CODE-SWITCHING BETWEEN MANDARIN AND ENGLISH IN ENGLISH-DOMINAT ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the driving factors and utterance features of code-switching of bilingual (Mandarin and English) students in English-dominant environments. The phenomenon of code-switching in the course of a verbal interaction can signal a range of distinct meanings. Therefore, I want to identify the main factors that stimulate Mandarin-English bilinguals to switch their codes in an English environment. This study was carried out based on two groups of bilinguals in Newcastle: 1) adult Chinese students who study in the UK universities and 2) teenage Chinese students who moved to the UK with their parents some years ago. The main research methods employed in this study are observation and interview of each of these two groups. This study is still under research. Some features of the subjects' code-switching identified in this work so far, as well as future the focus, will be described in this paper.

1. Introduction

In the area of sociolinguistics, the study of language use is usually conducted within or among a wide range of groups of speakers (Wardhaugh, 2002). Researchers have investigated many different features of communication, among which, it is perhaps not surprising at all that code-switching (CS) is frequently researched. In the

long run, sociolinguists have debated 'the phenomena that may be subsumed under the umbrella term of CS' (Sachdev and Bourhis, 2001: 408).

CS violates a strong expectation that only one language will be used at any given time. This paper describes a formal consideration of CS considering various factors among Mandarin-English bilingual students in the English-dominant environment.

This essay is outlined in four parts. First of all, basic theory and empirical literature of CS is provided to support my research, including the influential factors that result in CS, and various occasions in which it occurs and the users of CS. In addition, the research design and research methods will be explored. Then, current research results and analysis about CS in this target community will be clearly demonstrated. Finally, a conclusion will be presented to summarize the article.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of CS

Efforts to explore sociolinguistic meaning of CS have occupied an important niche in the study of bilinguals' communicative practices. The notion of 'code' as explained by Romaine (1995) and Wardhaugh (2002) is a neutral and objective term, which refers to a language or a variety of a language. CS, therefore, is viewed as the alternation between two languages exploited by bilinguals in the course of a single communicative episode. While the concept of CS was originally coined as the term to cover situations in which a bilingual speaker produce an entirely unassimilated code from another language into his/her speech (Hangen, 1956, cited in Gardner-Chloros, 1991). A recognized definition of CS is thus far given by Wardhaugh (2002: 100):

> *People, then, are usually required to select a particular code whenever*
> *they choose to speak, and they may also decide to switch from one code*
> *to another or to mix codes even within sometimes very short utterances*
> *and thereby create a new code in a process (Wardhaugh 2002, p.100).*

It can be therefore noted that the researchers' understanding of CS is changing. Simultaneously, the influential factors of CS are also changing. What influences the speakers to switch codes to each other? And how do the various factors interact in the process of speech production? Under what kind of occasions will CS occur? Does CS occur differently with different conversation partners? Answers to these questions will be sought in the following sections.

2.2 Driving Factors of CS

Generally, CS is a means of conveying linguistic and social information (Grosjean, 1982). There is a significant quantity of literature about the influential factors of CS, which can be classified as follows.

Speakers' Social Identity

Being fluent in two languages, bilinguals have more language choices than monolinguals. They can employ either of them or both of them when they are conversing (Foley, 1997).

Normally, a certain group of bilinguals tend to switch codes to elevate their own social status in a community (Baker, 2001). In English countries, when bilingual people use English to other bilinguals, they give an impression of status and westernization. Bonvillain (1993) gives an example that a Hindi bilingual speaker switched Hindi into English when he talked with another Hindi because of the high position of English throughout the world. Myers-Scotton (1988, cited in Li, 2000) has emphasized the same idea that higher social position can be naturally displayed when a prestigious language was exploited.

Additionally, CS can enable speakers to single two identities in one situation or to differentiate 'we' from 'they' (Ng and He, 2004). As Nishimura (1995) has claimed in her study, bilingual students are inclined to switch codes in order to show their social

or ethnic identity. Myers (1988, cited in Li, 2000) has also reached the same conclusion.

