

## CODE-SWITCHING AS A COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY IN CONVERSATION

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*ABSTRACT: Code-switching, which may be defined as the alternation between two or more languages in a speaker's speech, occurs naturally in the speech of bilinguals. According to some studies, code-switching often happens subconsciously; people may not be aware of the fact that they have switched, or be able to report, following a conversation, which code they used for a particular topic (Wardaugh, 1998, p. 103). Bilingual speakers claim that code-switching is an unconscious behavior, but researches have shown that it is not a random phenomenon. As attested by Li Wei (1998, p. 156). Code-switching is seen as a purposeful activity. There are functions and intentions assigned to this behavior (Gumperz, 1971; Myers-Scotton, 1983; 1988; 1989, Hoffman, 1991). Based on this assumption, this paper investigates how code-switching is used as a strategy to achieve the communicative intents and serve certain functions in a conversation. The language a community speaks is part of its culture and so few changes in language occur unless there are prior changes in culture. This usually occurs when two communities, living side by side, interact by exchanging ideas, tools, methods, cultural behaviors (Alicja Witalisz 2011). This is the case of linguistic globalization and as it is a growing trend in the modern world, most of the world's speech communities are multilingual in nature. In language contact situations, code-switching between different language codes has become a very common and inevitable consequence in everyday lives of most people. Here this paper will demonstrate how code-switching functions as a communicative strategy to reduce language barriers as well as to manifest cultural identity. This study will prove that code-switching is a versatile strategy to meet the complex communicative demands between or within the interlocutors. In order to explain and clarify how code-switching is used as a communicative strategy, a few examples are given in reference to the speech of Bangla-English bilingual speakers.*

**KEYWORDS:** code-switching, discourse functions, communication strategy, communication accommodation theory, convergence, divergence.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Speakers of more than one language (e.g., bilinguals) have the ability to code-switch or mix their languages during communication. While speaking, they use more than one language simultaneously, and switches from one to another very easily and effortlessly. This is the most common phenomenon in the speech of bilingual or multilingual speakers. The bilinguals substitute a word or phrase from one language with a phrase or word from another language in the same sentence. Sometimes a full sentence can be in one language while the next one is in the other. But code-switching must follow certain grammatical rules and one cannot switch from one language to other at any points in the discourse. Following example will make it clear. Where and how one would be able to switch his codes is under consideration and the subject matter of many researches but for the purpose of this paper, we will not concentrate on those conditions. Here we will only discuss how this phenomenon is used by bilingual speakers as an effective strategy to achieve certain objectives.

(1) I want a car *rouge*. (*rouge* ‘red’)

(2) I want a *rouge* car. (*rouge* ‘red’)

In these sentences, the English word “red” is replaced with its French equivalent. A noteworthy aspect of sentence (1) above is that the French adjective “rouge” follows a grammatical rule that is observed by most bilingual speakers that code-switch. Thus, according to the specific grammatical rule-governing sentence (1) above, sentence (2) would be incorrect because language switching can occur between an adjective and a noun, only if the adjective is placed according to the rules of the language of the adjective. In this case, the adjective is in French; therefore, the adjective must follow the French grammatical rule that states that the noun must precede the adjective (Roberto R. Heredia, 1997).

In a multilingual society, each language uniquely fulfills certain roles and represent distinct identities, and all of them complement one another to serve “the complex communicative demands of a pluralistic society” (Sridhar, 1996, p. 53). Traditionally, it is believed that code-switching functions as a strategy to compensate for diminished language proficiency. The

belief behind this theory is that bilinguals code-switch because they do not know either language completely. This argument is also known as semi-lingualism (Roberto R. Heredia, 1997). However, one thing should be admitted that the notion of language proficiency is not clearly defined. It is not clear whether reading and writing language skills should be taken into consideration as much as the spoken language. This reliance on reading and writing is problematic because most bilinguals receive their formal education in one language, whereas a majority of their social interactions take place in the other language. So, when their reading and writing abilities are tested in both languages, it is quite expected that the language in which bilinguals received formal education will usually fare better.

