Child codeswitching
and adult content contrasts

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Abstract

This paper discusses links between the conditions of developing child bilingualism and the adult outcomes in semiotic contrast in elicited speech and codeswitching.

Analysis of interaction of children raised as bilinguals shows that from the beginning they can recognize the appropriate language for addressees. When the lexical repertoire is inadequate, borrowing occurs, and codeswitching of longer segments appears before age two. Throughout childhood and adolescence, codeswitching has increasing interactional functions as children's pragmatic skills grow.

Some adult codeswitching relies on semiotic differences implied by language. It is likely that both such codeswitching and the dual selves shown in elicited discourse in different languages are limited to specific sociolinguistic situations and personal histories. These include education in a second language, adult immigration, and frequent contact with a monolingual community.

1 Introduction

The differences in content and perspective related to language separation in the bilingual adult are the other side of language choice during codeswitching. In this paper, we propose to examine the context and development of codeswitching in children as an aspect of pragmatic development, and then to link developing codeswitching practices to the adult division of labor between languages.

2 Child bilingualism

The requirements for the acquisition of any language are: capacity, motivation to understand, be understood and/or sound like a group member, and access or sufficient time in situations where a symbolic system and understandable information (meanings) co-occur systematically and permit inference and mapping.

The factor of access is the most important one at any age to acquire a language. Motivation has its effects primarily through varying access. In infancy motivation is not a variable factor since exposure is out of the control of the child, but older learners

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can ignore or avoid access to one of the varieties available to them. By preschool, children begin to consider it more important to understand some speakers than others and tend to pay more attention to them and try to spend time with them. They come to care more about being understood by or sounding like specific others. These are the factors that account for the fact that children usually sound more like their peers than like their parents.

Children also often learn the language of their peers in the neighborhood. To go beyond just understanding a language, one also needs a reason to speak. This might be sociability, which makes one want to initiate interaction, or a need to ask for necessities. Beyond this, learners can have a desire to sound like others and to be seen as an insider who shares the same values. Sociolinguistic studies of dialect (e.g., Berthele, 2000; Eckert, 1989) have shown that in children and teenagers these can be powerful factors in making children’s speech like that of others located nearby in a peer network.

These factors mean that most infants with enough exposure to more than one language will become competent, regardless of how the interaction conditions are set up. In the case of bilinguals, there is not equal access to both languages. Whether a bilingual child will grow in knowledge of each language, develop complex syntax, a variety of registers, and a mature vocabulary, depends both on the changing family usage and on wider social networks as time passes. It is very easy for a childhood language to be lost without family and community support (e.g., Hakuta, 1994; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Later use of one of a child’s languages often declines in relatively monolingual societies like the United States because the child hears the dominant language of the community more often, wants to sound like a speaker of that variety, and gets no school support for his or her first languages if they are of low prestige.

3 Contexts of child bilingualism

3.1 Person-prescriptive families

The first studies of child bilingualism were often done by linguists studying their own families (Leopold, 1939–1949; Ronjat, 1913). In these cases, the prescriptive beliefs of linguists affected their family practices. A prototype of this kind of study is Ronjat’s family, in which one parent spoke only German, the other spoke only French, and visitors were admonished to stick to one language only (Grammont’s principle).

In such practices, the output of each parent is prescribed, but both parents must understand each other. In the strictest case, speech between the parents involves asymmetry of use, with one speaking language A and the other speaking language B. While the child must know that the parents can each understand the speech of the other, the child is admonished to do situational switching; that is, to change language by addressee, even when the child is with both parents.

In a three-person, isolated family, such prescriptive conditions can be described as valuing maximum separation of languages and setting up the optimal experimental conditions for the study of any mutual influences on the linguistic systems of the child that might occur. However, families are normally not isolated. There are others who
come into the household as playmates, relatives, guests, employees or repairmen. In many communities it cannot be assumed that these all are bilingual, so what happens theoretically is that the child must act as interpreter, since only the child is allowed to speak both languages. Valdés (2003) provides more discussion on the child as interpreter to outsiders. Language choice between siblings in such a family is not predictable, since their interaction must sometimes occur outside of parental control.

