

LANGUAGE CHOICE IN MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITIES

1. Choosing your variety or code

code → a neutral term

language, dialect, standard, etc.: these terms imply judgement,
emotion, attitude } not neutral terms!

The linguistic (=verbal) repertoire of speakers may be of three main types:

- (i) monolingual
- (ii) bilingual
- (iii) multilingual

Monolingualism: the ability to use only one language.

In some countries (especially in the western world) it is assumed that speaking one language is a world-wide norm, so much so that bilingual or multilingual speakers are considered somewhat strange.

However, in most places in the world speaking two or more languages is natural; in those speech communities speaking one language only is considered to be a handicap.

Bilingualism: the ability to use two languages.

It is important to distinguish between speakers who are *bilingual* from those who are *bidialectal*. Why?

“LANGUAGE” or “DIALECT” ??

These terms do not represent clear-cut concepts.

Traditionally, *dialect* is defined as follows:

- a. It is a specific form of a given language spoken in a certain geographic area.

- b. It differs substantially from the standard of that language (pronunciation, grammatical construction, idiomatic usage of words, etc.).
- c. It is *not* sufficiently distinct to be regarded as a different language.

Problem: It has often been said that *language is a collection of mutually intelligible dialects*.

‘mutually intelligible’ → this is a *linguistic* criterion.

From the speaker’s perspective it is less important, than *political and social criteria!*

Examples:

Serbian and Croatian -- languages or dialects?

Mandarin and Cantonese -- languages or dialects?

Hindi and Urdu -- languages or dialects?

Ranamål and Bokmål (see Example 6 on p. 5) – languages or dialects?

Scandinavian ??

(You may add more examples!!)

‘LANGUAGE’ -- superordinate term: it can be used without reference to dialects.

‘DIALECT’ -- subordinate term: it is meaningless unless it belongs to a language.

X is a dialect of Y (language)

Y has the dialects X and Z

But Y is *never* a language of dialect X!

Multilingualism: the ability to use more than two languages.

Most countries are multilingual -- they contain several ethnic groups in contact. Speakers in multilingual communities use different languages in different context . These languages most times acquired naturally, and shifting from one to another is not problematic.

However, the languages involved in multicultural communities are *not spoken with equal command by the individuals*:

“Multilingualism involving balanced, native-like command of all the languages in the repertoire is rather uncommon. Typically, multilinguals have varying degrees of command of the different repertoires.”

Important: “ Multilinguals develop competence in each of the codes to the extend that they need it and for the contexts in which each of the languages is used.”

Stridhar: *Societal multilingualism*. 1996.

Bukavu: a multilingual community. Study the example on p. 19.

Tukano: a multilingual community between Columbia and Brazil in the Amazon.

- Men are not allowed to have a wife who speaks the same language;
- In every household two languages are spoken;
- In the village the men speak the same language, but every woman speaks a different language;
- The children speak one language to the father and another to the mother, and a third, fourth, etc. with different female neighbours in the village;
- Speaking several languages is natural in that community – apparently the individuals are unable to tell visitors, how many languages they speak and how well they speak them.

Comment on the Tukano case!

2. Domains of language use. Modelling variety or code choice.

Domains may be: family, school, working place, playground etc.

Study the examples #2 (p. 21) and #3 (p. 22). Comment on the choice of language in relation to the domains listed in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 (pp. 22, 23).

The concept of domain implies three social factors relevant to the speaker's choice of code from the speech repertoire of the community:

- participants
- setting
- topic

Study the model representing the choice of code by the bilingual Portuguese-English speaker (Example 4 (p. 23), Figure 2.1 (p. 24)).

In addition to the importance of the *domains* when choosing a code, *social dimensions* are also relevant to the code choice:

The solidarity-social distance scale
The status scale
The formality scale
The referential-affective function scale

} these play a role in determining the code choice!
(Review these concepts in Chapter 1, Lecture #1).

Study the Exercise #4, p. 26 – compare your answer to the solution given on p. 48.

3. Diglossia

The term diglossia refers to situations when two distinct codes exist in the speech community, and these two codes are kept apart in their *functions*.

The classic definition of diglossia by Ferguson (1959) has been in usage ever since for identifying diglossic situations:

“DIGLOSSIA is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language ... there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superimposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respective body of written literature ... which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation”.

Ferguson: Diglossia. 1959.