Adendorff's (1966) view is contrary to the notion that code-switching is a comprehension for a linguistic deficit in bilingual speakers. According to him, code-switching is 'functionally motivated' (p.389) behaviour. If code-switching is functionally motivated, then a study that investigates the functions of code-switching occurring in a particular bilingual or multilingual society will be meaningful. As language of a certain speech community is closely related to the cultural practices of that community and since language and culture influence each other, language behaviours of the speakers are influenced by the cultural aspects. A small change in the cultural aspects will obviously bring corresponding changes in the language to account for those concepts. That is why the purposes, functions of code choices and code-switching varies in different cultures, language communities, or by different social situations. Therefore, this paper aims to illustrate a general overview about the intents of switchers and what is gained by communicating with code-switch.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In addition to Gumperz's work on bilingual discourse strategies, many studies (Poplack, 1980; McClure, 1981; Gumperz, 1982; Bialystok, 1983; Færch & Kasper, 1983; Tarone, 1983; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Milroy & Muysken, 1995; Romaine, 1995) have revealed that bilingual speakers use CS as a valuable linguistic strategy to achieve certain communicative goals. This illustrates that CS is far from being a language deficit.

2.1. Poplack (1980:581) states that ‘CS proceeds from that area of the bilingual’s grammar where the surface structures of L1 and L2 overlap, and that CS, rather than representing debasement of linguistic skill, is actually a sensitive measurement of bilingual ability’. Poplack (1980: 596) attributes a variety of functions to her informants’ use of CS. She also recognizes (Ibid 608) that other extralinguistic factors such as sex, age of L2 acquisition contribute to the occurrences of CS.

2.2. Gumperz (1982: 75-80) addresses particular social functions for the use of CS. His work is very influential and many researches have been done in different languages on the basis of his theory of functions of CS. He identifies six basic discourse functions that code switching plays in conversation: *quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, message qualification, and personalization versus objectivization*. In *quotations*, code switching occurs to report someone else’s utterance as direct quotations. In *addressee specification*, the switch serves to direct the message to one particular person among several addressees. *Interjections* serve to mark sentence fillers. *Reiterations* occur when the speaker repeats the message in the other code. It clarifies what has been said or increases the utterance’s perlocutionary effect. *Message qualification* is the elaboration of the preceding utterance in the other code. Lastly, *personification versus objectivization* indicates the degree of speaker involvement in what is being said. quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, and message qualification.

2.3. Bialystok (1983: 100) discusses the implementation of various communication strategies employed by non-native speakers (NNSs) including language switching (CS), foreignising native language, and transliteration. She claims that the best strategies “are those which are based in the target language and take account of the specific features of the intended concept” and that “the best strategy users are those who have adequate formal proficiency in the target language and are able to modify their strategy selection to account for the nature of the specific concept to be conveyed” (Bialystok 1983: 116).

2.4. Føerch & Kasper (1983) discussed the fact that CS can also be a sign of production difficulties in the target language. Speaking a second language can present problems in speech production which can lead to avoidance or reduction strategies or, alternatively, achievement strategies (1983: 37). Avoidance strategies include formal reduction strategies, that is, a reduced system (phonological, morphological, syntactic or lexical) in order to avoid producing non-fluent or incorrect utterances, and functional reduction strategies, which may include modal reduction, reduction of propositional content through topic avoidance, message abandonment or meaning replacement (Føerch & Kasper 1983: 52). With achievement strategies, the speaker tries to expand his communicative resources with the use of compensatory strategies, which include code-switching, interlingual transfer, interlanguage based strategies (generalization, paraphrase, word coinage, restructuring) co-operative strategies and non-linguistic strategies.

2.5. Tarone (1983) raises a discussion on what a communications strategy is. She distinguished between sociolinguistic competence and communication strategies, arguing that communication strategies “are used to compensate for some lack in the linguistic system, and focus on exploring alternate ways of using what one does not know for the transmission of a message, without necessarily considering situational appropriateness” (Tarone 1983: 64), whereas with sociolinguistic competence it is assumed that there is a shared knowledge, of the social norms between the interlocutors. He proposes (Tarone 1983: 65) the following criteria when defining a communication strategy:

- 1) A speaker desires to communicate a meaning X to a listener.
- 2) The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning X is unavailable, or is not shared with the listener.
- 3) The speaker chooses to:
  - a) Avoid – not attempt to communicate meaning X, or
  - b) Attempt alternate means to communicate meaning X. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning.