In the real world, of course, it is extremely difficult to maintain rigid prescriptive separation, and even adults following a prescriptive system are likely to slip and use codeswitching or brief insertions to each other or to the child or to find it necessary to use their passive language to outsiders.

3.2
Asymmetric parent bilingualism

In some families, there is both a bilingual and a monolingual parent or other relative. The outcome depends very much on whether the monolingual speaks the dominant societal language or a minority language, and is unwilling or unable to learn the other language.

In such families, the child hears the parents talk to each other in the shared variety. Since bilinguals often feel it is rude to speak in a language others do not understand, there is a problem in conversation between the child and bilingual parent if the monolingual parent is present. For this reason, the excluded parent sometimes may not actually want the child to be bilingual, so power dynamics in the family can play a role. If the monolingual speaks the community’s dominant language, there can be a strong risk of language loss. This issue of fear of exclusion and of a threat to power is reminiscent of the problem in workplaces where monolingual owners/supervisors prohibit speech in the minority language.

On the other hand, the presence in the family of a monolingual speaker of a minority language that is not supported in the community can be a very strong inducement to bilingualism in children. In an unpublished instructional classroom study on hundreds of families through a questionnaire project in the community, Ervin-Tripp and Guo (1992) found that death or departure from the household of a monolingual first generation immigrant was among the strongest predictors of minority or immigrant language loss after childhood.

3.3
Bilingual dual use families

In the majority of bilingual families, both languages are known and used by everyone. In immigrant families competence changes through time, as a result of both schooling of children and language learning on the job by parents (Hakuta, 1994), changing both language attitudes and codeswitching practices in the family (Valdés, 1996).

Although sibling talk is an understudied topic, a few researchers have stressed the importance of siblings’ social role in the development of a family’s bilingual skills (e.g., Fantini, 1985; Grosjean, 1982). Most studies show that at a given age it is first-borns that know the parents’ language best. Yet older children also bring the dominant language
from the community into the home and switch or translate when siblings or parents
do not understand.

3.4 Bilingualism from the outside

When a family uses a single language variety inside the household, the bilingualism
of a child comes from outside the family. In immigrant communities, many children’s
first exposure to the dominant societal variety is from school and neighborhood peer
interaction. For many, the first contact is at school age. In such cases, there is an inside
language and an outside language, which are likely to have quite different pragmatic
and semantic domains.

Because the pragmatic and social features of language are learned in contexts of
social differentiation, children whose knowledge of one language is limited to hearing
their parents can have embarrassing gaps in their ability to use the language in the
larger community. An example is formal style or social marking. Jun (1992) found
that Koreans brought up in the U.S. did not learn obligatory addressee honorifics
unless they spent many hours in Korean-speaking gatherings of varying age and rank.
This frequency variable, in addition to family attitudes toward correctness in Korean,
predicted pragmatic proficiency. The presence of nearby older relatives might be the
key, since Korean parents must use polite honorific forms to their own parents and
older siblings, and children learn from observation. The nuclear family is not enough
to give full social competence in a language.

3.5 Multilingual communities

When there is multilingualism in the local community, a child will encounter more
than one variety of language in school or neighborhood. Community use of the family
variety can provide the child with a formal oral style, literacy, and access to wider
register variation than the home offers (Lowie, 1945).

In the larger community, the family language may be heard in a local neighborhood,
and may even carry prestige on the playground, yet this community may be relatively
powerless in the larger society. In other conditions, the child’s home variety may be the
language of a powerful minority. An example of the latter would be children of families
of colonial rulers, as in Victorian India or South Africa, or Americans in Puerto Rico.
It remains to be seen in future research at what age children make use of macro-societal
prestige locally in their language use, for example in play.

In the case of communities where different ethnic groups live, children learn
different varieties of a language. For a decade, Zentella (1997) followed a group of
Puerto Rican “Nuyorican” children who were growing up in New York City’s East
Harlem. These “Nuyorican” children grew up learning up to seven varieties of Spanish
and English, such as Popular Puerto Rican Spanish, English-dominant Spanish, Puerto
Rican English, and African American Vernacular English. The children’s repertoire
was directly influenced by the community members and their social networks.
The simple measurement of relative lexical or syntactic proficiency does not begin to exhaust the range of difference in possible pragmatic, social, and semantic developmental histories that can affect research studies of bilinguals.

