CODE MIXING AND CODE SWITCHING

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Abstract
Code mixing or code switching is the use of more than one language or variety within a single communication event. Various information is signaled by the choice of language or by switching from one variety to another. This may include the structure of the on-going interaction, the relevant social context, or elements of the speakers' identities highlighted in the interaction. Research on language mixing or code switching developed in the mid-twentieth century, following occasional work on language mixing in the preceding century. Linguists have explored constraints on code switching within a sentence, as well as the phonological and grammatical structure of borrowed or switched forms. Work in linguistic anthropology and related fields reveals various ways that language choice and code switching signal or create context in interaction. Language users select from their repertoires to highlight elements of identity or to negotiate relevant social roles. Future directions in research include understanding language use in diverse or globalized settings, and challenging views of normative monolingualism against more complex language behavior.

Keywords
language contact, code switching, bilingualism, contextualization

Main Text

Code mixing or code switching is the use of more than one language or variety within a single conversation or other communication event. The shift from one variety to another may occur within a single utterance or between turns at talk. The choice of a particular form of language, and change from one form to another can signal the social, rhetorical, or structural context within which the linguistic contribution is made. For example, a professor at a university in Japan who is delivering a lecture in English may switch briefly to Japanese in order to tell students arriving late that there are empty seats near the front of the room. This change in

language – traditionally labeled *code switching* – signals that the instruction about seats is distinct from the content of the lecture. Alternately, a receptionist who speaks in a formal register when answering the telephone may switch to an informal register when she learns that the caller is her coworker, switching linguistic form in order to change the relevant social role from service provider to colleague.

Although some scholars distinguish code mixing from code switching, no single distinction is universally accepted. In studies of children's language acquisition < iela0003 >, the term *code mixing* sometimes refers to a developmental stage during which bilingual children seem to draw indiscriminately from more than one grammar or lexicon. Similarly, studies in psychology and psycholinguistics describe code mixing as the use of two or more languages without the signaling of context that code switching usually entails. Some sociolinguists likewise use the label *code switching* to describe changing linguistic form to accomplish communicative effect, versus *code mixing* for language alternation without such effect. This distinction is not always recognized, though. Some linguists use the term code mixing for relatively stable, though not fully grammaticized mixtures of two or more languages. An example of code mixing in this sense is Spanglish – mixtures of Spanish and English used in some bilingual communities. In other literature, the terms code mixing and code switching are used more or less interchangeably.

The kind of information signaled by code switching or language choice is potentially quite varied. In some cases what is signaled is detail about the structure of the on-going communication. For instance, a speaker may want to transition from an exchange of greetings to making a request. One way to signal this change is by switching languages. In contrast, the change from one language to another can also make elements of the broader social context relevant to the interaction. By speaking a variety of language associated with a particular

location, ethnicity, or profession, a speaker can call attention to particular identities or social roles, making them relevant to the conversation. This contextualization < iela0078 > is accomplished by the participants in an interaction, and may be very local. Recurring patterns linking a linguistic form and a communicative context may be shared within a speech community < iela0366 > or community of practice < iela0069 >. On the other hand, specific contexts may be negotiated by participants at the moment of conversation, sometimes requiring multiple attempts to reach a shared understanding. Therefore code switching may be seen as a kind of contextualization cue or a means to accomplish footing < iela0133 >.

History

Every language that we know of has been in contact with other languages. And although precise counts are not easy to achieve, it is thought that a great many people, perhaps the majority of all human beings use more than one language. Nevertheless, until fairly recently many people, including many scholars, have thought of using more than one language in a single communication as unusual or strange. Languages are often thought of as distinct entities, bounded from other languages. Moreover, a widespread, if often unexamined assumption among anthropologists and other scholars has held that members of an ethnic or national group typically share one dominant language. Together these language ideologies < iela0217 > have tended to undervalue or even render invisible the use of multiple languages.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "language mixing" (Paul 1886) was often seen as an adulteration of languages or an intrusion from one language into the proper domain of another. Linguists in the early twentieth century were at pains to note that the use of

words or other linguistic patterns from one language in the context of another was not a threat to existing languages. In his analysis of linguistic borrowing Einar Haugen noted, "Mixture implies the creation of an entirely new entity and the disappearance of both constituents." In contrast, he said, people who command more than one language "may switch rapidly from one to the other, but at any given moment they are speaking only one" language (1950, 211). This defense of borrowing may have been intended to deflect criticism of bilingualism as a threat to the perceived purity of national languages.

