

GRAMMATICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CODE-SWITCHING

Samira Abdel Jalil¹

samirajalil@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT: This study aimed at examining the rules for code-switching, and more specifically, for intrasentential code-switching. First, a review of the literature in bilingualism and code-switching was conducted with the attempt of providing theoretical foundation for the analysis of the data set. Then, the participants are described in the Methods section, along with an explanation of their linguistic background and the materials used for collecting the data set. Third, an analysis of the data collected is conducted in a more detailed way so as to verify if the hypothesis that code-switching is a systematic phenomenon, governed by Poplack's free-morpheme and equivalence constraints. Moreover, using the data set as a reference, patterns for Portuguese/English intrasentential code-switching spots were drawn.

KEYWORDS: bilingualism; code-switching.

INTRODUCTION

The following study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the rules that govern code-switching, and more specifically, intrasentential code-switching. It is hypothesized that code-switching is a systematic phenomenon, rule-governed mainly by two constraints suggested by Poplack (1978/1981): the free-morpheme and the equivalence constraints. Also, patterns for Portuguese/English intrasentential code-switching sites were drawn from the data set collected for this paper.

First, a review of the literature in this field of Linguistics was conducted in order to give theoretical support for the analysis of the data collected. Second, in the Methods section, a description of the participants and their linguistic background is provided. The subjects of this study are Brazilians whose first language is Brazilian Portuguese. At the time of this study, all of them were living in the United States. In addition, there is an explanation of the game used for collecting the data set, which was the conversation that the participants carried

¹ Faculdades Integradas Santa Cruz – FARESC.

out using the topics of the game as a reference. Also in this section, the procedures followed for the recording and analyzing of the data are described. Third, an analysis of the data and findings is carried out in more detail, using the literature previously discussed as a support for the findings and results, in an attempt to answer the following questions: Are Poplack's constraints at work in intrasentential code-switchings? Is intrasentential code-switching really systematic? If so, can any patterns be drawn for possible sites for Portuguese/English code-switching?

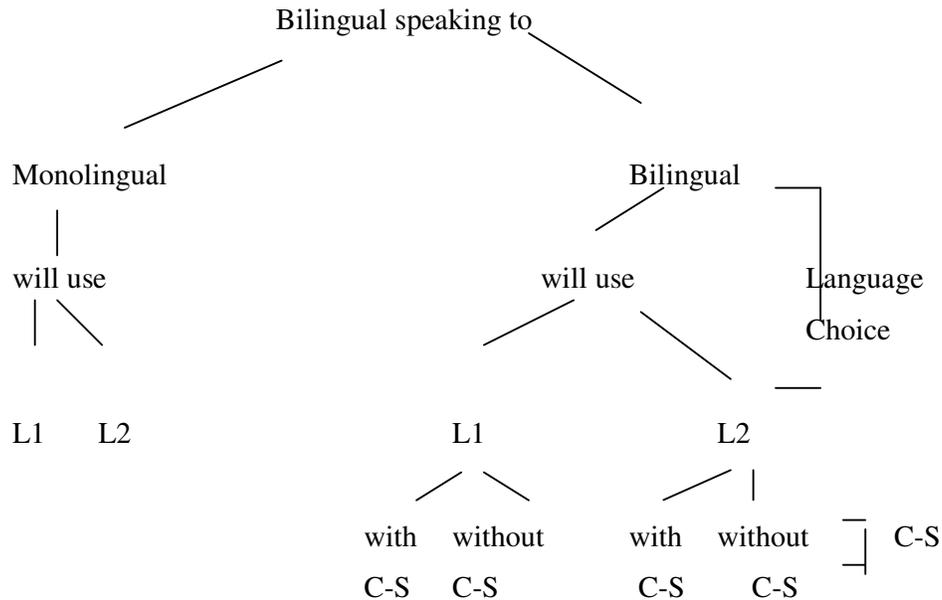
1. BACKGROUND

Bilingualism is a phenomenon that involves “the regular use of two or more languages” (Grosjean, 1982:1) within a certain speech community. Once bilingualism is established in this community, language choice patterns emerge and are very common in bilingual behavior. Individuals have to make choices over “what language [to use] to whom and when...” (Fishman, 2000)

1.1 BILINGUAL INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR CHOICES

If a bilingual individual is speaking to a monolingual individual, both speakers usually function within the language they have in common. Variation may occur in style or degree of formality; for example, there can be a style change from informal to intimate, or from informal to formal, just to mention a few. However, if bilinguals who share the same linguistic background are taken into consideration, this phenomenon becomes much more complex and involves more aspects than language choice only; it may involve aspects like code-switching and borrowing. (Grosjean, 1982) To illustrate the relation between bilingual individuals, the following chart was adapted from Grosjean, 1982, p.129:

C-S = code-switching



According to Grosjean’s approach to bilinguals’ decision–making process, a bilingual speaker will choose a language as basis for the conversation first according to the linguistic background of his or her interlocutor. Both speakers will agree about the language to be used. This means that, if a bilingual individual is speaking to a monolingual individual, conversation in the monolingual individual’s language will take place. On the other hand, if a bilingual is speaking to another bilingual of the same linguistic background, communication will take place within either language as a base language, with or without code-switching. But what is code-switching?

