My experience related to codeswitching

Codeswitching is valuable in pragmatical communication. Several overlapping situations, are concluded by Colin Baker (2001, pp. 102–104, 2014, pp. 75–76) as the strategic usage of codeswitching, and they are still far from inclusive. In the light of my previous experience, some of them I intended to use, some I used insensibly, and some I happened to see. From my student time, the codeswitching is a part of the life.

As a Chinese student, we all learnt in middle school *sin* and *cos* considered with the triangle. Without the knowledge of spelling as sine and cosine, only we knew were their symbols and pronunciations /sʌɪn/ and /kəusʌin/ at that time. The Chinese equivalents of them are *ZhengXian* and *YuXian* respectively. So, the expression of "let's calculate the sine of this triangle" could be "*WoMen Lai Qiu ZheGe SanJiaoXing De sin (sʌɪn)*" or "*WoMen Lai Qiu ZheGe SanJiaoXing De ZhengXian*". The former being not a pure Chinese sentence is more favoured than the standard latter by us. It is what Backer (2001, p. 102) concludes as the substitution, bilingual using the word they know to substitute the equivalent they don't know in another language. In this situation, it was not because we didn't know, but its direct correspondence with writing made our thinking easier. Such is very common in academic field.

After I began to work, codeswitching is purposely used to adjust the relationship with our foreign co-operators. We usually learn in advance a few expressions of their language. By switching to their language when we talk in English, we express a respect of them and an involvement in their culture, and their approval is usually returned. Backer (2001, p. 102) gives a rational explanation for our purpose that the switching from majority language to minority language is to communicate friendship. I have also seen many times that the participants talking in dialect before the meeting quickly change to the mandarin when it starts. That is how we use codeswitching to keep relational distance. Scotton and Ury (1977) recorded a conversation between a male shopkeeper and his sister in Kenya, which can be a proof of this distance keeping. After he sensed she wanted to buy salt from him, he quickly switched to Swahili, the official language, and kept on speaking it, despite his sister was still using their local language. This case is very interesting. The sister keeping on speaking local language, trying to get a relational discount, while the shopkeeper insisted on responses in Swahili with a hint that business is business.

Considering my classroom teaching, I usually reiterate the important points or tasks in Chinese after first time in English, though I rarely speak Chinese during my teaching. According to Baker (2001, p. 102), it is because the codeswitching can be used to reinforce a request. It seems I have been using this strategy for a long time without sensing it. By my doing that, students identify which part is more important and which they need to pay more attention to. Furthermore, it is also a clarification that sets a framework for the students to self-reflect the concept, helping the internalization of the knowledge.

As for my family life, codeswitching is also pragmatically used. When we want to talk about something secret that I don't want my children know, my wife and I switch to English. My father reports the same situation that my grandparents switched to Cantonese from his local dialect in his childhood. Parents seem to naturally know how to keep their privacy from their children. That is the advantage of bilingual over monolingual who can only write or stop talking to avoid the leak of information.

Codeswitching is nearly inevitable for some immigrants or tourists, for there is no exact equivalence in both of their languages. I have clear experience after coming to Wales. Parsnip is a common vegetable in Wales but hardly seen in China. Though Chinese botanists name it with a categorical label, it never comes to the average people's conception. How could a Chinese student that lives in Wales, including me, introduces this to his friends in China? For me, it is better to say parsnip than "European radish", otherwise my friends will surely take it as a radish and never make any link with what it really is.

Codeswitching is also used to express humour. Not only can the content of the language cause the humour, but also language switching itself. Siegel's study (1995) on jokes made by switching from Fijian to Hindi gives a convincible approval of the idea. The very example appeared to me was the debate in British Parliament on 19th of January 2022 when Sir Ed Davey accused Boris Johnson, the prime minister of UK, of violating the Covid blockade measures he set himself, and demanded him to resign immediately. Johnson responded in Chinese right away, "*Ni Hao! Ren Shi Ni Hen Gao Xing*!" (Hello, nice to meet you!), making the whole parliament burst into laughter.[1] This codeswitching was an extremely successful humour, managing to save Johnson from embarrassment and brought him time to organize his thought. In addition, it functioned as an ironical fight-back to Davey, because he was once caught in a scandal of accepting a £5000 donation from a Chinese agent.

