

(ARTICLES)

Code-Switching: Focusing on Multilingual Contexts

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I. Introduction

The “Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics” defines the term “code-switching” as the following (pp. 49 - 50):

The alternate use of two languages in the same discourse, for example, Spanish/English *Todos los Mexicanos*ⁱ *were riled up*. Sociolinguists investigate pragmatic causes like reporting other people’s speech, discussing certain topics and emphasizing particular social roles (see PRAGMATICSⁱⁱ)... Psychologists stress the bilingual’s unique ability to use two languages simultaneously. See BILINGUALISMⁱⁱⁱ.

There is another word that is used to convey nearly the same meaning as code-switching. That is “code-mixing” and it is explained in “Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language” at “Encyclopedia.com” as below^{iv}:

CODE-MIXING AND CODE-SWITCHING. Terms in SOCIOLINGUISTICS for language and especially speech that draws to differing extents on at least two languages combined in different ways, as when a Malay/English bilingual says: *This morning I hantar my baby tu dekat babysitter tu lah* (*hantar* took, *tu dekat* to the, *lah* a particle marking solidarity). A *code* may be a language or a variety or style of a language; the term *codemixing* emphasizes hybridization, and the term *code-switching* emphasizes movement from one language to another.

Thus, code-switching (we use this term all the way in this article, instead of the term “code-mixing”), or CS, is considered to be one of the typical features of the speech of bilinguals as described by Li Wei (2007)^v. Also, there have been sufficient reports that CS often occurs

unintentionally, which means the speakers might not be aware of the fact that it is indeed happening during the discourse they are carrying out (Suppiah, 2011).

Now, suppose that you hear a family conversation as the following:

(The italicized utterances are English translations from Japanese and Flemish-Dutch^{vi}.)

(A: father / B: mother / C: child 1 / D: child 2)

A: "So, how was it today? How did it go?"

B: "Niet zo goed, allez^{vii}, ik bedoel, *(Not so good/well, say, I mean,)* son-nani 'super! sugoi!' ja nakatta, demo, waruku mo nakatta yo... *(it was not so super cool, but it was not bad, either...)*"

A to D, in order to get something on the table: "D, mag ik dat hebben, alstublieft? *(D, can I have that, please?)* ...Thanks... Oh by the way, you should clean up your room, D. What kinda mess is that?"

A to B who fixed the meal: ... mmm, lekker! *(delicious!)*

A to B to explain about the situation of D's room and at the same time, to D to complain: "It was really 'mecha mecha' *(messy)* this morning!"

B to A for the compliment: Dank U, dank U! *(Thank you, thank you!)*

C to A: "Sumimasen! Soko no kosho, totte moraeru? *(Excuse me! Can you get the pepper there?)* ... Arigato. (Thanks.)"

B to C: "Anata no o-heya wa kirei desho, ne. *(I hope your room is clean.)*"

C: "Yes!"

Typical, domestic daily conversations like above, carried out in my family, have led me to deliberate about code-switching in multilingualism. The communication above might simply look like a fickle patchwork of words and sentences, but this might also mean something meaningful in this peculiar multilingual situation. The main purpose of this article is to investigate through reading and inspecting literature what code-switching is, to find out how it functions and what it could actually mean in the speakers' minds and behaviors.

II. Previous Studies – Literature Review

Azuma reported that code-switching has been observed all over the world and at the same time it is not just a phenomenon which takes place between two languages but sometimes between more than two, three languages (2000, p. 44)^{viii}. He further explained that "very often code-switching tends to be judged negatively as 'Franglais'^{ix} and 'Tex-Mex'^x are despised in general. Code-switching is often considered to be an "ill-mannered behavior" spoken by those who have failed to "master" any of the languages they use. Thus code-switching has such a negative connotation by and large. However, also according to Azuma (p. 59), the phenomenon of code-switching has been well studied and discussed by a number of researchers so that we have reached a certain point where we understand and thus can advocate that it is not just a chaotic nonsense but it is a well-structured system in language usage, applied by the people with high

language skills (p. 46). This system has two features: (1) code-switching has a clear set of well-organized rules in usage and (2) we need no specific grammatical system for it; we can account for its system by using the sets of grammatical rules of the languages in use. Also, Gumperz (1982) defined conversational code-switching as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (p. 59).