There are three crucial features of diglossia (listed on p. 27):

- (i) Two distinct varieties of the same language are used in the community, with one regarded as high (or H) variety and the other a low (or L) variety.
- (ii) Each variety is used for quite distinct functions; H and L complement each other.
- (iii) No one uses the H variety in everyday conversation.

Study the Example #6, p. 27.

Additional examples:

Arabic -- regional varieties (L) vs. classical Arabic (H)
Greek -- Dhimotiki (L) vs. Katharévousa (H)
Haitian Creole (L) vs. standard French (H)
etc.

(pp. 27-29)

What about Latin? Manchu?

Diglossia with or without bilingualism:

Study Table 2.4 (p.30)!
Define the four possible scenarios and provide examples!

The scope of diglossia may be extended by way of recognizing that two codes are used in different situations – for example, Guarani and Spanish in Paraguay.

Here, only feature (ii) is relevant (see above), and features (i) and (iii) are not considered.

Study the Exercise #7 (p.31). Compare your answer to the solution on p. 49.

3.1 Changes in a diglossia situation

Diglossic situations may be *stable* (e.g., Arabic) or, one of the codes may *displace* the other (Latin in Europe lost its H position).

Study the English and the Greek examples on pp. 32-33.

4. Poliglossia

Poliglossia exists when more than two languages need to be recognized in describing *functional distributions* in the community.

Refer to the Bukavu example (Chapter 1)!

Study the poliglossic situation in Singapore: Table 2.5, p. 32.

5. Code switching or code mixing

- (i) One of the many forms of language contact phenomena.
- (ii) It can be understood by placing it in the double context of
 - a. verbal repertoires of a bilingual or multilingual community
 - b. verbal repertoires of individual members of the community
- (iii) A boundary-leveling (solidarity) or a boundary-maintaining (power) strategy.
- (iv) It contributes to the understanding of the relationship between social processes and linguistic forms.

When may code switching occur??

Consider: domain, social situation, expressing identity and relationship between participants (solidarity/social distance dimension!), change in status relations and/or formality, topic, changes for affective functions, etc.

Study the examples illustrating these potential triggers for code switching (pp. 34-40)!

Code switchings may be of two types:

- (i) *Situational code-switching*: Linguistic varieties symbolize the social situations (participants, status, formality, etc.).

This type of code-switching is *unmarked* (=expected!)

The topic relates to the function of the speech event; for example, Chinese students speak Mandarin between each other, except when discussing their studies – they switch to English (p. 37).

- (ii) *Metaphorical code-switching*: Misuse of codes (= in unconventional context) has the effect of inappropriateness (= normally the other code is operative).

This type of switching is *marked* (=unexpected!)

The “marked choice” can be

- (i) positive: when it narrows social distance
- (ii) negative: when it increases social distance

(Scotton: “Code-switching as indexical of social negotiations,” 1989.)

There are no obvious reasons for the switch -- the switch “symbolizes a set of social meanings, and the speaker draws on the association of each, just as people use metaphors to represent complex meanings”. (p. 42)

Study the Example #17, p. 41.

When do we speak about *code-mixing*??

Two approaches:

- (i) code-mixing may occur because of incompetence, because of indiscriminate, random use of one or the other code.
- (ii) The switchings are well-motivated, reflecting skill on the part of the bilingual speaker – a distinctive conversational style: *fused lect*, a special kind of metaphorical switching.

Study the Example #18, p. 42.

6. Lexical borrowing

PROBLEM: Distinguishing SWITCHING from BORROWING in bilingual or multilingual situations.

Borrowing: High degree of integration of a linguistic item from L1 to L2.

e.g., English *zebra* < Bantu
kayak < Inuit

Swahili *kiplefiti* ‘traffic island’
(< keep left)

Plural: *viplefiti* ‘traffic islands’
(words with *ki-* in Sg. have *vi-* in the Pl.)

“Borrowed words are adapted to the speakers’ first language”. (p. 43)

Interference: Lower degree of integration

e.g., *crepe* (< French)
French *le milk shake* (< Am. English)

7. Linguistic constraints

Question: Is it possible to predict code-switching on linguistic grounds?
Probable (but highly debated!) answers:

- (i) intra-sentential switches (=within sentences) only occurs when the grammars of the two languages match: “the equivalence constraint”

Study the Example #20, p. 45.

- (ii) The two languages involved have a matrix vs. embedded sentence relationship. The MLF (matrix language frame) provides the structure of the sentence, the content words will be from the other language.

Study Example #21, p.45.

Most sociolinguists deny the existence of universal linguistic constraints responsible for code-switching.

