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## Patterns of Code Switching in Children

Mili Mary Mathew, M.Sc. Speech Language Pathology

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### Abstract

Two types of code switching have been recognized by most researchers: Intra-sentential code switching used for switches within sentences, and inter-sentential code switching for switches between sentences (Schmitt, 2004). India being a country with a rich merge of different languages, essentially most children across the country are exposed to two or more languages. Depending on the socioeconomic status and geographical location, children can be either sequential or simultaneous bilinguals or multi-linguals. Since inter-sentential and intra-sentential patterns of code switching are used by proficient adult speakers, it is necessary to see if the same patterns are seen in children also. 8 children, 4 males and 4 females within the age range of 14-16 years participated in the study. They were instructed to describe a picture, depicting a farm, in two languages Kannada and English separately. The result revealed that code switching to English was present in all the participants (13 %), while speaking in Kannada. All the participants showed only intra-sentential switch. The location of the switch was on semantic

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structures, namely concrete nouns and action words. It was concluded that the patterns of code switching in the studied children were not similar to previous accounts on children and adults from other linguistic backgrounds

## **INTRODUCTION**

In many situations of languages in contact, constituents of one language can be found with the constituents of another language in a number of linguistic phenomena, namely lexical borrowing, transferring, interference, calquing, diffusion, reflexification, code switching/mixing, etc. (Annamalai 1989). Code switching and code mixing are the two linguistic phenomena claimed to be the most prevalent and common modes of interaction among bilingual speakers.

The earliest understanding of code switching defined bilingual people as individuals who switch “from one language to the other according to appropriate changes in speech situation” (Naseh 1997: 202). In recent literature, there has been some variation in defining this term in comparison to code mixing. Muysken (2000) refers to code switching as the rapid succession of several languages in a single speech event, and refers to code mixing as all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence. Few others comment that switching is normally done for the duration of a unit of discourse, but mixing is not normally done with full sentences from another language with its grammar (Annamalai, 1989). According to Bentahila and Davies (1983) the act of choosing one code rather than another must be distinguished from the act of mixing the two codes together to produce something which might itself be called a third code. Therefore, code mixing is referred to as the process of mixing of elements from two languages in one utterance, and code switching as the product of this mix.

Language experts across the globe have investigated in their experiments the causes, functions, characteristics and effects of code-switching and code-mixing. Such investigations on the causes of the phenomena, for instance, have revealed sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors. One reason maybe bilingualism or language contact which results in lexical borrowings and mixture of a new language and vernacular expression (Cheng & Butler, 1989). Some others are status, integrity, self-pride, comfortability and prestige (Akere, 1977; Bokamba, 1989; Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)  
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Hymes, 1962; Kachru, 1989; Kamwangamalu, 1989). Other causes include modernisation, westernization, efficiency, professionalism and social advancement (Kachru, 1989; Kamwangamalu, 1989). According to these scholars, some of the functions of code-switching and code-mixing are intra-group identity (Gumperz, 1982); poetic creativity (Kachru, 1989) and the expression of modernization (Kamwangamalu, 1989).

One of the major characteristics of both phenomena is their imposition as the norm of language use in the most bilingual communities (Kamwangamalu, 1989). Among their effects, however, are undermining of certain traditional values (Kachru, 1989), innovations in the structure of one of the other of the languages code-switched and code-mixed (Kamwangamalu, 1989) and making one language to be more dominant than the other, thereby causing the individual to switch always to the dominant language (Cheng & Butler, 1989).

Also, two types of code switching have been recognized by most researchers: Intra-sentential code switching used for switches within sentences, and inter-sentential code switching for switches between sentences. Intra-sentential code switching is divided into four types: single word switches [hosa box]; mazed switches [because uh hogi]; phrase switches [nanu kote to him]; and, hybrid switches [enjoy madofying]. Inter-sentential coding occurs when the speaker changes language between sentences in relation to their own previous utterance in a conversation, or the use of tags [ok, ok , maduthini]

Most of the studies done in code switching has focused on adults and remain silent on the implication this phenomena has on language acquisition right from childhood. Becoming a bilingual is a formidable task for children. Developing the communicative competence to achieve success in conveying and understanding meaning in its many aspects is a time-consuming, highly complex process that reaches far beyond surface assessments of sounds, words and sentences. The process of becoming a bilingual is a dynamic one, engaging and challenging children's ability to use two language systems for communication with speakers of differing languages and culture.

Becoming bilingual is further compounded for children by the timing for the acquisition of the two languages. For some children the process begins at or nearly at the onset of language, in infancy, as a result of dual language input from parents. The result is first-language bilingualism, a process of simultaneously acquiring two languages (Swain, 1972). This type of developmental bilingualism is described for the acquisition of two languages before age 3. When the process of acquiring another language begins after this point, sequential or successive bilingualism occurs in which one language follows the first in the acquisition order.

