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Code-Switching

Code-Switching has been hot topic in the fields of both linguistics and bilingualism. Speakers of more than one language, considered to be bilingual or multilingual, are capable of mixing their languages during communication. Code-Switching appears in various forms of communication, such as verbal and written communication, texting and online chatting for example. An example of code-switching is “*I want a motorcycle VERDE”* (Heredia and Brown, n.d). According to Auer and Muhamedova, embedded language is inserted in the form of single words or of larger consituents into the grammatical frame (Auer and Muhamedova, 2005). In this case, the matrix language is English, and the most grammatical components of the sentence are based in English (I, want, motorcycle), but the speaker uses the Spanish adjective “VERDE” meaning “green.” Also, VERDE is positioned after the noun, which is a grammatical feature of Spanish, not English. This sentence shows that the speaker is mixing the words of two languages, but the speaker is still keeping the grammatical feature of Spanish. If the speaker puts *VERDE* before *motorcycle* then it is ungrammatical in Spanish grammar because nouns must come before adjectives. Therefore, this indicates that the speaker who uses code-switching has lower proficiency in their language skills.

However, code-switching brings an argument of semi-lingualism, which underscores the multilingual speaker’s language proficiency. There are many myths about multilinguals. There are some beliefs that acquiring two languages at the same time will slower one’s learning process. There is also the false belief that multilingual speakers’ language growth is worse and slower than monolinguals. However, this is not true. In the SLS 380 textbook, it is stated that a multilingual speaker’s language proficiency is at the same level, or higher than, that of monolinguals.

The reason that multilingual speakers may take more time to read and comprehend sentences is because there is a “mental switch mechanism” (Heredia and Brown, n.d). Psycholinguistic research found out that when multilingual speakers see sentences, their brains detect the language and change the “switch.” For example, when Spanish-English speakers see English sentences, the brain turns English ON to comprehend the sentence and Spanish remains OFF. When the brain detects Spanish sentences, the brain turns Spanish ON and English OFF (Heredia and Brown, n.d).

Another factor that has influence on code-switching is language dominance (Heredia and Brown). Language dominance is the term used when defining which language is used more frequently by a speaker. Research shows that that a speaker’s second language becomes a more useful tool than their first language as their first language skills grow. This is because after certain growth of first-language fluency, language shift occurs in which the second language behaves as if it were their first language (Heredia and Brown, n.d). This was very interesting due to the fact that Japanese is my first language, my second language is English, and for me there is clear line between the two languages. There is a clear separation between the two languages for me. Japanese is my social language, which I use to communicate with people outside of the classroom, and I use English when I speak to local friends or in school, but Japanese is the language that I use in more domains (Home, church, close friends). On the other hand, English is my academic language, which I use in classroom, assignments, and work (my work is on campus). Before I started to work in an office where I had to speak only English, my English communication skills were worse because I had less opportunities to speak it, but when I started to use it more often, it improved. My first language has not improved since I moved to the US because I do not take Japanese courses or go to Japanese Immersion schools here. Therefore, the growth of Japanese and English are not related in my case.

The sociocultural perspective of bilingualism is that monolinguals have two separate linguistic varieties. Under code-switching circumstances, topics and purpose of communication play great role (Nilep, n.d). Also, code-switching has a direct relationship with identity. Since languages tend to be associated with situations and groups of speakers, the use of multiple languages creates more possibility for action when a choice is expected (Nilep, n.d). For example, in Quebec there are two dominant languages: English and French. Since Quebec is francophone and there are many French cultures embedded in citizens’ identities, being able to speak English and French is more dominant than monolingualism of either. Since the dominant group is superior, inferior semi-linguals use code-switching to resist or redefine the value of resources in the linguistic marketplace (Nilep, n.d). This can be seen in Hawaii where there is a strong Japanese culture. There are many tourists from Japan throughout the year and there are many places where Japanese tourists visit, so there are many needs for both English and Japanese speakers. Due to this demand, bilingual English and Japanese speakers are superior to monolingual speakers of English in the tourism industry. Therefore, street vendors in Ala Moana Shopping Center code-switch between English and Japanese to attract Japanese tourists. Even though street vendors do not learn Japanese academically, they successfully acquire Japanese and manage to attract Japanese tourists and have conversation with them.