1.2 CODE-SWITCHING

Code-switching is the alternation in the use of two languages (or even more) in the same discourse. The switch can happen within words, clauses, or sentences. However, there is only a switch in the language, not an integration of the word, clause or sentence into the other language. (Grosjean, 1982:147)

According to Poplack (1978/1981), there are three types of code-switching. First, there is tag-switching, which is related to the inclusion of a tag (e.g. *you know, I mean, right*, etc). This type of code-switching is very simple and does not involve a great command of both

languages, since there is a minimum risk of violation of grammatical rules. For example, from a Portuguese-English bilingual:

“I look like Lilica, *you know*, nunca paro!” [I look like Lilica, you know, I never stop!]

The second type of code-switching is the intersentential switching, which is at the phrase or sentence level, between sentences. For instance, the title of Shana Poplack’s paper used in this study (2000) is a perfect example of intersentential switching: “Sometimes I’ll start a sentence in Spanish *y termino en español*” [Sometimes I’ll start a sentence in Spanish and finish in Spanish].

The third and most complex type of code-switching is the intrasentential one. The complexity of this type of switching is explained by the high probability of violation of syntactic rules, as well as the requirement of a great knowledge of both grammars and how they map onto each other. For example, in a Portuguese-English bilingual’s speech:

A: “Yeah, I don’t know *o meu lugar nesse mundo*...so, something that is weird, like a, like a, I guess it’s...” [... I don’t know my place in this world...]

For the examples mentioned above, it is clearly seen that, in code-switching, there is no adaptation or integration of words or clauses from one language into the other. What occurs is simply a switch in the language. What if there is a phonological and morphological integration into the language spoken?

1.3.BORROWING

It is pertinent to make a distinction here between code-switching and borrowing. Whereas there is no integration of the word (s) or clause (s) into the language spoken in code-switching, there is morphological and phonological integration in borrowing (Grosjean, 1982:308). Using the data set collected, a great example of borrowing will be the word “dropar”, which was not only integrated morphologically into Portuguese (*DROP=English stem + AR= Portuguese inflection for infinitive verbs*), but also phonologically (*/ ‘d r p / = English, / d r ‘p a / = Portuguese*)

There are two types of borrowings: speech borrowings or nonces, at individual level; and language borrowings or established loans, at the community level. (Grosjean, 1982:308-9). Moreover, more “culture-specific items” such as food, cultural-specific nouns or cultural institutions, just to mention a few, are considered borrowings as well (Romaine, 1985:131)

1.4 GRAMMATICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CODE-SWITCHING

Poplack (1978/1981) suggested two syntactic constraints that govern code-switching: the free-morpheme constraint and the equivalence constraint. The free morpheme constraint states that “no switch can occur between a lexical form and a bound morpheme unless that lexical form is phonologically integrated into the language of the bound morpheme, as in *flipeando*, but not in **runeando* (Clyne, 2000). The second of these constraints is the equivalence constraint which predicts the occurrence of code-switching points where elements of both languages are equivalent, that is, they map onto each other in surface trees (Poplack, 1978/1981). Thus, the juxtaposition of these elements will not violate a syntactic rule of any of the languages, and there will be points where code-switching is permissible.

For the information given above, it can be hypothesized that code-switching is not a casual phenomenon; it is actually a systematic and linguistically based one (Grosjean, 1982:323). In this study, I attempt to test the validity of both proposed Poplack’s constraints (1978/1981), regarding intrasentential code-switchings in the data set collected. Are Poplack’s constraints at work? Is intrasentential code-switching really systematic? If so, can any patterns be drawn for possible sites for Portuguese/English code-switching?

2. METHODS

2.1 PARTICIPANTS

- I) Samira (S), 23 at the time of this study, student of the Master’s program in Education (TESOL) at Queens College. Samira had been studying EFL for 12 years, and teaching the language for 7 years. Proficient in the language, Samira used to use English on a daily basis for she lived with an American family and studied in the US. Her first language is Portuguese.
- II) Veronica (V), 24 at the time of this study, a Portuguese native speaker, first came in contact with English at age 19, when she moved to the US. Veronica acquired the language in a naturalistic way, with no instruction in the beginning. After being in the US for 3 years, Veronica went to an American college in 2000; she was already fluent in the language at that time.

