![Lund University seal with figure holding a sword and book, flanked by crowns, with text "SIGILLVM UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINÆ GOTHORVM" and "1666"]

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Code-switching in second language teaching of French

Flyman Mattsson, Anna; Burenhult, Niclas

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Anna Flyman-Mattsson and Niclas Burenhult

Introduction

Although code-switching has attracted a considerable amount of attention for quite some time, the issue of linguistic switch in foreign language teaching has not been a major subject of scientific study. Using a qualitative approach to individual examples of linguistic switch among three second language teachers of French in Sweden, this article, although highly preliminary, attempts to highlight and explain some of the features of code-switching in the foreign language classroom.

History of research

Code-switching in general has been a subject of great scholarly attention in recent decades. For overviews of the subject, see e.g. Eastman 1992, Fishman 1971, Gumperz 1982a, 1982b, Heller 1988 and Jacobson 1997. Detailed accounts of individual cases of code-switching include those of Platt & Platt 1975:91-4 which deals with the multilingual situation in Singapore; Blom & Gumperz 1972, who describe the code-switching patterns in Hemnesberget, Norway; and Hewitt 1986, who discusses code-switching among West Indian youths in Britain.

Theoretical treatments of the purely linguistic aspects of code-switching include those of Woolford 1983, Di Sciullo, Muysken & Singh 1986, Romaine 1989 and Poplack 1980. The latter suggests two constraints on code-switching: (1) 'the free morpheme constraint' which prevents switching between a bound morpheme and a lexical form; and (2) 'the equivalence constraint' which prevents switching at points where it breaks the syntactic rules of either language (Poplack 1980:585-6). More recently, Myers-Scotton 1993 has provided a model to account for the linguistic consequences of code-switching, claiming that one language is dominant and the other is subordinate,

and that the word structure of the dominant language determines the outcome in the subordinate language.

All of the above literature draws on material from natural discourse, but quite a few studies have also been done on code-switching phenomena in the more formalised context of classroom interaction. Using ethnographic observations, Merritt et al. 1992 explore the determinants of teacher code-switching between English, Swahili and mother-tongue in three Kenyan primary schools. Reasons for code-switching put forward include e.g. the socialising role of the teacher, the importance of variation and repetition, and the teacher's linguistic competence and insecurity. Bergman 1993:90-100, 102 discusses issues of conscious, planned code-switching among teachers in Swedish schools with bilingual education in Swedish and Finnish.

Other accounts include Martin-Jones 1988, who reviews research in bilingual education programmes in the context of classroom code-switching. For instance, she refers to Guthrie's comparative study of two teachers, one bilingual and one monolingual, working with Chinese learners of English in the U.S. The bilingual teacher made use of five communicative functions for switching into Chinese: translation, 'we code', procedures and directions, clarification and check for understanding. The monolingual English-speaking teacher, however, did not tolerate any code-switching into Chinese (Guthrie 1984).

Less has been done on code-switching within foreign language teaching specifically. Referring to Jacobson 1983, who has put forward a model in which code-switching is used as a teaching method in bilingual programs, Giauque & Ely 1990 propose an extended use of this method to also include foreign language teaching. Drawing on attitudes expressed by students, the authors note an increased acceptance of code-switching as a teaching method and understanding of its applicability.

Material and method of investigation

Material

The present study sets out from a series of video recordings, supplemented by back-up audio recordings, of classroom interaction between teachers and Swedish students of French as a second language. The recordings involve three classes of 4th year students (1st year of the Swedish *gymnasium*, roughly equivalent to upper secondary school or senior high school) and eight lessons for each class, altogether numbering 24 lessons, or 24 hours of recorded classroom interaction. All of the recorded material has been

transcribed into CHILDES format. The three instructors of French studied include two Swedish male teachers and one French female teacher. All three teachers use both Swedish and French as a teaching medium.[1]

Method

The transcribed material serves as a basis for a detailed analysis of the patterns of code-switching between Swedish and French exhibited by the three teachers in the classroom. A quick glance at the material reveals extensive use of code-switching in the teachers' interaction with their students, and the study aims at identifying these instances of code-switching and describe the reasons for them.