3.6 Instructional strategies

Family language values and the family strategies for dealing with mixing and switching provide a contextual background for all code choice issues. Because of the inevitability of lexical gaps, nonce borrowing must occur in every child, even in prescriptive families. Several observers have reminded us that what parents say they do is not always what it turns out on tape that they actually do. Inaccuracy of informal observation or recall, especially where there are values about mixing or about the varieties used, is a familiar caution in sociolinguistic research, (e.g., Gumperz, 1982, p. 64). For this reason, we can only trust recorded observations.

Lanza (1992) has provided us with a convenient list of increasingly permissive instructional contexts. She suggests a cline in adult responses to child errors in language choice, going from (a) minimal grasp by the hearer (such as a clarification request), (b) expressed guess which reveals some comprehension, (c) repetition in the other language (translation), (d) move-on (ignore), and (e) codeswitching at the instigation of the child. It is not surprising to learn that most of the time families go about their business and do not stop to do instruction on language each time a switch or insertion occurs (Juan-Garau & Pérez-Vidal, 2001).

Given the problem of lexical access for young children and the exigencies of daily life, it is not altogether practical to respond at the instructional level to each instance. However, we can expect that differences in family discourse strategies at the extremes of the cline can have consequences for the child’s practices in the family. For example, Juan-Garau and Perez-Vidal (2001) and Lanza (1992) observed that in asymmetric parent bilingualism the parent who speaks the minority language is the one who strives the hardest by using clarification requests because the threat of language loss is greatest. The parent who speaks the least threatened language is likely even to accept codeswitching as a communicative strategy.

4 Types and functions of codeswitching

The literature on the functions of various kinds of code alternation directs us to four slightly different processes. One is discourse-related switching, as described by Auer (1984), Halmari and Smith (1994), Wei (1998), and others. In the case of discourse-related switching, it is a change itself that does the marking, just as in monolingual speech lexical and prosodic discourse markers do their work by signaling change. Marking of quotations, interjections, reiteration, clarifications, and emphasis on a request, or marking teasing or punchlines by language switching can be of this kind. Alfonzetti (1998) explicitly separates switching where direction matters from switching purely for interactional functions such as self-repair, reformulation, topic change, story-telling, and pre-closing of conversation.
Lexical insertion or borrowing involves triggering of brief codeswitching, which is often due to a second process that Zentella (1990) calls crutching, producing the most immediately accessible lexical item in a semantic field. Such insertions are often related to topic specializations (Lowie, 1945).

In some cases, codeswitching dependent on topic specialization is correlated with well-defined language choice in the history of the speaker. The use of English textbooks in many countries for science and professional instruction can lead to special language use by field. People who do not live in bilingual communities or go to schools or universities where situational switching occurs can nevertheless have a personal history which leads to lexical specializations, such as professional or humanities education in a different country. In his analysis of the socio-pragmatics of switching, Gumperz (1982) identified socially predictable language choices based on addressee, location, event frame or genre, and topic. He dubbed these all situational codeswitching. In established societal bilingualism, situational codeswitching can be so predictable that deviations become marked (Myers-Scotton, 1993) and available for tactical use (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai, 2001).

A fourth function of codeswitching is what Gumperz (1982) has called metaphorical or conversational switching, in which the switch is a contextualization cue. These are switches that occur without any other cues, as part of the normal flow of conversation, “to communicate metaphoric information about how they intend their words to be understood” (p. 61). Among his examples is a type he called personalization versus objectivation, the contrast being drawn between we and they, the family variety and other varieties, emotional aspects usually being in the family variety. However, just which semiotic contrasts are indexed by a switch may vary widely. For instance, in public monologs, comedians play on the audience’s beliefs about the groups alluded to by linguistic features — ignorance/education, conservatism/radicalism, cold/warm, and so on. (Ervin-Tripp, 2001; Woolard, 1987). In these switches, direction matters since the code alludes to or indexes social features, or involves conversational divergence or convergence. Gumperz regards this switching as an optional semiotic device for generating implicature.

These processes are not entirely independent. In a conversation between bilinguals, it is not always clear when a particular switch is just interactional topic change marking, is triggered by lexical specialization and accessibility, or is a contextualization tactic. Even in the discourse-related switching described by Wei (1998) the particular language did matter to the local interactional process, in ways that became clear through the exchanges.

