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Code Switching and Code Mixing Among Oriya Trilingual Children - A Study

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Introduction

Code switching, according to Hudson (1999), is the inevitable consequence of bilingualism. Anyone who speaks more than one language chooses between them according to the situation. Normally, a person chooses a language which is comprehensible to the hearer.

In situational code switching, languages coincide with changes from one external situation to another. In case of metaphorical code switching, choice of languages determines the situation. Similarly, in case of code mixing, a fluent bilingual speaker, while speaking to another fluent bilingual speaker, changes language without any change at all in the situation. The changes generally take place more or less randomly as far as the subject matter is concerned.

In modern times, Oriya children of urban Orissa in India learn to speak Oriya, Hindi and English right from their childhood. As a result, frequent code switching and code mixing are noticed in children's speech, which form their natural way of speaking. As the speakers are unaware of how much and what kind of code switching they produce, the analyst too finds it difficult to assign clear communicative functions to every individual code switch.

According to Ghloros (1990), there is a relation between patterns of code switching and their motivation. This has been demonstrated in a number of studies. Many authors ascertained that, at the lexical level, children switch

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codes more frequently than do adults from the same social group. It appears that children are less capable of concealing lexical gaps in their speech than adults. Code switch of adults are more complex and depends on their discourse skills which is undeveloped in children.

Background of the present study

Oriya is the official languages of Orissa, a state in eastern India. Along with Oriya, English is used as language of education and administration. English is the medium of instruction in various private English medium schools right from pre-nursery classes. Oriya and Hindi are taught as 2nd and 3rd languages subsequently. English also serves as the common language of communication in a multilingual situation. Due to the impact of various entertainment programs and movies in television advertisements and in newspapers, Oriya children learn Hindi right from early childhood. Many urban elite Oriyas speak to their children in English along with Oriya. Some parents also mix codes while talking to their children. Hence, the present day urban Oriya children are growing up learning all the three languages simultaneously.

Aim of the study

The aim of the present study is to show how urban Oriya children acquire two or three languages from a very early age. The study also aims at presenting the process of early language socialization of Oriya children growing up in trilingual environment. The question that I will seek to answer here is: What is the pattern of code switching in the language interaction of children?

Tools and measures

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For the study, I used participant observation methodology which focuses on natural behavior. My methodology included both observation and recording of speech (Gardner – Ghlors (1991), Sebba (1993), Fasold (1984). I chose participant observation method to observe “who was speaking what language and to whom and when” (Hymes, 1972) with a view to determine the pattern of code switching and the extent of the use of Oriya language during play time interaction.

Further, Matrix Language Frame Model formulated by Myers-Scotton (1993) was used to see if it can be applied in the conditions of trilingualism and communication in three languages such as Oriya, English and Hindi among Oriya speakers. According to Matrix language Frame Model, the languages used by bilingual speakers are defined as Matrix language (L1) and an embedded language (L2). This model claims that bilingual people always use the morphological structure of the matrix language when they switch codes.

Data collection

Casual playtime conversations among 100 Standard I (Grade 1) students were audio-recorded, which formed the primary data for the study. These students were chosen through simple random sampling method out of 500 students of various private schools with comparable schooling conditions, a comparable socio-economic status of children’s families in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Orissa. The secondary data were collected from the written sources. The primary data was then transcribed and analyzed.

Analysis

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While analyzing language choice and language use among the trilingual Oriya children, it was found that the children were experiencing language shift. Patterns of dominant Oriya language used with a range of interlocutors from Hindi and English helped to establish the vitality and the extent of the use of Oriya language which is the mother tongue of the chosen students.

This study is important to determine the extent of mother tongue use. Language maintenance would appear to be at risk where interactions in the ethnic languages are minimal and manifested in single word responses, or if ethnic language production is deficient and caused communication break downs and where the use of communicative strategies likes code switch and code alternation are extensive (David, 2005).

