. 150-151) brings a different perspective. She states that most communication does not take place within a language community but across language communities. Whether we share this view or not, the fact remains that it is in the European territory, due to the high degree of linguistic and cultural diversity, that we can observe such communicative overlaps very often. The same is true of the formation of linguistic repertoires in communities or individuals. People from the same linguistic community, the same region, the same institution,



and sometimes even the same household, show a considerable degree of diversity in linguistic repertoires. They have differently ordered groupings of languages in them.

If we adopt an individual understanding of the linguistic repertoire as a set of communicative possibilities and means available to a speaker, then we find that the linguistic repertoire begins to be built up from the native language of the speaker, expands to include institutionally acquired foreign languages, and is gradually supplemented by other languages mediated in non-institutional contexts. The situations in which the speakers find themselves, the types of communicative events in which they most frequently participate, and the dominant modes of language acquisition all play a role in the construction of the language repertoire. All means of interaction of the speaker with different languages and all the opportunities that the user has had to learn languages, within the family, at school, or in the local community. All of this influences their linguistic repertoire and its potential development.

Gal points out that an individual's linguistic repertoire is not determined only by the speaker's command of the language of the territory in which they live. Although correlations between the form of language repertoire and areal determinants of speakers' life trajectories are not entirely irrelevant, an individual's linguistic repertoire is not formed solely on the basis of territorial affiliation. Those who live in the same territory may use the same language, but they do not have an identical linguistic repertoire. The order of acquired languages or the level of their acquisition may not even be crucial when considering different constellations of linguistic repertoires. If a speaker has acquired a language earlier than another language, the earlier acquired communicative code may not become the most frequently used, nor may it have the broadest use for the speaker. Nor may it be the language to which the communicator has the strongest emotional attachment.

The linguistic repertoire is coming back to the attention of linguistics, especially sociolinguistics, due to the fact that research attention is more focused on the phenomenon of multilingualism in society in the context of globalization and diversity. Dutch theorists Jan Blommaert and Ad Backus draw attention to this fact. They understand the linguistic repertoire as a set of interconnected knowledge that the speaker has gathered in different ways. It is gradually built up and created in situations not only during formal and informal learning but most intensively in the real situations in which the speaker takes part. In doing so, he or she retains the repertoire already acquired in relation to the native language or the foreign language already in use. In authentic communicative situations, there is contact between languages and communities, which is reflected in the acquisition of the user's linguistic repertoire and its further development. According to Blommaert and Backus, the linguistic repertoire grows even when the speaker acquires even minimal knowledge of the language, limited to a few words or to a passive understanding of utterances formulated in the language (Blommaert and Backus 2012).

We agree with Androutsopoulos (2014, pp. 13-14) that linguistic repertoire allows us to detail trajectories the speaker has followed throughout his/her life; the opportunities they had at reach; limitations and inequalities he had to cope with; educational environments they were able to access (and those they were not allowed or able to integrate); their movement across geographical territories and across communities; his/her potential to communicate in different contexts with regards to heterogeneous nature of his/her social relations.

Theorists specifically define a synchronic language repertoire, defining it as a set of resources that are active in the user's present repertoire (Blommaert and Backus, 2012). Outside of it, there are resources acquired in the past that are no longer actively present in the repertoire, or only became a part of it for a certain time or in a certain situation but speakers are no longer able to use these resources actively in communication, which means that they are passive users of the language in question. They might be able to read something in this language, or understand some communication in it but they are unable to communicate in it in an active way. Thus, we might understand the language repertoire as binary, made up of active and passive resources. This understanding takes into account the fact that language repertoire may reflect a particular language learning stage, life stage and a particular learning environment. The authors also proposed a methodology for assessing language repertoire based on the evaluation of the four core competencies (speaking, listening, writing, reading). They compare the levels of these competences (absent, limited, average and advanced) in speakers in situations characterized by different degrees of formality.

