Codeswitching in Intra-generational Conversation

Literature Review

In a globalizing world today, it isn't unusual to hear people talk in several

different languages in a conversation, or even within one sentence. Such regular

exchange, in fact, demonstrates a complex phenomenon called codeswitching, or "the

alternation of languages in the same interactional episode." (Zhu, 2008, p. 1800) Despite

the fact that CS is used commonly and frequently in a conversation with bilingual friends,

colleagues, superiors, and family members, the attitudes toward it have often been

negative as many people consider it "impure," "lazy," or expedient. (Edwards, 2004)

Since the issues of CS stem from the idea of bilingualism, the issues of

bilingualisms need to be addressed in order to understand the significance of CS besides

its commonly held view as a compensating strategy. One is the issue of identity with

regard to bilingualism as CS concerns the different choice of language that reflects the

socio-psycho-cultural aspects of the bilingual speakers. Lin (2010) argued that identity is

not limited to the language, ethnicity, or nation, and that people are free to cross such

borders and yet encounter limits as they do so, which Otsuji (2010) termed as

"performatively constructed 'metro-origin.'" (p. 192) Kanno (2000) focused on the

identity of Japanese returnees and stated that the majority language served as a key to

participation in the mainstream society while the minority language represented their

desire to be unique. Apart from this "two-fold concern," (Haneda & Motobayashi, 2009,

p. 11) Kanno (2003) further argued "imagined communities" (p. 285) that structured the

schools' policies in their bilingual education, suggesting the schools' role in shaping the identities of their bilingual students.

Others have focused on the issues of ethnic identity in particular. Schecter & Bayley (1997) suggest that the use of heritage language in the "intergenerational transmission" (Baker, 2006, p.71) is regarded as closely related to the formation and retention of the ethnic identity. Brown (2009), however, argues that if the individuals don't accept the culture associated with their heritage language, they don't form a positive ethnic identity.

Several other researchers have discussed the interplay between the two languages in bilingual academic literacy. Bostwick (2001) states that the knowledge "constructed" (Spack, 1998, p. 49) in the acquisition of second language aids students in further developing their first language. Drawing on the notion of "language dependent recall in bilinguals' linguistic production," (p. 1) Motobayashi (2009) states that in the autobiographic writings, the "language of experience" (p. 2) or the "language of encoding." (Pavlenko, 2006, p.16) elicits more detailed description, and also information only presented in the language of experience.

Such interplay between the two languages suggest the notion that CS, which demonstrates the shift in language and the differences in language choice, serves as a communicative strategy for bilinguals. Although often understood simply as a tool to fill the "gap of linguistic competence between the two languages," (Chung, 2006, p. 302)

many researchers suggest CS is performed strategically to promote the communication which won't be achieved otherwise. Particular focus has been placed on the role of CS in intergenerational "conversation." (Hardman, 2008, p. 254) Zhu (2008), who takes on the notion of CS as "a multifaceted socio-cultural practice," (p. 1801) states that CS in a family conversation is used to dominate the conversation, to secure and negotiate their positions, and to challenge each other. Zhu further argues that CS allows family members to form and reform their cultural values, roles and expectations by challenging the power distance between parents and children while maintaining the orders in the family through such language practice. Meanwhile, Chung (2006) suggests the possibilities of CS as a resource for supporting communication and reinforcing the bonds in a bilingual family. Apart from meeting the different needs of preferred languages in family members, CS, Chung stresses, is often used strategically to clarify, reinforce or exaggerate the points that the speaker makes by repeating the same phrase or sentences in the other language.

While CS serves as a communicative strategy in recognizing as well as overcoming the gap in intergenerational conversation as Zhu (2008) and Chung (2006) have reported, examining the role of CS in peer to peer, or "intra-generational" conversation will provide further understanding of CS in a different dimension.

Methodology

The participant of this study is Miki (pseudonym), one of my Kikokushijo friends who is a sophomore, majoring Political Science at a university. Miki first left

Japan and moved to England at the age of 0 and lived there until age 3. She was back in Japan for 3 years and then moved to the U.S at age 6, where she stayed until age 14. She then moved to New York and lived there until the end of high school. Although she had spent 15 years of her life abroad, she has about the same level of speaking skill for both English and Japanese due to the fact that she attended Hoshuko, or Japanese Saturday school, when she was in California and went to an international school in NY where classes were taught both in Japanese and English. Her reading and writing skills, however, is stronger in Japanese. In selecting a bilingual participant for this study, I looked for a bilingual friend whose speaking proficiency is of about an equal level for both languages so that it is not likely that CS is simply used to compensate for the lack of competence in one language.

The data were collected in November, 2011 through 3 hours of audio recording at a café. I asked for her permission in recording the interview and explained that her identity will be protected. I used an ethnographic approach, similar to one conducted by Kanno (2000), in collecting the data so that the results will not only reflect the different patterns of CS, but also the psycho-socio-cultural factors behind them. I asked Miki 3 open-ended questions to initiate the conversation. First, I asked her to talk about one of the most exciting experiences she has had in 2011. Second, I asked her to talk about her school life. Finally, I asked her to talk about where she sees herself in 5 years from now. To analyze data, I chose three series of a short conversation which contained significant themes.

<center>Findings</center>

I found two main themes when analyzing data. They both relate to the idea that CS is often used to establish a stronger relationship between the two speakers. Also, they are both connected by the notion that CS, in many cases, is triggered by the emotional state of both the speaker and the listener.

Extract 1:

Miki: huh, anta-mo (referring to her mother in an impolite way) ryu-gaku shitetayo tekanji. Uchino mama shitetano America ni. Sokode papa to deatte. (But she participated to the study abroad program, too. She was studying in the United States. And that's where she met my dad)

The author: Usodesho Usodesho!!! (No way! Are you serious?)

