LANGUAGE ALTERNATION, IDENTITY AND CONTROL IN THREE EMERGENT BILINGUAL CHILDREN

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1.1. Motivation for study

This paper is based on a case study of three children carried out during 1994 and 1995 in Chesterfield, England. The study itself was prompted by a puzzling incident: two young sisters, recently arrived from Italy, were noticed to be code-switching when playing together at home. This was puzzling since they were both only just beginning to speak the 'additional' language. The aim of this paper is to show how code switching in these children seems to be related to the identity and self perception of the speaker, and is a strategy used to control social situations.

1.2. Terminology

This study views language alternation as the result of socio-psychological influences on spoken interaction.

The terms *language alternation* and c*ode-switching* are synonymous in this paper.

In this study code-switching is seen as requiring more than monolingual competence and occurs when elements of two (or more) of the speaker's languages appear in the same speech exchange. This encompasses inter-turn, inter-phrasal and intra-phrasal switching.

In this study, the term emergent bilingual speaker refers to a monolingual speaker who is placed in a situation which requires use of a language which they are in the process of acquiring. The emergent bilingual speaker, therefore, has limited additional language competence.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings

2.1. Status, Power and Saliency

McConvell (1988), Blom and Gumperz (1972), and Breitborde (1983) all suggest that a particular language choice indicates a speaker's point of view and his/her perceived relationship to the interlocutor(s). Social relationships are complex and involve amongst other factors, identity. Identity, being multi-faceted, consists of clearly defined elements such as gender, age, and occupation. These are static in that they do not change constantly in relation to interlocutor. However, other elements are relative, or dynamic. An example of this is status,

which changes according to whom a person is speaking. In this study, Child 2 is older than Child 3, but younger than Child 1; she is sister to Child 1 and friend to Child 3. Thus Child 2 perceives herself in different ways depending on whom she is with. This is also discussed by Ng and Bradac (1993) who explore how a 'status characteristic', for example gender, can influence conversational interaction, by casting the hearer into a particular role. The speaker can thus control or influence the interaction.

The dilemma between the individual and society becomes relevant here: society or socio-cultural norms may exert a dominant influence in one situation, whereas in another situation the individual may not feel constrained to follow such norms but may feel able to act according to personal values and principles.

The children in this study find themselves in a limited socio-cultural environment. The socio-cultural norms at school require that English be spoken and those at home require that Italian be spoken. Where it is possible to use either language, i.e. with another bilingual Italian/English speaker at school or at home, the children's choice of code reflects their perception of themselves and status is, therefore, relevant.

Giddens (1976: 111) states:

> "The use of power in interaction can be understood in terms of resources or facilities which participants bring to and mobilize as elements of its production, thus directing its course. (...) [and] include (...) any other resources which a participant is capable of bringing to bear so as to influence or control the conduct of others who are parties to that interaction (...)".

Status is a resource which a participant may bring to the interaction, and status being dynamic, may afford the capacity to control what occurs in a situation. Referring to Herman, Fasold (1984) suggests that a bilingual speaker is in a two dimensional psychological situation. Thus in any social situation a bilingual speaker may perceive themself (and/or be perceived) as belonging to two groups; this adds an extra dimension to their identity and to their psychological make up. The extra dimension creates another set of factors which may influence the bilingual speaker's behaviour.

Herman (1961) considers the factors that influence the speaker in making their language choice. Influences arising may operate in the same direction, in which case they point to the use of one particular language. However, when the influences operate in opposing directions then the most potent influence indicates the language choice. The influence gains strength by means of salience, described as the perceptual prominence in field (Herman, in Fishman, 1968: 495). The influence of a background situation gains salience by moving temporarily into the foreground. In order for the influence to gain salience certain conditions

of setting, emotion and personality have to be met. Thus a speaker's language choice depends on a particular situation gaining saliency as a result of the prevailing conditions.

The notion of the speaker's perceptions and feelings leads to consideration of Accommodation Theory (Giles & Smith, 1979). This theory proposes that speakers adjust their speech for the benefit of others present (convergence). Conversely, a speaker may deliberately use speech unlike that of the other person(s) present to emphasize loyalty to their own group and simultaneously dissociate from the other person's group (divergence).

Gumperz (1982) states that a speaker's personal stance can be indicated by using what he terms the 'we' code and a more objective stance indicated by use of the 'they' code. Scotton's Negotiation Theory (in Jacobson, 1990) also proposes that status and identity influence language choice. In general terms, identity, with all its implications, is seen to influence language choice.

2.2. Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were proposed in this study. The first is not immediately relevant but the second hypothesis is of central importance to this paper:

A switch in this study reflects the speaker's perception of herself within the situation.

This is in line with the theories outlined in 2.1 above.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Two categories of data were collected: linguistic and attitudinal. Linguistic data was collected from August 1994 to January 1995. Recordings, using an audio cassette recorder, were made at two or three weekly intervals. The recordings were made at three different locations, at school, at home and at the home of the language support teacher. The children were recorded during the same week but in the different locations so that any notable differences would be attributed to change of topic, situation or relationships rather than to language development. Attitudinal data were gathered from rather informal semi-structured interviews with both the parents and the children; this was because they were not sought for quantitative analysis but simply to place the children and linguistic data in a wider context. Therefore the attitudinal data are limited in reliability and consequently, in usefulness.

