

Value of codeswitching in an interaction

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



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SWITCHING AMONG BILINGUALS IN TRANSACTION DUE DATE : 6th MAY 2013

In linguistics, code switching is changing between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation. Multilinguals sometimes use elements of multiple languages in conversing with each other.

Thus, code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety in a manner consistent with the syntax and phonology of each variety. According to Weinreich (1953), in the 1940s and 1950s, many scholars considered code-switching to be a sub-standard use of language. Since the 1980s, however, most scholars have recognised it is a normal, natural product of bilingual and multilingual language use. With this recognition in mind, Muysken (2005), states that switching is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a central part of bilingual discourse.

With regards to this view, this essay will examine the value of code switching among bilinguals in transaction. There are a number of different reasons why people code switch and thus code switching holds value for bilinguals. Firstly, during a transaction, code switching is of value because it can be used by bilinguals to show identity with a group. For example, (Di Pietro, 1977) reports that Italian immigrants would tell a joke in English and give the punch line in Italian, not only because it is better said in Italian but also

to stress the fact that they all belong to the same minority group, with shared values and experiences.

Very often, people code switch both consciously and unconsciously to act or talk more like those around them. Code switching therefore allows the establishment of rapport among bilinguals involved in a transaction. With this rapport established it becomes easy for bilinguals to participate in a transaction easily. Secondly, during a transaction, code switching is of great semantic significance. Gumperz (1982), stresses that switching at a particular moment conveys semantically significant information. It is a communicative resource that builds on participant's perception of two languages.

Lexical choice conveys meaning during code switching. Gal (1979) reinforced this view by stating that listeners interpret codeswitching as an indicator of the speaker's attitude, or communicative intents and emotions as code switching is a tool for conveying appropriate linguistic and social information. By the same token, David (2003) describes a range of speech acts like reprimands, directives, requests, and warnings that are conveyed by using different intricate strategies to show the semantic significance in certain specific situations.

Another reason why code switching is of great value to bilinguals is that, it can be used when there is the need of making a point, that is, to emphasize or highlight the significance of a given word or topic in the speech event. These reasons may bear pedagogic significance because in many cases it is the use of emphasis or the intent of assigning importance to a word or a

topic that directly correlates with the extent of a respondent's knowledge about a given topic and his or her choice of language.

For example Gal (1979) reports several instances in which code switching at the end of an argument not only helps to end the interaction but may also serve to emphasize a point. She has taken an example from English-German code switching and stressed that switching from English to German is a means of adding more force to the final statement. Lastly, code switching has the value of communicating the mood of a speaker during a transaction. According to Malik (1994), usually when bilinguals are for example tired or angry, code switching takes place with a new dimension.

This means that, when the speaker is in the right state of mind, he or she can find the appropriate word or expression in the base language. Very often he or she knows exactly the word in both the languages that he or she is competent in but the base language may be more available at the point of time when the speaker has a disturbed mind. Such circumstances may create a hurdle in getting the appropriate word or phrase in the language in which the speaker may be more proficient if he or she is not mentally agitated.

For example a bilingual competent in Tumbuka (base language) and Sena may use Tumbuka expressions more than Sena when he or she is angry. It can therefore be concluded that there are many values of code switching in particular social contexts. The ability of the interlocutors who are able to speak more than one language fluently plays an important role during their interaction. This essay has shown that the ability of bilinguals to use more than one language in a transaction is of certain value to the speakers

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