By the mid-twentieth century, however, scholars had begun to describe the use of different languages or varieties in different contexts. Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing through the decades that followed, anthropologists, sociologists, and linguists produced work describing how speakers used different languages or varieties on different occasions and with different partners. These studies were based in almost every continent, and ranged from the study of multilingual societies, to migrants, to speakers of regional, class, or other socially marked dialects. Scholars noted that when speakers control more than one language or variety, there appeared to be correlation among the language spoken and the audience or the topic of discussion. Similarly, the study of diglossia < iela0101 > during the 1950s and 1960s offered further illustration of the ways that different languages or varieties function in distinct settings.

The labels *code* and *switching code* to refer to language use came from information theory during the 1950s. In a paper applying information theory to the study of speech, engineer Robert Fano compared the speech patterns produced by different speakers to the different codes used in electronic systems. He noted, "we are often conscious of 'switching code' in our brain, particularly when a change of language takes place" (Fano 1950, 696). This metaphor of

language users as users of codes, and of switching languages as switching code was taken up by linguists and anthropologists during the ensuing decades.

Major steps toward the modern understanding of code switching came from the work of John Gumperz <iela0148>, and especially his work with Jan-Petter Blom on code switching in northern Norway (Blom and Gumperz 1972). Blom and Gumperz studied how the residents of a small village, Hemnesberget, used the standard and regional dialects of Norwegian with different partners, in different social settings, or when discussing different topics. They noted, for example, that shop keepers or public officials tended to use the standard Bokmål, while artisans and workers tended to use the local Ranamål dialect. But there were also occasions when a single speaker might switch dialects within a single setting. For instance, teachers reported that they used the standard variety for lectures, but shifted to Ranamål in order to encourage students to discuss the topic further. Blom and Gumperz called this shift in topic to note a change in social setting *situational switching*. They contrasted this with *metaphorical switching*, wherein a change of language was used to allude to other cultural identities or relationships between the speakers without changing the situation or the topic of discussion. The ideas of situational and metaphorical switching, and of code switching as a means to highlight cultural identities and social structures as described by Blom and Gumperz influenced much of the subsequent work on code switching and code mixing in linguistic anthropology, as well as sociolinguistics and the sociology of language.

Linguistic structure

In addition to anthropologists and sociologists, theoretical linguists – especially those in the areas of syntax < iela0380 > and phonology – have attempted to explain grammatical aspects of code switching. These linguists are especially interested in *intrasentential code switching*, language alternation within a single sentence, as illustrated in the example below.

Demo san- nijuu kyu doru **plus tax** ga hairun yo.
*But thirty- twenty nine dollars, **plus tax** is included.*

While the sentence is uttered primarily in Japanese, the speaker switches briefly to English with the phrase "plus tax". This kind of intrasentential switching is of interest to linguists who wish to understand the grammatical aspects of the behavior.

A major interest in the grammar of code switching is the search for "constraints", potential alternations that do not occur or that seem not to be allowed by the rules of grammar. Various constraints have been proposed in an attempt to understand the limits of language alternation. For example, the equivalence constraint suggests that a sentence in which switching occurs from one language to another must not violate the grammatical rules of either language. The free-morpheme constraint states that switching can take place between whole words but not between bound morphemes within a word. A variety of constraints have been proposed, often with reference to particular theories of syntax and morphology. Not all linguists agree, though, that such constraints are necessarily a part of grammar. Moreover, there is rarely general agreement

regarding any specific constraint, and apparent counter-examples to proposed constraints are frequently debated.