For our research, it is appropriate to define the linguistic repertoire not intralingually in relation to the contextual variation of the idiolect, but multilingually. The linguistic repertoire will be understood as the set of all languages that the speaker knows or has been in contact within the course of his or her passive or active communicative activity.

2 Mapping language repertoires as a methodological component of research on multilingualism



The concept of linguistic repertoire takes on a special significance for us in the context of multilingualism research. It is the empirical study of communicative situations in which two or more languages come into contact. The object of research interest in such a case may be the communicative strategies that speakers use to ensure the success of the communicative exchange and the traces of these strategies in the utterances of individual communicants. The ability of communicators to make good use of different communicative strategies depends to a large extent precisely on their linguistic repertoires.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of communicative behaviors, it is imperative to possess a foundational understanding of linguistic repertoires. The critical inquiry at hand pertains to the optimal method of accessing such repertoires. Specifically, we seek to gather insights into the diversity of linguistic repertoires concerning both the quantity of languages available and the proficiency levels exhibited across these languages by the speaker

On the one hand, the researcher has the opportunity to address to ask the respondents to self-evaluate their linguistic repertoires. In this procedure, the respondents first identify the languages they possess and then self-assess and self-declare their level of overall communicative competence or the degree of mastery of individual receptive and productive skills in whichever language is part of their linguistic repertoire. As it can be expected, a weakness of such a procedure may be the inaccuracy of the determination of competence levels, either because of incorrect self-assessment or because of a deliberate attempt to present a better or worse picture of oneself before the research begins. Therefore, it is appropriate to complement the self-evaluation of respondents with an objective measurement of the level of competence. This process necessitates an initial assessment of respondents, involving the utilization of standardized tests, preferably those aligned with the Common Framework of Reference for Languages. Alternatively, and perhaps more advantageous, custom-designed tests tailored to the specific requirements of the research should be employed. These bespoke tests offer a superior means of showing the ability of respondents to integrate knowledge across various components of their linguistic repertoire.

3 Limitations of research tasks using information about language repertoires

Before presenting research on multilingual mediated communication, it is necessary to outline motivations resulting from research tasks conducted previously. In these preliminary research tasks, concerned with intercomprehension of languages with varying degrees of relatedness, both the importance of knowledge about speakers' linguistic repertoires for research on their communicative competence and limitations of the use of such information about language repertoires clearly shows.

Since 2013, we have been conducting multi-stage research on intercomprehension of languages. We tested several methodologies, mainly focused on the didactics of intercomprehension for different target groups (Křečková et al. 2017, Zázrivcová et al. 2019, Chovancová 2020). Simultaneously, our research benefited significantly from comparative grammars of European languages founded on the genetic principle, as highlighted by Pognan in 2018. However, our aim was to build on the existing results and develop a suitable method for scientifically ascertaining the state of intercomprehensive skills in different language users. In particular, we saw potential in this research for further application, either in better designing of didactic supports or for curriculum development, including university curricula. Our research is also closely aligned with our interest in contrastive analysis and its potential implications within multilingual settings. Specifically, we investigated its relevance to language pairs such as French-Slovak and others, as well as its applicability to diverse samples of natural languages across various language families, notably Slavic, Romance, and Germanic languages.

We conducted three series of empirical tests of intercomprehensive skills in college students. The first two series involved exclusively respondents from the field of Romance Studies; the third compared the level of written reception in technical college respondents in two different languages, first in Czech as a language related to the respondents' native language, then in French, which was unfamiliar to the respondents and more distant from their native language.

Thus, we worked with three distinct groups of respondents amounting to a total of 250 individuals. Consisting of tasks testing different aspects of both global and local/detailed written receptive competence in reading comprehension, each assessment included first an introductory section aimed at obtaining demographic metadata, but primarily at ascertaining the extent of foreign language proficiency. In this mapping, based on the respondents' self-reported declarations, all three groups showed the dominance of English at the L2 position, followed by variously advanced levels of proficiency in related languages from the Romance language group among the Romance students. (This proficiency, as a prerequisite for successful intercomprehension, was most closely associated with Hispanic students, less so with Italian and French students, on the basis of their declared levels of competence.)