Speaker's Attitudes towards Conversation Participants

Myers-Scotton and Jake (2001) has pointed out that a bilingual speaker may open an exchange with one language choice and probably prepared to switch to another code, depending on his/her attitudes to the partners or partners' code choice, since the speaker tends to show his/her deference or accommodation to the receiver(s).

Harding and Riley (1993) have also confirmed that CS can reinforce the closeness of the relationship between interlocutors in some instances. An example is set to prove the fact.

> *A: Nau, ni goh. (This one.)*
> *B: Ho leng a. (Very pretty.)*
> *A: Leng me?(Pretty?) Very expensive.*
> *B: Guai m guai a? (Expensive or not?)*
> *A: Hao guai. (Very expensive.)*
> *(Li and Milroy, 1995)*

Notice that in line 3, A switched to English to emphasize that the clothes was quite expensive; however, in line 5 A then shifted back to Cantonese to draw closer relation with B due to B's preference of language use in this extract is Cantonese.

By contrast, sometimes, interlocutors' CS can be used to isolate other receivers (Cook, 2004). People start to talk in a common language in a group but suddenly shift into another language which only some group members can understand, in order to exclude the rest participants from their conversation (Baker, 2001). Likewise, CS is used to dispute with the receivers or to issue complaints (Cook, 2004). An example is presented in Li (2005).

> A: Finished homework?
> B:…
> A: Steven, yiu mo wan sue? (Have you reviewed book?)

B: I've finished. (Li, 2005)

In this example, mother A asked her son B whether he finished homework, but B had no reply at the beginning. Hence, A shifted from English to Cantonese to emphasize her question and express her dissatisfaction with B.

Educational Factor of CS

Bilingual speakers tend to talk one specific topic in language A because language A is the language they were taught to cope with this topic, and/or because language B may sometimes lack some terminology needed to handle this topic (Baker, 2001; Romaine, 1995). To some extent, it should be accounted for as an educational factor.

CS has been viewed as an approach to balance diminished language proficiency (Cook, 2004). The premise behind this idea is that the bilinguals switch codes since they are not entirely familiar with either language. Thus CS becomes necessary, which, in this case, can be considered as a linguistic aid: CS fills the linguistic gap (Baker, 2001).

Another situation exists in educational area where in bilingual schools in the USA. Chinese students sometimes prefer to switch codes between Chinese and English to confirm their understanding of the topics or emphasize their questions exactly in classes (Ruan, 2003).

Cultural Factor of CS

Undoubtedly, CS plays a significant social role among bilinguals. Evidence shows that the intention of CS can also be driven by cultural differences. One example is that CS is a useful means to introduce relevant 'culturally defined system of meanings' (Foley, 1997: 174). Baker (2001) has emphasized that there are sometimes no exact word equivalents in one culture than in another. Given the fact that nearly all

bilinguals possess more than one culture, it would be likely that they use CS to express their unique combination of viewpoints of different cultures (Scheu, 2000).

Auer (1988, cited in Li, 2000) has asserted that bilingual people have a clear preference to switch codes to their mother language when referring to names of places and humans in an English conversation.

Jokes and humour are also normally expressed in speakers' original language in a multilingual context, especially if the joke depends on particular words in the native language (Scheu, 2000; Siegel, 1995). When conversation is processed in language A and one of the speakers inserts a joke which was created in language B, s/he usually use language B since it enables the key of the story to be properly delivered and understood (Auer, 1988, cited in Li, 2000).

Topic regulation of language choice implies that certain topics in a cultural context are somehow handled more appropriately in one language than in another (Scheu, 2000). The argument is verified by Ruan (2003):

> Lingling: I need to go to Wu Shu Ke.
> (I need to go to the class of martial arts.)
> Di: Yeah, punching and kicking people.

In this record, two bilingual students Lingling and Di talked about a typical Chinese topic Wu Shu (martial arts), which was 'better' for Lingling to switch to its Chinese term and keep its cultural feature. It is widely recognized that the personality of a speaker may therefore be additional driving factors in the use of CS. However this should be further researched in the literature and explored in future observation work.

