"Criteria for Identifying 'Best Fit' between Data and Competing Theories of Bilingual Communication"

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In striving for the best possible theory of language contact in bilingual speakers, linguists rarely pause to consider how to evaluate their progress in reaching this goal. This paper, however, will report on how a group of linguists specialising in bilingualism have grappled with this issue and have formulated provisional criteria to be used in testing competing theories. It will include a discussion of the nature of the problem to be accounted for, which is how bilingual speakers manage to use material from two languages with different structures in the same clause ('code-switching'), and of the appropriate data to be analysed in resolving the problem. Our proposed criteria for evaluating competing theories will then be outlined, and will be discussed in the light of previous work by philosophers of science on issues such as 'incommensurability' and the 'theory-ladenness' (cf. Okasha 2002) of data. Finally, they will be illustrated by work in progress on the analysis of mixed nominal constructions from Welsh-English and Spanish-English data in which we evaluate two competing models of code-switching, the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) approach and a Minimalist approach.

Okasha, S. (2002). Philosophy of Science: A very short introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press.