Code Switching as a Countenance of Language Interference

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Interference may be viewed as the transference of elements of one language to another at various levels including phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical (Berthold, Mangubhai & Batorowicz, 1997). Berthold et al (1997) define phonological interference as items including foreign accent such as stress, rhyme, intonation and speech sounds from the first language influencing the second. Grammatical interference is defined as the first language influencing the second in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determinants, tense and mood. Interference at a lexical level provides for the borrowing of words from one language and converting them to sound more natural in another and orthographic interference includes the spelling of one language altering another. Given this definintion of interference, code-switching will now be defined and considered in terms of its relationship to this concept.

Crystal (1987) suggests that code, or language, switching occurs when an individual who is bilingual alternates between two languages during his/her speech with another bilingual person. A person who is bilingual may be said to be one who is able to communicate, to varying extents, in a second language. This includes those who make irregular use of a second language, are able to use a second language but have not for some time (dormant bilingualism) or those who have considerable skill in a second language (Crystal, 1987). This type of alteration, or code switching, between languages occurs commonly amongst bilinguals and may take a number of different forms, including alteration of sentences, phrases from both languages succeeding each other and switching in a long narrative. Berthold, Mangubhai and Bartorowicz (1997, pg 2.13) supplement the definition of code switching thus far with the notion that it occurs where 'speakers change from one language to another in the midst of their conversations'. An example of code switching, from Russian to French, is "Chustvovali, chto le vin est tiré et qu'il faut le boire" meaning 'They felt that the wine is uncorked and it should be drunk' (Cook, 1991, pg 65). Further, Cook (1991) puts the extent of code switching in normal conversations amongst bilinguals into perspective by outlining that code switching consists of 84% single word switches, 10% phrase switches and 6% clause switching.

There are a number of possible reasons for the switching from one language to another and these will now be considered, as presented by Crystal (1987). The first of these is the notion that a speaker may not be able to express him/herself in one language so switches to the other to compensate for the deficiency. As a result, the speaker may be triggered into speaking in the other language for a while. This type of code switching tends to occur when the speaker is upset, tired or distracted in some manner. Secondly, switching commonly occurs when an individual wishes to express solidarity with a particular social group. Rapport is established between the speaker and the listener when the listener responds with a similar switch. This type of switching may also be used to exclude others from a conversation who do not speak the second language. An example of such a situation may be two people in an elevator in a language other than English. Others in the elevator who do not speak the same language would be excluded from the conversation and a degree of comfort would exist amongst the speakers in the knowledge that not all those present in the elevator are listening to their conversation.

The final reason for the switching behavior presented by Crystal (1987) is the alteration that occurs when the speaker wishes to convey his/her attitude to the listener. Where monolingual speakers can communicate these attitudes by means of variation in the level of formality in their speech, bilingual speakers can convey the same by code switching. Crystal (1987) suggests that where two bilingual speakers are accustom to conversing in a particular language, switching to the other is bound to create a special effect. These notions suggest that code switching may be used as a socio-linguistic tool by bilingual speakers.

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that code switching is not a language interference on the basis that it supplements speech. Where it is used due to an inability of expression, code switching provides a continuity in speech rather than presenting an interference in language. The socio-linguistic benefits have also been identified as a means of communicating solidarity, or affiliation to a particular social group, whereby code switching should be viewed from the perspective of providing a linguistic advantage rather than an obstruction to communication. Further, code switching allows a speaker to convey attitude and other emotives using a method available to those who are bilingual and again serves to advantage the speaker, much like bolding or underlining in a text

document to emphasise points. Utilising the second language, then, allows speakers to increase the impact of their speech and use it in an effective manner.

To ensure the effective use of code switching there are however two main restrictions, as developed by Poplack (1980), cited in Cook (1991). The first of these is the free morpheme constraint. This constraint suggests that a 'speaker may not switch language between a word and its endings unless the word is pronounced as if it were in the language of the ending' (Cook, 1991, pg 65). The example given by Cook (1991) to illustrate this constraint is creation of the word "runeando" in an English/Spanish switch. Cook suggests that this is impossible because "run" is a distinctively English sound. The word "flipeando", on the other hand, is possible since "flip" could be a Spanish word. The second constraint is referred to as the equivalence constraint. This constraint is characterised by the notion that 'the switch can come at a point in the sentence where it does not violate the grammar of either language' (Cook, 1991, pg 65). The example Cook uses to illustrate the equivalence constaint is a French/English switch with the suggestion that switches such as "a car americaine" or "une American voiture" are both unlikely as they are wrong in both languages. A switch "J'ai acheté an American car" (I bought an American car) is possible as both English and French share the construction in which the verb is followed by the object.