Some analyses of code mixing seek to differentiate borrowing from code switching. Cases of apparent intrasentential switching involving a word or short phrase may instead be analyzed as monolingual sentences containing loanwords. This difference might affect how scholars analyze the structure of the languages involved, as well as the psychology and the communication practices of speakers. Tests to differentiate loanwords from code switching usually center on the idea that loanwords are assimilated to the structures of the language they enter. Individual sounds, prosodic patterns, morphology, or other grammatical aspects of the borrowed word may be altered to fit the target language. For example, the Norwegian adjective *ålreit*, borrowed from the English phrase *all right*, substitutes sound segments of the English source with Norwegian sounds that are similar though not identical. On the other hand, some English speakers assimilate the word *voilà* a great deal (/wɑlɑ/), while others pronounce it much like the French source (/vwa.la/). In such cases, it may be difficult to say with certainty on the basis of assimilation whether the word is a loan. Scholars sometimes rely on the frequency of a word or phrase in the target language, or its familiarity to people who do not speak the source language in order to decide whether a word or phrase in a particular utterance is a loanword.

Certain words or phrases may be *bivalent*, meaning that they exist in the lexicon of two languages being used in an utterance. This can occur when a word has been borrowed from one of the languages into the other, but more often bivalency is the result of cognates, words in both languages derived from a common source. The use in bilingual speech of words or phrases that

are a part of both languages is known as *simultaneity* (Woolard 1998) or *hybridity*. Such speech

resembles code switching but features no clear language boundary. In the following example a

Catalan-speaking comedian uses both Catalan and Castilian Spanish forms. The underlined

portion is bivalent – the words are used in both languages, and it is not clear in this case which

language is being spoken.

li vem preguntar, die, perdoni, escolti, que <u>saben si</u> **tiene para mucho**?
*We asked him, say, excuse me, listen, <u>do you know if</u> **you have much more***?*
(Woolard 1998, 9)

The phrase *tiene para mucho* is Castilian, while the earlier portion of the utterance is Catalan. It

appears that this utterance uses more than one "code". Since the words *saben si* could belong to

either language, however, it is impossible to identify the precise point at which a code-switch

takes place. The occurrence of such hybrid or simultaneous utterances complicates analyses of

code switching, and may indicate the problematic nature of dividing utterances into discrete

languages.

Context and situation

One of the main ways that bilingual speakers utilize code switching is to indicate a change

in context. Speakers may switch language in order to provide cues to listeners about how to

understand a particular utterance. These contextualization cues can make listeners' knowledge of

a broader social context relevant to the current discourse, or serve as a means for speakers to negotiate the structure of the discourse and their roles in it.

Many studies of bilingual conversation show a preference for maintaining language choice. That is to say that, all things being equal, a second speaker will normally use the same language variety that previous speakers used in the conversation. This does not mean that speakers do not choose a different language; rather, changing language is a means to change the nature of the conversation or to mark a new context. By using another language, the speaker can separate an utterance from an ongoing activity, in the manner of the expansion or repair sequences described in conversation analysis < iela0080 >.

In the following example a speaker switches from Cantonese to English in order to switch from a telling to a request.

A: Jenny shuo to xian da dianhuo wenwen.
  Can I have some money please?
B: **What for?**
A: wo he Jenny qu MetroCentre kan dianying.

A: Jenny says she'll phone and ask the cinema first.
  Can I have some money please?
B: What for?
A: Jenny and I are going to the cinema at the MetroCentre.
(Li Wei 2005, 383)

Speaker A, the daughter of speaker B, has been telling her mother about her plans for the evening, to go to the cinema with a friend. The conversation has been going on for some time, with both women speaking Cantonese. The daughter switches from Cantonese to English when she asks her mother outright to give her money. The change in language accomplishes a change in activity, from describing her plans to directly requesting money. Changing activities is one use of language alternation, and switching languages is one way to accomplish a change of activity.

In addition to changing communicative activities, switching languages or language varieties may be used to accomplish other organizational or conversational work. Some studies suggest that switching language variety is common when offering a dispreferred response, such as a disagreement or a refusal following a request. By breaking up or distancing the elements of the conversation, a change of language may soften a potentially face-threatening utterance <iela0126> and help to preserve politeness. Changing linguistic form can also help to accomplish repair, either a correction or alteration of previous speech, or a request that the speaker offer such correction. Again, changing linguistic form allows speakers to separate the request for repair or the repair itself from an ongoing conversation. Some studies also suggest that code switching or language alternation may be used to gain the floor or negotiate the right to speak. When two speakers overlap in conversation, normally one will stop talking and give the floor to the other. Sometimes speakers compete briefly to gain this right to speak. In bilingual conversation, changing languages is one tool speakers have to try to take over as the current speaker. By changing languages the competitor may be able to reset the conversation and thereby to gain the right to speak.

