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Level: 3rd Year

Subject: Linguistics (Sociolinguistics)

1.3 Code Switching

Code switching is a direct, automatic outcome of language contact. Speakers who have control over more than one language are known for their ability to switch between, or even mix, codes during a communication episode. This linguistic behaviour, which characterizes bilingual speakers, is termed code switching (also written codeswitching or code-switching, henceforth CS).

Gumpers defines CS as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (Gumperz, 1982:59). Auer (1984:1) refers to CS as “the alternating use of more than one language”.

Code Switching Classification

External (cross-linguistic) Internal

Occurs between two occurs between varieties of

different languages the same language

between H and L Or two or more dialects

(diglossic switching)

It was only by the early 1970s that code switching turned to be an interesting phenomenon that attracts much of scholarly attention. It had been traditionally seen as an aberration of the ‘correct’ language even by highly acclaimed linguists, not least the structuralists led by Bloomfield and later Weinreich. It was after Blom and Gumperz’ work of 1972, a groundbreaking research, that many significant works overflowed CS literature.

1.3.1 Types of Code Switching

Blom and Gumperz (1972) introduced two types of code switching:

 Situational code switching: the use of different language varieties in different social situations.

 Metaphorical code switching: alternating the code in order to discuss a topic that would normally fall into another conversational domain.

Gumperz and Hymes (1986) summarize the difference this way:

An important distinction is made from situational switching, where alternation between varieties redefines a situation, being a change in governing norms, and metaphorical switching, where alternation enriches a situation, allowing for allusion to more than one social relationship within the situation

It is clear that code switching was considered as a complete alternation from one language (variety) to another. This can be captured in, for example, Weinreich’s (1953:73) statement arguing that the “ideal bilingual switches from one language to another according to appropriate changes in the speech situation […] but not in an unchanged speech situation, and certainly not within a single sentence”. Weinreich, like other linguists of the time, do not consider sentential switching which was considered a corrupt form of language. This is not the case with later writers. Myers-Scotton (1993a:vii), an outstanding figure in CS scholarship, defines CS as “the use of two or more languages in the same conversation”. Likewise, Milroy and Muysken (1995:7) perceive code switching as “the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation”.

Poplack (1980) identifies three (grammatical) types of conversational CS:

1) Intersentential CS: occurs when a change of language happens at a clause or sentence boundary, i.e. where each clause/ sentence is in one language or the other.

2) IntrasententiIal CS: takes place within a clause/sentence boundary, including also word boundaries. It may be a process of inserting a bound morpheme, noun, verb, or even a phrase in a sentence.

Example from Arabic-French (Arabic in italics)

min ∫uftah pour la première fois ؟raft balli jaqdar j؟awanni

3) Extrasentential CS: is the case where tags, exclamations, and ready-made expressions (such as, ‘I mean’, ‘you know’, etc), from the donor language are inserted into the recipient language.

Example from Arabic-French (Arabic in italics)

a. Je crois ha:kda taqdar tafhamha χi:r.

b. χabbrukum ؟al li∫tima: ؟ mnaqbal. n’est ce pas?

CS scholarship revolves around two basic questions:

1. Why do bilinguals code switch?

2. When do bilinguals switch code?

The first question deals primarily with the motivations for code switching, or simply the function of code switching. The second question considers CS from a syntactic standpoint, i.e., where switches are permitted and where they are not.

1.3.2 Functions/Motivations of Code Switching

Below we list some of the motivations that make people alternate between the codes at their disposal.

Lexical need: bilinguals code switch in cases where there is lexical need, i.e., switching is used to compensate for linguistic gaps (gaps can be momentary or complete).

Language Skill Showing: sometimes people deliberately switch back and forth between the languages that they control to display their linguistic abilities.

Quoting: quoting can cause the language user to shift from one language to another in order to cite the exact speech of another person.

Accommodation: accommodation is used to refer to the state where an addressee adopts the same linguistic choice of the addresser. This is an act of convergence. If the addressee refuses to use the language of his interlocutor, he then reinforces divergence.

Euphemism: there are some words which are culturally unacceptable in certain situations in every society. Bilinguals have the advantage of avoiding these words by switching to another language in which these items bear no, or at least less, vulgarity.

Assignment: Mention the prevailing grammatical constraints theories about code switching, then provide examples (and even counter examples if possible) from Arabic-French mixed sentences