Factors Associated with the Code Mixing and Code Switching of Multilingual Children: An Overview

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Abstract:

Code mixing and code switching are useful strategies for the multilingual speakers and they use them to succeed their communication, depending on the situation and their interlocutors. These strategies are seen throughout this paper and the studies reviewed show that code mixing and code switching can be exceptional qualities which are employed by speakers, either at some point of their lives or continuously - especially in the case of an environment that supports multiple language use. The individual characteristics of the speakers, their language environment, the social status of their languages as well as the everyday usage of them, are all factors that may influence the mechanisms of code mixing and code switching and should be taken into consideration by the teaching and the pedagogic community as children need to feel assured that their languages are all appreciated and taken into consideration. This can improve not only their language learning results but also their general learning career.

Keywords: Multilinguals, code mixing, code switching, communication strategies, language learning/teaching.

Introduction

Ever since the importance of multilingualism has been largely acknowledged more and more research is being conducted on the acquisition and learning of a third language (L3). This is mainly because of the vast mobility of populations between countries and mixed marriages (Barnes, 2005). Since multilinguals are far more compared to monolinguals in the world (Tucker, 1998) it is just as important to investigate the way bilinguals use their languages while still in the process of learning their third language. A child's ability to communicate in more than one language is surely a more complex ability and thus represents an intricate phenomenon too. This phenomenon entails acquiring more than one grammatical system as well as language learning processes that are not part of a single vacuum.

Families whose members come from different ethnic and/or national backgrounds are globally increasing (Cruz-Ferreira 2006, Tokuhama-Espinoza 2000, 2001). Children growing up in multinational families are often in contact with more than one language through their parents, and in some cases these heritage languages are supported by the linguistic system of the wider community's language. In cases that more than one language is available to individuals (i.e. multilinguals) the use of their multiple languages and the way they interact with each other can appear in many combinations and it can also prove that these speakers can be very resourceful compared to monolinguals.

This paper aims to review the theories regarding the code mixing and the code switching techniques the multilinguals employ when they use more than one language during their speech productions as well as the factors that may affect these subconscious choices on behalf of them.

Defining Code Switching and Code Mixing

Hans Vogt (1954) was the first one to introduce the term "code-switching", while he was reviewing Weinreich's "Languages in Contact" (1953). The terms code switching and code mixing have been the research subject of language contact for more than fifty years, and they have been defined by Haugen (1956) and Gumperz (1982) as the alternating use of two languages. Code switching and code mixing have often been used vice versa; Code switching (see e.g. Sankoff and Poplack, 1981; Zentella, 1997; Bullock and Toribio, 2009) is seen as a structurally constrained combination of two (or more) languages and can take place either in a single sentence ("intrasentential") or from one sentence to another within a conversation ("intersentential"). Meisel (1995) argued that the term "Language-Mixing", in general terms, refers to all occasions where elements of the two languages are mixed within a clause or across a clausal boundary, and on the other hand "Code-Switching" is a specific subdivision of mixing that relates to the bilingual's actual abilities, i.e. selecting the language in accordance to the interlocutor, the context or the topic of the conversation, etc. without "breaking" any syntactic rules.

However, Thomason (2001: 262) has suggested that code switching is: "The use of material from two (or more) languages by a single speaker with the same people in the same conversation (...) the term includes both switches from one language to another at sentence boundaries (intersentential switching) and switches within a single sentence (intrasentential switching). The latter is sometimes called code-mixing".

In this paper however, the previously mentioned terms will be used according to Myusken (2000) who decided to used the term "Code Mixing" for "all cases where lexical items and grammatical features of two languages

appear in one sentence" (intrasentential), and the term "Code-switching" for a "rapid succession of several languages in a single speech event" (intersentential). So, the term code mixing refers to the mixing of different linguistic units (words, phrases, sentences, modifiers) usually from two participating grammatical systems within one sentence. In other words, code mixing is governed by grammatical rules and can be prompted by social/psychological motivations. Code switching refers to the combination of different linguistic units (phrases, words, clauses, sentences) mainly coming from two participating grammatical systems in a single speech event. Thus, code switching is intersentential and can be subject to some conversation principles.