Milroy and Muysken (1995) stated that one of the central issues in bilingualism research was code-switching and determined that it was the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation. In other words, speakers of more than one language (e.g., bilinguals) “code-switch” or mix their languages during communication. This switching occurs sometimes between the turns of different speakers in the conversation, sometimes between utterances within a single turn, and sometimes even within a single utterance. (p. 7). An utterance here means a speech item, a spoken word, or what is said. (Pham, 1994, p. 185). According to Duran (1994), code-switching is defined by Valdes-Fallis as the use of two languages simultaneously or interchangeably. Duran also introduced Gysels’ idea that code-switching may be used to achieve two things: one is to fill a linguistic or conceptual gap and the other is for other multiple communicative purposes.

Bokamba^{xi} defined code-switching (1989) as “the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event.” Therefore, code-switching can be interpreted as one of the phenomena that result from bilingualism and/or multilingualism.

Dewaele introduced (2000, p. 193) the statement of Gardner-Chloros that “CS does not seem to be linked to gender” although it intersects with many intervening variables which are themselves connected with gender issues (2009). As far as this particular study is concerned, the attempt to uncover the link between gender and frequency of CS did not succeed. Citing Pavlenko (2005), Dewaele also stated that “the relative scarcity of studies on CS in emotion talk could be linked to the fact that these are ‘among some of the most private acts and are as such close to impossible to capture for research purposes.’^{xii} In other words, there are still categories that have not been explored enough yet in the field of code-switching studies.

III. Typological Analyses

Blom and Gumperz (1972) distinguish between two forms of code-switching:

(1) situational switching, where the reasons for the switch can be identified through a change in situation and,

(2) metaphorical switching, which occurs for rhetorical reasons and is further defined by Gumperz as a method “to communicate metaphoric information about how they intend their words to be understood” (1982, p. 61).

Hamminck (2000) stated that code-switching can be categorized as follows : “*Borrowing*”

is the use of a word from another language, which demonstrates morphological/phonological adaptation to the base-language, termed “matrix language” (Muysken, 1995, p. 182).

“*Calque*” is a literal translation of an expression from another language. Syntax, rather than vocabulary, may be the second language’s contribution to the construction, though calques may also demonstrate the use of a matrix language cognate with an alternation of meaning.

“*Intersentential*” is switching at the sentence level. It may serve to emphasize a point made in the other language, signal a switch in the conversation participants, indicate to whom the statement is addressed; or to provide a direct quote from, or reference to, from another conversation.

“*Intrasentential*” is switching at the clause, phrase level, or at word level if no orthophonological adaptation occurs.

Azuma demonstrated another approach to categorize code-switching from the viewpoint of its meaning, function and role when in use (pp. 47 -58). He described further that the points are:

(1) to whom CS is carried out. According to the research on CS by the targeted bilinguals, they target only the same sort of bilinguals whom they regard as their counterpart, capable of handling CS conversations. In other words, they never start CS to the ordinary people who are not capable of switching languages.

(2) when CS is carried out. When the speakers find no word/phrases/expressions that would just fit in the context in one language, they switch to another that has the “just-fitting” ones. For instance, when French-English cannot find the French word for ‘pub’ in English that carries exactly the same connotation as in English, they simply use the English word ‘pub’ in discourses in French.^{xiii}

(3) (a) when the code-switchers do not wish the conversation to be understood by the third party. In order to exclude the third in the scene, the code-switchers use the language only they can use. (b) when the code-switchers wish the conversation to be understood by the third party. In order to include all the people there, the code-switchers use the language that everybody understands in the situation.