Almost all studies of codeswitching over the years have been done on fluent adult bilinguals and the claim has been made that codeswitching requires equal competence. However, we will demonstrate that codeswitching occurs even before second-language learners have achieved equal proficiency in both languages.

5 Developmental changes in bilingualism

5.1 Infant code choice

Studies of bilingual infants in person-prescriptive families reveal that from the beginning the children differentiate the languages (Goodz, 1989; Lanvers, 2001; Lanza, 1992), and
if they know the necessary lexical items, make appropriate choices to a significant degree. Controlled evidence of this skill has been developed by Quay (1995) and by Genesee, Nicoladis and Paradis (1995) in Canada, using French/English bilinguals around two years old. A particularly important feature of this body of work is the careful recording of the lexical repertoire of each child for each language, which makes it possible to identify when borrowing is based on gaps in lexical repertoire. What is not clear in such research is how children normally cope with addressing both parents at the same time, when the family rules oblige them to do situational switching according to addressee.

5.2 Borrowing in early child bilingualism

The insertion of single words or short phrases is very common in early child bilingualism. The linguists who have looked at cases of infant bilingualism (Jisa, 2000) have noted that when there is a difference in dominance, the dominant language is no different from that of child monolinguals, but the weaker language may be deviant from that of monolinguals of the same age. In addition, there is a language typology factor, in the earlier emergence of morphosyntax in some languages. Thus a child who is bilingual may be at a more advanced stage in one language than in the other.

In the case of Siri Lanza (1992; 1997) the child’s stronger language was Norwegian, the language of the larger community. The language of the mother, and between the parents, was English. Siri inserted lexemes across languages, but the basic system was always Norwegian. She could borrow English words into Norwegian sentences, but she never integrated Norwegian words into English morphology with English function words. Petersen (1998) reports a Danish-English bilingual dominant in English who did the same with English as the basic language.

At early stages of language development, insertional processes may be quite different from those that occur later. A good comparison is provided by Jisa (2000), whose two French-English bilingual daughters (2:3 and 3:6), after starting out in France with French dominance and strong passive competence in English, were immersed for two months in English at their differing stages of language development. As in the Lanza and Peterson examples, these children did not insert French lexical material into English bound and free grammatical morphemes, thus showing French dominance. One piece of evidence that mixed utterances were pushing the limits of the children’s capacities was that they were longer than the MLU in one-language utterances.

Jisa’s examples of borrowings by young children are conspicuously different from those we see in older children and adults; for example in the case of pronouns, which are freely inserted as if they were nouns.

(1) French-English bilingual age 3:8
    tu DO WHAT avec le table
    ‘you do what with the table’

(2) tu SEE
    ‘you see’
(3) WHAT THIS tu GOT
‘what this you got’

(4) moi I GET DOWN
‘me, I get down’

(Jisa, 2000 p. 1374)

The last example reflects the practice of Francophone children who often start sentences with moi je as a strong assertion about the self. Paradis, Nicoladis and Genesee (2000) show similar examples in Montreal, such as HE a pomme, I was taxi, and ME cacher loup. These examples show us that young children treat pronouns as content words to be borrowed.

5.3 Functions of codeswitching

Evidence of situational switching reflects what is salient to young children as they develop: people, place, activity, and genre. Person switching has proven to be the most robust pragmatic factor in children's language choices. Lanza (1997) noted that from the earliest age, Siri would speak the appropriate language according to addressee, or to get the hearer’s attention. Lanvers (2001) found self-corrective switching to parents in a parent-prescriptive family by 1:7 and 1:10. According to experimental evidence of Genesee, Boivin and Nicoladis (1996), bilingual children in Montreal are capable of adapting their language choice to match the language used by an unfamiliar interlocutor by two years of age. Jisa found slips in her two-year-old, who occasionally spoke English to a French grandmother after her return from America, but none in the three-year-old. The sources of this skill appear to be the language used by the other and communicative breakdowns (Comeau & Genesee, 2001). Eventually children generalize to strangers similar in appearance (Fantini, 1985; McClure, 1981).