Code switching and code mixing are phenomena that have been under a lot of important attention in bilingualism's literature, focusing mainly on intrasentential instances (code mixing); however the attention on language mixing in trilingualism, has only recently received significant attention, which is also the case with trilingual data too (Rothman & Nino-Murcia, 2008). According to the existing studies, mixes that involve a combination of all three languages are rare since trilingual speakers usually combine elements of two languages out of the three they have at their disposal (Anastassiou, 2014; Edwards, 1994; Hoffman, 2001; Klein, 1995). However, there is not an advantage for a specific subgroup of the three languages. Although, speakers usually combine only two languages in their code mixes, in a broad sense this happens with any potential combination of the three language systems.

Code mixing and code switching as naturally employed strategies by multilingual children.

According to Cruz-Ferreira (2006: 20), language combinations seem to "constitute a strategy for learning" and show a wide range of communication tools rather than an absence of bilingual synonyms at the lexical level or parasitic cross-linguistic alteration of the grammar systems during the period of acquisition of any of the three languages. The early language mixing during the early stages of language development is viewed more like a spontaneous procedure than a mechanical transfer. In later stages, taking for granted some level of proficiency in the languages in question, code switching and code mixing might serve as a more sociolinguistic complex phenomenon, in which more variables can play a determining role, like linguistic identity, language negotiation, as well as the influence of the interlocutors. All of these lead to the conclusion that multilingual children have a wide perception of language principles, which they apply in various combinations.

Hoffman also (2001) suggested that it is a communication strategy: "For bilinguals or trilinguals it is normal to move between different languages

when talking with each other, and code switching is an essential strategy for them" (p. 11). In this case, learners are not considered as inadequate monolinguals in each one of their languages, but more like people that possess and manage more than one grammatical system; pieces from these systems come into contact often enough and the speakers mix them in compatible ways with each language, but they also represent individual properties specific to the code switching situation.

Similarly, young children can be considered as explorers of the languages they speak. Hamers and Blanc (2000) stated that language formation is initiated in the "social interaction with others" (p.15); therefore each one of the languages used is dictated by specific social functions which are then transformed into actual expressions through a sequence of actions onto linguistic forms. A multilingual child may keep the languages in a balanced level, or in a state of altering connections at his social and personal levels. If the sequence of forming and functioning or the social value of a language changes, this will also lead to changes in language behaviour. Conclusively, multilingualism is considered as an ongoing changing phenomenon, which represents a process and not a state. This perspective is also supported by numerous of the available empirical studies by many researchers (see e.g. Cenoz, 2003; Cruz-Ferreira, 2006; Ervin-Tripp and Guo, 1992, in Ervin-Tripp and Reyes, 2005).

The fact that trilingual children can have numerous language choices can lead to various linguistic formations which are different from a sense of a single language proficiency, and therefore should be treated accordingly. As a result, studies on trilingual code mixing and code switching, apart from contributing to the relevant literature, should also contribute to the development of new suggestions on the study of child trilingualism, the distinction of the linguistic systems in the mind of children who own more than one language, as their roles.

Code mixing and code switching as a communication strategy used by children.

According to MacSwan (1999) code switching can be regarded as a coping strategy to overcome specific communicative hardships in one or both of the languages that are involved. In other studies these communicative deficiencies are mentioned as semilingualism (MacSwan, 1999). The term semilingualism was regarded as the state in which the bilingual speaker may lack linguistic proficiency for one or more of the languages that he or she speaks. This was often considered as the reason for low academic success for a lot of multilingual children (Tokuhama-Espinoza, 2003). The term semilingualism was largely applied to ethnic minorities and not to the speakers of dominant languages (Wei, 2000). However, its perspective received

criticism during the 1980s (Martin-Jones and Romaine, 1985; Poplack 1980) for its faulty terminology (meaning that the speaker has less than one language at his/her disposal, while in reality it is two language systems that are different from two monolingual equivalents) and the prejudices it imposed on the speakers of minority languages.