   Several explanations for code-switching in the second language classroom may be relevant to the present study, including, for instance, the following:

(a) Linguistic insecurity, e.g. the difficulty teachers experience in relating new concepts, discussed by Merritt et al. 1992:112-13.
(b) Topic switch, i.e. when the teacher switches code according to which topic is under discussion; it might be suggested, for instance, that certain aspects of foreign language teaching such as grammar instruction, is preferrably expressed in the mother tongue of the students (Flyman-Mattsson, forthc.).
(c) Affective functions, e.g. spontaneous expression of emotions and emotional understanding in discourse with students.
(d) Socialising functions, i.e. when teachers turn to the students' first language to signal friendship and solidarity (this is briefly touched upon in Merritt et al. 1992:108-9).
(e) Repetitive functions, i.e. when teachers convey the same message in both languages for clarity.

   Presumably, these and other reasons for foreign language classroom code-switching interact in various complex ways.

   As pointed out above, most of the previous research on code-switching deals with natural discourse, not with classroom interaction. Traditionally at least, the tutorial situation is obviously radically different from an ordinary conversational speech situation, and we might expect classroom code-switching to differ in several important respects from code-switching in natural discourse. For one thing, we should bear in mind that the foreign language

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[1]The recordings used in the present study form part of a larger collection of classroom interaction gathered by Anna Flyman-Mattsson.

teacher perhaps should not be regarded as a true bilingual who can choose freely between different codes. Instead we are normally dealing with a monolingual individual who has skills in a foreign language and whose task is to teach this language to other monolinguals. Still, we have chosen to study foreign language teacher code-switching within the framework of theoretical thinking on code-switching in general, in order to chart more easily the similarities and differences present.

Furthermore, we have chosen not to delve into the problem of distinguishing code-switching from language choice, since this distinction is not relevant for our present purposes. Hence, we adopt a fairly liberal definition of code-switching, namely, each time the teacher switches from one language to another.

Analysis

Introduction

At a first glimpse on code-switching in a foreign language classroom, it is easy to get the opinion that the teacher switches code for one reason only, to make the students understand the utterances. This of course is one of the main functions of code-switching since the number one purpose of classroom instruction is to teach the students the foreign language in question, and since their proficiency in this language is incomplete, the teacher feels it necessary to use the first language in order to make his or her students understand.

Further investigation of classroom data, however, clearly indicates that code-switching has more functions than mere translation. Although there is seldom true bilingualism on the teacher's behalf in a foreign language classroom, since he/she is usually either a mother tongue speaker of the first language or of the second language, this study has shown that it is possible to find similarities in code-switching in natural speech by bilinguals and code-switching in classroom interaction by native or nonnative speakers.

Linguistic insecurity

There are, however, some differences in the reasons for switching code. In natural speech, in bilinguals as well as monolinguals, linguistic insecurity in the speaker may constitute a possible cause for switching into the code that is the most comfortable for the speaker. In the case of bilinguals, the two languages are often made use of in different situations, e.g. formal vs. informal situations, and consequently some words are more stable in one language. However, linguistic insecurity in classroom interaction is a more complicated matter. In

students' speech it is not uncommon; code-switching is one of the most frequent communication strategies used by foreign language students (Flyman 1997:57). In teachers' speech the situation is somewhat different. Since the task of the teacher is to transmit knowledge of a foreign language onto the students, it is not appropriate to use words for which the teacher will have to switch code to be able to control. This might damage the students' confidence in the teacher's proficiency of the foreign language. A possible solution for the teacher might, therefore, be to avoid words he/she does not control or quite simply restructure the utterance. This assumption is based on the fact that nowhere in the data of the present study has there been found a clear case of linguistic insecurity by the teacher.