Choosing or switching language variety can also be a means to signal footing < iela0133 >, the alignment that speakers take up relative to other people present. Within an interaction, one

individual may change roles: for example from story teller, to animator of quoted speech, to evaluator of the narrative. While there are a variety of ways that speakers mark such shifts in role, one of the means to shift footing in bilingual speech is through code switching. In the following example the use of two languages highlights two different roles taken by the speaker.

Este se está llenando, **lookit, Ana**.
This one is filling up; look at it, Ana.
(Zentella 1997, 95)

The speaker begins by describing a situation in Spanish, then switches to English in order to pick out a listener and direct her to pay attention to the situation described. Code switching may be seen as a means to attempt shifts in footing, or as a way to signal that such shifts have been accomplished through interaction. Participants in a conversation jointly negotiate the context and their footing relative to one another. Language choice is one of the signals by which such accomplishments may be indicated or achieved.

Close observation of discourse shows that participants share some understanding of social roles and language norms, but that specific meanings and structures are brought about by participants in an interaction. Since language choice and code switching are among the means of accomplishing such meaning, analysts need to pay attention to the forms of language that speakers use in order to fully understand the behavior. Simply looking at the utterances and the language varieties involved in a discourse, however, may not reveal to the analyst everything that is going on. This is particularly the case for scholars analyzing the discourse behavior of societies or groups that they are not a member of. In such situations, it may be necessary to

combine ethnographic observation or similarly comprehensive methods with focused discourse analysis in order to fully understand how speakers use language to accomplish various communication goals.

Language and identity

Selecting a language from a bilingual repertoire, as well as switching at particular moments or indeed drawing from multiple languages are all ways of marking a particular identity or social role. Therefore, the role of code mixing and code switching in identity work is a particular area of interest for analysts.

Blom and Gumperz (1972) noted that the use of a particular language variety may highlight a particular role associated with that variety. Each social role may be associated with particular rights and obligations relative to other people. This idea of language as an index <iela0307> of rights and obligations lies at the center of the markedness model (Myers-Scotton 1993), a social-psychological theory that attempts to describe the motivations that govern code switching. According to the markedness model, speakers in a particular multilingual community share understandings of the usual or unmarked <iela0250> uses for each language variety. For most common situations, there is an expectation regarding which language forms will be used. By using the unmarked code to initiate an interaction, a speaker can index the communicative situation and the expected relationship between the speaker and the listener. Other parties in the conversation are, however, free to challenge or attempt to change this situation by switching to another language. Critics of the markedness model have noted that it appears to be fairly inflexible, and requires speakers and listeners to share a great deal of knowledge prior to their

interaction. The static association between language varieties and specific social roles that the markedness model suggests may serve as a theoretical model of social norms rather than an easily-applied diagnostic of individual speakers' behavior. There have been a number of empirical studies that do show a tendency for certain types of topics or interactions to be carried out using one language more often than other languages spoken within the community described. Even so, these tendencies show frequent exceptions, as speakers use the languages in their repertoires in novel ways.

Contrary to broad theories of social motivation or cultural norms, close observation of speakers in various settings can help develop understandings of the place of language in the construction and transmission of social traditions. By combining observations of language behavior with analyses of social groups and their non-linguistic behaviors and values, linguistic anthropology can produce empirically and theoretically rich understandings of the functions of language choice and the ways in which language varieties are contextualized and remixed.

There has been a great deal of scholarship in linguistic anthropology as well as sociolinguistics and related fields that analyzes the functions of code switching in a particular society or group. This work is often grounded in observations of specific individuals and populations, rather than attempting to explain the functions of code switching or code mixing generally. At the same time, these analyses do point to the range of social and cultural work that may be accomplished via code switching.

