

CODE-SWITCHING

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INTRODUCTION

Members of a speech community can agree to use one language variety in formal situations and another variety in informal situations. Diglossia is characterised by the fact that the formal variety is a standard language. Speakers therefore switch from the standard language to a dialect in different situations.

In this paper we will attempt to identify another type of situation in which a different type of switching between languages occurs. We will identify sociological factors that determine the use of these varieties. Sociolinguistic rules should enable us to determine the social implications, or meaning, of the use of certain varieties in certain situations. We should also be able to determine what non-referential meanings these varieties convey to the listener. By formulating sociolinguistic rules we should be able to determine under what conditions a speaker may use particular varieties. These rules will probably not be able to predict what variety a speaker will ultimately choose (cf. Sankoff 1970:41).

DEFINITION OF CODE-SWITCHING

The term *variety* is used to refer to the same concepts as the terms *language*, *dialect* and *register*. It appears that many speakers switch from one variety to another so as to comply with certain requirements of a particular situation or to achieve certain communicative objectives.

The clearest form of switching from one language to another occurs in South Africa when an Afrikaans speaker changes to English as soon as he notices that his hearer is English speaking. This switch takes place even if the hearer can speak Afrikaans fluently. It also occurs in the opposite direction, i.e. a bilingual English speaker may, in a similar situation, switch to Afrikaans. I will not use the term *code-switching* to refer to this type of switch from one language to another because the speaker and the hearer belong to two different speech communities.

We could possibly use the term *metaphorical code-switching* (Hudson 1980:56) to refer to the habit of some Afrikaans speakers of switching to English in certain circumstances such as when entering a shop or a restaurant. Similarly, some bilingual English speakers tend to switch to Afrikaans when addressing a civil servant.

I will restrict the term *code-switching* to what Hudson (1980:57) calls *conversational code-switching*. *Code-switching* will refer to the switching from one language to another that occurs when two bilinguals, who belong to the same speech community, are talking to each other.

The next example illustrates what the term *code-switching* refers to in this lecture:

Kyk ou vriend, 'now I want you to listen very carefully',
want ek sê nie 'n ding twee keer nie.

The speaker switched from one language to another to emphasise a particular section of his message. An interesting illustration of code-switching was found in the case of an artisan who spoke fluent and fairly formal Afrikaans to me while repairing something in my home. After I had offered him some coffee, he relaxed and used a less formal register in which some English words and phrases occurred. In this case the code-switching indicated a degree of intimacy between speaker and hearer. Because of this function of code-switching, some speakers who wish to emphasise their social distance from other speakers might be insulted by code-switching.

The following definition of the term *code-switching* matches closely the way in which this term is used in this paper:

Changing from one language or language variety to another in the course of using a language; usually determined by the particular function, participants, or setting and identity the speaker wishes to project (Ferguson & Heath 1981:527).

The description of code-switching in New Guinea that Sankoff (1971:47) offers is also valid for the type of code-switching during a conversation that I exemplified above:

This speech, and others like it, is certainly repetitive, but the speaker does not 'translate' what he has just said into the other language as he goes along. Rather, he makes one point in one language, then switches to the other to bring out a different aspect of the argument.

The difference between register-switching and code-switching can be very subtle. As Hudson uses this term, *code-switching* does not necessarily imply that the speaker switches from one language to another. The speaker may also switch from one variety to another within the same language. It seems that this switching is rule-governed, but this topic has not received much attention in South Africa.

The observation that speakers continually select a code from a repertoire of codes has an influence on our theory of language. We can no longer work with the Chomskyan assumption that speakers live 'in a completely homogeneous speech-community...' (Chomsky 1965:4). We are now forced to see language as 'a set of role-related, and in part role-defining, codes, grouped together as the repertoire of an individual...' (Bell 1976:110). In other words, neither the speech-community nor the language can be seen as undifferentiated phenomena.

In the definition of *code-switching* by Ferguson & Heath (1981: 527) the switching from one variety to another is also seen as a form of *code-switching*. I find that the meaning of the term *code-switching* becomes too general in such use - cf. Hudson's (1980:24) definition of *variety*. It seems safer to restrict the meaning of the term *code-switching* to the switching from one dialect to another and particularly to the switching from one language to another in the same conversation.

CAUSES OF CODE-SWITCHING

As already stated, the causes of code-switching lie in language varieties that are determined by different situations. The members of each society use specific codes in specific situations or for discussing specific topics. If the switch from one code to another becomes conventional (i.e. more or less obligatory), we are probably dealing with a diglossic situation. From this you can see that the meaning of the term *code-switching* lies on a scale ranging from the meaning of *register* to that of *diglossia*.

Blom and Gumperz (1972) analysed code-switching in the Norwegian town of Hemnes where a dialect and the standard Norwegian language is spoken. They found that students would switch from the dialect to the standard language when they spoke about certain topics such as university rules and regulations. The interesting observation was made that all the students denied switching to the standard language. It seems that code-switching may, in many cases, operate below the level of consciousness. Gumperz & Gumperz (1981:443) point out that code-switching occurs often in the speech of many urban bilinguals.

Du Plessis (1980:7) describes code-switching in the language of an Afrikaans-speaking tramdriver. As the speaker relaxes, he switches into a less formal register and code-switching begins to occur in his language:

... dan is jy rangelator (?) dan is jy inspektor, en so hel hulle jou rond, anyway, toe's ek weer agter 'n helse tyd ... 'We'll let you know' - ons sal jou laat weet. Here, man, ek het gewerk daarso.