2.6. Myers-Scotton (1993), with her markedness model of CS, states that speakers make choices because they are able to consider the social consequences of these choices. Under this model CS occurs due to one of four motivations: 1) CS as a sequence of unmarked choices; 2) CS itself as the unmarked choice; 3) CS as a marked choice; and 4) CS as an exploratory choice.

2.7. Two comparatively recent publications, Milroy and Muysken (1995) and Auer (1998), both collected editions, present many articles on the intricacies of CS and borrowing, containing structural approaches, sociolinguistic standpoints or then articles that investigate the notions of power and negotiation in bilingual conversations.

### 3. DISCUSSION

This section gives an elaborate description of speakers' use of code-switching as a personal communication strategy. It attempts to explain how speakers organize and enrich their speech through code-switching and how they use it as a tricky strategy to fulfill certain objectives such as signaling social relationships and language preferences, obviating difficulties, framing discourse, contrasting personalization and objectification, conveying cultural - expressive message, giving special effect to some key words of the utterance, lowering language barriers, maintaining appropriateness of context, and reiterating messages (Ariffin, 2009). The following study will show these findings.

#### 3.1. Code-switching as a strategy to minimize or emphasize social differences among the interlocutors

One can use code-switching as a tool to indicate the social relationships between the interlocutors. The speakers may code switch either to hide the gap in their rank or position in the society or to manifest his power and apply it on the other participant. When people interact, they adjust their speech, their vocal patterns and their gestures, to accommodate to others (Howard Giles 1971). It explores the various reasons why individuals emphasize or

minimize the social differences between themselves and their interlocutors (those with whom they are communicating) through verbal and non-verbal communication. There are two main accommodation processes. Convergence refers to the strategies through which individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviors, in order to reduce these social differences. Meanwhile, Divergence refers to the instances in which individuals accentuate the speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and their interlocutors. In other words, it can be said that by convergence, the speaker levels his rank with the other participant and by divergence; he shows his power or authority over the other participant. For example, in Bangla-English bilingual context, if two friends are talking in English between them and they get on a public bus, they are most likely to switch to Bangla while offering the bus fare to the conductor. And they will switch their code of communication in order to show equal relationship between them and the participant of different status, age, and familiarity and level their rank with the middleclass Bangla speaking people. This is the case of convergence which they adapt to achieve their communicative objective.

On the other hand, the following example will show that the speaker (principal investigator) code switch to manifest power over the listeners (research fellows). In the following example, the speaker switches to English to scold her students and thus changes (lines 1,2) to scolding frame (lines 3,4).

(3)PI: 1 tomra jodi kajTa bujhte na paro tahole kajTa korbe kikore?

‘you’ ‘if’ ‘work’ ‘understand’ NEG MOD ‘then’ ‘work’ ‘do’ ‘how’

2 Prothom din theke bolchi *be serious*,

‘first’ ‘day’ ‘from’ ‘saying’

3 *but I do not know why you are not listening to me!!*

4 ebhabe cholle *I will have to stop the project.*

‘this way’ ‘goes’

‘If you do not understand the work, how will you do? From the very first day, I am repeatedly telling you to be serious about the job but I don't know why you are not listening to me, if it goes like this, I will have to terminate the project’.



‘Conjunct verbs are composed of a noun and a verb but in case of compound verb, there is no noun and instead of that, there we find a main verb that is nonfinite and an auxiliary verb which is finite and tense, aspect, mood endings are attached to it’.