(4) when the code-switchers want to show their power, or authority. Also when they want to change the power-balance of the relation they have with their counterpart in the conversation.^{xiv}

(5) CS as an ethnic marker. For instance, there are a number of ethnic groups in the USA, and to them, English is merely a language they happen to borrow in order to communicate with the outside world. By conducting CS (switching to “we-code^{xv}”), they can create a certain atmosphere in which some special feelings are felt such as a pleasant sense of solidarity and comradeship (Azuma, p. 57).

IV. Discussion

Code-Switching and Identity

Hammink (2000) also observed that the practice of code-switching was often viewed negatively by monolingual people, and it was often considered a low prestige form, incorrect, poor language, or a result of incomplete mastery of the two languages. Related to the issue above, it is often said that a bilingual child has two separate identities and tends to suffer from an identity crisis (Iwata, 2000, p. 1). However, is it in reality the case? If so, to which extent? Does code-switching have any correlative aspects with the levels of language as well, such as syntax (“the study of the internal relationships between signs and their meanings”), semantics (“the study of the relationships between signs and their meanings”), and pragmatics (“the study of the relationships between signs and their users”)? (Pham, 1994, Syntax, Semantics, and Pragmatics section. para.1).

An interesting example of research on code-switching was observed by Iwata (2000). At the time of observation, the subjects were a bilingual family (English and Japanese) living in Tokyo. The members were a monolingual British father, a bilingual Japanese mother, a 5-year old daughter, and a 3-year-old son. The father worked while the mother took care of the children at home. The daughter went to an international kindergarten on weekdays while the son went to a playschool in an American compound 2 or 3 days a week. The mother spoke mainly Japanese to her children and the father mostly English, which means, in this case, the parents took a “one person – one language policy” (Iwata, p. 2)

After her careful and detailed data analysis of observations on six dinner conversations, Iwata reported that the family was co-constructing conversations by the usage of two languages. The bilingual family members commanded both English and Japanese, chosen according to the topic and the one they were talking to. The mother tried to play the role of interpreter for the rest of the family from time to time, and all the bilingual members spoke English as well as Japanese. Moreover, even the father, who was basically monolingual, made use of several Japanese words and expressions during the conversations. This is because anybody in the family could be involved in one conversation if the three bilinguals spoke only English with one another and with the father. Everybody seemed to be accustomed to the co-existence of these two languages (p. 13). In conclusion, she observed that, by switching back and forth from Japanese and English, the family co-constructed bilingual conversations, which helped the children reach an understanding of their bilingual identities. Thus, the identity of a bilingual individual is an outcome of jointly constructed actions. (pp. 13-14).

In a section on the function of language in discourse, Pham noted that discourse analysis was, in the expression of Hatch and Long, close to sociolinguistics because it focused on real tasks undertaken by human beings in social action. Iwata’s observations support that point. In spite of negative perceptions, Hammink (2000) observed that code-switching was a common feature of bilingual speech, and Duran (1994) indicated that it seemed to serve important functions in cognition and communication.

From the emotional point of view, Dewaele mentioned about two possibilities of bilinguals or/and multilinguals to use CS: (1) the distracting effect of CS can be used un/consciously to talk about topics that might be too painful in their first language (p. 206) and (2) they can also apply CS in order to express some sorts of strong emotions such as strong anger (p. 207). These are all quite interesting phenomena when thinking about what is actually happening in the mind of the bi/multilingual speakers in the relation between the emotions and multiple language use, which is strongly related to the identity issue.

Grammatical and Functional Aspects

From the standpoint of analysis based on the grammatical aspects, there are several issues which should be examined and defined, such as “the borderline between borrowing and switching” (Muysken, 1995, p. 189). The code-switching is different from lexical borrowing, which involves the incorporation of lexical elements from one language in the lexicon of another language. Yet, most switches of code are spontaneously formed in discourse (p. 190), and are commonly observed phenomena in multilingual situations. From close observation and analysis, Muysken (1995, p. 196) concluded as follows:

- (1) switching is possible when there is no tight relation between two elements, so-called paratactic switching.
- (2) switching is possible under equivalence.
- (3) switching is possible when the switched element is morphologically encapsulated, shielded off by a functional element from the matrix language.
- (4) switching is possible when at the point of the switch a word could belong to either language, the case of the homophonous diamorph (e.g. in *in* English, German or Dutch).