A second frequent factor in early situational switching is physical setting. Children come to recognize that language is different at school, at church, at the doctor’s and at home, though these changes in setting typically also include personnel changes, so a careful study would use controlled conditions. Jørgensen (1998) argues that until eight years of age, person and setting are the main determinants, and that therefore conversational and discursive switching start late.

Kwan-Terry (1992) identified activity as a third situational selector for her son, who insisted that narratives from his bilingual mother always occur in Cantonese.

Whether metaphorical switching occurs in children has been under dispute. The evidence suggests locally constructed cases of contrast. Young children engage in fantasy; one could see rules about speech variety according to role as an extension of participant situational switching. For example, Kwan-Terry’s son insisted that play characters and animals speak and receive English. Language changes can be used to mark the voices in play, the director’s voice, the role voice, the child’s voice (e.g., Halmari & Smith, 1994), just as very young monolinguals vary pitch and phonological features of roles.

Discourse-related switching appears quite early. Lanvers (2001) found in early German-English switching before age two the same functions of crutching, appeal, and
emphasis that Zentella (1990) described in older children. Topical switching appeared before two, with quotational switching later.

5.4 Pragmatic changes in middle childhood

Around seven or eight, children develop new pragmatic skills such as being able to infer intentions from hints or from sarcasm and to make requests that take into account obstacles in another’s situation (Ervin-Tripp, 1982; Shantz, 1983). We expect that at this age there will be more complex conversational strategies that may take the listener’s perspective into account.

In a study of middle childhood peer talk, Ervin-Tripp (2000) developed a method of collecting data which lets children mutually select one or two friends and leaves them alone while being monitored with radio microphones. The conversational data gathered using this methodology is rich in content and does not interfere with children’s normal peer talk.

First, Ervin-Tripp examined what children at these ages are able to do within monolingual speech or single language turns, by way of marking of conversational structure. The markers used varied with function. They include prosodic changes, vocatives, discourse markers like hey, look, but, OK, and repetition. It is known from studies of early social interaction (Kyratzis & Ervin-Tripp, 1999), and from puppet play (Andersen, Brizuela, DuPuy, & Gonneman, 1999) that by age four children can already use stylistic variation and choice of discourse markers to indicate social information. The various markers we identified in the peer talk served most often to mark episodes in an activity such as quoting or role-playing, to shift frames, and less often to attract attention or grab a turn. Changing frame recalls Goffman’s discussions of footing (1974, 1979). What is shifted in the frame change can be genre, topic, speech act, or perspective. The identifiers after each example indicate grade level, gender, and group. Asterisks precede stressed words.

(5) Marking genre/activity change (seven-year-olds)

[boys discuss cleaning up lunch garbage]

a. Alan: [blows into microphone]

b. sh-h-h

c. \{[funny voice] hello = is this *on? = \}

d. Len: = he-

e. \{[funny voice] my name is *Lenny.\}

UCDisclab T2M3

Sometimes the child appeared to be shifting perspective in a new idea or in a reply. An example is marking the frame of a quotation, frequently by speeding up. Quoted or imagined speech of course is itself represented by changes, usually stylistic, but also often prosodic.
After frame change, the next most common function in the markers was a change in role, shown by a vocal shift of some sort, often prosodic. This might be a shift from narrator to speaker, or from narrative line to coda.

Reyes has used the same research method to observe bilingual children’s peer talk (Reyes, 2004). The children in this sample are Spanish speakers from immigrant families in northern California who were in a bilingual education program. All of the children had first learned Spanish at home. The children we observed heard English and Spanish unpredictably in the classroom, and their own language choice was left uncontrolled in class. Teachers generally supported the use and development of both Spanish and English at school, but many teachers and schoolmates were monolingual English speakers.

When the children talked about science materials and bilingual worksheets in the observational situation, they typically increased their use of Spanish. Clearly, one cannot say that English is marked for school uses for these children.

**Borrowing**

These children all were competent in Spanish but differed in their relative skill in English. The children with the least English skill did the least codeswitching and more often inserted English lexical items into their Spanish. This borrowing was typically of items we judged to have greater relative frequency of use in this community in the source language, or which had unique semantics in that language. In these examples, the identifiers indicate grade level, gender, and group.

