The Correlation Between Bilingual Language Proficiency and Pattern Variations in Code-Switching

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ABSTRACT *Bilingualism is defined as the use of at least two languages either by an individual or by a group of speakers. Bilingual is a person who uses at least two languages with some degree of proficiency. Depending on the demands of a particular communicative situation, bilingual or multilingual speakers switch between language varieties. A question which caught the attention of many linguists is: Is there a relationship between the pattern variations in code- switching and the bilingual speaker's language proficiency? The present study makes an attempt to review the most prominent notions on this issue and provide an answer to the question.*

1. Introduction

Code mixing (CM) is a bilingual speech act where two or more linguistic codes are used in a single conversation. Grosjean (1982) defines code-switching as "the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation". Scholars from different disciplines have studied code-switching from different approaches and perspectives.

Many scholars and linguists have tried to define code-switching (CS) and Code-mixing (CM). Hymes (1974) defines CS as a common term for alternative use of two or more languages, varieties of a language or even speech styles. Bokamba (1989) views it as the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event.

These approaches are mainly either sociolinguistic or linguistic. While linguists usually focus on the grammatical and structural rules that govern bilingual speech production, sociolinguists are primarily interested in the social and meaningful intentions associated with code-switching.

Code-switching can be viewed from a grammatical perspective, as well as from a sociolinguistic perspective (Van Dulm, 2007). Grammatically, there are three types of code switches. Hoffmann (1991) states that code switches can take place within sentences, (intrasentential code-switching); between sentences, (intersentential) or at an extrasentential level that involves a situation in which a bilingual attaches a tag from one language to an utterance in another language.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, there are two types of code-switching, namely metaphorical and situational code-switching (Van Dulm, 2007). According to Van Dulm, metaphorical code-switching is a process in which a bilingual speaker changes codes based on the change of topic or in other words they switch because of the change in what is being talked about. In contrast to metaphorical code-switching, situational code-switching refers to the process in which a bilingual person often switches from one code to another depending on whom that person is talking to (Van Dulm).

Within the linguistic framework, there have been many studies that focus on discovering and observing the structural constraints governing code-switching. Since the 1970s, a large number of different theories and models of code-switching have been proposed and each one declares a particular constraint on this phenomenon. However, there has been disagreement on the nature of these constraints. Another new insight indicates that there is no special constraint on code-switching or no constraint governs the occurrence of CS, mentioning that the same principles that are influential in the monolingual speech act are active and operative in bilingual contexts (Mahootian 1993).

2. Definition of technical terms

2.1 Communicative Competence

Knowledge of not only whether something is formally possible in a language or not, but also the knowledge and the cognizance of whether it is feasible, appropriate, or suitable for a particular person , place or condition or simply appropriate for a particular speech community is considered as communicative competence.

Coined by Hymes. D (1974) in his ethnography of communication (ethnography of speaking), this term gives a critical expansion on N. Chomsky's concept of competence (competence vs. performance), which concerns only with the linguistic capabilities of the ideal speaker-hearer, and it doesn't give any consideration on the social function of language. Communicative competence is the primary concept of a pragma-linguistic model of linguistic communication: it refers to the repertoire of know-how that individuals must improve if they want to be able to communicate with each other appropriately in the changing situations and conditions. In this model, speaking is understood and considered as the action of transmitting symbols which is interaction. Communicative competence is the descriptive goal of various social-psychological disciplines.

2.2 Bilingual/Bilingualism

Bilingual is a person who uses at least two languages with some degree of proficiency. Although a bilingual in everyday use is usually considered as an individual who can speak ,interact, read or understand two languages equally well (which in this case it is called a balanced bilingual), but a bilingual person usually has a better knowledge of

one language than another.

Bilingualism is defined as the use of at least two languages either by an individual or by a group of speakers. Bilingualism is the norm in the most of the countries of the world. Ambi-bilingualism is a term in bilingualism which is defined as the capability and aptitude to function equally well in two or more languages across a wide range of domains.

2.3 Code selection
The selection of a particular language or language variety for a given situation is called code selection. In different situations may individuals use more than one code while they are communicating with each other, they usually select one code for certain purposes and places, in certain settings and with certain people and may use another code for other purposes in other places and with other people.