3.2. Subject Profiles

For the purposes of this paper, the children are identified by initial and according to age. At the time of the study S was the eldest, 8 years old; M was 6 years old; C was the youngest, 5 years old. S and M are sisters. It is also necessary to point out that formal schooling in Chesterfield starts at 4 years of age, whereas in Italy it starts at 6 years of age. The children arrived from Italy once accommodation had been arranged by their fathers.

3.2.1. S

S arrived in England in July 1994, at the end of the Italian school. She immediately joined her new school in England for the last three weeks of term having already completed two years of school in Italy. She settled into her class very quickly going almost immediately into the strongest group in her year. She picked up spoken English very quickly, could follow lessons well and enjoyed communicating. At the time of the study she was beginning to express herself in written English.

3.2.2. M

M arrived in England in April 1994 with no formal school experience before coming to England. M also settled into school very easily. At the time of the study M could follow instructions, explanations and participate in discussions. She was also beginning to express herself in written English. According to both her parents, M's Italian was beginning to deteriorate: she sometimes used English sentence structure when speaking Italian.

S and M spent two weeks in Italy at Christmas.

3.2.3. C

C was an only child. She arrived in England in April 1994 with no formal school experience before her arrival. Her parents had problems managing her behaviour. C's parents' attitude to school was lax, allowing her to miss school when she did not wish to attend. At the time the study was carried out, C was making progress in the use of single words, holophrastic speech, and understanding others. She was also able to produce short sentences in English.

4. Findings

4.1. Linguistic data findings

The data were analysed within their discourse context and with one question in mind: What did the switch achieve for the speaker? Two main categories, Alignment and Manipulation, were identified and subdivided into seven further subcategories. These are

shown below, together with their percentage of occurrence, in the corpus of data in parentheses:

Alignment (28.2%): Cultural Identity (13.2%); Language Competence (15%). Manipulation (55.8%): Showing off (4.5%); Cooperation (25%); Non cooperation (2.3%); Controlling others (15%); Managing own needs or desires (9%).

The remaining 16% of switches not accounted for above are divided into two further categories: Confusion (4.6%) Unclear (11.4%). These are discussed elsewhere[1].

4.2. Attitudinal data findings

Briefly, Children S and M said they liked school in England, but missed their friends, grandparents and pets in Italy. They had made a lot of friends in England and enjoyed living here. C was noncomittal in her answers to questions referring to life in England. She said she liked doing schoolwork and English nursery rhymes. She was very talkative about life in Italy.

The fathers were busy at work and seemed to enjoy what they were doing. S and M's mother said she was happy in England, and she only returned briefly to Italy at Christmas. C's mother, on the other hand, regularly returned to Italy 'for the sun' for extended periods, taking C with her. All parents thought that being bilingual was an advantage and were proud of their daughters' achievements.

5. Discussion

It is necessary to point out that analysing discourse results in a subjective interpretation; however, language alternation is analysed within the socio-psychological theories mentioned in Section 2.

5.1. Alignment - Cultural Identity

The notion of alignment ties in with the different identities we adopt in the course of our daily lives. Thus, in this study alignment occurs when a child perceives herself as closer to her Italian identity or as closer to her English identity. The point of switching is the arena where topic, domain, attitudes and emotive factors struggle for precedence. If the child recognises in the situation more features particular to one specific culture, she may select the language associated with that culture. By selecting that language she may be placing herself within, or aligning herself to, that cultural background.

Interaction 50

Participants: L - bilingual English language support teacher; S. Inter-turn switch.

Setting: School library. Talking about games that S and M played at school in Italy. L deliberately switches to Italian when chatting about games to see if this would cause the children to respond in Italian. The children were describing 'musical chairs'. (N.B. The reference to 'circles' at the end of the interaction should really be 'hoops', but L could not recall the English word for **cerchi**.

> L: Have you played it in England?
> S: Yes.
> L: **Colle sedie?** [With chairs?]
> S: no not with the chair with the ...
> L: cushions?
> S: no...
> L: with the circles?
> S: circles.

When L switches to Italian, S does not respond in Italian, but responds by switching back to English. S's association with musical hoops is an English experience and this is reflected by her use of English, despite the fact that the teacher has given her the opportunity to respond in Italian, and that, structurally, it would be easy to do.

In this interaction there are three influences being exerted: language competence, cooperation with the teacher and cultural alignment. The latter seems to exert the strongest influence and this is reflected in the language choice of the child.

5.2. Alignment - Language Competence

Language alternation, usually in the English-Italian direction, results from lack of language competence. Language alternation due to lack of competence in the presence of a bilingual interlocuter is based on recognition that such an interlocuter speaks the speaker's dominant language. Rather than choose other available options (e.g. gesture, silence), the speaker, perceiving a cultural feature common to both parties, switches to the common language.