Other researchers (Di Sciullo, Muysken & Singh, 1986; Berk-Seligson, 1986; Sankoff & Poplack, 1981) have also worked on generating similar specific linguistic constraints on patterns of code switching, with a general view to contributes to the work on language universals. On this basis, constraints provide a mechanism whereby two languages may be integrated together without causing interference in the conversation between two bilingual speakers.

A varying degree of code switching may also be used between bilingual conversationalists depending on the person being addressed, such as family, friends, officials and superiors and depending on the location, such as church, home or place of work (Crystal, 1987). The implication here is that there are patterns which are followed reflecting when it is appropriate to code switch with regard to addressee and location. These patterns are the established norm for that particular social group and serve to ensure appropriate language use. Milroy (1987) is a further proponent of this proposal with the observation that bilingual speakers attribute different social values to different codes, or languages. Since a different social value is associated with each code, the speaker considers use of one code more appropriate than the other with different interlocutors. Milroy (1987, pg 185) presents an example of perceived appropriate use of a given language over another with regard to the conversational participant, by stating:

> .. in the West of Ireland, Irish/English bilinguals will switch to English not only in addressing an English-speaking monolingual, but in the presence of such a person who in Bell's terms is an auditor - that is, a person ratified as a participant in the interaction (Bell 1984b:172)

A similar study was carried out by Gal (1979), as cited in Milroy (1987), who concluded that the participant in the conversation is the variable to which the others were subservient in a study of code switching. The notions of Gal (1979), Bell (1984) and Milroy (1987) suggest that code switching occurs naturally and unobtrusively such that it is not an interference to language but rather a verbal mechanism of presenting an individuals' social standing with regard to a particular conversational participant. As such, code switching performs a socio-linguistic function.

Code switching may also be considered in relation to language acquisition. A number of theories have been postulated as to how an individual attains language and these will now be outlined. The first to be considered is that of Chomsky (1972; 1975; 1979) where he suggests that language acquisition takes place as the brain matures and exposure to the appropriate language is obtained. Chomsky also suggests that people are aided by innate universal language structures and as children learn, they realise how to express the underlying universal structure according to their particular culture, as described by Bootzin, Bower, Zajonc and Hall (1986). From this point of view, addressees in conversations serve as facilitators of language development by means of exposing students to cultural elements required to express the universal structure appropriate to the cultural and social requirements of the individual. This biological theory is not accepted by behaviourists who suggest that language acquisition is a verbal behaviour which is an example of operant conditioning, as advocated by Skinner (1957). Behaviourists argue that individuals are reinforced by their own speech which matches the reinforcement of providers of affection during childhood. Further, grammatically correct constructions get desired results so the individual tends to repeat them. A point to note here is that the theories rely on exposure to appropriate samples of the language. The same is true when acquiring a second language.

Although switching languages during a conversation may be disruptive to the listener when the speaker switches due to an inability to express her/himself, it does provide an opportunity for language development. As may be derived from discussion above, language development takes place through samples of language which are appropriate and code switching may be signalling the need for

provision of appropriate samples. The listener, in this case, is able to provide translation into the second language thus providing a learning and developing activity. This, in turn, will allow for a reduced amount of switching and less subsequent interference as time progresses. These principles may also be applied in the second language classroom.

Cook (1991) asserts that code switching may be integrated into the activities used for the teaching of a second language. Cook describes the Institute of Linguistics' examinations in Languages for International Communication test as one which utilises code switching. At beginners level, students may use the second language for obtaining information from material such as a travel brochure or a phone message to answer comprehension questions in the first language. At advanced stages, the student may be required to research a topic and provide a report in the first language. This approach is one which uses code switching as a foundation for the development of a second language learner who can stand between the two languages and use whichever is most appropriate to the situation rather than becoming an imitation native speaker (Cook, 1991).