The nature of code-switching is spontaneous and subconscious, but studies have shown that it is depended on the speaker’s communicative intent (Ariffin, n.d). Code-switching is used to enhance, enrich, and organize their speech. Also, the perception of code-switching has been shifted from language deficiency to functionally-motivated behavior (Ariffin, n.d). I agree with the fact that code-switching is a functionally-motivated behavior because if the speaker is not motivated to learn a second language, they would not use it. There are many different reasons speakers acquire and learn another language. Immigrant students acquire a second language because they are put into a situation where they have to learn it. Students learn foreign language because foreign language classes are required. International students learn specific skills of language, such as Medicine or engineering to get into schools. When a speaker code-switches that means the speaker is eager to use two languages to make their communication more effective and stronger. Code-switching is also used to fill in the lexical gap in the language of interaction (Ariffin, n.d).

Code-switching gives power to a multilingual’s communicative interactions. There are many purposes for code-switching in interactions, but their common idea is that the code-switching helps deliver the speaker’s message better and more strongly. In the topic of code-switching, I am interested in code-switching in texting. The textbook describes the purposes of code-switching, such as excluding/including people in conversation, emphasizing expression, injecting humor, etc.

The topic of my research paper is Code-Switching in written communication. The reason why I chose this topic is because I see and do code-switching on an everyday basis. I am a balanced bilingual in English and Japanese, and passive French user. Most of my friends are also bilingual in English and Japanese. Therefore, when I talk to friends, I code-switch in both verbal communication and written communication, such as text messaging and chats. Mostly, the matrix language is Japanese and the embedded language is English, but sometimes I switch them depend on the situation or the audience of communication. My code-switching style is that I embed English words in Japanese sentences. Sometimes I cannot directly find a right expression in Japanese, so I use English words that are more suitable in meaning and expression, and vise versa. When I use English, at the end of the sentence I embed Japanese conversational stems, such as “dayo” and “ne” expression as a reassurance in conversation because Japanese is my mother tongue and those stems are embedded in my speech habit. The reason why it is specifically in written communication is because in written communication there is more time to think and construct sentences than verbal communication. In a limited, short period of time bilinguals use their language naturally, so code-switching is often used, but in written communication bilinguals have time to think and construct sentences well, so if code-switching occurs, there might be more concrete reason why they construct the sentence.

On the topic of code-switching, I am interested in code-switching in texting. The textbook describes the purposes of code-switching, such as excluding and including people in conversation, emphasizing expression, injecting humor, etc. I find code-switching in texting and other written communication more interesting than code-switching in conversation because bilinguals use various style of sentences. For example, when I send text to friends who are bilinguals, I send Japanese-only text, English-only text, and text written in both English and Japanese (code-switching). I do this without thinking about it, so I want to know what makes bilinguals to choose what language to use in written communication, such as texting and chatting.

Code-switching is very interesting topic in both second language studies and linguistics because only multilinguals do code-switching. Monolinguals do not primarily code-switch because they do not often have another language to embed in. Code-switching is also interesting with the cognitive system because bilinguals often code-switch unconsciously. It is also interesting that I feel code-switching only consists of embedding the word. They do not really mix the language but interchange the word from different languages. Multilinguals substitute a word when they do not know how to express it in other language. Social issues to this topic is that since the world is now globalized and people can use the Internets and other tools to “steal” a word and use it in their sentences. For example, a word “TSUNAMI” is a foreign word to English, but it is used in many different fields and treated as embedded language, which monolinguals use. This is not particularly code-switching. I need to define and set the line between “code-switching” and “just using foreign words.”

I carried out this research with a sample of texting and chatting with my friends who are bilinguals. The domains of written communication are cell phone texting and an application called LINE, which is a chatting application.

The samples that I collected data from are Subject 1, an 18 year-old girl who was born and raised in Hawaii. This subject uses Japanese at home, but outside the home the she uses English as academic and social language. Sample identifies both English and Japanese as her dominant languages. Subject 1 considers herself a balanced bilingual. Another sample, Subject 2, is a 20 year-old girl who was born and raised in Japan until the age of 17, but went to an international school in Japan. Later, she went to New York, and moved to Hawaii 2 years ago. This subject lives in a dorm, so this person uses English both at home and school. Subject 2 identifies English as her dominant language since she has been using English more than she uses Japanese. She considers herself a balanced bilingual too. The reason why I chose balanced bilinguals is because they will have equal opportunities to use both language at the same time, so the possibility of code-switching for both language is equal.