Topic switch

Code-switching at topic switch, on the other hand, seems to be a relatively frequent phenomenon in the classroom. As suggested above, grammar instruction is usually carried out in the students' mother tongue (note that this is also the case with the teacher whose mother tongue is the students' foreign language, in this case French), while conversation, in a majority of the cases, is performed in the target language. A probable explanation for this is the fact that the proficiency of the students is not developed enough to include terms necessary in grammar instruction. Following the traditional teaching methods still widely spread in Sweden, teachers believe that the first language is a necessary means of explaining rules and structures of the foreign language. Our data point to the presence of this belief as the teacher often switches code in the middle of an utterance if the situation demands a comment of a grammatical phenomenon. Examples (1) and (2) show some very obvious code switches where the teacher explicitly informs the students about the change of topic. There are also cases where the topic changes without any notice, but where the code switch indicates that a change of topic has been made, see examples (3) and (4).[2]

(1)   *LH1: … c'est la fête de tous les saints Toussaint är alla helgons dag oui autres questions sinon **då går jag över till svenska vi ska prata lite verb här** …

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*LH1: … it's the feast of all the saints Toussaint *is all saints' day* yes other questions otherwise ***now I will turn to Swedish we will talk a little about verbs now …***[3]

(2)   *LS1: … voilà Clémentine aime la musique xxx **men nu så ska vi faktiskt ägna oss åt något annat …**

*LS1: … OK Clémentine loves music xxx ***but now we will actually do something else*** …

(3)   *LP1: … vous prenez l'ascenseur est-ce que vous prenez l'ascenseur prenez vous l'ascenseur **här behöver jag gå upp med tonen väldigt mycket inte de andra mm** # maintenant on prend ça vous avez le verbe s'appeler …

*LP1: … do you take the elevator do you take the elevator do you take the elevator ***here I need to raise the tone a lot not the others mm*** # now we take that you have the verb s'appeler …

(4)   *LP1: … il y a d'autres mots aussi mais on dit on douche les plantes mais on se douche on baigne on baigne un enfant ou un chien mais on se baigne ah on lave le linge et on se lave **och så vidare och de och är båda reflexiva så måste jag ju xxx apropå accenterna jag märker att ni har problem med accenterna** …

*LP1: … there are other words as well but you say on douche les plants but on se douche on baigne on baigne un enfant ou un chien but on se baigne ah on lave le linge and on se lave ***and so on and they and are both reflexives then I have to xxx speaking of accents I notice that you are having problems with the accents*** …

As can be seen from the last two examples above, the topic change is not obvious, if by topic change we mean an apparent change of the subject of discussion. However, the sense of the word that is used in the present study involves also the sometimes rather vague change from focus on meaning to focus on the form itself. Since topic indicates what is being dealt with, the switch from focus on meaning to focus on form should count as a topic switch. In natural discourse this kind of topic switch is not very common, mainly because metalinguistic conversations are rare outside the classroom. On the other hand, it is not unusual to switch code when a new subject is introduced. This code switch may be due to a higher degree of control of a certain subject in one of the languages. The control factor does not exist in classroom interaction, since the teacher is expected to use the foreign language in most topics discussed in the classroom. The data, however, contain situations where there is a code switch along with a topic switch, but no explicit reason for the code switch.

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[3]In all translations of Swedish and French into English, Swedish as opposed to French is *italicised*. The code-switching example in question is in **bold** text.

(5)   *LH1: … c'est a de la page cent cinquante neuf ## ici ce sont les verbes parler ## **Rut jag hör din röst hela tiden** …

       *LH1: … it's on page one hundred and fifty-nine ## here are the verbs parler ## ***Rut I hear your voice all the time*** …

(6)   *LP1: … le premier épisode *första avsnittet* dans le bon ordre *i rätt ordning* mm dans le bon ordre **alltså ni ni suger åt er allt inte sant Augusta Laura Hilda snälla mm** on vous donne l'exemple un égal …

       *LP1: … the first episode *first episode* in the right order *in the right order* mm in the right order ***so you you absorb everything don't you Augusta Laura Hilda please mm*** they give you the example un égal …

In examples (5) and (6), the topic switch seems to be a change from 'typical' classroom speech into a more personal level. In both cases specific students are adressed and indirect or direct requests are presented. There are mainly two possible explanations for this kind of code-switching: the message in the utterances is so important that the teacher is not willing to risk a misinterpretation on the part of the affected students, or the code-switching is used as an instrument to get the students' attention. In any case, code-switching functions as a marker for the students to listen extra carefully.