Contrary to expectations, the statistical evaluation of the testing itself did not show a clear correlation between the extent of the language repertoire and the level of receptive skills in an unfamiliar language; however, this correlation was identifiable in many of the individual cases of the respondents that we subjected to qualitative analysis. We, therefore, viewed the statistical insignificance in our sample as a possible consequence of the limited number of respondents in each group and also of methodological inadequacies in the mapping of language repertoires, which may have exhibited a degree of imprecision in the respondents' statements. An interesting finding, however, was that declaring their language skills allowed respondents to express their perceptions of languages, including subjective perceptions of their foreignness, remoteness or difficulty. It is the uncovering of the position of particular languages in speakers' awareness that we consider to be one of the significant benefits of initial self-assessment in intercomprehension tests.

4 Research on oral spontaneous multilingual communication

4.1 Research setting

After a period dedicated to research on intercomprehension our research focus has been changed to multilingual mediated communication. Knowledge of linguistic repertoires was confronted here with the empirical analysis of oral spontaneous communication within micro-groups of speakers. We focused on situations where individuals who have limited access to a common communication code were to communicate with each other. These are situations in which multilingual communicators meet and, in order to communicate successfully, have to overcome a barrier resulting from the unavailability of a common language or a competence asymmetry resulting from unequal proficiency in a common language.

We provided conditions for communicative events of groups of 3 or 4 communicants, with no trio or quadruplet containing communicants all of whom could speak the same language. Invariably, one of the communicants did not understand the language understood by the remaining speakers. The basic model of the participatory scheme included one native Slovak with no or very low proficiency in French, one French with no or very low proficiency in Slovak, and one or two Slovaks or French who were proficient in the other communicative language than their native language of the above pair of languages – the communication codes – i.e. Slovak and French. Each communicant entered the communicative event with a broader linguistic repertoire, which includes languages other than the two mentioned above. Naturally, they were more proficient in English, but some also spoke Spanish or Italian. We also had native French speakers who had a good command of Czech.

The task of the communicants was to start a conversation on common topics in Slovak and to try to persevere, using all available means, in a conversation in this language. In accordance with the instructions they were given, in case of misunderstanding, they had the opportunity to use different strategies, such as repetition, non-verbal communication or the use of auxiliary words from another language. One of the communicators was assigned the role of mediator, i.e. to facilitate the communicative exchange and to be helpful in moments when communication reached a total impasse. Naturally, the mediators were equipped with multilingual competence and had the prerequisite to successfully manage their facilitating role. The communication situation thus modelled resembled "dinner-table conversations" or a conversation between friends over coffee.

We observed the presence of different communication strategies in a set of four audio recordings of communication events with a total length of 2 hours 53 minutes and 5 seconds. We labeled the recorded communication events with the symbols U1, U2, U3, and U4.

Event Length I Length II Number of (minutes) (utterances) speakers U1 62:53 1384 4 U2 53:34 1039 3 3 U3 34:59 228 U4 21:39 367 3 2:53:05 3018

Table 1 Basic features of the set of communication events analyzed

The communication events took place in a Slovak university environment. The meeting places of the participants were located directly at different locations on the university campus. In the analysis presented below, we will focus mainly on U4 as it involves two mediators at a time.

4.2 Characteristics of speakers

The sample consists of 13 respondents, 7 men and 6 women, 5 mediators (P) and 8 speakers who do not take on a mediating role (xP). Table 2 provides a basic summary of information about the speakers. The communicators are identified by ordinal numbers and randomly chosen initials. Furthermore, their affiliation to the communicative event and communicative role are indicated.