### **Need for the Study**

India being a country with a rich merge of different languages, essentially most children across the country are exposed to two or more languages. Depending on the socioeconomic status and geographical location, children can be either sequential or simultaneous bilinguals or multilinguals. Few studies have been done on the pattern of code switching seen in simultaneous and sequential bilingual children. One such study done on multilingual children (Swiss-German, English and standard German) revealed that there were no differences in the usage of both inter-sentential and intra-sentential patterns of code switching in both groups. Within the intra-sentential type 'hybrids' were observed in not-so-proficient speakers (Hubbell-Weinhold, 2004). Müller & Cantone (2008) suggest that future studies should examine types of acquisition separately, to have a better knowledge on the patterns of code switching seen in children. This justifies the need for this study, in that; one has to have knowledge on the patterns of code switching used by the children, which might also reflect on the proficiency of usage of languages.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to understand code switching in sequential multilingual children, with respect to the types of code switching, i.e. whether both inter-sentential and intra-sentential types are present as reported in bilinguals. It also was intended to provide information on the pattern of linguistic encoding for the instances of code switching observed.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants:**

8 children, 4 males and 4 females participated in the study. All the children were within the age range of 14-16 years. They were from multilingual, middle socio-economic backgrounds and studying in a Government English medium school, in the city of Mangalore. The language backgrounds of the children were noted. They were all screened for communication and hearing abilities.

### **Material**

A scene depicting activities in a farm was selected for the study. This was presented as a black and white picture card.

### **Instrumentation**

A Sony handy cam, with a steady shot, good optical zoom and built-in surround microphone was used for recording the task.

### **Procedure**

The participants were interviewed individually in a quiet room. They were provided with the picture card and encouraged to describe the picture in Kannada as well as in English. They were seated facing a bilingual listener who was unaware of the contents of the picture. The recording was done after 1 minute of the introduction of the picture.

### **Analysis**

The following analysis was carried out separately in Kannada and English:

- a) The presence of code switching was noted
- b) The types of code switching was noted
- c) The linguistic encoding at the instance of code switch was noted

## RESULTS

The analysis of the recorded samples in Kannada and English revealed the following results which are as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: The frequency, types and location code switching behaviours in TICH I Kannada and English

S no:	Gender	Languages known (years of exposure)				CS in K			CS in E		
		T	K	E	H	% (total no of words)	Type	Location	%	Type	Location
1	F	10	8	8	5	28.12(32)	IAS	9names	0	IAS	0
2	F	10	10	10	5	20.00(45)	IAS	8 names 1 action word	0	IAS	0
3	F	12	10	10	5	14.63(41)	IAS	4 names 2 action words	0	IAS	0
4	F	12	10	10	5	20.52(39)	IAS	6 names 2 action words	0	IAS	0
5	M	13	12	12	10	4.25(47)	IAS	2 names	0	IAS	0
6	M	12	10	10	5	9.30(43)	IAS	4 names	0	IAS	0
7	M	-	13	11	5	12.5(32)	IAS	4 names	0	IAS	0
8	M	4	13	10	5	7.69(39)	IAS	3 names	4.34(46)	IAS	2 names

NOTE:

T –TULU

K-KANNADA

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H-HINDI

E-ENGLISH

CS- CODE SWITCHING

IAS-INTRASENTENTIAL

From the above table it can be seen that, code switching to English was present in all the participants on an average of 14.62% (range: 28.12% to 7.69%) of the time, predominantly while speaking in Kannada. All participants, except for one, did not code switch while speaking in English. All the participants showed only intra-sentential code switch. The location of the code switch was on semantic structures, namely concrete nouns and action words.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study done on 8 multilingual children has revealed a few interesting findings in the context of nature of use of multiple languages.

From the observation of the data it can be understood that though code switching was present in all the children (average 14.62%), there were individual variations seen (ranged from 28.12% - 7.69%). These differences were also evident in the samples of male and female children. Females (20.81%) used more instances of switching than males (8.43%). But, since the sample size was small it would be too early to comment on gender differences in these children. But there have been studies done on adults stating that females tend to code switch more than males. The reason attributed to this observation is that females are inclined to be better in their mastery and usage of multiple languages than males (Miller, 1984).

Another finding was the rigidity in the usage of English. All, except one child, did not code switch to any language while speaking in English. Also none of the children switched to other languages like Tulu or Hindi in spite of their exposure to these languages. This could be because of sociolinguistic factors, which points out that since these children are being brought up in a society which considers English as a language used for educational and occupational purposes, it is possible that English takes the stance of the dominant language. This is also reported in other cultures (Cheng & Butler, 1989).

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The analysis of the types of code switching revealed that all the children used intra-sentential pattern. Previous studies have commented that proficient language users, both adults and children, show both inter-sentential and intra-sentential patterns (Schmitt, 2004; Hubbell-Weinhold, 2004). The findings in this study may be a reflection on the fact that though these children have been attending an English medium school with exposure to the language for a good number of years, they still were not proficient users. The reason for this could be the fact that they were all from middle socioeconomic status families and the usage of English was restricted to school environment.

It was also noted that all the children used only single-word switches within the intra-sentential type. Studies have revealed that proficient speakers show a combination of single-word switches, phrase switches, mazed switches and hybrid switches (Hubbell-Weinhold, 2004). This could again be a reflection of the possible effects of the environment that limits the use of English in these children.

The analysis of the linguistic encoding of the single-word switch also revealed that most children switched to the dominant language only to represent concrete nouns. Few children code switched for action words. Previous literature has provided evidence that bilinguals code switch on different linguistic categories, like nouns, pronouns, action words, prepositions etc. (Miller, 1984). The rigidity in the switching behaviours of the children in the study could again be reflective of the lack of proficient use of the dominant language in these children.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study revealed that the patterns of code switching in the multilingual children are not the same. Moreover there might be many socio-linguistic factors at play that prevent these children from being proficient speakers. The sample under consideration in this study does reflect on factors of socioeconomic status, levels of exposure to English, gender etc., that might interact and affect the language learning proficiency in children. Further studies have to be undertaken to understand the variables that might affect code switching on larger groups of children, which will yield valuable information on the trends of acquisition of multiple languages.

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