According to MacSwan (1999: 249) "If teachers believe that code switching (sic) relates to an inherent disability in children which might be remedied with sufficient instruction, then the children's perceptions of their own 'natural abilities' as severely limited, conveyed by classroom teachers, will impact upon their success in school". The lower academic level of the children in question was linked with a more general lower social and educational level of their immigrant families and was also linked with various other socioeconomic factors. Valadez, MacSwan and Martínez (1997) performed a study in which they assessed how three low-performing children possessed a grammar that was practically indistinguishable from the original grammar of the control group, making it clearer that code switching (sic) in cases like that can be attributed to other factors and not to some sort of grammatical imperfection. Poplack (1980), in her research in mixed utterances in English-Spanish bilinguals, was one of the first that claimed that this phenomenon is not an indication of language imperfection; on the contrary it showed that bilingual children were developing their languages normally: "Code switching (sic), then, rather than representing deviant behaviour, is actually a suggestive indicator of a degree of bilingual proficiency" (p. 73). MacSwan (1999: 22) also shared this opinion by stating that "code switchers (sic) have the same grammatical proficiency as monolinguals for the language they use", and thus instances of mixing of elements of two languages can be attributed to an immature system in either language, and they are not caused by interlinguistic misinterpretations (Goodz, 1989). Heritage language speakers constitute a group that tends to code mix a lot; however, researchers have shown that proficiency differences exist between the heritage language and the majority language in this particular group of speakers (Montrul, 2008; Polinsky, 2007).

Wei (1998: 207) agreed but also added the issue of cultural identity shown in each specific language: "code-switching (sic), far from being caused by an insufficient proficiency in one of the two languages, and besides expressing a double cultural identity works as a communicative strategy used for a variety of purposes, related either to the negotiation of the language of interaction or to the organization of conversational activities". Bilingual children establish different language systems from the beginning and have the ability to use the evolving languages according to the context they find themselves in (Genesee, 1989). Cruz-Ferreira's (2006) study, along with many other current studies in child trilingualism, showed that if these children have

the opportunity for a successful academic and linguistic development, then as multilingual children present the same ability with, if not greater, with their monolingual peers when it comes to academic achievement.

Another question is if code switches and code mixes are triggered by lexical deficiencies. This could look like a rational explanation; even if bilingual speakers have a totally developed grammatical system in each one of the languages they speak, they may show a lack of specific lexical units that are necessary for the expression of their ideas. Also, it needs to be stated that although code mixing per se is not an indication of a lack of fluency, it could, in some occasions, be a sign of a reduction in proficiency, namely language attrition. Seliger (1996: 163) clearly suggested that mixing "can be considered a precursor sign of primary language attrition when mixing begins to occur in contexts that are not motivated by external factors such as interlocutor, topic, or cultural environment". Bolonyai (1998, 2009) found variations in the amount and the structure of code mixing as the children that took part in the study gradually turned to English-dominant and their use of Hungarian was eventually less. They produced more code mixes than code switches and their code mixes were grammatically English (matrix language). However, the researcher did mention that when the children started visiting Hungary the mechanism of language attrition was strongly hindered.

Older studies though, (Clyne, 1967; Lipski, 1978) suggested that code switching (sic) cannot be attributed only to the lack of lexical availability. Among others, Cruz-Ferreira (2006), Rothman and Niño-Murcia (2008) displayed data on trilingual siblings which made it clear that the switches between languages were not totally caused by the lack of available synonyms in children's vocabulary; in fact, in Rothman and Niño-Murcia's study, the children often used the correct terms from two languages conversely within the same context. Moreover, Dewaele (2000: 42) studied his daughter's progress as she was being raised as trilingual. Although he stated that most of his daughter's utterances were mixes in two of the languages she owned, he did observe that there were times that she used all of her three languages. He reported that Livia (her name) even from the age of 2 years and 5 months was able to use all of the three languages she spoke for the same concept. She first used the English word, then the French and then the Dutch one for the word "feet" as in the example:

L: Grands feet papa! (Big feet daddy!)
D: Grands pieds? (Big feet?)
L: Oui grands pieds! (Yes big feet!)
L: Voetje, non grands feet. (Small foot, not big feet). (*She points to her feet).

What still remains open is the question of whether these mixes and switches are caused by some type of language distribution according to which

children tend to assign the term in a specific language to a specific context or interlocutor. However, Livia was aware that her father knew all of her three languages and thus she was feeling confident to use them when speaking with him. Dewaele though had pointed out that she had a clear understanding of the fact that not all of the interlocutors she was speaking with knew all of her languages and she would only use English with her English friends and at school. In that sense and because of her ability to include in her speech French and Dutch only with children that understood it Dewaele rightly pointed out that Livia was a perfect applied sociolinguist. For instance, she addressed a French speaking child at school in French only when they were on their own. If their English speaking schoolmates were present she would only use English. Concluding, Baker (2000) suggested that code switching in general should not be seen as a sign that bilinguals are not able to keep their languages apart but more like a manifestation that they have a unique multicultural personality. He added that bilingualism seems like "a more richly fed thinking machine" (p. 67).