Gender **Event** Role Speaker 01 M U1 P 02 C U1 M 03 A U1 хP F U1 F 04 K хP 05 R U2 P M 06 F U2 хP M 07 S U2 хP M 08 D U3 P M V 09 U3 хP F 10 В U3 хP M 11 I U4 P M 12 U4 хP F J 13 E U4 xPF

Table 2 Basic information about speakers

Table 3 gives an overview of the languages that make up the speakers' linguistic repertoire. The symbol L1 refers to the native language of the speaker, the symbol LX to the second language of the observed Slovak-French language pair. For all speakers, the first foreign language (L2) is English. We use the symbol L3 to denote the second foreign language that the speaker knows. In column L4, we provide information on any additional foreign language spoken, if relevant. This is particularly the case for speaker C in communication U1, who has a high level of proficiency in Czech, having acquired this language in a non-institutional setting and at a later stage than the other languages he/she has mastered.

We note that in addition to the officially designated mediators (multilingual competent individuals whom we had asked in advance to cover this role), there were also mediators in the conversations who took on the mediation role naturally, on their initiative, precisely because of their multilingual competence. These were mainly, but not exclusively, cases where we had four communicators and two of them were multilingual competent. This is the case of communicative event U1, which we chose as the main object of analysis.

Speaker L1 L₂ **Profession** SK 01 M FR C2ΕN **A**1 IT teacher CZ 02 N FR SK C₁ EN **B**1 IT C2 teacher ES 03 A FR SK **A**1 EN **B**1 teacher K ES 04 SK FR 0 ΕN **A**1 researcher 05 C1 R SK FR **EN** C2student 06 F ΕN **B2** FR SK 0 student 07 S 0 ΕN В1 student SK FR RU 08 D SK FR B2 **EN** C2student 09 V SK FR 0 ΕN **B2** student 10 В FR SK 0 ΕN **B**2 student I C1 11 SK FR В1 ΕN student

Table 3 Linguistic repertoires of speakers

In communication event U1, four speakers actively participate: three females (denoted as M, K, A) and one male (indicated by the initial N). Among them, three (M, A, N) are proficient in French, with two (A, C) being native

student

student

C2

EN

EN

12

13

J

E FR

SK

FR

A1



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French speakers. M, a Slovak native, demonstrates a C2 level proficiency in French, akin to that of a native speaker. K, a native Slovak speaker, lacks proficiency in French. Regarding Slovak, two native speakers (M and K) are present. N, a French national, exhibits solid proficiency in Slovak and Czech (C2 level). A, a French speaker, has a proficiency level of A1 in Slovak. The communication comprises 2944 utterances from the participants. M authors 1032 utterances, K contributes 661, A intervenes 791 times, and N generates 460 utterances. Evaluating the distribution of utterances among speakers in U1, we observe a significant discrepancy in the volume of speech production, particularly between mediators M and C. Mediator M, in this case, assumes the primary responsibility for mediation, likely due to her native Slovak proficiency, despite her extensive linguistic repertoire comparable to N's. Notably, multilingual proficient speakers do not necessarily dominate the communicative space, but their presence may be more pronounced, especially when a multilingual proficient speaker shares the dominant language of the communication event (in this case, Slovak) and feels a strong responsibility for its success. For example, The involvement of speaker N in the initial stages of the event is notably less than others, resulting in the smallest number of utterances overall.

The research hypothesis was as follows: in the speech of multilingual competent communicants, intralingual reformulation is the dominant discursive operation compared to other discursive operations, either explicit or implicit This dominance would be particularly evident in comparison to translation and intercomprehension processes.

4.3 Results

In accessing authentic material available, we identified two groups of discursive operations that were repeatedly used by speakers. In the first group, we included operations that are transformational in nature, manifesting themselves in structural and semantic changes of speech segments. We will refer to these operations as coreferential (KOR). They can be identified on the basis of the existence of a pair of segments in which a mutual coreferential relation of invariant parts is realized and at the same time they are characterized by the presence of variant parts. We assume that this type of operation will be significant for the speech activity of the mediators. Within discursive operations of the KOR type, we distinguish:

A – literal repetition in the same language (intralingual non-modifying reformulation);

A' – repetition with a change in form or in semantic content (intralingual modifying reformulation, see Richard 2000; Richard – Pennec 2009);

 $B-{\rm translation/transcoding}$ (a change in the linguistic code of a speech segment, potentially accompanied by a semantic change).