[1] The video can be seen on BBC Politics (https://twitter.com/BBCPolitics/status/1483789935459065866?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1483789935459065866%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.breakinglatest.news%2Fnews%2Fbritish-prime-minister-johnson-speaks-chinese-when-asked-by-mps-to-resign%2F)

Report for parents being worried about switching between languages

Parents in many bilingual families are cautious or even worried about the language spoken by their children is not pure but mixed of two languages. It seems that this mixing use of two languages in one sentence shows a deficiency of at least one, or even both languages. In fact, adults who can speak more than one language also do the same thing, unconsciously and consciously, thus making the blame on the child very unfair and unreasonable. Codeswitching is what we use to describe the mixing use of languages by bilingual individuals. It is never a deficiency, but strategies of speaking properly.

Codeswitching is common

If we consider daily language we use carefully, we will find a lot of loanwords, such as English originated words *soho* and *cool* in Chinese. Nearly all languages borrow words and phrases from other languages because it is easier and more acceptable than complete coinage, especially in such a highly interactive modern world. Some words in source language, in spite of their coined counterparts in target language, are still popular among speakers. Computer is called cyfrifiaduron in Welsh, but many Welsh people still say computer when they speak Welsh. Since loanwords are extensively accepted, then codeswitching should also be equally treated. Codeswitching may probably be the first step of borrowing new word (Baker, 2001, p. 101). There is no clear distinction, but rather a continuum of relationships exists between them, according to the study by Myers-Scotton (1992, p. 21).

Codeswitching is not an interference of acquiring language competence. There is a period of children under 2-year-old mixing languages very often. Parents may attribute the codemixing to child's being not able to sense the difference of languages, and worry such confusion cannot be rectified later. However, recent research shows the bilingual children who are even younger than 2 tend to select their uttering language according to the context (Deuchar and Quay, 1999), and 90% of their codemixing is due to the lexical gaps in one language (Nicoladis and Secco, 2000, p. 3). Therefore, we can see the bilingual children do not deficiently but very pragmatically manipulate with their language. The obliged mixing use disappears quickly once they get the equivalent in that language.

Codeswitching is contextual

The highly contextual codeswitching, as mentioned above, can be seen from the bilingual children who are as young as 2 years old. There is a "appropriate language matching" shown in these children's utterances. They prefer to speak to the familiar

bilinguals in a bilingual mode, but they quickly switch to monolingualism when they want to talk with a stranger or sense the person in front of them is a monolingual. (Genesee, Boivin and Nicoladis, 1996). That phenomenon once again manifests the codeswitching is irrelevant to the interference, but rather a choice made. They pragmatically want their communication smooth and easy. Whether children choose codeswitching or monolingualism when they talk to a bilingual probably depends on their parents and family circumstance. If the parents set strict rules for the child in using language, the child usually prefer to speak monolingually at a time. Oppositely, children of parents who often codeswitch don't pay much attention to their mixed language use. Such a difference in language using attitude doesn't influence the final success of bilingual competence, shown by the results of 40 case studies done by Claire Thomas (2022).

However, it is still suggested both languages be separated consistently before 3 years old if the condition permits. The contextual difference between majority language used in public and minority language in family easily gives the children the impression that the former is more prestigious while the latter is less worthy. Such a concept will cause a problem that children rely too much on the words of majority language and always use them to replace the minority language. Thus, the integrity and purity of minority language is hardly maintained.

To make the separation possible, "one parent one language" approach is worth trying at home. Each parent speaking a separate language to the child consistently, setting clear boundaries between languages, is very effective in keeping both pure and integral. However, not all the language communities pursue the purity, such as Puerto-Rican communities in New York whose members admire codeswitching for the label of ethnic identity. For those communities, flexibly mixing the languages in family communication is also advocated (Baker, 2014, p. 74).

