

An Overview on Markedness Model



Linguistics

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays there is a lot of research on code-switching phenomenon within three main perspectives which include: linguistics, sociolinguistics, and more recently, psycholinguistics. On the basis of these perspectives, various universal models and theories on CS and CM have been proposed and formulated. The present article gives an in-depth overview on Markedness model of Myers-Scotton which is one of the most significant and controversial theories within the sociolinguistic perspective. According to this theory, an unmarked language within a certain sociolinguistic situation is more likely to be the ML. The term "unmarked language" refers to the status or general acceptance of a given language in a situation or a society.

1. Introduction

The study of language in relation to social factors that is, educational level and type of education, social class, age, gender, sequencing of utterances, ethnic origin, language planning, language attitudes, etc. Sociolinguistics is concerned with the relationship between the language and the context in which it is used (Holmes, 2001).

Sociolinguists have concentrated on the social motivations, attitudes and social correlates of code-switching. Within this perspective several theories and models have been proposed which one of the most significant one is Markedness model of Myers-Scotton which focuses on the social indexical motivation for code-switching.

2. Markedness Model

Gumperz introduced the notion of code-switching as an interactional strategy, and it was adapted by Myers-Scotton in her Markedness Model (Shin and Milroy, 2000: 352). Along with the Gumperz's explanation of code-switching as being a contextualization cue, Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1999: 1260) is greatly determined by Rational Choice Models. Elster (1989: 22) explains the essence of Rational Choice or Rational Actor Models as follows: 'When encountered with various courses of activities, individuals often do what exactly they think is probably to have the best overall outcome'. The idea underlying Rational Choice or Rational Actor models comes from sociology and as well as economics. Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model is specially affected by the work of the philosophers such as Jon Elster (1989) who argues that individuals' activities are filtered by two distinct processes before they happen. During the first filter the speaker's opportunity set is formed. The second filter makes the moment in time where the individual consciously selects between various options. Both filter and as well as related terms are described in more details below.

The first filter includes so-called structural constraint which, for instance, is composed of social factors such as the participants' social identity characteristics (e.g. sex, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status) or the feature of the discourse situation (e.g. topic, setting) (Myers-Scotton, 1998). Myers-Scotton (1998) claims that 'surface discourse structural characteristics are a further type of structural constraints. This kind of constraint consists of 'structural features that organize discourse, especially those having to do with sequential organization' (Myers-Scotton, 1998: 34). For instance, whether a specific utterance illustrates the first or the second part of a contiguity pair can influence its content or form (Myers-Scotton, 1998: 34). A number of these discourse structural constraints have originated from the work accomplished in conversation analysis (CA). The various kinds of constraints that constitute the basis of this first filter are 'external', since the speakers do not have any direct control over

them (Myers-Scotton, 1998: 34).

These discourse structural and social factors affect the speaker's 'opportunity set' that can be defined as the speaker's linguistic repertoire. This repertoire consists of the different languages or dialects which the speakers are able to use. Discourse strategies such as minimal responses and turn-taking are as well parts of the individuals' linguistic repertoire or opportunity set (Myers-Scotton, 2002: 207). Once the structural constraints of the first filter have functioned and the speaker's opportunity set has been created, the speaker ultimately can obtain control over the interaction and also is able to make conscious and mindful choices about which codes to use. In other words, the first filter produces a set of feasible choices from which the speaker is able to choose during the second filter.

The second filter suggested in Elster's Rational Choice or Rational Actor models encompasses the mechanisms which permit speakers to consciously select a particular outcome among the several different options provided by the opportunity set (formed during the first filter) (Myers-Scotton, 1998: 34). Rationality is the essential factor in the second filter. At this stage the speakers consciously deal with a cost-benefit analysis and they prefer and opt the choice that can offer the best overall outcome regarding interpersonal relationships.

Myers-Scotton (2002) uses this theory for the analysis of CS in conversation and argues that 'speakers are reasonable in the sense that their choices are mostly based on assessments of possible options in regards to a cost-benefit analysis which considers their own subjective motivations and their objective opportunities'. This particular notion illustrates the intricate interaction of people's prior attitudes, beliefs and values on the one hand and their temporary goals and desires in a given interaction on the other hand (Myers-Scotton, 1999: 1261). In fact, speakers think about their possibilities and rationally opt for the choice which enables them to carry out their temporary goals without diminishing their prior beliefs.

The Markedness Model (MM) is based on the premise that both speakers and analysts can easily identify and differentiate between marked and unmarked codes or choices. Myers-Scotton (1998: 22) mentions that all speakers possess a 'markedness evaluator' that includes a cognitive capacity to assess markedness. In order to be able to conceive markedness speakers have to develop two abilities:

- (1) The ability to identify that linguistic alternatives or choices fall along a multidimensional continuum from more unmarked to more marked and that their ordering will be different, according to the particular discourse type;
- (2) The ability to recognize that marked choices will receive various receptions from unmarked choices (Myers-Scotton,

1998: 22). Speakers acquire these kinds of abilities as a result of contact with both marked and unmarked codes (Myers-Scotton, 1998: 22). Consequently, speakers are required to be exposed to the use of marked and unmarked codes in community or group discourse so that they can learn which codes are expected to be employed under which circumstances.

