

CODE-SWITCHING IN BILINGUAL COMMUNICATION: WHY DO SPEAKERS MIX LANGUAGES

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Annotation. This article explores the code-switching in bilingual communication and tries to explain why people mix languages when they speak. It focuses on different reasons such as social situation, identity, emotions, and sometimes the lack of exact words in one language. This article also describes its main types and showing that it is not a weakness but a natural and effective way of communicating for bilingual speakers.

Keywords: code-switching, bilingualism, language, communication, language mixing, speaker.

In recent years, bilingual and multilingual communication has become increasingly widespread due to globalization, migration, and the growing importance of international interaction. Many individuals today use two or more languages in their daily lives, often alternating between them depending on the context, topic, or interlocutor. One of the most noticeable features of bilingual speech is the phenomenon known as code-switching, which has been widely studied in linguistics.

Code-switching refers to the use of two or more languages within a single conversation, sentence, or even phrase. It is a natural and systematic aspect of bilingual communication, rather than a random or accidental process. Speakers switch between languages to achieve specific communicative goals, making their speech more effective, expressive, and contextually appropriate.

Linguists generally distinguish three main types of code-switching based on where the switch occurs in speech.

Inter-sentential code-switching occurs when a speaker switches languages between sentences. For example, a person may say one sentence in English and then continue the next sentence in another language. This type of switching usually requires a good command of both languages, as the speaker must maintain grammatical accuracy across sentence boundaries.

Intra-sentential code-switching takes place within a single sentence, where elements from two languages are combined. For instance, a speaker might insert words or phrases from one language into the grammatical structure of another. This type is considered more complex because it requires a high level of fluency and control over both linguistic systems.

Tag-switching involves inserting short expressions, fillers, or tags from one language into an utterance in another language. Common examples include phrases like “you know,” “okay,” or similar expressions in another language. This type of switching is relatively simple and does not require deep grammatical integration.

These types demonstrate that code-switching is not chaotic but follows identifiable patterns and linguistic rules.

There are several linguistic, social, and psychological factors that motivate speakers to engage in code-switching.

One of the primary reasons is **lexical need or vocabulary limitation**, where a speaker cannot find an appropriate word in one language and therefore switches to another language that provides a more suitable expression.

Another important factor is **social context**. Speakers often adjust their language depending on the situation, level of formality, or the people they are communicating with. For example, a bilingual speaker may use one language at home and another in professional settings, or switch languages when addressing different individuals within the same conversation.

Identity and cultural affiliation also play a significant role. Code-switching can signal group membership, cultural identity, or solidarity with a particular community. It allows speakers to express who they are and where they belong socially and culturally.

In addition, **emotional expression** strongly influences language choice. Many bilingual individuals report that certain emotions—such as anger, excitement, or affection—are easier to express in one language than another. As a result, they may switch languages to convey feelings more naturally and accurately.

Code-switching serves several important communicative functions in bilingual discourse.

Firstly, it can be used to **emphasize a message** or highlight important information. Switching languages can draw attention to specific parts of speech and make them more impactful.

Secondly, it helps in **clarifying meaning**. A speaker may repeat or explain an idea in another language to ensure understanding, especially when communicating with interlocutors who have varying levels of proficiency.

Thirdly, code-switching enhances **expressiveness**. By drawing on multiple linguistic resources, speakers can convey nuances and meanings that may not be easily expressed in a single language.

Furthermore, it contributes to **social bonding**. Switching languages can create a sense of closeness, informality, and shared identity among speakers. It often makes conversations more natural and engaging.

From a theoretical standpoint, code-switching has been analyzed through various linguistic frameworks. Structural approaches focus on grammatical constraints that govern where switching can occur within a sentence. For instance, researchers have proposed that switches tend to happen at points where the grammatical structures of both languages align.

Sociolinguistic approaches, on the other hand, emphasize the role of social factors such as identity, power relations, and context. These perspectives highlight that language choice is not only a linguistic decision but also a social one.

Psycholinguistic studies examine how bilingual speakers manage multiple language systems in the brain. They suggest that bilingual individuals do not completely separate their languages but rather operate within an integrated system, allowing for flexible switching depending on communicative needs.

Code-switching is a natural and integral feature of bilingual communication. It reflects the complex interaction between linguistic competence, social context, and individual identity. Rather than indicating a lack of proficiency, code-switching demonstrates a speaker's ability to effectively use multiple languages as communicative resources.

Understanding code-switching provides valuable insight into bilingual speech behavior and highlights the richness and flexibility of human language. As bilingualism continues to grow worldwide, the study of code-switching remains an important area of linguistic research.

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