2.3 Occasions where CS Occurs

Myers-Scotton (1988, cited in Li, 2000) has declared that CS occurs in diverse situations in a certain community. In a stable community where all exchanges are conventionalized, competent speakers know which code is appropriate for which occasion. The code people choose to employ on a particular occasion indicates that how they wish to be viewed (Wardhaugh, 2002).

In Public

CS in multilingual contexts is attributable to social norms and rules, especially in public occasions. (Sachdev and Bourhis, 2001). CS rarely exists in formal public occasions, since CS can be viewed as impoliteness to monolingual speakers in those occasions (Baker, 2001). However, Romaine (1995) has stated that while other languages are used in English-dominant public environments, it to some degree indicates the speaker's intention of humanity and solidarity to the participants who share the same languages. In addition, when the bilinguals present their ethnic identity in public, they prefer to adjust the communicated code to their mother language (Myers-Scotton, 1988, cited in Li, 2000).

At Home

CS not only happens in public settings but also in private surroundings (Sachdev and Bourhis, 2001). It is observed that almost all bilingual speakers employ more than one language at home as part of the family interactive style, since Baker (2001) has alleged that CS can be used to ease tension in a family conversation. When the bilingual speakers stay at home, CS is frequently employed in this relaxed environment to entertain their daily lives (Harding and Riley, 1993).

In another situation, the family seniors at home prefer to exploit their mother language in communication. The younger immigrants, who probably prefer to speak

the second language, thus have to adjust their conversation to the mother tongue when they communicate with their seniors (Li and Milroy, 1995).

At School

In different types of schools, CS takes place in different way. In English-dominant schools, bilingual students are stimulated to use English. Lectures in those schools are processed in English but the discussions among bilingual students may turn to their familiar mother tongue, provided they share the same language (Heller, 1995).

In bilingual schools, Baker (2001: 102) has demonstrated that 'teachers in the classroom explain a concept in one language, and then explain it again in another language, believing that repetition (in both languages) adds reinforcement and completeness of understanding'.

2.4 Conversation Participants in CS

CS can build a common ground for interlocutors (Wardhaugh, 2002). As mentioned above, a varying degree of CS is used among bilingual conversationalists. In this case, a significant insight from Ruan (2003) has been highlighted that CS is frequently motivated by the changes of role of the participants involved in discourse based on the intention of speakers.

Family seniors

Li (2002) has noted that Chinese students in English-dominant countries spoke English more than their parents and other seniors. He has also underscored that since family seniors are more or less limited bilinguals, the bilingual youngsters usually use the seniors' mother tongue to talk with them. They may shift back to English only when they issue complaints or use some dirty words.

An interesting idea derives from Blum (1997) who says that the epithet in China is very important. Thus, bilingual Chinese always address their family seniors in Chinese in English-dominant conversations, since Chinese forms of address can fully express the respect meanings and draw a close relationship between family members (Blum, 1997; Heller, 1988).

Teachers

In the predominantly English-speaking cities, teachers in English schools insist that the bilingual students use English as a means to communicate with them. While in the schools of other languages, the learners are encouraged to communicate in the target language (Heller, 1988).

One of the examples comes from a Chinese girl's CS. This girl spoke more English than Chinese in her daily life, so she was sent to Chinese school to strengthen her Chinese. The girl switched codes depending on the appearance of her teacher.

> Lingling: I got lots of Candy from Trick-or-Treat.
> Di: Me, too. I have a lot of candy and my mom won't let me have all.
> (Teacher coming into the classroom)
> Lingling: Lao shi, ni yao bu yao yi ke tang?
> (Teacher; do you want a piece of candy?)
> Teacher: Xie xie. Bu yong. (Thanks. No.)
>   (Ruan, 2003)

Lingling in this record switched from English to Chinese in front of her teacher in a polite manner due to the reason that she was aware that she was prompted to speak Chinese rather than English in this school.