As can be seen from the excerpt<sup>2</sup>, the speaker’s use of English referential terms such as ‘noun’ (line 2) and verb (lines 1, 2, 3, 4) was not because of the lack or unfamiliar terms in Bangla. The Bangla equivalence, ‘biSeSSo’ (line 1) and ‘kriya pOd’ (line 1) occurred in his speech. However, it seemed that the English version was preferred as the words ‘noun’ and ‘verb’ were used more compared to ‘biSeSSo’ and ‘kriya pOd’. Romaine (1995, p. 143) points out that,

Although it is popularly believed by bilingual speakers themselves that they mix or borrow because they do not know the term in one language or another, it is often the case that switching occurs most often for items which people know and use in both languages. The bilingual just has a wider choice – at least when he or she is speaking with bilingual speakers. In effect, the entire second language system is at the disposal of the code-switcher.

### 3.3. Code-switching as a strategy to obviate difficulties

Code-switching is not always random. Speakers seem to code-switch at points where he does not readily find out the correct referential terms in one language, and he does it to obviate difficulties that ruin the continuity of the utterance. The following excerpt will help us to understand the point. Here the speaker switches to English to obviate difficulties in finding the correct equivalent form in his first language i.e. Bangla. It may be due to habitual use of the English equivalent terms in daily life.

- (5) Speaker: 1 ami to dekhei Obak hoye gechilam, erOkom ga chaRa bhab  
‘I’ ‘PRT’ ‘see’ ‘surprised’ ‘be’ ‘PAST’ ‘such’ ‘carefree’ ‘behaviour’  
2 ki kore hOy...mane bokar mOto...*okay I mean idiotically carefree.*  
‘how’ ‘be’...’means’ ‘foot’ ‘like’  
3 bEparTa bhiSon..(pause)..mmm...*shocking.*

‘matter’ ‘very’

‘I was surprised to see that, how one could have such carefree behaviour? I mean like a stupid...I mean idiotically carefree. The incident was very shocking’

The excerpt illustrates evidence that the speaker felt that he faced difficulties in finding the right referential term in Bangla to express his thought for the noun phrase ‘idiotically carefree’ (line 2) and the word ‘shocking’ (line 3). The fillers ‘mane’ [I mean] (line 2), and ‘mmm’ (line 3) show that he was looking for the appropriate word to express what exactly he was thinking of the matter. And when after trying, he could not find out the equivalent word in Bangla that was causing unexpected delay in conversation, by uttering okay (line 2) he expresses that he had stopped looking for the right word in Bangla. Thus, he decided to stick to the English term as he felt that it was more comprehensible than the Bangla corresponding term and thought that the English term would obviate all confusion.

#### 3.4. Code-switching as a strategy to frame discourse

It is important for the speaker to make hearer give him the opportunity to finish what he wants to say and for this purpose he needs to hold the attraction and patience of the hearer till he ends up. So another important function of code-switching is to attract and hold listeners’ attention. This is commonly done by framing the discourse with the use of conjunctions like ‘so’ and ‘then’, and routines like ‘well’, ‘ok’ and ‘alright’. “According to Koike (1987), this type of code-switching normally occurs at boundaries as an intensifying strategy to emphasize the utterance, hold the listeners’ attention and move the action forward” (Ariffin, 2009). The following excerpt will show how CS is a strategy to frame discourse.

(6) Speaker: 1 age pORaTa SeS kOr, *then* amra ghurte jabo. ar aj rate  
‘before’ ‘study’ ‘finish’ ‘we’ ‘go for walk’ ‘and’ ‘today’ ‘night’  
2 baire khabo...(pause)..*well*, Amar aro Onek *plan* ache,  
‘outside’ eat –FUT’ ‘I’ ‘more’ ‘many’ ‘have’  
3Segulo *surprise*....*so*..(pause) gan na Sune taratari poRte ja.  
‘those’ ‘song’ ‘NEG’ ‘listen’ ‘soon’ ‘study’ ‘go’

‘At first you finish your study. Then we will go outside, and tonight we will have our dinner outside. Well, I have a few plans more, those are surprise..so stop listening to music and go to study’.

Here, a father is trying to draw his 14-year old daughter’s attention to her study, and to make her feel interested in it, he baits her to take her out for dinner. Father is switching his code as an effective strategy to make her interest grow into the matter. As can be seen from the excerpt 4, the body of the speech was in Bangla, framed by the English conjunction, ‘so’ (line 3), ‘then’ (line 1), and ‘well’ (line 2). The switches occurred at the places where the speaker needed to capture the hearer’s attention to make him feel interested into the matter.