Affective functions

A common reason for code-switching among people who speak one standard language along with another language in a more vernacular style is to use one of the languages for affective functions. If the speaker has only one mother tongue, this is usually the language used for such functions. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the teacher's mother tongue is used for affective reasons also in the classroom. In example (7) the teacher expresses his sympathies by switching to Swedish, and continues with French as soon as focus is back on the task. In the following example (8), the code switch is affective in the sense that the teacher shows her anger by using the student's mother tongue. In this way it is also stressed that the utterance is seriously meant and expected to be obeyed. Note that in this example, the teacher is French, but the affective code switch is adjusted to the student's first language.

(7)   *LH1: et Hanna+ …
       *EHI: måste jag?
       *LH1: pardon?
       *EHI: måste jag?
       *LH1: **har du ont i halsen**?
       *EHI: nej jag vill inte.
       *LH1: **du vill inte** elle ne veut pas alors Agnes vous voulez?

    *LH1: and Hanna+ …
    *EHI: *do I have to?*
    *LH1: pardon?
    *EHI: *do I have to?*
    *LH1: **do you have a sore throat?**
    *EHI: *no I don't want to.*
    *LH1: **you don't want to** she doesn't want to Agnes then do you want to?

(8)   *LP1: Fabian qu'est-ce qu'elle a dit là?
    *EPA: jag hörde ju inte.
    *LP1: **nej då kommer du hit**+ …

    *LP1: Fabian what did she say?
    *EPA: *but I didn't hear.*
    *LP1: **no then you come over here**+ …

It might be argued that the code-switches exhibited by the teachers in the above examples are triggered by the students' use of their mother tongue and that they therefore are not primarily signalling affective functions. However, influence from the students' choice of code is highly unlikely since students use their first language quite frequently in the classroom and would then force the teacher to commonly turn to the first language, which is not the case.

Socialising functions

Closely related to affective functions are socialising functions, i.e. when the speaker signals friendship and solidarity by using the addressee's first language. This is often directed to people with a lower proficiency in the second language. The same kind of phenomenon appeared in our classroom data: it seems as if the teacher switches code when he/she wishes to be friendly with the students. Example (9) shows an obvious attempt on the teacher's part to fraternise with one of the students to create a positive attitude towards the task. Also, in example (10), the teacher tries to show solidarity towards the students by expressing understanding of their problems in their mother tongue.

(9)   *LH1: … oui voilà un coin qui **xxx ja det här ska vi göra fler gånger va Vincent**?
    *EHN: oui c'est très bien.

    *LH1: … yes OK a corner which ***xxx well this we will do again huh Vincent?***
    *EHN: yes very good.

(10)   *LH1: … le matin de Pacques voilà bon d'autres problèmes avec les questions ou avec les réponses **kom ni er satt ni nu till exempel och inte kom på hur ni skulle kunna svara ni fick inte fram den där franskan som ni**

ville eller när ni skulle säga nånting till mig så fick ni inte fram det på franska nåt sånt problem # ni är helt problemfria vous êtes tout-à-fait sans problèmes parfait et encore oui c'est mademoiselle Emilia qui a noté qu'il y a une faute d'impression …

*LH1: … on the morning of Easter OK good other problems with the questions or with the answers *did you were you now for example not knowing how to answer you didn't come up with that French that you wanted to or when you were about to say something to me then you couldn't say it in French a problem like that # you are totally without problems* you are totally without problems perfect and also yes it's Miss Emilia who has noted that there is a misspelling …

Somewhat surprisingly, there are also socialising cases where the code switches from the first language to the foreign language. Interestingly enough, these examples are not collected from the speech of the native French teacher, as would be expected, but in cases where the Swedish teachers give instructions in Swedish and suddenly switch to French to mark a socialising event. In example (11), the teacher switches into the foreign language when one of the students arrives, to greet him in a personal way. In this particular case, however, the switch might as well be ironically intended, since the student is late for class, and must then be classified as having an affective function.