- III) Aninha (A), 20 at the time of this study, studied EFL for 6 years (12 to 18 years old) in Brazil Her L1 is also Portuguese. She could not communicate in English at that time, though. When she was 18, she moved to the United States, and started college then. She said that moving to the US was what really improved her oral communication skills in English. She was very fluent at the time of this study.
- IV) M (Man) and Andrea (A2) interrupted the conversation for a while and the participants ended up switching to a Portuguese-unilingual mode. However, this was just a coincidence, and did not affect the overall results of this experiment since the parts in which they interfered were not taken into account for this study.

2.2 MATERIALS

The only material used was a board game (Tell us about), which had 17 different open-topics for conversation in English, the base language for the conversation. Participants tossed a coin. If it were heads, they would move one space; tails, two spaces. Then, participants had to answer the proposed question in English, giving as many details as possible, and the other participants, including Samira, had to ask more questions about the same topic. Also, spaces like “Free Choice” or “Free Question” were used, in order to enrich the conversation with topics that the participants would themselves pick to talk about. There were “Free Spaces” as well, so participants could have a break.

2.3 PROCEDURES

The game was played in two parts: the first part was played while participants were heading to a party. The recording was stopped after the interruption because of the presence of different participants, already mentioned on section 3.1 of this paper. The second part was recorded after the party. The participants were at a deli, eating. For this, it is clearly seen that the participants were in a natural and relaxed atmosphere, talking about themselves and their own experiences. This kind of procedure was a crucial motivational tool on the collection of the data, due to the fact that participants were not too focused on the activity or their performance.

2.4 ANALYSIS

The code-switches in the data set were divided into three categories or types, defined by Poplack (1978/1981): Tag-switches, intersentential switches, and intrasentential switches. There was a total of 41 switches in the data set: 1 tag switch, 17 intersentential switches, 15 intrasentential switches, and 8 borrowings.

An analysis of the intrasentential switches was carried out in order to test the validity of the two constraints suggested by Poplack (1978/1981). From this analysis, possible switch site patterns for Portuguese/English were inferred from the data collected. As the data set is very small and limited to two participants only, it can be said that there are many more possible sites for Portuguese/English switches. The conclusions drawn were exclusively based on the data collected. In addition, it was verified whether or not the hypothesis that intrasentential code-switching was a systematic and logical phenomenon in bilingual discourse is a valid one.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 BORROWINGS

Five out of the eight borrowings found belonged to Romaine's "culture-specific items" (1985).

Other borrowings (*dropar* and *cool*) were also found. These words were morphologically and phonologically integrated into these participants' piece of discourse when they switched to Portuguese. For explanation on *dropar*, see section 1.3 of this paper. Also, *cool*, an English word, was phonologically adapted into Portuguese as *well* (/k u w l/)

3.2 TAG-SWITCHES

The two only tag-switches found were:

1. "V: It's like desenho (cartoon), *right?*", and
2. "I look like Lilica, *you know*, eu nunca páro...."

3.3 INTERSENTENTIAL SWITCHES

These switches were the most common ones – 17 out of 41 of the switches found were of this type.

An interesting thing to point out is that some intersentential switches triggered a total switch into the less dominant language used by the speakers at that moment. For instance, when Veronica was talking about the man who invited us out of his deli:

1. “A: yeah, paying my own bills, going to school...to take care of me, like you gotta do this, you gotta do that...

S: And what was the main lesson for you?

V: *Ei, o cara ta mandando a gente embora, ele ja ta fechando... aah, ele que va cagar! Vambora! Desculpa gente... ai, ta gravando... e aquele cara que eu ja nao gosto, e o cara fez no relógio assim, “o, tchau que a gente ta fechando!”* (Hey, the guy is asking us to leave, he’s closing it... aah, the hell with him! Let’s go... sorry girls, it’s recording... it’s that guy I don’t like, and he pointed to his watch like this ‘hey, bye, because we’re closing!)

A: Did he do that?

V: There are some other people. *Que se dane!”* (The hell with him!)

As it can be seen above, a need to avoid being understood led to a switch of language in Veronica’s discourse. Another example:

2. A: “Oh, my God... It’s not white, it’s blond!!(...) *Calaboca! Loraburra!*[laughs] *Além de tá ficando loira, tá ficando burra!”* [laughs] (Shut up! Dumb blonde! Not only are you blond, you’re becoming dumb!!)

3.4 INTRASSENTENTIAL SWITCHES

This type of switching is the most interesting one, since its occurrence “may be avoided by all but the most fluent bilinguals” (Romaine, 1985:113) for its higher probability of violating syntactic rules. On the data set collected, however, this was the second most frequent one: 15 out of 41 switchings were intrasentential.