Contextual and social factors connected with the code switching and code mixing of children.

Scotton and Ury (1977) claimed the existence of three prime factors than lie behind code switching and code mixing; these factors are: identity, power and transaction. The chosen language is selected according to these factors. Myers-Scotton (2004) also shared a similar point of view with the Markedness Model she proposed. According to this model, the speakers face an awareness of markedness when it comes to the linguistic choice for various situations or discourse types, and according to their relationship to the situation and its participants they get to choose the language they will use. According to Myers-Scotton (1993) there is also a principle that has to be taken into consideration as the basis of all code switches (sic) and that is the Negotiation Principle: "Choose the type of your conversation input in a way that it points the set of rights and obligations [the PRO set] that you covet to be in force between speaker and the person addressed to for the exchange" (in MacSwan, 1999: 39). This principle suggested that people are trying to form their social relationships according to their choice of languages within their conversations or their speech. Bilingual children come in contact with the mainstream language usually at their school age, when the basic education begins, so the parent languages are characterized as "home languages" or "inside languages". At the same time the taught language opposes to the home language and it becomes the "outside "language" (Ervin-Tripp and Reyes, 2005, also similar to the division between we-code and they-code proposed by Gumperz, 1982). The next step for the child is to try and bring a balance to these languages depending on the speech situation, which should be examined

on an individual basis. There is also another significant factor that has to be taken into consideration in code switching and code mixing strategies and this is the language negotiation between the two speakers. It could be easily characterized as unfair to ascribe the choice of language absolutely to the speaker, without taking into consideration the impact of the other interlocutor and the number of switches and mixes that are needed so as to be a norm inside a certain circle of people. The feedback taken from the interlocutor, the overall value attributed to each language and the quality of the linguistic group that the conversation occurs in, they all appear to have an impact on the number and type of switches and mixes produced.

Language negotiation is a concept that may find ground to child speech from an early stage. Vygotsky (1978) stated that whether children are inside or outside a bilingual situation, they are equally affected by the same elements as adults too and respond to the way others surrounding them express themselves by means of "social" speech. Nicoladis and Genesee (1997) confirmed that situational code switching (sic) is usual for young bilingual children, based on an efficient separation and the way they are aware of their interlocutors and the situation they find themselves in. This kind of evidence is also introduced by speech production data derived from bilingual children in the studies of Foster- Meloni (1978), Saunders (1988), Lanza (1992) and others. The children's mother tongue can be the language of the comparatively powerless social group, as with Albanian in Greece (Anastassiou, 2014; Anastassiou & Andreou, 2014), or as in fewer cases these days, the language of a minority with a high status (e.g. French or Swedish in Greece). Children are prone to the societal status and the prestige of their languages from their young age and make use of it in various types of interaction with their peers (Ervin-Tripp and Reyes, 2005; Shenk, 2008; Zentella, 1997). Young children are also considered as quite sensitive to the power relationships between languages (see Khattab, 2009).

Children can also be very sensitive to the amount or frequency that switching and mixing might occur from their interlocutors and so they modify their own speech by fluctuating the rate of code switching (and mixing) ever since their preschool age (Comeau et all, 2003). Literally, their sociolinguistic proficiency is more likely to begin to establish and develop almost at the same time that their grammatical proficiency begins to occur, emerging as actual language production (Andersen 1990, Hymes 1974, amongst others). Social roles can definitely play an important part in language switches and mixes; nevertheless, the individual characteristics of the speakers can also be very important and influential. According to the longitudinal studies of multilingualism in families (presented in Tokuhama-Espinoza 2001, 2003, Cruz-Ferreira 2006, Davidiak, 2010 each summing up the speech data from siblings) even children that are being raised in one family and thus in the same

conditions appear to have different patterns of language use, which seem to depend a lot on their personality and their communicative style. Therefore, the social and personal factors have to be taken into consideration when examining the presence of each language in a bilingual or a trilingual situation.

The Triggering Hypothesis.