Friends or Peers

As mentioned above, CS can reinforce the closeness of the relationship. Thus, CS is usually employed between friends. Furthermore, Li (1998) has stressed that the Cantonese bilingual youngsters in Newcastle upon Tyne shift their languages between

English and Cantonese in order to be understood and accepted by their peers. Baker (2001: 103) has concluded the same idea that 'a person may deliberately use CS to indicate the need to be accepted by a peer group.'

Based on these literatures, I will explore the relevant issues in Mandarin-English bilinguals' CS in English countries, and then I will examine whether the previous literatures can be verified in my research.

3 Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

What factors influence bilinguals' (Mandarin and English) code-switching in an English-dominant environment? Under what situation will these bilinguals switch their codes? To whom will they switch their codes?

At present, the research of the last two questions is still in process. Therefore, this paper will pay more attention to the current findings of influential factors of participants' CS in English circumstances.

3.2 Research Subjects

My research mainly employs two groups of Mandarin-English bilinguals in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Group 1 is composed of 4 Mandarin-English bilinguals who had 2 or 3 years primary education in China and then moved to the UK with their parents for years. In Group 2, 3 students came to the UK for higher education in the universities, most of whom had already finished 12 years of education in China.

The reason that these two groups are chosen in this study bases on the fact that they represent two types of Mandarin-English bilinguals in English countries: participants in Group 1 are more or less English-dominant bilinguals while participants in Group 2 are Chinese-dominant bilinguals. Then data collected from both groups can cover bigger varieties of CS in English countries.

3.3 Research Methods and Research Design

My research contains qualitative ethnographic observations and interviews, since observation and interview have traditionally been the primary technique used in linguistic researches. In my studies, the observations were mostly recorded. Only a few observations were solely documented in paper. At present, interviews were done with 3 participants to examine their consciousness and interpretation of CS employed in their daily conversations.

The research is currently in process. Up to now, the observation has been carried out for 3 months and 2 weeks. The participants from both research groups are observed 6-8 hours per week. As for further study, the observations will continue and then further interviews with target participants will also been executed.

3.4 Ethical Issue

In the context of my research, the primary concern with the focus participants' personal and interpersonal justification is counted as ethical issue. When selecting the methods for research, ethical controls were included to avoid threats to participants' rights. The content of my participants' conversation is highly confidential, since young students are extremely sensitive to damage to their dignity (Homan, 1991). Therefore, I ensured I had written permission from all the participants before their information was collected.

4. Findings and Discussion

In my study, based on the observations and analysis of participants' daily conversation, a few research findings about the influential factors of target bilinguals' CS found to date are illustrated as follows. An interesting discovery has revealed that one CS occurred probably due to more than one reason. An example is given as

Extract 1:

A: Ni zhi dao Anthropology ke bu shi yi ge rong yi de zhuan ye.
(You know, Anthropology is not an easy study).
B: Shi me? Wei shen me? Ni tai bang le!
(Really? Why? You are so talented!).
A:…….

In this conversation, a Chinese PhD student A talked with his Chinese junior B. PhD student A was eager to show his higher status in the research area to this junior; he then suddenly switched when expressing his subject Anthropology in order to identify himself as belonging to a specific class within the situation. From another perspective, the PhD students' CS can be argued as an educational factor because he learned the word Anthropology originally in English so that he naturally expressed it in English.

The observation was then confirmed in the interview with this PhD student. He admitted that both factors mentioned above can explain his potential consciousness in switching codes, although he did not notice his CS at that moment.

Another influential factor, speaker's attitudes towards conversation participants, can be seen in *Extract 2* which was collected from Group 1. A bilingual teenager talked with her mother at dinner time.

Extract 2:
Mum: Chi fan le. (It's time for dinner).
A: Bu. (No).
Mum: Kuai, Chi fan. (Quickly, dinner time).
A: I told you No!

This conversation was started with Chinese language. A's first refusal to her mum was also expressed in Mandarin. However, when her mum produced a further instruction, A suddenly switched to English to deny her mother's suggestion and issued complaints to her mother. Another example was derived from Group 2 where a Chinese student argued a Chinese-Korean historical issue with his Korean classmate in English. However, they failed to reach an agreement, accordingly, the Chinese

student unhappily switched to Chinese in the end to emphasize his ethnic identity to the Korean student, *'because wo shi zhong guo ren* (because I am Chinese)'.