(6)  P:  \( y \text{ luego el GUINEA PIG que tiene se salió a escondidas} \)
     \(`and then the guinea pig that she has got out and hid`\)

UCDislab W2F3

It is unlikely that a child would have encountered ‘guinea pig’ in California outside of the school context.

(7)  R:  \( \text{veníamos aquí cuando éramos STUDENT COUNCIL} \)
     \(`we came here when we were [part of the] student council`\)

UC Dislab W5M3

(8)  a.  J:  \( \text{aquí esta la bola} \)
     \(`here's the ball'\)

   \( \rightarrow \)  b.  I:  \( \text{OH CO-O-OL} \)

c.  J:  \( = = \text{dámele, dámele} \)
     \(`give it to me, give it to me'\)

UCDislab W2M1

Many slang phrases that children use, such as *oh cool* have no equivalents and carry connotations of hipness specifically in American mass culture. Brief phrases can be acquired quickly as a first entry point into another language, before the child’s productive skills make it comfortable to switch longer sentences. Many were from music. The younger children (seven-year-olds) who were still developing their skills in English were the ones who used nonce borrowing the most.
Codeswitching

Halmari and Smith (1994) and Cromdal and Aronsson (2000), observing bilingual peer play in middle childhood, found many discursive uses of codeswitching, often at the service of social dynamics such as teasing or anger, or to mark by-play. In group interaction, codeswitching can be used to select participants or to display power.

The codeswitching in the Oakland dyads was most frequent by the most competent and most balanced bilinguals. In the observational situation, there were three contexts which might have lent themselves to situational switching — sociable talk while waiting for the science task, school task-oriented talk about the science materials we brought, including a worksheet in English and Spanish, and the sociable talk that was interspersed into the task activity.

Given that the two languages occurred in the school both in the classroom and at play, we did not find evidence of situational switching, for example between the on-task science talk and sociable exchanges. However, the terminology for magnets, though the objects were labeled in print in both languages, tended to be in English, so there was English lexical borrowing during the science task when Spanish was preferred. The largest amount of codeswitching in both age groups occurred during the sociable talk that frequently alternated with the science task talk.

In example (9) codeswitching marked a change in footing that occurred during the alternation of social and science talk, making use of the terminology for magnets embedded in the children’s figurative speech play. L’s speech accelerates as she talks.

(9) Fifth grade girls during activity with magnets.

a. L: *mira* (fac.)*mira mira mira mira mira*
   ‘look, look, look, look, look’

b. *si lo pongo así y lo quiero acercar ese se va*
   ‘if I put it like this and I try to put it close to the other one it pulls apart’

c. E: [laugh]

d. L: *[role voice]* I DON’T WANT TO BE WITH YOU. I DON’T WANNA BE WITH YOU *NORTH. I WANNA BE WITH *SOUTH MY *LOVE*
   [both laugh]

e. *hora* (*ahora*) *un SOUTH con un SOUTH*
   ‘now a south with a south’

g. *[high, role voice]* OH MY GOODNESS I LOVE NORTH.

h. I DON’T WANT YOU SOUTH!

i. *[crying]* OH GET AWAY FROM ME

UCDisclab W5F5

The example above shows how two fifth-grade girls use the concept of the polarity between positive and negative electric charges of the magnets as they test the attraction and repulsion of the magnets. They switch between languages as they switch footing between the science task involving object manipulations and social imaginative play with the objects as characters. Throughout the transcript, the two girls used both languages...
in a variety of contexts, so it was not predictable which would be chosen to role play the voice of magnetic poles.

Even in dyads, the children used switching to mark interactional processes, as Halmari and Smith (1994) and Cromdal and Aronsson (2000) proposed for larger play groups. The primary function of switching marking the sociable talk during the science task was to indicate an off-task frame shift. Within sociable talk at both ages, switching most often marked topic changes. Secondarily, switching marked emphasis for commands, or clarification. In the science activity there also was some language change to mark interactional function shifts such as those between assertions and questions, and in the older children’s sociable talk there also was inter-turn accommodation to follow up on a partner’s language choice. In (e) we see attention shifting, in (h) shifting for a clarification, and in (g) the shift of O from the language of his prior turn seems to be an accommodation to the prior shift of A.