(11)   *LH1: … när ni lyssnar så lämpligen vänder ni på boken och bara känner igen allting som ni så väl har läst in till idag ## (%Paulus enters the room) **ah on arrive bonjour monsieur**+ …

*LH1: … *when you listen you preferrably turn your book over and just recognise everything that you've studied so well for today* ## (%Paulus enters the room) **aha he's coming good day sir**+ …

Repetitive functions

As mentioned above, one of the main reasons for teacher code-switching to the L1 of the students is to make the students understand their utterances. Of course this can be done without using a single word in the target language, but more frequently code-switching is used as a repetition of the previously uttered sentences. The repetition in the first language can be either partial (12) or full (13) and is often expanded with further information. Commonly in the repetitive code-switch, the target language precedes the first language.

(12)   *LH1: … voilà le temps primitif temat puis vous connaîssez xx s'il vous plaît le future **alltså följande tempus och former förutsätts ni kunna vid det här laget det är alltså ren repetition** le future le pluriel du présent le passé composé vous pouvez regarder et me suivre # le singulier mais pas le prés le passé simple **passé simple behöver ni inte befatta er med ännu så länge**

vous connaîssez le conditionel jag skulle tala et l'impératif parlons parlez et le plusqueparfait jag hade talat et enfin er imperfektum l'imparfait je parlais tu parlais il parlait er il parlait c'est peut+être plus facile de dire ce que vous ne devez pas connaître encore **det ni inte behöver kunna nu** c'est le passé simple mettez le passé simple entre parenthèses …

*LH1: … here is primitive tense *the theme* and then you know xx please the future tense *that is you are supposed to know the following tenses and forms by now so it's pure repetition* future tense plural present tense passé composé you can look and follow me # the singular but not the pres the passé simple *you don't have to concern yourself with passé simple yet* you know the conditional *I would speak* and imperative parlons parlez and the pluperfect *I had spoken* and finally er *the imperfect* the imperfect I spoke you spoke he spoke er he spoke maybe it is easier to say what you don't have to know yet *what you don't have to know now* it's the passé simple put the passé simple between brackets …

(13)   *LH1: … alors maintenant tous qui ont besoin de ce programme l'ont reçu on va commencer aujourd'hui par une petite exercise de comprehension c'est-à-dire exactement ce que vous le texte que vous avez lu et c'est pour pour faire entendre que vous comprenez très bien le français # et puis j' ai préparé quelles questions vous travaillez deux et deux á propos du texte # oui c'est très important on va travailler avec les verbes aujourd'hui er quelques petits introductions ici et puis à dans le la salle des ordinateurs où il y a des programmes de verbes que j'ai préparé pour vous **alltså vi börjar med hörövning här för att ni ska känna att ni verkligen förstår franska och den här texten kan ni och då ska ni känna igen ni ska ha böckerna stängda förstås och sen ska ni jobba två och två med de här frågorna och sen ska vi jobba med verb när jag nu tittar tillbaka på er enkät era enkäter och jag frågade då ju om det var nåt särskilt inom grammatiken som ni tyckte var svårt och då är det väldigt många det var en sju åtta stycken som särskilt har nämnt verben och några har ju uttryckt sina bekymmer för verben och det ska vi göra en del åt idag och er jobba i datasalen andra lektionen där det finns särskilda verbprogram** …