The second group includes discourse operations based on the juxtaposition of interlanguage speech segments without a coreferential or associative relation. We label these discursive operations as uncorreferential (xKOR):

C – code switching - code change without the presence of translation activity features, i.e. juxtaposition of segments in different languages (mostly L1 and LX) without a semantic equivalence relation;

D-use of a third (auxiliary) language - choice of an alternative communication code, a lingua franca common to all communicants.

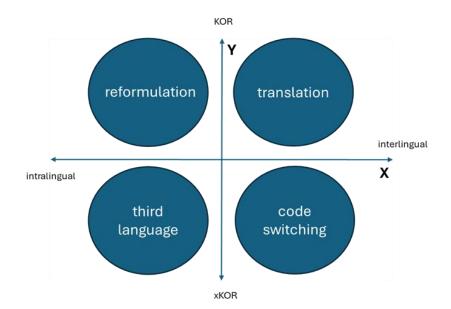
Operations C and D relate to intercomprehension – implicit understanding based on contextual inference or contextual prediction.

The relations between the analysed discursive operations can be represented by two basic axes as shown in Diagram 1 below. The X-axis contrasts intralingual and interlingual characteristics of the discursive operation in practice. On the Y-axis, unidirectionality and bidirectionality are opposed.

Intralingual discursive operations, depicted on the X-axis, do not require code change and occur within a single language. A typical example of such an operation is reformulation as a return to what has been said, regardless of the nature of the reformulated segment and the degree of its modification. Reformulation, as a prominent intralingual speech activity aimed at mitigating competence asymmetries in favour of effective communication, emerged as a natural preference among speakers. Another example of intralingual discursive operation is bridging by means of an alternative common language.

Conversely, at the opposite end of the interlingual pole, a shift in language or interaction between two languages is required. Similarly, code-switching leading to juxtaposition of sections in different languages, implicitly achieving full or partial comprehension, appears here.

Diagram 1 Typology of discursive operations in the speech of speakers with multilingual competence



On the Y-axis, expressing the contrast between unilaterality and bilaterality, the principle of co-reference, embodied in the semantic relation of the two segments or, on the contrary, in the absence of such a relation, is mainly taken into account. In this respect, we understand translation as a response to the need for immediate explicit clarification of meaning. This demand is usually signalled, explicit. In translation, semantically equivalent segments in different languages come into relation with each other. These segments may be more or less distant in speech, but in any case, the intention to ensure semantic equivalence can be observed in their expression. This effort may be more or less successful accordingly we register cases of complete, partial, or more rarely zero (erroneous) equivalence.

Reformulation, understood in the sense of repetition with or without modification, is also based on the principle of a bilateral relationship between the original and the reformulated. It is precisely identified by the presence, either within a single utterance or across two or more different utterances, of segments with the same referent. In reformulation, however, as we have already said, the linguistic resources of the same language are used.

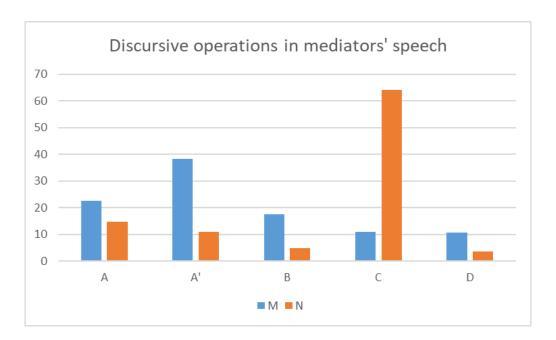
Code-switching differs from reformulation and from translation in that it does not require or assume the presence of a recurrence of a semantically invariant segment in two adjacent passages, each of which is formulated in a different language. On the contrary, it assumes the continuity of the interlanguage segments while preserving the relative seamlessness of the communicative exchange. It is precisely the failure-free nature, in the sense of the absence of signals of misunderstanding, that is the hallmark of a well-developed linguistic intercomprehension. We thus define this phenomenon, so to speak, by negation. However, this way of defining is somewhat understandable in the case of communicative-pragmatic phenomena of an implicit nature, such as intercomprehension.