Many studies have examined links among language choice, code mixing, and group identity. These identities include large, macro-sociological ideas such as ethnic or national identity, as well as more local in-group and out-group identities. On one hand, work in the

ethnography of communication <iela0119> tradition has analyzed the use of different language varieties as *we code* versus *they code*, languages or styles used within a group versus those used with others outside of it. The in-group may be defined on the basis of a shared linguistic style or shared expectations for interaction. For example, members of a minority group or other marginalized segment of society often use a specific in-group language or style with family, friends, or neighbors, and code-switch to the language associated with the out-group majority in less intimate, more public situations. On the other hand, though, many studies show that speakers can play with the ideological links between language and group to inhabit more than one role, to perform two or more social roles within a single setting. The behavior that Blom and Gumperz (1972) identified as metaphorical switching – drawing on two linguistic styles to add a second context to an interaction – allows speakers to practice a kind of strategic ambiguity, to claim multiple identities at the same time.

Studies of language behavior in recent decades includes analyses of the multidialectal repertoires of multicultural or intercultural groups, as well as language crossing within multiracial or interethnic communities. Analysts explore the ways in which individuals move between idealized social groupings, show affiliation with multiple groups, and – by weaving together linguistic elements that may be seen as belonging to distinct codes – construct complex identities for themselves. By crossing perceived linguistic and ethnic boundaries, individuals may destabilize received ideas about the fixedness of social categories. Some of this work paints an optimistic picture of the potential to eradicate or alter stereotypes or harmful ideologies about race and ethnicity. Not all analyses share this optimism, however. By drawing on received notions about racial, ethnic, or other social categories, for example, new ideas about the meaning of language behavior have the potential to reinforce rather than to break down those categories.

Studies of Mock language use < iela0275>, for example, suggest that laying claim to forms of language connected with racialized groups can reproduce and strengthen negative stereotypes associated with those groups, and with other language behaviors seen as related.

Whether such cross-group language behavior has positive or negative outcomes for the groups involved, study of language mixing across sociocultural boundaries shows how the race and ethnicity are constructed in discourse interaction. The categories associated with linguistic codes are neither discretely bounded nor historically stable, but are built up through interaction both within and across groups.

As with investigations of ethnic or racial identities, analysis of code switching and language choice contributes to understanding the formation of national and socioeconomic class identities. In studies of language and political economy < iela0212 >, code switching has been recognized as a highly visible and apparently systematic example of linguistic variation among groups and hierarchical levels within a society. The analysis of code switching within these studies does not simply provide empirical evidence for social theory. Rather, studies of language behavior serve at times to expand the view of social organization, while at other times countering or correcting grand theoretical narratives.

Language behavior is not only an index of social structures, but also a means to construct social organization, just as it both indexes and constructs context and situation in the studies described in the preceding section. A major goal of sociopolitical research, then, is to understand what hierarchically arranged social positions exist, and the ways in which these positions are constructed through everyday behavior. Language use that indexes social identities, such as the

choice of an in-group code or mixing different varieties, can reflect understandings of the available ethnic, gender, or class positions and the speaker's and listener's positions within the available hierarchies.

One approach to understanding hierarchically arranged social positions comes from the Marxist notion of *consciousness*: the individual's awareness of their own social position with regard to the state and to other individuals within the society. Since national languages or standard varieties are often promoted or sanctioned by the state, the use of nonstandard varieties can serve as a marker of social position. Speakers can use local, nonstandard varieties to enhance solidarity, and switch to privileged standard varieties in order to index the power of the state, or to use that association for various metaphorical connotations. For example, Jane Hill (1985) described how indigenous people in the Malinche volcano region of Mexico use Mexicano (Nahuatl) within the community, and associate Spanish with the Mexican state and with people outside the local community. When villagers recount myths in Mexicano, evil characters speak Spanish. At the same time, though, Spanish serves as a marker of power through which influential Mexicano men assert their authority. Strategies of language choice can reveal ways in which people work to maintain a group identity against the domination of the state and of other social classes, and ways that these identities are reanalyzed and remixed.

The ideas of symbolic domination and the linguistic marketplace show another approach to analyzing sociopolitical identities. Dominant language varieties, such as the standard language promoted by the state or other powerful institutions through education, publishing, and broadcasting provide their users with symbolic capital. The speakers of less dominant varieties come to evaluate the prestige varieties more highly than their own speech. Speakers of the dominant variety have greater access to employment, education, and other levers of social power.