The markedness evaluator is regarded as an additional filter that can occur in between the first filter's structural constraints and the second filter's rationality (Myers-Scotton, 1998: 34). To become capable of deciding which code can have the best overall result or outcome in a specific situation (second filter), a speaker should first recognize whether the code is marked or unmarked (markedness evaluator). According to Myers-Scotton (1998: 34) the markedness evaluator further influences 'the selection of alternatives from the initial, structurally determined opportunity set, this time regarding "successes" or "failures" depending on the actor's former factual experience, facts previously classified in an unconscious cost-benefit analysis'. Unmarked alternatives continue to be undetected in a conversation since they act according to the social expectations attached to the different codes. Marked choices, however, violate these kinds of social expectations and can, consequently, be used strategically by speakers (Milroy and Gordon, 2006: 213).

Quantitatively demonstrating which codes are marked or unmarked is a vital step in an analysis of code-switching based on the Markedness Model. Simple frequency counts can be used to describe the less frequently-used language as the marked code and the more-frequently used language as the unmarked code or choice (Myers-Scotton, 2002: 206). The use of the marked code depends on the speaker's rational decision to use this code so that fulfills a particular goal in a specific interaction (Myers-Scotton, 2002: 218). Therefore, in order to analyze the meaning of the use of various codes the researcher should, first clearly describe which codes s/he thinks are marked or unmarked in a given interaction?

This quantification of marked and unmarked codes can be represented by Myers-Scotton's (2002: 209). She analyzed English-Chichewa code-switching in a Malawi family living in the United States. Chichewa is usually considered as the parents' unmarked code during home interactions as it makes the most frequently-spoken language by the parents. Only 6 percent of the father's and 7 percent of the mother's utterances are English-only (Myers-Scotton, 2002:210). Myers-Scotton (2002: 210) points out that this recognition of Chichewa as the unmarked code depending on basic frequency counts is supported by the parents' language attitudes, which were evaluated in a follow-up interview.

The parents explained their conscious attempts to talk in Chichewa at home with their children so that to maintain their indigenous language. The children, however, mostly speak English at home since approximately 70 percent of their utterances are English-only. Myers-Scotton (2002: 210) points out that the identification of English as the children's unmarked

code is not only supported and affirmed by these frequency counts but also by the children's attitudes towards English as the language awarding them independency from their parents. However, both children equally switch to Chichewa at different points during family interaction to be able to fulfill short-term objectives. For instance, during a disagreement between the two children, one of them addresses their father in Chichewa, the father's unmarked code and preferred language of conversation, when seeking support from the father. This temporary switch to the marked code provide a good example of a speaker abandoning their former attitudes (i.e. preference for English) to be able to attain a temporary objective (i.e. receiving support).

Socio-psychological aspects such as language attitudes and speaker identity are integrated in the Markedness Model. Li Wei (2005: 377) points out a shortcoming for Myers-Scotton's analysis and mentions that the Markedness Model can only work if the researcher presumes that each individual will act rationally on all occasions. In addition, the Markedness Model is based on the presumption that all speakers have an intrinsic 'markedness evaluator' that permits them to assess which codes are marked and which codes are unmarked in any given interaction. Both Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model and Gumperz's distinction between 'we codes' and 'they codes' in bilingual communication constitute a part of what Cashman (2008: 276) terms the 'symbolic approach' to language alternation.

Symbolic strategies make use of speakers' macro-level identities in order to reveal and describe language choices. Macro-level identities can be defined as the speaker's 'membership in social categories, for example sex-based, racial or ethnic groups' (Cashman, 2008: 284). Cashman (2008: 276) depicts that symbolic approaches are based on the concept that speakers make use of the social connotations attached to the different codes to make meaning in interaction. The subsequent section represents the sequential method to CS. Researchers utilizing this alternative method to code-switching avoid to base any kind of interpretations regarding multilingual language behavior on socio-psychological factors including identity and attitudes on theoretical constructs like rationality.

3. Conclusion

Code-switching is a phenomenon which appears in multilingual communities where two or more languages or language varieties are used in a single conversation, in this process language changes even within a sentence. There is a great deal of recent research on code-switching phenomenon within three perspectives that include: linguistics, sociolinguistics, and more recently, psycholinguistics. On the basis of each approach different models and theories have been formulated. One of the most substantial theories is Markedness model of Myers-Scotton which is a sociolinguistic theory and concentrates on the social indexical motivation for code-switching. Based on Markedness Model, an unmarked language within a certain sociolinguistic situation is more likely to be the ML. The term "unmarked language" refers to the status or general acceptance of a given language in a situation or a society.

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