### 3.5. Code-switching as a strategy to contrast personalization and objectification

Code-switching may also be employed to show a contrast between personalization and objectification (Kamisah Ariffin & Shameem Rafik-Galea, 2009). From our data, it is seen that a speaker uses different languages in talking about his or her personal feelings and describing facts or objectives. When the person is supposed to speak in English in a formal situation, he describes the fact in English but when he expresses something showing personal opinion or feelings over the matter, he switches to his first language i.e. Bangla. This can be illustrated in the following example.

(7) Trainer: 1 Tomorrow the exam will start at 12 p.m. and you  
2 will have to reach by 11:30. And if any one of you come late,  
3 don’t expect me to allow you in the examination hall  
4 *Ami kintu kauke Dhukte debona*  
‘I ‘but’ ‘none’ ‘enter’ ‘allow’  
5 You have to be punctual  
‘I will not allow anyone to enter’.



was bound to switch from English to Bangla. Similarly, the speaker purposely used the term 'kakima' (line 3) because in Bengali society, the wife of uncle is called 'kakima' but in English it is aunt and the same term is used to indicate mother's sister, as well as father's sister. And these three persons are being indicated by three different terms in Bangla, so the speaker used the term in Bangla to make the hearer understand actually whom she is talking about. Again in line 3, the speaker uses the term 'pranam' (to touch the elder's feet to ask for blessings) which is a cultural norm in Benglaee society. So this thing could not be said by using any English term. The term 'annaprashan' (line 4) was used to refer to a particular cultural norm and there is no equivalent word for this in English, so the speaker had to use this term to convey the cultural-expressive message.

### 3.7. Code-switching as a strategy to dramatize keywords

Speakers also code-switch very strategically to bring a dramatic effect, in order to attract the listeners' attention. This special effect can be achieved through the use of inventive expression. The following excerpt shows that the inventive expression occurs in the form of language play. It mainly happens in the friend circle (age limit 16-30 years approximately) when speaking informally. It is more a fashion than a real need to switch codes. This type of switching is not very usual; rather it seems to refute the conventional rules and beliefs of code-switching. But still, this type of switching succeeds in bringing a special effect in utterance which most commonly the young generation uses to make their speech more charming and stylish.

(9) Speaker: 1 I have to go home early today otherwise I will face a lot of *jhamelas*  
'problems'

2 I am leaving. *TaTas*

'good-bye'

'I will face a lot of problems. Bye'.

(Chorus): (laugh)

The speaker's invention of the word 'jhamelas' (line 1) and 'TaTas' (line 2), which were the pluralisms of the Bangla words 'jhamela' (problem) and 'TaTa' (goodbye) respectively into English by adding 's', had a dramatic effect on the listeners. The listeners understood and accepted this kind of switching and they reacted accordingly by appreciating the language play with their laughter.

### 3.8. Code-switching as a strategy to lower language barriers

“Studies have shown that speakers accommodate and take into account other interlocutors' linguistic factors in designing their speech (Giles & Smith, 1979; Bell, 1984; Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991)” (Ariffin, 2009). Speakers may increase or decrease the social distance between the interlocutors by changing the style of his language use, thus he diverge or converge his speech accordingly to accommodate the other interlocutors for effective communication. The following excerpt will show that code-switching is employed as a strategy to lower the language barriers between the speaker and the audience. The hearer was more fluent and competent in English compared to Bangla. The speaker, on the other hand, was competent in both English and Bangla. The following example will show how the speaker maintained to speak in Bangla and still made the hearer understand it by uttering the main informative words in English. Here the speaker used code-switching very tactfully and strategically to manage the difference in their levels of language competence in Bangla and English. Code-switching was, thus, seen as device to ensure understanding where she switched only at the topic-related words such as 'picnic', 'meet', 'sharp at 8 a.m.' (line 1), 'by train', 'night stay' (lines 2).

