



Mechanisms of Language Contact

Introduction

In many countries of the world at least part of the population is bilingual or multilingual. Therefore there are a number of coping mechanisms to handle bi- and multilingual situations. The following poster presents three mechanisms of language contact.

Code-Switching in medieval English poetry

Definition: Code-Switching

"... the change from one language to another within one act of communication." (Schendl 2001, 305)

During this time period Britain was a multilingual country with an ethnically and linguistically, mixed population. The three main languages of medieval England were English, Latin and French, which means code-switching was a necessary and widely used discourse strategy.

Latin = high variety → literature, religion

French → law

English = vernacular → spoken by the majority of the people

Switching occurred in certain contexts according to speaker situation and participants → but no strict adherence!

Poetry from the 13th to the 15th century

When did code switching occur?

Metrical and syntactical factors: Often correspondence between the placing of the switching and the metrical patterns

→ Regularity of the rhyming

→ Formation of patterns

"... *Sen covent aver, ne stulcior inveniat.*

'It is necessary to have understanding, lest one be considered more foolish'

Quando quis loquitur, bote resoun reste perynne,

'When anyone speaks, unless there be reason in it, ...'

Schendl 2001, 314

Why did code switching occur?

- Extralinguistic factors
- Poetic or artistic function → playing with the languages
- Quotations → e.g. biblical texts
- Clarification of the context → French knight salutes in French, rest of the poem in English
- Display of the author's membership to a certain linguistic or social group
- Reiteration = translation into another code → clarification and emphasis of the message
- Interjections → to characterize the speaker

→ **Poetic switching usually is a stylistic device and a conscious choice of the author!**

Code Alternation

Definition: Using different languages in different situations.

→ Very basic definition. Due to the lack of research on code alternation, there is no fixed or generally accepted definition.

Where does code alternation occur?

- **Triglossia** in medieval England (→ also code-switching)
- **Language death**: e.g. last speakers of a dying language speak this language with each other, but are using the dominant language with everyone else
- Using one language at home and another at work (e.g. immigrants, foreign workers)

Even in pure monolingual situations, the second language cannot be fully "deactivated" → bits of that language can always leak into the other

(cf. Thomason 2001: 136-139)

Code Alternation vs. Code-Switching

Both are highly linked interference features, as code-switching often occurs as a result of using different languages for different communicative situations, which would be code alternation.

Example: German Air Force pilots

Most part of German Air Force pilots' education and training takes place in the US. In addition, English is the only language in which flying communication takes place. So the German pilots are used to German in daily life, but in education the only language is English.

→ Code alternation

When they are back in Germany after their education the pilots speak German in work context, which is heavily influenced by English – especially terms and phrases concerning flying vocabulary.

Examples:

- 'Wart ihr da aware, dass wir so nah drin waren?'
- 'Also, ich glaub' wenn wir die floor transition noch ein bisschen smoother gefahren hätten, dann hätten wir noch mehr angels gegen Ende euch präsentieren können'

→ Code-switching

(cf. Thomason 2001: 136-139; 'Deutschland von oben: Land II')

Negotiation

Definition:

Speakers change their own language (A) with patterns of what they believe are included in the other language (B) to make their own language similar to the other.

When does Negotiation occur?

Depending on the speaker's knowledge of other languages and the contact situation:

- Speaker of A is not fluent in B:
 - Changes applied on A may (not) be close to B's structure
- Speaker is bilingual
 - Changes applied on A make A more similar to B

If speakers of A and B interact, the results will either be changed versions of their languages or a completely new language

It is also possible that bilingual speakers adjust their own language's structure to another language without making mistakes (→ convergence).

The noteworthy cases of negotiation are with speakers of language A or B who do not know the other's language and make wrong assumptions of the other language.

Phenomenon of correspondence rules: bilingual speakers draw phonological generalizations (mostly in languages that are closely related to each other) while full fluency of the other language is not needed.

Example:

A local group of people from the former Yugoslavia who lived near the border to Hungary speak Hungarian. They shift their language to the local Serbo-Croatian dialect. While they accurately concluded that the stress of this dialect does not lie on the first syllable, they did not consider that the stress pattern is free, unlike the Hungarian with fixed order. Thus, the dialect created in this contact situation has a fixed stress on the second last syllable of a word.

In conclusion, the new dialect created in this contact situation displays a stress pattern that is neither in the original or the actual target language at the beginning.

(cf. Thomason 2001: 142-146)