Cook (1989) provides another method of using code switching as a second language teaching tool through reciprocal language teaching. This method requires students to switch languages at predetermined points pairing students who want to learn each other's languages. Thus the students alternate between the two languages and exchange the roles of student and teacher. A similar system may also be used whereby the teacher uses code switching by starting the lesson in the first language and then moving into the second and back (Cook, 1991). This makes the lesson as communicative as possible and is similar to the 'New Concurrent Approach' presented by Rodolpho Jacobson, outlined in Cook (1991). The approach gets teachers to balance the use of languages within each lesson with the teacher allowed to switch languages at certain key points, such as during important concepts, when students are getting distracted, during revisions or when students are praised and told off. On this basis, switching may be used as an effective teaching strategy for second language learning.

There is however a means for viewing code switching as language interference, particularly from a teaching perspective. Prucha (1983) examines how language usage is determined by consideration of extraindividual and extralinguistic purposes, or social needs, taking a 'sociofunctional' approach to the study of language. Prucha is of the opinion that all of linguistic reality is determined by certain purposes, programs or aims reflective of societal needs. As a result, social needs have caused an evolution of language and language communication. This proposition relates to the notion that language acquired by an individual will have an effect on the society in which the individual participates (Clark & Clark, 1977; Winner, 1977; Dodd & White, 1980) as successful societal functioning demands an adaptable, thinking and autonomous person who is a self-regulated learner, capable of communicating and co-operating with others (Birenbaum, 1996). Acquisition of these skills is addressed by Cherryholmes (1993) and others (Percy and Ramsden, 1980; Moore, 1988), with a consideration of reciprocal teaching. Cherryholmes (1993) adapts a definition by Vygotsky (1978) suggesting that cognitive development takes place as students undertake activities in the presence of experts, or teachers, coming to eventually perform the functions by themselves. This allows the student to become autonomous over a period of time whereby the teaching is reciprocated from the teacher to the student. In terms of societal consequence, the teaching-learning activity would then produce individuals who are able to participate in society independently. These concepts applied to reciprocal teaching/learning, as presented by Cook (1991) above, would suggest that a use of code switching in the classroom would provide for a bilingual norm whereby code switching is seen to be acceptable method of communication. Students then would feel comfortable switching languages within normal conversations providing for a bilingual society. In turn, those who were not bilingual may be disadvantaged as they would not be able to communicate as effectively as those who were not. Perhaps a societal expectation of currency is bilingualism and this may be a foundation for the high degree of languages other than English programs existing in all levels of schooling. In this situation the environment is set whereby interference may occur as the societal norm moves to the inclusion of code switching and the degree of bilingualism increases. Interference may occur in this instance by monolingual speakers who attempt to use a second language for a social reason such as solidarity or bilingual speakers attempting to integrate the second language into the first to be understood by monolingual speakers.

However, from another perspective, code switching means that the two languages are kept separate and distinct which creates a barrier to interference. This is on the basis that if an individual code switches, he/she will not try to make up their own variations of the words they are unable to correctly say thus preventing interference at a phonological level. Language would also not be subject to using them out of grammatical context and would not be subject to interference at a lexical level or with orthography.

Code switching may be viewed as an extension to language for bilingual speakers rather than an interference and from other perspectives it may be viewed as interference, depending on the situation and context in which it occurs. This conclusion is drawn from the notions that switching occurs when a speaker: needs to compensate for some difficulty, express solidarity, convey an attitude or show social respect (Crystal, 1987; Berthold, Mangubhai and Bartorowicz, 1997). The switching also occurs within postulated universal constraints such that it may be integrated into conversations in a particular manner (Poplack, 1980; Cook, 1991). On this

basis, given that it occurs within a particular pattern, potential for code switching to interfere into a language exists. It has also been outlined above that code switching may facilitate language development as a mechanism for providing language samples and may also be utilised as a teaching method for teaching second languages (Cook, 1989; 1991). Again, scope for code switching to cause interference in a language exists if it is not utilised carefully as a teaching method. It may be concluded then, that when code switching is to compensate for a language difficulty it may be viewed as interference and when it is used a a socio-linguistic tool it should not.

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