3.4.1 ARE POPLACK'S CONSTRAINTS AT WORK ON THESE INTRASSENTIAL SWITCHES?

By looking at the data set in more detail, the validity of the free-morpheme and equivalence constraints suggested by Poplack (1978/1981) was examined within the intrasentential switching samples. There was no violation of the free-morpheme and equivalence constraints in the data collected. Due to this fact, some patterns on possible code-switching sites for Portuguese/English were drawn, based on the intrasentential switches of the data set. Possible Portuguese/English switching sites are:

I) Between Verb and Object Noun Phrase:

1. V: "Yeah, I have... you know what's my problem... I remember... when I used to go to school, I always had a problem when I, I had to sit straight to the teacher, and I have *_um complexo* about my nose, and you know, like my..." (=a complex...)
2. A: "We throw *flores pra Iemanjá*, that's like a queen..." (=We throw flowers for Iemanja....)
3. V: "Yeah, I don't know *o meu lugar nesse mundo*...so, something that is weird, like a, like a, I guess it's..." (=... I don't know my place in this world...)

II) Between Copular Verb and Subject Predicate Noun Phrase

1. V: "Yeah, they were *terríveis!*"
(=terrible)
2. A: [laughs] "Oh, my God! That's *cômico*, Veronica! I had something in high school too..." (=...funny...)
3. "Como chama aquela livro? É... *Potter, that's it?*" (What's that book called? It's ... Potter, that's it?)
4. "It's *desenho*." (It's cartoon.)
5. V: "Hey, girls, it's *por aqui*." (Hey, girls, it's this way!)
6. A: "E, *como seria holiday, hmm... Parties?*" (And, what's holiday, hmm...parties?)
7. "I'm *Lilica, Veronica, fala tchau, tchaaaauuuu!* Bye!!!!" (I'm Lilica, Veronica, say goodbye, byyyyyyyyyy! Bye!)

III) Between Prepositional Verb and Prepositional Phrase

1. V: “No... not really... in the close future, I’m going to Brazil, and then, I mean, I don’t want to make plans for the future because it’s really hard decision...to make plans for the future, but I’m going *pro Brazil* (to Brazil) to visit my family for the near future ...”

IV) Between Preposition and Noun Phrase:

1. A: “Maybe from *Sacramento!* (*Portuguese pronunciation of this word*)[laughs] *Esse é meu!*” [laughs] (Maybe from Sacramento! That’s mine!)

4. CONCLUSION

For the discussion of the findings above, it can be inferred that the initial hypothesis concerning the validity of the constraints proposed by Poplack (1978/1981) and consequent systematic characteristic of intrasentential code-switching was strongly supported by this specific data set. Intrasentential code-switching patterns were inferred by examination of the data, supporting the hypothesis that intrasentential code-switching is a rule-governed and logical phenomenon, and not a random one. For these factors, some possible sites for Portuguese/English code-switchings were made. However, the suggestions were very limited to the data set collected.

For future research, I suggest that preliminary investigation on the level of proficiency of the participants be carried out in an attempt to compare the proficiency of participants and maybe predict the types of code-switches they make more frequently. Also, more patterns on possible switching sites should be developed in future research, by using a larger data set or by repeating this game under different conditions.

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed at examining the rules for code-switching, and more specifically, for intrasentential code-switching. First, a review of the literature in bilingualism and code-switching was conducted with the attempt of providing theoretical foundation for the analysis of the data set. Then, the participants are described in the Methods section, along with an explanation of their linguistic background and the materials used for collecting the data set. Third, an analysis of the data collected is conducted in a more detailed way so as to verify if the hypothesis that code-switching is a systematic phenomenon, governed by Poplack's free-morpheme and equivalence constraints. Moreover, using the data set as a reference, patterns for Portuguese/English intrasentential code-switching spots were drawn.

KEYWORDS: bilingualism; code-switching.

RESUMO: Esse estudo tem por objetivo examinar as regras para *code-switching*, e mais especificamente, para o *code-switching* que acontece em posição intrasentencial. Em primeiro lugar, uma revisão da literatura sobre bilinguismo e *code-switching* foi feita para fornecer fundamentação teórica para a análise dos dados. Em segundo lugar, na seção Métodos, os participantes foram descritos, bem como os materiais utilizados para a coleta de dados. Em terceiro lugar, foi conduzida uma análise dos dados de forma detalhada, para verificar a hipótese de que o fenômeno *code-switching* é sistemático e governado por regras, em particular pelas restrições de Poplack do morfema-livre e da equivalência. Além disso, usando os dados coletados como referência, foram delineados padrões para a ocorrência de *code-switching* intrasentencial para Português/Inglês.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: bilinguismo; *code-switching*.

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