Azuma pointed out that there have been a number of discussions and suggestions over the possibility of “the Grammar of CS (if it exists indeed) (p. 58)” – based on the viewpoints of the morphological aspects, the relation of agglutinative languages^{xvi} with the other types of languages, and so on. At the same time, he suggested that, instead of sticking to the conventional theories and approaches, we should start looking at some new possibilities to explore this issue by implementing new approaches; one of the new perspectives which he offered is to use the concept of function words^{xvii} and non-function (content) words. Applying this idea to account for generating CS sentences enables us to analyze at which level CS tends to take place (pp. 70-73).

In one of my interviews with a Flemish trilingual code-switcher (Dutch-English-Japanese), he pointed out that - to him - the three languages together form a supra-language which he uses for his thought processes. In his communication with others, he limits his utterances to the sub-language(s) understood by his discussion partner. In his experience, there is a smooth transition between borrowing and switching. “Borrowing” occurs when, at a given moment, a word of one of the sub-languages is more appropriate than an utterance in the main language of the moment. If the accompanying thought process relies heavily on concepts of a different language from the current main language, extensive “borrowing” will evolve into

“switching” of the main language.

V. Conclusion

Probably Duran’s (1994) remark might summarize CS best:

Because code-switching (and interlanguage) do not sound conventional, and because we do not understand the role they play in natural language development and usage, and because we have little control over them, we tend to see them as aberrations. Because we do not understand well the linguistic and communicative rules and purposes which explain them as natural and creative outgrowths of being bilingual we cannot accept them as a pattern unique to bilinguals. Because they are neither fish nor fowl we may see them solely as alingualism, semilingualism, intereference, confusion, or fossilization instead of as new and alternative forms created by cognitive/conceptual synthesis of two languages. Whether code-switching is used to fill a gap or if it is a conscious desire to mix the two languages to create new forms, the language created in most code-switches has internal linguistic consistency and validity for the learner’s deep structure (Conclusion, para.1).

Code-switching, among people who share more than one language, seems a rich method of exchanging meaning rather than the evidence of imperfect language use. Discourse studies have demonstrated its functionality and suggested its role in constructing identities. Furthermore, Duran (1994) referred to its function of facilitating and supporting thinking and communication, and introduced the idea of viewing how we might approach such facilitation in the bilingual classroom.

The research of code-switching hitherto could be summed up as the operation of examining its mechanism, dynamics and consequences such as how it can be switched on and further operated by speakers on what kind of occasions, under which circumstances and on which conditions, and how it concludes, together with the influence and effect it brings, through close and careful observation of each illustrative case, studying systematically the supposedly relevant academic fields, such as neuro-linguistics, sociolinguistics and anthropology, in comparison with each other for the investigation of the correlations between the analyzed elements, and eventually making a good use of it, as much as possible, as the medium for better understanding of the status quo in FLE (Foreign Language Education) and for the solution of its present problems. Ultimately, any research program over code-switching has a great possibility to contribute to study on human nature since it naturally and automatically deals with language itself and language activities, which is an essential part of human beings.

A more rewarding and beneficial task for future studies in code-switching is to focus on “code-switching between linguistically and culturally distinct languages” such as English and Japanese or Korean rather than studying similar language pairs such as the case of English

and German, or French and Italian. It should also be more interesting to watch if and how code-switching occurs in trilingual or “multilingual” environments, especially in highly cross-cultural contexts.

In any case, what used to be commented about code-switching – it is an indiscriminate and impuremixed language used by un-educated or/and unintelligent interlocutors – has been revealed to be an unrealistic remark which is simply not true. Instead, code-switching is a highly skillful and tactical strategy for bi/multilinguals to conduct smooth verbal communications most effectively. To do this, the speakers are required to acquire high-levelled knowledge and ability to manipulate more than two languages at the same time (Azuma, 73).