(10) Fifth grade boys’ talk about magnets

a. O: *con el *compas así que da *vueltas la flecha?  
   ‘with the compass this way the arrow turns around’

b. las *demas cosas de *clase?  
   ‘the other things from class?’

c. A: ==*ira (mira).  
   ‘look.’

d. O: se *pegan.  
   ‘they stick together’

e. A: *ira (mira) … LET’S DO *THAT ONE … LET’S SEE.

f. [low] GOO::D … *POWER UP] … AAH::

g. O: ROUND *THEM UP.

h. son *MAGNETS. tienen MAGNETS *dentro.  
   ‘they’re magnets … they have magnets inside’

i. A: YUP.

UCDisclab W5M4

The codeswitching observed in child second language learners is very similar to codeswitching observed in bilingual adults in terms of interactional functions, and somewhat expands the functions observed in infants. The variety of interactional functions served by the switches increased with age. As children achieve higher levels of second language fluency and social adaptability, their pragmatic and conversational repertoire increases to achieve their more complex communicative goals, like accommodation.

Zentella (1997) has described the prevalence of codeswitching in Puerto-Rican families in New York. Within families and in schools, values differ with respect to codeswitching. Peers can have their own norms about switching. A very rich set of group practices, including gender difference in norms, can be seen in Woolard’s description of teenagers in Barcelona (Woolard, 1997). Woolard argued from her interview data that there were different ideas about the social meaning of accommodation and divergence for the boys and for the girls.

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Identity functions in switching

Gumperz pointed out that “in bilingual situations the participants’ awareness of alternative communicative conventions becomes a resource, which can be built on to lend subtlety to what is said” (Gumperz, 1982, p.65). This he referred to as contextualization. In a family situation Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai (2001) argued for a case of tactical language choice by a child which was marked because of family preference. However, in our child peer data, there were as yet no clear semantic differentiation between the two languages, only interactional functions for shifting, independent of direction as far as we could tell. Sebba and Wotton argue that, even for adults,

although speakers may systematically differentiate the codes in conversational practice, it is not possible to make a priori assumptions about which code carries the putative ‘we’ functions and which the putative ‘they’ functions. This can only be decided by looking at the functions which the codes serve, which may vary from situation to situation and cannot be treated as given. (Sebba & Wotton, 1988, p.276)

6 Changes in content with changes in language

The semiotic separation of languages implied in certain types of metaphorical code-switching in adults suggests that languages (and related cultures) may call up different semantic contexts. In the mid-fifties, the possibility that bilinguals may have different experiences in their two language contexts that would be reflected in discourse in each language had not yet been explored. Impelled by the report of bilingual friends that they felt that they had several personalities according to language, Ervin undertook two projects using the social psychological tools of the day. The first (Ervin, 1964b) used the collection of three-minute stories about ambiguous Thematic Apperception Test pictures. The participants were all French-born bilinguals who had learned the languages in entirely different cultural contexts. English was a second language for all of them. Many were married to Americans, and had raised families in the U.S. The sessions were six weeks apart. Half the bilinguals told French stories first, and half told English first. They were told that if they remembered the first story, they should think of a new one. Ervin used media comparisons and cultural studies by anthropologists to predict contrasts before collecting the data. Three were significant: in French the subjects told more stories involving themes of autonomy/passive aggression, and more involving verbal aggression to peers, and the women subjects produced more achievement themes in English than in French.

An expanded study in the early sixties (Ervin-Tripp, 1964a, 1967) found female Japanese-English bilinguals in order to enlarge the contrast of both culture and language. There were two samples: Nisei born in the U.S., who spent part of their childhood, often during the WWII years, with relatives in Japan, and Japanese “war brides” who grew up in Japan, married Americans and moved to the U.S. Monolingual matched samples were added, all subjects were female, and a variety of measures besides the three-minute Thematic Apperception Test narratives about ambiguous pictures were used—including chain word associations and sentence completions. Because of the monolingual comparisons, it was possible to have a completely statistical measure of proximity to monolingual norms, which often did not fit stereotypes. Because there was
a possibility that differences could be merely the result of role playing or self instruction rather than due to change of language, some subjects were told to use the same language but answer like a Japanese woman or like an American.