Apart from the social and discourse mechanisms that may influence code switching and code mixing, theories have suggested other mechanisms too, such as the triggering hypothesis. Clyne (1967, 1972, 1977, 1980, 2003) also suggested another explanation for the switches and mixes with a hypothesis he made. He clarified that cognates "trigger" code switching in their close environment, no matter if they are preceding or following them. Such trigger words include the following groups:

a) Lexical transfers (lexical items which belong to one language but also form part of the speaker's lexicon in another language, such as names of certain foods),

b) Bilingual homophones,

c) Proper nouns.

Moreover, according to Clyne, these kinds of words make the speakers identify the language they begin to talk in as the linguistic system of their conversation and to continue speaking in this particular language. Apart from that, Clyne also reported various occasions of mixing, or transversion as he characteristically refers to this process, produced by prosodic and syntactic factors. Depending on the position in relation to the lexical switch, Clyne classified the triggers as "consequential" (the trigger word is followed by the switch), "anticipational" (the trigger word is preceded by the code switch [sic]) and finally a category derived from a combination of these two, having the lexical switch being put between two trigger words. It cannot be taken for granted that this hypothesis can fully predict the change of code next to a candidate trigger word. However, it can be assumed that the existence of such words increases the possibility of code switching and mixing, depending at the same time on the position the trigger has in a sentence along with its pronunciation; with regard to the structural relationship there is no influence accredited to the trigger word and the adjacent sentence elements, therefore it somehow becomes a rigid surface phenomenon. Triggering is also considered to happen during overlaps of meaning between the words in two different languages, and so false cognates cannot be expected to act as triggers. True triggers would include words that have slight morphological and phonological differences, such as "boot" in English and "mpota" in Greek. Apart from Clyne, the triggering hypothesis has also been studied and tested by other researchers like Broersma & de Boot (2006), who broadly agreed with Clyne's suggestion that trigger words can in some occasions lead to a code mix, but

they clarify that the reasons that cause code switching and code mixing are way more complex than what Clyne supports and will be different according to the speaker's individual characteristics, occasions and situations.

Conclusion

In this paper we presented a review of the theories on code mixing and code switching of multilinguals and we tried to give an overview of the mechanisms these speakers employ when they communicate with either people who speak the same languages they do or with people who may only speak one of them. It is evident that multilinguals use their code mixing and code switching mechanisms in order to support their communications and according to the research conducted and reviewed in this paper multilinguals are very efficient in manipulating their speech production to meet their needs depending on their interlocutors and the situation they find themselves in. Also, the scholars reviewed here seem to agree that multilinguals turn to code mixing or code switching as a mean of communication and they do not consider these communication mechanisms as a drawback, as people used to perceive them. Even in the cases that code mixing or code switching is used by speakers that have not fully developed one of their languages and they have to turn to these mechanisms in order to get their message across, it should be seen as a stage of their language learning and not as a deficiency. Multilinguals are far more intricate users of their languages compared to monolinguals or bilinguals. Therefore, the study of the way they move between their languages can help us to further understand their potentials and their abilities and treat them accordingly, especially when it comes to language and teaching pedagogy. Code mixing or code switching should thus be regarded by language teachers and parents as a rather useful strategy employed by young learners. The older negative perceptions held about code mixing and code switching has been seen by researchers not to be the case. The points to be applied within the classroom, either it is a second and/or a second language lesson or a general class that is comprised of multilingual children, are very

Cummins and McNeely (1987) emphasized on power relations between groups within the school environment and between teachers and students. These power relations are determined to a degree by the very nature of being a second or a third language learner. Also, according to Oliver and Purdie (1998) students perceive that their teachers and peers feel more positively when the environment language is used rather than their heritage language, in all contexts.

Code switching and code mixing should therefore be encouraged by teachers and all of the class should become aware of their classmates' need to use their other languages when they emerge during their conversations. Multilingual students have different needs than their monolingual peers and

these should be taken into consideration by the teaching and the pedagogic community as children need to feel assured that their languages are all appreciated since most of the times these are associated with another heritage. This can improve not only their language learning results but also their general learning career. Attitudes are determinants of the manner in which students engage in language learning at school, they influence learners' expectations for success and they do play a significant role in students' successful maintenance of their mother tongue or their heritage language (Cummins, 1984).

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