We may assume that he uses English names for his various professions because he worked in an English-speaking environment. Why does the speaker use 'anyway' and 'we'll let you know' in the course of his conversation? What is he trying to achieve by switching from Afrikaans to English in the middle of a sentence? Is he trying to prove that he is bilingual?

The use of 'anyway' probably forms part of his informal register in which he is relaxed - as is indicated by the neologism 'rangelator'. Interestingly enough, this speaker, and others that Du Plessis interviewed, never uses the English word 'railways' for the Afrikaans 'spoorweë'. The longer English phrase (which is translated by the speaker!) might signify the social distance between the speaker and those whom he is quoting. An elderly Afrikaans-speaking farmer used code-switching to indicate to me that he was going to talk about a formal or 'learned' matter.

Note that in du Plessis' example code-switching only began to occur when the speaker began to accept the hearer as 'one of us' and lowered his register accordingly. It appears that code-switching forms part of the linguistic repertoire of bilinguals and that it is directed mainly at members of their own speech community. As the examples above show, code-switching does not occur when bilinguals are having problems with certain grammatical structures, nor does it reflect lack of linguistic knowledge. Code-switching is not an *ad hoc* mixture of two languages:

Fluent code-switching is not indiscriminate mixing; code-switches are subject to syntactic constraints, the rules for which are shared by all competent switchers in the speech community ... and some rules may be shared by all switchers in all bilingual situations (Zentella 1981:233).

Code-switching is clearly *not* a strategy used to communicate with members of other speech communities. Code-switching does, however, occur only in speech communities that have also acquired the language of another speech community with which they have continuous contact. Such situations are found when immigrants form a colony in a new country. For example, code-switching occurs frequently in the language of young urban German-speaking South Africans (i.e. German spiced with either Afrikaans or English). In a multilingual country such as South Africa, code-switching occurs in most of the speech communities (in some it is frowned upon). Sankoff stresses that code-switching occurs within one speech community and that it is not used as a communicative strategy with members of other speech communities (Sankoff 1980:157-158).

In the following example the speaker uses code-switching as a strategy to assure the hearer that he is getting the best possible service. The conversation took place between an English-speaking workshop foreman and a (presumably) bilingual Afrikaans-speaking farmer with a broken tractor:

Don't worry, Mr Botha, we'll fix it in time for harvesting.
We're a bit busy now, but don't worry, 'ons maak 'n plan',
we'll squeeze this job in somewhere.

The Afrikaans phrase clearly does not add new information and cannot, therefore, be seen as a way in which an English-speaking person communicates with an Afrikaans-speaking one, but it does seem to signify some closing up of the gap between members of different speech communities.

Gumperz and Hernandez-Cavez (as quoted in Zentella 1980:233) identify the following reasons why bilinguals use code-switching:

1. to express meaning more effectively
2. because the experience or the item referred to is typical of the other language's culture
3. to establish the social identity of the referent or speaker

4. to embellish a point
5. to reflect confidentiality or privateness

Many code-switches are introduced by triggerwords or phrases such as *you know*, homophones (or near-homophones) such as *man*, *can* and certain nouns such as *job*, etc.

I have now identified some of the causes of code-switching. There are probably more causes. In a country that is so rich in code-switching you should be able to observe this phenomenon freely as you should be able to come up with examples that reflect causes other than those that I have mentioned here.

SOCIAL ATTITUDES TO CODE-SWITCHING

Code-switching is regarded in some communities as an example of verbal skill and as a marker of social mobility. It is thought that a code-switcher has more communicative tools at his disposal than a monolingual person (cf. Zentella 1981:234). The generation of educated Afrikaans-speakers that is now between 60 and 70 years old used code-switching more than later generations. In this generation code-switching occurred more in the speech of women than in the speech of men. Certain English phrases are very common in the speech of these women: *you know my dear*, *well*, *really* etc. Code-switching seems to occur in the speech of educated black South Africans as well.

As I pointed out earlier, some societies or some sub-groups of a speech community frown on code-switching. Later Afrikaans-speaking generations (i.e. those that are now between 40 and 60 years old), reacted against the influence of English on Afrikaans, and code-switching became stigmatised amongst educated Afrikaans speakers. An even younger generation of urban Afrikaans speakers (i.e. those under 30) seems to use code-switching more - despite condemnation by schools and universities. This description seems to be valid for many young German-speaking South Africans as well.

Hudson (1980:58) asks whether there are limitations on when code-switching may be used - i.e. in what types of conversation and in what situations may code-switching be used? It would be interesting to investigate the answers to questions such as:

- (a) Does the formality of the situation have an influence on code-switching?
- (b) How well must the speaker know the hearer before he can use code-switching?

- (c) Is code-switching restricted to certain topics (or, phrased differently, are there certain topics that, by their nature, preclude code-switching)?

CONCLUSION

The term *code-switching* was used mainly in this paper to refer to the switching from one language (or variety) to another in the course of a conversation between two bilinguals. Code-switching takes place mainly amongst members of one speech community. Code-switching is, amongst others, used to emphasise certain aspects of a message and it is also used to define the degree of familiarity between speaker and hearer. In some communities code-switching is regarded in a positive light whereas it is frowned upon in other communities.

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