(10) Speaker: 1 kal amra picnic e jabo. Meet kora hObe sharp at 8 a.m.  
                   'tomorrow' 'we'           'LOC-marker' 'go-FUT'           'will happen'  
                   2 by train jabo ar night stay kOra hObena.  
                                   'go' 'and'                           'will not happen'

'Tomorrow we will go to picnic. We will meet sharp at 8 a.m. We will go by train and we won't stay at night'.

### 3.9. Code-switching as a strategy to maintain the appropriateness of context

In our data, the following example expresses the concept of switching which is similar to Blom and Gumperz's (1972) concept of situational switching. The following excerpt shows that the teacher switched her language to answer a particular expression used by her students and she indulged this switching in order to maintain the appropriateness to the context.

(11) Teacher: 1 How are you students? How was the vacation?

Student: 2 *Subho nObobOrSo* madam, we are fine

'happy new year'

Teacher: 3 oh yes *Subho nObobOrSo*.

'happy new year'

4 Tell me how you celebrated.

'Student: Happy New year ...Teacher: Happy New Year'

Like many other societies, in Bengalee society also, it is the practice that when someone greets a person, it is compulsory for that person to give his or her reply. Bengalee people greet with 'Shubho noboborsho' when Bangla New Year comes. On this day the English phrase 'Happy New Year' is not used. And it is also known that this Bangla greeting should be replied with the same utterance. This is also seen in the excerpt mentioned above, the teacher was talking in English but whenever her students greeted her 'Shubho noboborsho', she could not reply their greetings in English, instead, she switched her language of interaction to Bangla in her reply to the student's Bangla greeting as it was the most appropriate thing to do. A Bengalee will not answer it in another language as it will not be appropriate, it will seem absurd.

### 3.10. Code-switching as a strategy to reiterate messages

Sometimes it is seen that the speaker feels it necessary to repeat a particular message for certain reasons, either to express its importance, or to make it clearly understood to the hearer. But to repeat the same thing in the same language makes it quite monotonous to hear.

To make the utterance listen well, the speaker, most of the times, repeats it in another language to give it a special importance and effect. Not only to mark the importance of the utterance what has been already said earlier, but also to disambiguate a particular pronunciation, code-switching can be used strategically to reiterate messages.

(12) Officer: 1 After one year, it will be automatically deducted from your  
2 Savings account, the interest rate is thirteen percent mane tEro percent  
‘thirteen’

On the basis of the analysis of this example, it can be said that the speaker repeated the phrase ‘thirteen percent’ (line 2) in order to ensure mutual understanding among the listeners. As a member of the Bangla speech community himself, the speaker was aware of the fact that Bengalee speakers normally have a problem in differentiating between short and long vowels, because Bangla does not have short and long vowels phonetically. Though both types are present in spellings, but they are pronounced in the same way. So it is a common mistake that people very often confuse between ‘thirteen’ and ‘thirty’ because both are pronounced almost similar by native Bangla speakers. Thus, by reiterating the word ‘thirteen’ with ‘tEro’ the speaker was making sure that everybody in the context of the interaction understood it as ‘thirteen’ not ‘thirty’.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

So, all the excerpts shown in this article have shown that code-switching behavior is not random and code-switching is also not always a sign of linguistic deficiency or inadequacy. Rather, it is “a negotiation between language use and the communicative intents of the speakers” (Ariffin, 2009). The speaker employs this code-switching as an effective strategy to achieve these communicative intents. It is the most effective strategic tool which the speaker uses to express exactly what message he wants to convey and how. The speaker may not only need to convey the referential meanings of the words which he utters in his utterance, but also to accomplish different intents mentioned in this article. According to Myers-Scotton (1995),

the choices that a speaker makes in using a language are not just choices of content, but are ‘discourse strategies’ (p. 57).

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## ABBREVIATION

GEN ‘Genitive marker’

PL ‘Plural’

DET ‘Determiner’

NEG ‘Negative’

MOD ‘Modal’

PAR ‘Particle’

PAST ‘Past tense’

FUT ‘Future tense’

LOC ‘Locative case ending’

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