Codeswitching is strategic

Codeswitching is intentionally used in many situations by bilinguals. It has various purposes in accordance with different speakers, objects to speak, topic of the discourse, context of the conversation, etc. Several overlapping situations, far from being inclusive, are concluded by Colin Baker (2001, pp. 102–104, 2014, pp. 75–76) where bilinguals codeswitch on purpose while monolinguals cannot, making codeswitching an exclusive and valuable tool in communication.

1. Being unable to find the right word or phrase in one language is not exclusive to early bilingual children but also can be found in adults. It is common to find the speeches of international joint venture's staff members are Chinese mixed with English words. They don't show off their English ability as people hate, while they just cannot find the right word in Chinese immediately. The codeswitching here is a strategy that substitute the unfamiliar Chinese with familiar English jargons.

2. Codeswitching can be used to emphasize a particular point of the speech. Experts of communication are good at using an equivalent in another language as the topic or central idea. Strange collocations are always eye-catching or ear-catching. If we want to remind others of the importance of timing, a switch from time to *Zeit* may make your audience more cautious.

3. Repeating by codeswitching gives a strong stress. Imaging you ask your child to go to bed, but he/she refuses or pretends not to hear. You can use another language as a repetition in a bit accent. As more powerful than a repetition in the same language, the child easily recognizes it is a forceful demand. This is much better than a scold to let the child behave him/herself. It is suggested speaking the minority language at first and then the majority one as a complement. The minority language, usually related to the family root, is more intimate, while the majority language used in the society stands for authority and hints the strong command.

4. Since the bilingual repetition is emphatic, it can be used in the classroom to reinforce learning. Once the teacher starts a new concept in one language, he/she can reiterate it in another language. Such a method not only helps the students strengthen their memory by being aware this is important, but also gives them a chance to understand it better.

5. Switching from a majority to a minority language may symbolize the friendship. The minority language, as discussed above, is a label of intimacy due to its family root. During a talk in a common majority language, switching to the minority language means a mutual acceptance once they find both can speak that language. Even if they don't really speak each other's languages, only a few words are beneficial. People intend to express their friendship by switching to as much minority language as they can.

6. Since we can use codeswitching as a tool to get closer, we can also use it to keep relational distance. Switching from the minority language that both understand to a majority language means the incoming conversation will be formal. Commonly spoken in the society or communities, the majority language stands for fair and justice, even a bit of alienation. By speaking it, conversers suggest that all their emotional connections be put aside, and they are going to get down to business.

7. Codeswitching is useful in keeping privacy. If two monolinguals don't want their conversation to be overheard, they have no choice but to stop talking and to write. The advantage of bilinguals is they can switch to another language, it usually a safe way. Many parents have the experience of switching to another language when they have a quarrel or secrete that they don't want their children to know. And immigrants or tourists always switch to their original language if they want to criticize the people around.

8. To break into a conversation, codeswitching could be a good strategy for a bilingual. By introducing a new language, he/she can show the desire to get involved in avoidance of impoliteness. A different language usually arouses other people's interest, and thus a new topic could start with him/her included. Even if they don't pay any attention, it won't be so embarrassing because they may not understand what has been said. Out of the same reason, codeswitching can be applied to a pause and change of the topic. In a heat discussion, taking initiative to switch the language manifests the desire to get away from the topic.

9. Codeswitching can appear in reporting the conversation previously happened. Imagine the situation where two Welsh people are chatting in Welsh. One of them wants to tell the other the conversation he had with an English monolingual a day before. The content they conversed about then is probably narrated in English that was really used rather than Welsh now.

10. A sudden codeswitching can ease the tension and inject humor. If the conversation is becoming more and more tense, switching to another language symbols the mood needs to be altered.

Conclusion

Codeswitching is very common among all bilinguals including adults and children. It should never be considered as a deficiency, rather it be a very effective way of using the language in accordance with different contexts. For Bilingual people, codeswitching is a very valuable tool to strengthen communication, solve understanding problems, and to achieve all sorts of goals. To use codeswitching decently and strategically can be a great advantage of bilinguals over monolinguals in daily life.

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