The results suggested that semantic separation varies with the task. All the structured stimuli were chosen because cultural differences were expected. The most consistent differences were on the word associations and sentence completions. When speaking Japanese, the women gave word associations and sentence completions more like Japanese monolinguals, and when speaking English, more like Americans.

When the stimulus word or phrase for chain word associations was a standard contrastive cultural object like tea, familiar to everyone, there were strong contrasts both by language and by instructional set. But for emotion words the associations are much subtler, less often known, and contrasts much greater for language difference. (Similarly, Block [1957] found that grief, guilt, love, sympathy were different for Norwegians and Americans). For both word associations and sentence completions, the contrast with language was larger for the Japanese who had learned English as adults than for the Nisei. This makes sense in terms of the stronger separation of language and culture in their life histories. The Nisei, who were childhood bilinguals, were relatively American in both languages.

This issue has come back to life recently. There has been a resurgence of serious study of the effects of language on concepts and memory, in widely varying languages, using experimental methods to study observables such as spatial language (Lucy, 1997). One version is in work on the study of concepts in language and culture, using a variety of methods, as summarized recently by Pavlenko, who identified many of the factors affecting these phenomena (Pavlenko, 1999, p. 224).

Therapists who treat bilinguals have always been aware of the differences in memory and sense of self in both languages. Koven (1998) found that discursive displays of notions of the self differed in the Portuguese-French bilinguals' languages. She argues that this is possible because each language creates a new frame for the speaker. The resulting display of differences in personality is very similar to the contrastive findings in the Japanese-English research (Ervin, 1964a). These are some of the differences in the sense of self, in values, and in concepts available to be drawn on when bilinguals take different stances in codeswitching during dialogic discourse.

The differences repeatedly found in chain word associations involving cultural values indicate that the conceptual domains that are accessed in lexical processing can be reliably contrasted. However, these differences are greatest when there is contact with relatively monolingual communities, or age difference in the learning, as in the case of adult bilingualism. In ongoing bilingual communities there is a strong pressure to the merger of semantic spaces and the compromise of the contrasts between the monolinguals not in contact. It can be argued that what happens in ongoing bilingualism is that besides convergence, new semantic contrasts are constructed in the local group, as long as the lexical possibilities are present and there is an interest in maintaining contrasting varieties. There is evidence of both processes in studies of bilingual immigrant communities in which there has been maintenance without significant monolingual replenishment (e.g., Haugen, 1950) or many generations of bilingualism (Gumperz & Wilson, 1971). The studies on codeswitching have all found significant local conversational marking
of interactional processes with switches of code, but only some have found that the direction of switching made a difference. Codeswitching in dialog can call on contrasts in ideational reference, action inferences, social indexing, or emotional associations. Each of these can be indexed in switching.

It seems likely that sociolinguistic and personal history factors that create large contextual and cultural contrasts play an important part in producing shared differences. It is not an accident that social differentiation involving contrasting varieties used in education was important in Gumperz’s work in India and Norway. Among adult immigrants with similar histories, there can be shared contrasts in cultural frameworks that are invoked in story-telling tasks or in meaningful codeswitching.

The codeswitching we see in infants grows out of a milieu with minimal difference to be linked with language; in older children and adolescents, codes are used for locally constructed semiotic contrasts and for interactional processes. So it is only in a special subset of bilingual lives that one can expect the carry-over of monolingual experience to show up in either experimental studies of contrastive elicited discourse or in spontaneous codeswitching.

7 Conclusions

From a very early age, children raised as bilinguals use the appropriate language for addressees and for different contexts. When there are lexical gaps, borrowing occurs. Codeswitching of longer segments can be found before age two. As children’s pragmatic and social skills develop, codeswitching has more interactional functions, which supplement their within-language, monolingual speech marking.

Some adult codeswitching makes use of semiotic differences implied by language for speakers to signal the meaning context for interpretation. Certain bilinguals in elicitation tasks show differentiated selves in their two languages. They give different associative responses and sentence completions in their languages, which are more like those in their monolingual network. Yet the normal tendency of containing bilingualism is to semantic merger, so we can expect that these types of separation, rather than being universal in bilinguals, are to be found in particular conditions, such as education in a second language, adult immigration, and frequent contact with monolingual communities.

References


The International Journal of Bilingualism