*LH1: … so now everyone who needs this programme has received it today we are going to start with a small comprehension exercise that is exactly what you the text that you have read and it's for for letting you hear that you have understood the French very well # and then I have prepared some questions you work in pairs considering the text # yes it's very important we are going to work with the verbs today er some small introductions here and then in the computer room where there are verb programs that I have prepared for you *so we begin with a comprehension exercise here to make you feel that you really understand French and this text you know and then you should recognise you should keep your books closed of course and then you will works in pairs with these questions and then we will work with verbs now when I look back at your questionnaire your questionnaires and I asked you then as you know if there was anything particular within grammar that you found difficult and then many it was seven or eight who specifically mentioned the verbs and some have expressed their concern about the verbs*

and this we will deal with a little today and er work in the computer room during the second lesson where there are special verb programs …

Further reasons for code-switching

Apart from the functions of code-switching discussed above, there are also some cases that are difficult to explain since there are no obvious reasons for switching code. Using examples (14) and (15) as prototypes for this kind of code switches, one may assume that the teacher switches code in a preventing purpose, that is, he/she expects the students not to understand the words he/she is about to utter. In the examples below, those words would presumably be *bibeln*, *desinfektionsmedel* and *trubadurerna,* respectively.

(14) *LP1: … le vin est aussi un médicament # quel horreur qu'est-ce qu'elle dit là vad säger hon nu ah # oui oui mais on si vous lisez **om ni läser i bibeln så så sköljer man sår med vin # desinfektionsmedel** # bon ça va # et maintenant c'est une grande ville touristique …

*LP1: … wine is also a medicin # how terrible what is it that she is saying what is it that she is saying now ah # yes yes but we if you read *if you read in the Bible you will see that they rinse wounds with wine # disinfectant* # well OK # and now it's a great tourist town …

(15) *LP1: … alors l'occitan qui est aussi la langue # d'oc **oc-språket om ni hört talas om det # inte # har ni hört talas om trubadurerna # inte # nehej det är så att i Sydfrankrike** dans le sud de la France il y avait une autre langue …

*LP1: … now the Occitan which is also the langue # d'oc *the oc language in case you've heard about it # not # have you heard about the troubadours # not # well in southern France it's like* in southern France there was a different language …

Discussion

The analysed material contains examples of several kinds of code-switching as outlined in the method section above, including instances related to topic switch as well as affective, socialising and repetitive functions. No examples of code-switching related to linguistic insecurity were found. By far, the largest category is represented by topic switch, and our assumption that a switch to the first language occurs when the teacher turns to more metalinguistic discussions, grammar in particular, is by and large supported by the data.

As far as affective functions of code-switching are concerned, there is a clear tendency in these cases for the teacher to make use of the students' first language, even in the case of the native French teacher. One would perhaps expect this particular teacher to make more use of her mother tongue for

spontaneous expressions of emotion, but instead she appears to accommodate to the students' first language. The same patterns apply to the socialising functions of code-switching, although there are some interesting exceptions.

Repetitive examples of code-switching can be both partial and full and, as we have seen, normally go from L2 to L1.

Clearly, the tutorial situation affects the code-switching patterns in some respects. For instance, the extensive use of repetitive code-switching can be attributed to the teacher's wish to be as clear as possible in the act of teaching. Since code-switching in natural discourse normally involves bilinguals, repetitive functions of switch are not particularly common in such situations. Also, certain aspects of the kind of topic-related code-switching present in the material, notably that involving the transition from focus on meaning to focus on form, can be attributed to the classroom context. At a different level, however, subject-changing topic switch appears to follow the same patterns as in natural discourse.

The present data also show that affective and socialising code-switching does exist in a classroom situation not involving bilinguals but foreign language instruction, not unlike code-switching in natural discourse.

Although very preliminary, the present study has shown that teacher code-switching in the foreign language classroom is a relatively unexplored yet highly interesting field of research. It has pinpointed the presence of both similarities to and differences from code-switching in natural discourse. Future studies in this area, supported by larger corpora, are likely to shed further light on the subject.

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