Interaction 48

Participants: S; M; L - Bilingual teacher. Setting: School library. Drawing a picture about their forthcoming Christmas trip to Italy. As they draw they talk about what they are

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[1] These two categories are discussed in Lawrence, A. (1995), "Enhanced Meaning: a case study of code-switching in emergent bilingual children", unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Sheffield, England.

doing, sometimes addressing each other, sometimes the teacher, sometimes themselves, and sometimes their remarks are not addressed to anyone in particular. Intra-phrasal switch.

> S:... a table you put down and you
> L: that's right
> M: **ma** it is ..er..**attaccato qua**
>   [but]   [attached here] (pointing)
> S: Yeah, I know, but I'm not drawing (that) now.

M's objection starts with **ma** [but]; it has been suggested that **ma** is a discourse particle. Many of her objections start with **ma**, and it could be a stalling device, used in order to frame her objection. In this example she continues her objection in English and finally switches to Italian.

5.3. Manipulation - Showing Off

A truism of the function of language is that we use it to manipulate our environment. By switching from one code to another the speaker is displaying that they have power and control over two language (and in some cases, cultural) systems. In this way the speaker evokes their bilingual status to control the environment. Deliberately displaying such control over two language systems in order to assert superiority is termed 'showing off' in this study.

Interaction 13

Participants: S; C; Setting: S's home. The children were playing alone in the sitting room. One monolingual English-speaking child was present. C arrived and wanted to join in.

> C: (unintelligible in Italian)
> S: **chiedo a mia mamma.** (shouts) MUMMY!!
>   [I'll ask my Mum]

In her own home, being the eldest present, and being addressed in Italian, it would be unnecessary for S to switch codes. Her mother is not in the same room and she need therefore not take the English speaker into consideration. In order to make herself heard she has to open the door and put her head out into the hallway. In doing this the monolingual English speaker is not even in her line of vision. Moreover, S's mother's English language ability is weak and the children would normally address her in Italian. By switching to English in order to ask whether C can stay and play, S is displaying her control over both language systems. This could be a way of reminding C that S is not only the eldest, but also the cleverest. On the other hand it may be S's way of reminding C of her 'younger' and less knowledgeable status in order for her not to disrupt the game already underway, since C tends to be uncooperative

while playing. In this case, S achieves a different subcategory of Manipulation: controlling others by asserting status.

The above interaction is an example of how complex it is to discern the motivation or achievement of a switch.

5.4. Manipulation: Cooperation

In this study, when a child switches to the language another speaker is using, it signifies that the child is cooperating with that speaker, in line with Giles' term "convergent" behaviour.

Interaction 29

Participants: C; L - Bilingual teacher; Setting: School library. C doing maths exercises. C was familiar with the matching exercise and explains it to the support teacher.

> C:...e qua devi farci il francobollo il francobollo
> [...and you have to put the stamp here, the stamp]
> L: Very good, shall we try it then? Can you very quickly draw an egg in each cup? Can you do it quickly?
> C: Mmm (looks in pencil case)
> L: Yeah? Do you want to use a pencil?
> C: No, this is. (Chooses felt pen and draws)

C's explanation of the exercise is in Italian. She was very excited about being able to explain the procedure to L. Feeling confident, she wants to show L her ability. This puts her in a cooperative state of mind. When L addresses her, C responds in English demonstrating her cooperation.

5.5. Manipulation: Non cooperation

By refusing to switch to the language of another speaker, the child is refusing to cooperate. This 'divergent' behaviour is a way for the speaker to control the situation. The following example demonstrates language choice that shows an unwillingness to cooperate.

Interaction 5

Participants: M; P - mother. Setting: at home.

> M: (crossly) Faro quello che voglio!
>   [I'll do what I want!]
> P: Marta, Marta ti chiedo ti chiedo per fev per favore
>   [Martha, Martha I'm asking you I'm asking you pl
>   **di non (?) per piacere compartarti**
>   please not to (?) please behave yourself]
> M: No! (singing) Ah no, ah no, Cornflakes cornflakes
>   cornflakes cornflakes cornflakes!

The switch itself seems to be M's way of defying her mother. There is little meaning in the English words. The switch and maintenance of English is enough to demonstrate M''s non cooperation.

5.6. Manipulation: Controlling the personal environment

The following interaction demonstrates the way in which the child controls her own needs through code alternation.

Interaction 20

Participants: S; M; L -language teacher. Setting: Children looking for a reading book each in the school library.

S: Oh wonderful! I want to find a book.
M: Look at the teddy bear! **Cerco quello dal sole**.
                    [I'm looking for the one about the sun.]

When making a general comment M responds to S's comments in English; however, when she is expressing her personal needs she switches to Italian. This could be a way of controlling her personal environment, which not only includes her personal space, but also her wants and needs.

6. Conclusion

This paper has focussed on the second hypothesis of this study, that is that the perception of the speaker's own status and their perceived identity at the moment of speaking influence their choice of code. This has been shown by an analysis of discourse exhibiting inter-turn, inter-phrasal and intra-phrasal switches found in the corpus of data. The analyses of the above interactions are based on a theoretical framework, although the interpretations are still somewhat subjective.

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