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- i *Todos los Mexicanos means* “All Mexicans” in English.
 - ii “pragmatics is the study of how language is interpreted by its users in its linguistic and non-linguistic context.” p. 249.
 - iii “BILINGUALISM IN THE INDIVIDUAL... There may be many different reasons for an individual to become bilingual...”. P. 32.
 - iv originally published by Oxford University Press in 1998.
 - v DeWaele (2010). p. 192.
 - vi Flemish-Dutch. Dutch is one of the official languages in Belgium. It is the official language in Flanders, Belgium. In 1980 the Netherlands and Belgium (Flanders) signed the Verdrag inzake de Nederlandse Taalunie (Treaty concerning the Dutch Language Union). The Treaty stipulates that the governments will set joint policy with respect to the Dutch language. In 2004 Suriname joined as an associate member. In addition, the Nederlandse Taalunie also collaborates with Aruba, Curaçao and St Martin. The Taalunie is a unique organisation. Nowhere else in the world does such a treaty exist between countries with the same language. <http://over.taalunie.org/dutch-language-union>
Also, “5 Top Differences between Dutch in the Netherlands and Belgium” by Language TSAR, (<http://languagegetsar.com/differences-between-dutch-in-the-netherlands-and-belgium/>) explains that Dutch in Belgium is occasionally called “Flemish” and there are many differences in the actual usage between these two. We can easily find many websites such as this, describing the observable differences between Dutch in the Netherlands and what they call Flemish (but it is Dutch as well) in Flanders, Belgium. It is also evident by listening to the local people from Flanders and the Netherlands.
 - vii This is a French word that literally means “go!” (pronounced as “alloy”, written in Flemish as “allee” or as “allez”). “Flemish people, when do you use 'allee' in a sentence?” Here, a native speaker of Flemish explains when they use “allez” telling “ It's quite a multifunctional word really, almost impossible to fully explain. Just a few ways to use it: -motivation-false/ironic amazement -swearing/frustration -stop word-contrast. Having lived in Flanders for six years and then still keeping very close, intimate contact with most of the in-laws over there, I have a strong feeling that this is quite correct and the Dutch in the Netherlands would say “awel” in the same situations. https://www.reddit.com/r/belgium/comments/1t0r36/flemish_people_when_do_you_use_a_lee_in_a_sentence/
 - viii He reported, for example, CS observed in Arabic, French and English in Lebanon, which is quite common over there.
 - ix A blend of French and English, either French speech that makes excessive use of English expressions, or unidiomatic French spoken by an English person. Retrieved November 11, 2016 from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/franglais>
 - x A blend of English and Spanish spoken in South Texas, USA. “Tex-Mex language adds touch of spice to linguistic debate.” Retrieved November 11, 2016 from <http://lubbockonline.com/news/011497/texmex.htm>
 - xi a professor of Second Language Acquisition at the University of Illinois.
 - xii Pavlenko, A. (2005). *Emotions and Multilingualism*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
 - xiii pub, bingo hall, underground, etc. from Azuma (p. 49).
 - xiv Azuma cited the relationship between Swahili and English, both used in Kenya. The former is a less powerful language than the latter in the society. English is considered to be the language of more educated people there.
 - xv Azuma put an example of the CS, from English to Spanish in the discourse (p. 57).
 - xvi such as Japanese, Turkish and Finnish. “Agglutination, a grammatical process in which words are composed of a sequence of morphemes (meaningful word elements), each of which represents not more than a single grammatical category. This term is traditionally employed in the typological classification of languages. Turkish, Finnish, and Japanese are among the languages that form words by agglutination.” Retrieved

November 1, 2016 from <https://global.britannica.com/topic/agglutination-grammar>
xvii A function word is a word whose purpose is to contribute to the syntax rather than the meaning of a sentence, for example do in we do not live here. Retrieved November 2, 2016 from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/function_word