In the present study, it was found that though the students are exposed to Hindi and English simultaneously along with Oriya, their mother tongue, there is no fixed pattern of code switch as seen in a few examples in tables I, II and III.

Table-I

Oriya with some Hindi and English code mix and code switch

Example – 1 : - Sita ku(O)	high fever (E)	əchi(O)
Sita to	high fever	has
“Sita has high fever”.		
- Mane, (O)	aj (H)	no exam how lucky
“Meaning today no exam how lucky”		
- Kāsh (H)	mereko (H)	fever (E) thāānta(O)
I wish	I have	fever had
Example -2 : - Tiffin (E)	re (O)	tu (O) what you bought ?

Tiffin in you what did you bring?

“What did you get in the Tiffin”.

- Sirf (H) magi and (E) kela (H)

Only magi and banana

- I have only (E) Puri (H) āu (O) bhəja (O)

I have only Puri and fried vegetable

Table-II

Hindi with some English Oriya code Switch and code mix

Example (3)

- Because (E) ajaŋkə (O) ghərə ku (O) went maĩ nəhĩ āi (H)

Because grand pa's house to I did not come

- 'I did not come because I went to grandpa's house'.

Example (4)

- Kyon ki mere pas (H) only ten rupees (E) hei (H)

Because me with only ten rupees has

- So what? (E) Meĩne (H) dui tənkarə gupchup (O) khaya (H)

So what? I two rupees with gupchup ate

Table-III

English with some Oriya and Hindi Code switch and code mix

Example 5:

- Mummy gave (E) garəṁ gərəṁ alu bhaja au puri in the morning (O)

Mummy gave hot hot potato fry and puri in the morning

- Mujhe (H) puri bhəḷə lage (O)

To me Puri like

Example-6

- Saila gave me (E) torə (O) pencil box (E)

Saila gave me yours pencil box

- So, you took it, yours (E) kəhĩnki kiNi luNi (O)?

So, you took it, yours why bought not ?

It was also observed that no child was following a fixed pattern and it was also difficult to notice the degree of language proficiency. All seem to be quite confident in talking all the three languages. Although the school environment is English only, during play time the children mix the codes which forms natural way of speaking. The same children speak only in English in the classroom.

Conclusion

The empirical data analyzed here provide useful information about the language development of trilingual children. In the process of the simultaneous acquisition of two or three languages, they are at different stages of development. Borrowing words from another language is a natural process for the trilingual children. People from different cultures have different attitude towards bilingualism/trilingualism in individuals. In different culture, there is variation in communicative skills as well as the evaluation of early skills acquired by children in domestic environment (Haslett, 1989). According to Schieffelin (1994) early language socialization of children depends on their verbal surroundings.

The present study showed that Oriya children's conversations are full of code mix and code switch between Oriya, English and Hindi that seem to appear in their mind as a single code. The speakers seem to be unaware of how much and what kinds of the code switch and code mix they produce. The whole pattern of language alternation seems to function as unmarked choice. This in turn suggests that the pattern has some internal consistency in the language since how else could someone choose to speak it. In that case the patterns of alternation may be more adequately labeled a mix lect which exists side by side with monolingual register or varieties of two languages that make up the mixture (Backus 2002). The children who grow up in such a community Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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acquire this way of speaking as their primary language. This would be in stark contrast with the children who are normally described in studies of bilingual language acquisition, children who are growing up in families in which the father and the mother each speak different languages. In such cases, the children are taught not to code switch. What they are taught is to separate their languages and use the right language with the right person. Bilingual persons who have an imbalanced proficiency in two languages are inclined to speak the dominant language most of the time due to their limited ability to express themselves properly in the non-dominant language.

In the present study, we found that the trilingual Oriya children acquire the three languages as a single code and are not aware of the process of code switching in this respect the Myers – Scotton’s MLF Model (1993) turns out to be inadequate, i.e., it is not universally applicable as it is claimed to be.

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Smita Sinha, Ph.D.
Department of Linguistics
Berhampur University
Berhampur 760007
Orissa, India
smitas6@yahoo.com