In the discursive production of the two mediators (M and N) present at the communication event U4, we can observe the following distribution of discursive operations.

Table 4 Quantitative tracking of discursive operations in mediators' speech (event U4)

Operation type	Mediator M	Mediator N
A	22,5	14,8
A'	38,3	11,1
В	17,5	4,9
С	10,9	64,2
D	10.8	3.7

Graphical representation of the data introduced in the table 4 highlights dominant discursive operations selected by M and N, respectively.



While M predominantly employs A, A' and B operations, mediator N shows a substantial preference for C and D-type operations. Two different communicative strategies are discernible. The distinction correlates with differences in the linguistic repertoires of M and C as explained below.

4.4 Discussion

Comparing the representation of the signs of the discourse operations under study, for example, in the speech of two communicants who have the potential to aspire to the position of linguistically competent mediators of communication in the context of a U1 communicative event, we find that we are faced with two distinct approaches to the mediating role. Mediator M does a lot of reformulating, repeating, and translating. Mediator N speaks the bridging language, then mainly repeats, less reformulates. Thus, the speech activity of a multilingual competent mediator may not always be modelled in the same way. It is likely that there are multiple models of mediating activity in an exolingual context characterized by different pragmatic dominants.

The identification of linguistic traces of symptomatic phenomena originating from sets labelled KOR and xKOR allowed us to direct our thinking more precisely about selected phenomena, preferably about reformulation, translation, code-switching, or other operations carried out in intralingual space and, consequently, about intercomprehension. Some of these operations introduce elements of multilingualism into utterances, others serve as tools for diversifying the means of expression in the space of a single language.

The analysis showed a massive inclination towards the use of explicit discursive operations in the space of intralinguality, complemented by a much less pronounced activation of implicit discursive operations in support of mutual understanding, typologically belonging to intercomprehension. This mode of mediation was evident in mediators with a less extended linguistic repertoire. These were those who were bilingual in the space of the language pair Slovak and French but had only a low level of proficiency in the other languages in addition to these. In contrast, the mediator with a broad linguistic repertoire showed a strong ability to actively use his/her knowledge of several languages in mediation and even to encourage other communicants to use their partial knowledge of different languages. Thus, our analysis confirms the importance of a developed linguistic repertoire to achieve successful communication in the presence of exolinguistic speakers.

Thus, in addition to confirming the hypothesis about the effectiveness of the selected communication strategies, this research has also demonstrated interesting relationships between strategy choice and the communicative role of the speaker, and between the nature of the speaker's linguistic repertoire and his or her predisposition to take an active role in ensuring communicative success.

Conclusion

We understand the linguistic repertoire as a set of knowledge about natural languages available to the speaker as a member of a linguistic community and as a set of competences related to the active and passive use of this



knowledge. It turns out that mapping linguistic repertoires can be a functional part of multilingualism research, for example, such as that concerning spontaneous oral communication with alternation of multiple languages and with competence asymmetries in speakers. In this case, the detection of the level of cross-linguistic competence in the activation of interlingual and metalinguistic information is highly relevant and can be considered as one of the supporting parameters characterizing an individual's linguistic repertoire. The acquisition and use of knowledge about the linguistic repertoires of communicants is a starting point not only for basic research in the field of communication in language-contact situations, but also for its application to the field of foreign language didactics using a wide range of approaches, methods, and forms.

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