Miko: in California. When my mom was 18! Yabakunai? (Can you believe it?)

The author: Oto-san wa? (And your dad?)

Miki: He was 22. Yabakunai? (Can you believe it?) Eh, um, I'm 20 now.

The first theme is that CS is often used to exaggerate the points the speaker makes in a conversation between bilingual friends. In the Extract 1, in which she talks about her mother's lack of understanding about the idea of her going on a study abroad program, Miki switches to English in the second turn by saying "in California. When my mom was 18!" to exaggerate the fact that her mother who is unsympathetic towards the idea of her 20 year-old daughter going on a study abroad program, in fact, went on one when she was 18. Here, by code-switching to English, Miki successfully expressed her frustration and resentment against her mother more vividly and elicited sympathy from the author,

which helped form intimate emotional connections as they both tacitly agreed that it's unfair that her parents could go on a study abroad program when they were around her age and she doesn't get to go on one.

Extract 2:

> Miki: Hoka nandaro? (what else?)
>
> The author: Nandaro. (Hmm what else?)
>
> Miki: (After a long silence) Thinking time. Haha.
>
> The author: Haha.

The second theme is that CS is used to smooth over an awkward moment within a conversation or as a result of a particular turn of a conversation between bilingual friends. In the Extract 2, in which Miki runs out of things to say and a long awkward silence follows, she switches to English in the next turn, saying "thinking time", which brings out laughs from both Miki herself and the author. To have an awkward silence within a conversation with friends feels quite uneasy and uncomfortable as they both don't want to be considered boring by each other. Many of them even feel obligated to come up with something to say to break the silence and continue the conversation. Code-switching, which allows a shift of language within a turn of a conversation, per se brings a refreshing change in terms of the language used to an awkward moment. Moreover, in spite of saying "thinking time" in Japanese in a Japanese-dominant-conversation, which might sound a bit too straightforward with a possibility of causing further awkward moment, saying it in English sounds charming and elicits laughs from both the speaker and the listener, breaking the awkward silence as a result.

Extract 3:

> Miki: Mama ga nattoku iku hito jyanakya dame mitaina. (It's like he has to be a person my mom approves of)
>
> The author: eh!! igai!! (No!! I didn't expect that!!!)
>
> Miki: she cares a lot!! Mou nanka mama ga hantaisuru hitoto antaga kekkonsurutte nattara mou mama antato enkirukarane mitaina. And my voice is laud. Haha. (She's like "if you ever dare to marry someone that I don't approve of, I will disown you")

In the Extract 3, in which Miki talks about the fact that her mother is very particular about her future marriage partner, she switches to English and says "and my voice is loud", after mentioning the intensity of her mother's concern. Here she uses code-switching to cover up the awkward moment she instigated as she felt that saying aloud in Japanese in a café that her mother would disown her if she doesn't marry a person her mother doesn't approve of was inappropriate, considering that other Japanese customers in the café were just sitting quiet in their chair, relaxing. In both extract 3 and 4, Miki used CS to gloss over awkwardness within a conversation or as a result of what she said, which helped her maintain the emotional ties with the author.

The two main themes suggest the notion that CS is often used to establish a stronger relationship between friends. In Extract 1, Miki used CS to exaggerate the points, through which she expressed her emotions more vividly and elicited sympathy from the author, which helped strengthen their emotional connections and their relationship itself as a result. In Extract 2 and 3, CS was used to cover up the

awkwardness within a conversation or as a result of a particular turn of a conversation, which allowed Miki to maintain the bond with the author and to further build a sounder emotional ties.

Moreover, the two main themes are connected by the idea that the emotional state of both the speaker and the listener triggers CS. In the Extract 1, Miki responded in English to the author's excitement conveyed in words "Usdesho Usodesho!!!" (No way! Are you serious?) In the Extract 3, Miki also switched to English in response to the author's excitement expressed in words "Eh!! Igai!!" (No!! I didn't expect that!!) These two data suggest the possibility that Miki's CS was triggered by the author's emotional uplift which seemed to have provoked Miki's strong sense of resentment against her mother in both Extract 1 and 3. Such strong emotional state of her affected her language choice, through which she expressed her emotions more vividly, forming stronger emotional connections with the author. In the Extract 2, Miki code switched after a long silence. Her behavior brings up the idea that her sense of guilt that she had to break the silence to cover up the awkwardness triggered CS.

Implications

The results suggest that in a conversation between bilingual friends, CS is used to strengthen the ties between them, which is also found in a bilingual family conversation as Chung (2006) has pointed out. The way such ties are established in each case, however, reflects the different needs of the speakers. In the intergenerational conversation, the speakers intend to negotiate, challenge, and overcome the cultural

distance or generational gap between them using CS (Zue, 2006), whereas, in the intra-generational conversation, the focus is placed more on connecting with friends emotionally to form a stronger relationship. Certainly, in many cases, the general distance that exists between friends is no shorter than the one within family members since each friend comes from different cultural backgrounds while each family member has different cultural values that often change with times. Yet, in certain cases such as talking about things adolescents go through or experience that are often shared among them on daily bases, there isn't much cultural distance or a gap between friends as there seems to be within a family. In such cases, the speakers focus more on connecting with friends emotionally to form a stronger relationship than overcoming the cultural distance between them, which indicates the possibility of the different approaches to strengthening the bond, depending on the needs of each speaker.

The limited data in this study, however, raises the need for further research on the issue of CS in the intra-generational conversation and its connections and the differences with CS in the intergenerational conversation, with more diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds being taken into account.

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