Code-switching in Sociolinguistic Studies:
Review and Analysis

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Abstract

This paper reviews sociolinguistic studies on code-switching, a widespread phenomenon among speakers of different languages and/or dialects. It differentiates between code-switching and code-mixing and distinguishes between code-switching and diglossia. And it presents and evaluates the theories that are presented to explain the motivations and constrains for code-switching.
Code-switching in Sociolinguistic Studies

According to Wardhaugh (2010: p. 98), code is defined as the particular dialect or language one chooses to use on any given occasion and the communication system used between two or more parties. He asserts, “Most speakers command several varieties of any language they speak, and bilingualism, even multilingualism, is the norm for many people throughout the world rather than unilingualism.”

Code-switching and Code-mixing

It is thus the norm for speakers in multilingual societies to mix and switch codes according to certain personal and social conditions of the communication they’re involved in. These two processes of codes alternation are called code-mixing and code-switching. Generally, code-switching describes any switch among languages in the course of a conversation, whether at the level of words, sentences or blocks of speech, such as what often occurs among bilinguals who speak the same languages, whereas code-mixing describes the mixing of two languages at the word level (i.e., one word in the sentence is in a different language) (Baker & Jones, 1998). However, there seems to be no consensus among linguists in general, and sociolinguists in particular, on the distinction between code-switching and code-mixing. Some researchers, such as Wardhaugh (2010, p. 100), do not even distinguish between the two concepts. Fasold (1984) defines code-mixing as the use of at least two distinct languages together to the extent that interlocutors change from one language to the other in the course of a single utterance, while Hudson (1980) defines code-switching as the speaker’s use of different varieties of the same language at different times and in different situation, which seems to refer more to a diglossic situation. In contrast to Hudson’s definition, Gingras (1974: 167) seeing code-switching from the point of view of two different languages and only occurring at sentence boundaries, he defines it as “The alternation of grammatical rules drawn from two different languages which occurs between sentence boundaries.”

Gumperz (1971) calls the alternate use of codes within a single sentence intrasentential code-switching, whereas the alternate use of codes between sentences is intersentential code-switching. Gumperz & Hernandez-Chaivez (1975) and Gumperz
(1976) discuss how domain or situational switching has evolved into metaphorical switching to express a personal or affective orientation to the content of speech, in contrast to a more objective or impersonal use of a language. Wardhaugh (2010, pp. 101-102), equating code with language, further describes the two kinds of code-switching: situational, which occurs when the languages used change according to the situations, and metaphorical, which occurs when the languages used change according to the topics, for which “the choice encodes certain social values.” Focusing on multilingual children’s linguistic acquisition, McClure & Wentz (1975) point out that competence in situational and metaphorical switching is attained well before intrasentential switching norms are established. And more concerned with the role of codes in delineating linguistic as well as social borders, Gal (1988, p. 247) defines code-switching as “a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations.”

Finally, many linguists define the insertion of a single word from one language into the sentence in another language as code-borrowing or lexical-borrowing. Weinreich (1953), distinguishing between personal and social motivations for such phenomenon, discusses various reasons for lexical borrowing and claims that there is some kind of lexical gap, either in the internal lexicon of the bilingual speaker, or in the language in general, which is filled by borrowing. One of my observations in this regard is the widespread borrowing of the English word ‘already’ into Arab-American bilinguals’ Arabic speech. The reason for this code-borrowing is, in concurrence with Weinreich, a lexical gap in the Levantine Arabic dialect (the most popular Arabic dialect in the U.S.).

**Code-switching: Constrains and Motivations**

What constrains and/or motivates the processes of code-switching?

Recent research points out three universal linguistic constraints. According to Berk-Seligson (1986: 313), these are: (1) the equivalence of structure constraint; (2) the size-of-constituent constraint; and (3) the free morpheme constraint.
Sociolinguistically, the practice of code-switching is motivated and constrained based on the situational and/or metaphorical situation, such as social context, affiliation, occupation, or personal affection. The norms can be observed or taught. In general, the social domain (e.g., family, workplace, school, etc.), being an area of activity which is tied to a certain code, plays a major role in motivating and constraining code-switching, thus effecting the choice of codes being used for which topic while talking to which interlocutor. On the other hand, other personal and social factors play significant role in code-switching, such as language proficiency (e.g., gaps in the lexical repertoire of the speaker), language prestige and power, social, political, and cultural loyalty and cohesiveness (identity), and/or for simple habitual and convenience reasons, such as telling jokes or using certain improper or offensive words in certain language.

**Code-switching vs. Diglossia**

Khubchandani (1985) distinguishes between codes used within a language community and others used with the outside. Codes that are used for intergroup communication in a region should come under the scope of bilingualism, whereas the codes utilized for intragroup communication within a speech community qualify as diglossia.

What is ‘diglossia’? Ferguson (1959) coined the word and defined it as “a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes, but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.” There are several examples of diglossia worldwide, such as German and Swiss German in Switzerland, French and Creole in Haiti, Greek and Modern Greek, and Classic Arabic and regional dialects in the Arab world.
The most important distinction between code-switching and diglossia is that whereas all codes used in code-switching are verbally communicable varieties, at least one highly codified variety in diglossia is used only for writing. However, even this defined distinction has recently been disputed by many linguists. A newly evolved variety of spoken Arabic, called Formal Spoken Arabic (FSA), also referred to as Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), is not the vernacular of a circumscribed geographical region, but nonetheless represents a real segment of the continuum of spoken Arabic variants - a supra-regional, prestige form of spoken Arabic practical as a means of communication throughout the Arabic-speaking world (Ryding, 1991). This variety also defies Ferguson’s definition of diglossia for it (a) can only be learned through formal education, (b) is highly codified and grammatically complex, (b) is not represented in any formal written literature, and, yet, (c) is increasingly used by a growing sector of the community for ordinary conversation.

Nevertheless, in multilingual societies, such as the Indian subcontinent, code-switching, code-mixing, and diglossic complementation are regarded as different devices of linguistic stratification at the disposal of a speech community. Individuals in such societies acquire more synergy and serendipity, develop positive attitudes towards variety in speech, and 'come out' of their language codes to a neutral ground, such as in the use of lingua franca Hindustani. (Khubchandani 1983, 1985).

Conclusion

Even though research on code-switching has traditionally focused on speech among members of bilingual/multilingual communities, particularly in informal settings, a little has been written about the implication of the phenomenon on formal linguistic production, i.e., written literature. The reason for this, as Poplack (1980) observes, may lay behind the implicit assumption that code-switching is an informal speech style that can only be observed in informal settings and that the group membership of the researcher is a crucial factor for gathering code-switching data.