In another instance, two Chinese teenagers chatted in English; however, when they gossiped about a British woman next to them they naturally switched to speaking Chinese to exclude the British woman out of talk and avoid embarrassment.

In *Extract 3*, the bilinguals' potential motivation to use CS originates mostly in cultural reasons.

Extract 3:
A: This is our Yeye, father's father.
B: This is our Waigong, mum's father.

In this episode, the two girls introduced their grandfathers to their English teacher. They chose English in first instance but turned to Chinese when they address their grandfathers, since mother's father and father's father are expressed in the same way in English (grandfather) but differently in Chinese. Simultaneously, they translated *Yeye* and *Waigong* into English to their teacher who might not understand Mandarin.

Likewise, lots of bilinguals address their family seniors in their mother languages in order to reinforce the traditional relationship.

Extract 4:
A: Happy Birthday. Gugu.
(Happy birthday. Aunt).
B: Xie xie, bao beir. (Thanks, my love).

In this example, A switched from English to Chinese to show his respect to his aunt B since the Chinese epithet sounds more intimate among family members.

A Chinese student introduced Chinese cultures to his British tutor in English. Only when he mentioned the names of people or some Chinese traditions, he switched to Mandarin to enable the Chinese cultural value to be exactly described. Next

example was selected from two Chinese postgraduate students' conversation in the library.

> Extract 5:
> A: You know, wo de assignment ming tian yao jiao, ke
> shi xian zai bi xu xian qu Tesco mai dong xi.
> (I must turn in assignment tomorrow but at the
> moment, I have to go Tesco to buy something.)
> B: Zhen mang a! (You are so busy!)
> A: …

In this extract, *You know* is just a tag switching and then student A interposed the alternate word *assignment* in his Chinese-dominant sentence since he lacked knowledge to explain it in Chinese. He had learned this term in the English context and he cannot find corresponding Chinese code to use. It is similar when Chinese students are educated in English; they find it difficult to shift their professional terminology into Chinese. In addition, *Tesco* in this extract is the name of a British superstore, so the speaker cannot find a suitable Chinese translation to replace it.

Besides, it was found that a Mandarin-English bilingual asked her Chinese classmate for an English word, 'Hi, how can I say *hua xue* in English?' (Hi, how can I say 'chemistry' in English?). In this case, Chinese is a linguistic aid to improve the speakers' English.

Extract 6 is from a conversation between 2 undergraduate students from Group 2.

> Extract 6:
> A: Ting shuo chu xin de iPod Nano le.
> (It is heard that there is new iPod Nano).
> B: iPod Nano! Xin ke ji a!
> (iPod Nano! New technology!)

The two Chinese friends in this record communicated mostly in Chinese, except for the name of a new product: *iPod Nano*. It can be seen that the young bilinguals

easily accept modern words in English or other western languages. However, the main driving factor of speakers' CS in this extract is: *iPod Nano* is a fixed term for the typical product that there is no proper Chinese translation to replace it until now.

On the whole, based on my findings, CS is associated with a variety of factors which can be located in the literature. However, more driving factors need to be investigated in order to describe some potential reasons of CS in my focus community. In terms of the occasions of CS occurred and the conversation participants in CS, I will explore more evidence to prove and extend the current literature with further observations and data collections.

6. Conclusion

Many studies have revealed that no bilinguals cling to just one language in conversations (Romaine, 2000; Scheu, 2000). CS then in the present study is considered as a kind of linguistic choice and a communication strategy that bilinguals employ to achieve communication goals, even though some researchers has insisted that CS has bad effect on bilingual learners' language development.

Previous research on CS has focused mainly on the discourse, grammatical and other linguistic functions. My study therefore has attempted to take into account the sociolinguistic perspective of CS amongst the Mandarin-English bilingual speakers in the English-dominant society. At present, my study is still in process, so my mission is to develop the current findings using both past and my future observations and interviews.

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