3. The Correlation between Bilingual Language Proficiency and Pattern Variations in Code-switching
Bilingualism signifies   a range of language abilities from the native-like competence and proficiency of both languages to the ability to produce just a few foreign words besides one's native language. A question which caught the attention of many linguists is: Is there a relationship between the pattern variations in code- switching and the bilingual speaker's language proficiency?

Weinreich (1968, p.73), asserts that the ideal bilingual switches from one language to the other based on the changes of speech situation, such as: interlocutors, topics, etc., but not in an unchanged speech situation and definitely not within a single sentence. Other linguists who hold similar views, state that the language should be pure and they argue that the pure language is the best mode of language. The purist language view asserts that any language mixing implies an inadequacy and deficiency of language proficiency on the part of the speaker.

However, nowadays many linguists consider code-switching as a useful linguistic communicative phenomenon which may in fact be an indicator of language competence of bilinguals in two or more languages rather than a deficiency arising from insufficient knowledge of either language. Poplack, as an example, in her study of Puerto Ricans in the United States (with Spanish as Ll and English as L2), observed that no construction of English-Spanish code-switching violated the grammar of either language, and therefore she concluded that even the non-fluent bilingual speakers had adequate knowledge of both languages to draw from each system only those which the other shares, when alternating one language with another (Poplack, 1980, p.601). She also claimed that balanced bilinguals represented a far greater percentage of intra-sentential switches than those who were Spanish-dominant, which this demonstrates the high linguistic requirement of the code-switching behavior in bilingual interactions; Poplack depicted that there is a relationship between the type of switch and the language proficiency of the speaker. She concluded that the Spanish-dominant speakers favored tag-like switches most (e.g. understand? You know), while the balanced bilinguals favored intra-sentential code-switching most and tag-like switching least, she argued that intra-sentential code-switching requires the most language skills and language competence, thus, mostly used by balanced bilinguals as a communicative skills.

However, Poplack's conclusion on the correlation between high bilingual proficiency and intra-sentential code-switching is a relatively simplified justification that can be linguistically and as well as sociologically somewhat fallacious. Linguistically, she argued that inter-sentential code-switching; including the independent sentences require less knowledge and mastery of two grammars engaging in code-switching since they are freely distributable within discourse (Poplack, 1980, p.603). This is not supported by any evidence and may simply be rebutted and disproved based on the fact that to be able to utter a correct sentence in one's second language, in fact one needs a high level of bilingual proficiency. Sociologically, she has disregarded factors like the societal attitudes towards the excessive use of a L2 in intra-ethnic conversation, which is occasionally very negative in certain social contexts. Moreover, Poplack's findings have been challenged by other studies. Bentahila and Davies (1992), from the 1,545 corpus of Moroccan-Arabic/French code-switches used by Moroccan bilinguals, found out that switching between whole clauses (including independent sentences or those conjoined by either coordination or subordination) was actually the most common pattern of code-switching among the older generation who were balanced bilinguals, whereas the intra-sentential switching of small constituents was the most common among the younger Arabic-dominant generation. In the same line of argument, Jacobson (1990) specified that there should not be intra-sentential code-switching in the classroom which is not a good model of bilingual education when he advocated his New Concurrent Approach. The view of Bentahila, Davies and Jacobson runs as opposed to Poplack's claim that intra-sentential code-switching is more likely to be associated with high language proficiency than inter-sentential code-switching.

4. Conclusion
The present study reviews the most significant and controversial notions on the correlation between bilingual language proficiency and pattern variations in code-switching. It is concluded that in contrast to Poplack (1980) that asserts, inter-sentential code-switching; including the independent sentences require less proficiency in two participating languages in code-switching, there are many other linguists and researchers who have demonstrated opposite views with Poplack; For example the authors of the present article after doing an extensive research on Persian-English code-switching and code-mixing for several years, has reached to the conclusion that code-switching, i.e. switching in clausal level and sentence level, was actually the most common pattern of switching among the most fluent Persian-English Bilinguals or in other words among balanced bilinguals, whereas the intra-sentential switching (code-mixing) which is the switching at word level and phrasal level was the most common among the less fluent bilinguals.

However, it should be mentioned, language competence is merely one factor regarding patterns of code-switching and code-mixing. One should look beyond this to investigate the interaction between other influential factors such as socioeconomic and socio-pragmatic factors and discourse functions attributed to each participating language in the community under study.

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