This market power appears to breakdown, however, in situations of covert prestige, where nonstandard varieties become highly valued as markers of sociality, masculinity, or other locally valued social categories. When languages other than the standard variety are valued, an alternative marketplace may flourish. For example, speakers of a language that is associated with a foreign state may be undervalued and discriminated against on the basis of their linguistic identity. But if the state associated with the language is seen as economically or politically powerful, the "foreign" speakers may hold a relatively privileged position, at least in some situations. The relative prestige of standard and minority languages cannot be assumed ahead of time. The intersections of nationality, class, ethnicity, and other social categories are complex, and the values assigned to them at particular moments and in particular settings need to be understood through locally situated close observation.

Future directions

Empirical and theoretical work continues on code mixing and code switching as communication practices. At the same time, new areas of investigation seem poised to move beyond understandings of languages as codes. Over its history, the study of code mixing and code switching has generally moved from understandings of languages as systems toward analyses of language use as behavior. Early studies of language mixing and linguistic borrowing seem to take the language as the unit of study. Subsequent studies of code switching focused on individuals seen as marginal to the states or communities which they lived. As the scholarship developed, the focus moved increasingly toward diversity and hybridity throughout communities. Recent work takes a more intersectional view of linguistic behavior drawn from complex

repertoires. Two areas in particular – studies of global migration under the heading of *superdiversity*, and analyses of hybrid language practices under a variety of labels such as *translanguaging* or *polylingualism* – have appeared over the past decade.

Studies of language and superdiversity view language use as a complex behavior that draws from diverse sources present in contemporary cities and communities. The sociological model of super-diversity (Veretovec 2007) views contemporary societies not as a collection of multiple, partially-discrete subcultures, but as a polity of numerous intersecting dimensions, each of which features considerable variation – a so-called diversification of diversity. According to this view, populations such as those in European cities should be analyzed in terms of the ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds of their members, as well as their educational, age, gender, legal, and myriad other statuses. Scholars argue that understanding language behavior in conditions of superdiversity requires empirical study of the ways in which such populations construct social as well as propositional meaning through their language behavior.

Some critics of the language and superdiversity approach suggest that the kinds of analysis it recommends do not in fact represent a new paradigm. Scholars of language contact have been moving toward such empirical and theoretical understandings of variation and intersectionality for many decades. The superdiversity approach may represent a change in analysts' perspectives more than an actual change in the nature of the populations and the language behaviors to be studied. The notion of super-diversity assumes that the technological and sociopolitical conditions of late modern society have fundamentally changed the nature of migration, people, and society. But critics of the paradigm question whether societies really have become super-diverse, or if it is simply the attention and analytical emphasis of scholars that has changed.

Regardless of how one answers this question, the perspective of language and superdiversity scholarship serves a useful function, highlighting the shift of analytical focus from discrete languages and mono- or bilingual speakers to complexes of language behaviors and the repertoires that individuals build from them.

A similar shift in focus from languages to repertoires is apparent in approaches under a variety of labels including *trans-*, *poly-*, or *metro-lingual* practice. Like language and superdiversity, this work calls into question past understandings of the notions of code switching and multilingualism. Rather than viewing languages as bounded entities, these approaches focus their analytic lens on the practices of language users without trying to enumerate or identify specific codes. Much of this work, like work in language and superdiversity, is affected by migration: either the movement of people, or the movement of texts and linguistic products that may be experienced far from their place of origin.

Where the controlling metaphors of super-diversity are largely intersection and dimension, translingualism is often build around metaphors of flow, of movement and mixing. Where multilingualism sees a number of languages, and allows that an individual may use several of them, these more recent analyses see language use as human behavior that gains meaning not from preexisting structures but from the interactions of speakers and listeners. Again, these new approaches may represent more a shift in focus than the fundamentally different epistemology some of their practitioners suggest. Nevertheless, that shift in focus from languages as entities to language as behavior is an important one.

As anthropologists noted in the mid-twentieth century, almost all languages are in contact with other languages, and most speakers use more than one language at least to some extent.

Bilingualism, code switching, and code mixing do have real effects on communication, language structures, individual speakers, and societies. But given their ubiquity, it is perhaps unnecessary or even or unwise to set this behavior to one side as an exotic subject.

SEE ALSO:
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