Data Analysis

Example Data 1: Subject 2

Suvject 2 sent me a text message when she saw a person whom we both know at Blaisedell Center. Subject 2 texted me:

{Im at blaisedell picking up my stuff for the aloha run *nandakedo,* Takashi is volunteering. }

Within this sentence, English is a matrix language and a Japanese word is embedded. The embedded word *nandakedo (なんだけど)* is a conjunction similar to a English word “and”. The purpose of this code-swtiching was substituting a word. Objectively, the word *nandakedo* has more letters than *and* so she should have written *and* because it would save much more time, however, she used a longer word. I asked her way she used *nandakedo* in stead of “and”. She said because the following sentence consists of a *JAPANESE person* (Takashi is a name of Japanese man) so without thinking about it she used Japanese word. There was a connection between the context of the sentence and the diction. I asked was she conscious of substituting a word and she told me she was aware of code-switching. She did not know how to express *nandakedo* in English, so she used *nandakedo*. However, she also told me it was natural for her to mix words. She has been mixing the languages and words for so long it became her way to communicate.

Example Data 2: Subject 2

Subject 2 and I were making a meeting. I told her why don’t we meet on Sunday and she replied me:

{“Its only until Saturday *dakara iiyo}*

The purpose of this code-switching is an emphasis on a point. She wanted to emphasise the fact that she can make it to the meeting on the day we were talking about. Therefore, she switched to Japanese. This is a short sentence, but also this is a very interesting sentence because English is a matrix language until the word *dakara*, which is a Japanese conjunction meaning “so” in English and after that word the matrix language changes to Japanese. *Iiyo* means “yes” in Japanese. She could have said “Its only until Saturday dakara yes”, but after she used *iiyo.* When she wrote this sentence, her brain was in English mode. However, when she wrote *dakara*, her brain switched to Japanese mode and she continued writing sentence with Japanese. Her mental switch mechanism shifted from English to Japanese by code-switching. The reason why she said she used *dakara iiyo* in stead of “so yes” because she feels more attached to Japanese conjunctions than English conjunction. I asked her why she used Japanese to emphasize a point in stead of keeping English. She told me Japanese would be more softer and more polite than English. Subject 2 told me Japanese is the language when she use to talk about request or setting up a plan because English sometimes is too hard or too demanding.

Example Data 3: Subject 1

This is a text message from Subject 1 that she responded to a question when we were talking about a meeting.

{Who’s coming at *nanji?}*

The purpose of this code-switching is an emphasis on a point and also substituting a phrase. This is an interesting example too because *nanji* literally means “what time” in English. If she would say this sentence using only English a sentence would be “Who is coming at what time?” Japanese people would say the same sentence “nanjini dare ga kuru” literally translating word by word “what time who is coming” so normally Japanese people emphasize “what time” part at the beginning of the sentence. Subject 1 did not say “Nanji whos coming” because this would be a grammatically correct in Japanese AND English, but she put English prior to Japanese. Therefore, when people use a code-switching, they truly protect grammar of the matrix language.

I asked her way she code-switched and she told me it was faster to type *nanji* and it was natural for her to choose faster way of sending a text.

Example Data 4: Subject 2

This is when Subject 2 sent me a question about a Tupperware that I borrowed from her.

{ *Souieba* do you still have my Tupperware?}

The purpose of this code-switching was substituting a word. *Souieba* is a conjuction similar to “By the way” in English. This example is different from others because this sentence starts with a embedded word. At first this sentence would seem to have Japanese as a matrix language, but still this sentence has English as matrix language. She told me reason why she used *souieba* was because she just felt like using it.

Example Data 5: Subject 1

This is when Subject 1 sent me a random text.

I’m hima all dayyy

The purpose of this code-switching was substituting a word *hima*. *Hima* means free in social context in Japanese, but can figuratively be translated to having nothing to do in English. I asked her way she used *hima* instead of free and she said “free” in English and *hima* do not share the same meaning and she could not come up with a word that has the same meaning in English, so she used *hima.*

Based on the data I collected, among the majority of data sets subjects used Japanese as a embedded language since for both of them English is more superior than Japanese. The common purposes of code-switching was a substituting a word. There are many expressions that Japanese and English do not share, so subjects substituted words and phrases often. The common category of words and phrases that subjects switched was conjunction. However, emotionally they told me they feel more attached to Japanese. The fact that their native languages are both Japanese make me think that they would use Japanese a lot, but they used English as the matrix language for the most time, so there is a paradox.

To solve this paradox, there is a need of defining the domain language because both of them said that they speak English more often and they think they are better at English. However, they still code-switched to Japanese because they “feel” attached to Japanese. There is a conflict between the emotional state of speaker and the ability of the use of language.

The code-switching is a very useful tool for multilinguals because it gives more opportunities and choices of expression to multilinguals. The primary purpose of languages is to express ideas and communicate to others. Multilinguals use the code-switching to communicate with others more efficiently and express their ideas and feelings more freely.

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