**Bar-Ilan University**

**Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies**

**Reasons and Motivations for Codeswitching in Postcolonial Settings**

**Final Paper**

**The Intralingual and Interlingual Space: Implications for Translation**

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2. **Introduction**

This paper discusses the use of codeswitching (CS) within bilingual and multilingual communities in postcolonial settings, with a focus on the reasons and motivations for doing so. I will begin by summarizing what we reviewed in class regarding CS as well as the paper about Hinglish by Anderson-Finch (2011) that we discussed. I will then present a paper about CS in South African primary schools (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000). Finally, I discuss the phenomenon as it is presented in these two settings and note the similarities and differences between these two cases of CS, as well as the effect that education has on this phenomenon.

1. **Codeswitching: a short review**

**2.1 Class discussion**

When there is a certain level of bilingualism or multilingualism, CS can take place. CS is switching between two languages within a single conversation or verbal exchange. CS doesn’t necessarily have to be between words but can also be within words, such as adding a suffix from one language to a word in a different language.

There are different reasons my CS might take place, such as filling vocabulary gaps; attempting to achieve prestige; showing belonging to a certain group (inclusion), or the opposite (exclusion); substituting a word in a second language when there is difficulty retrieving it in the original language; habitus; etc.

**2.2 “Hinglish” as a communicative resource**

In this paper by Anderson-Finch (2011), Hinglish is used to describe Hindi-English CS. The paper seeks to show that CS is a skilled strategy that expands options for linguistic and social meanings. While Hinglish is viewed by some as a random jumble of the two languages, and CS in general is seen as an inability to sustain a conversation using just one language, this paper describes it as a deliberate choice that bears both structure and meaning. Hinglish is not limiting, but rather expands the possibilities for bilinguals who can use it as a resource to their disposal. The main example given is that of bilingual repetition – repeating the same utterance in a different language. While some see this phenomenon as merely ensuring comprehension, this paper shows other purposes to using this strategy: for example, for the sake of cohesion, contrast, and focus, which help create meaning beyond the semantic content of the utterance (Anderson-Finch, 2011).

This paper (Anderson-Finch, 2011) makes several observations regarding Hinglish. First, in reference to the markedness model (Myers-Scotton, 1983; Kieswetter, 1995), using Hinglish is seen as the unmarked choice, whereas the choice to use one language only is the marked choice (Anderson-Finch, 2011). Second, while English is often associated with official, Western, global issues, and Hindi as associated with familiar, familial, traditional issues, this distinction doesn’t seem to come into play in day-to-day Hinglish CS. Rather, Hinglish gives meaning to the micro-level, face-to-face interactions and has less to do with historical or societal context on a macro level (Anderson-Finch, 2011).

On this micro level, what the author proposes is that since language has several alternatives for expressing the same thing, it stands to reason that bilinguals have even more options to express themselves because they have more than one language at their disposal. By using bilingual repetition, they can take advantage of the differences between the languages to create additional meaning to their verbal exchanges. This is an important cognitive and social resource. As the author points out, if choices made within a language are systematic and purposeful (e.g., the use of one particular word and not another), then so is the choice to switch between two available languages (Anderson-Finch, 2011).

This can create cohesion and contrast – creating cohesion through bilingual repetition and contrast through the differences between the languages, such as marking specific words. These are interactionally meaningful without invoking outside context. Anderson-Finch considers Hinglish on a macro level overly simplistic and dichotomous – historical, social, political etc. – which doesn’t match the evidence seen in the study (Anderson-Finch, 2011).

Anderson-Finch (2011) suggests that similar phenomena of CS might take place in other postcolonial countries. This led me to think about other places that might indeed have similar situations, which led me to the following study.

1. **Codeswitching in South African primary schools**

**3.1 Study objective**

This is an exploratory study by Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000) which examines the (1) motivations and (2) context for CS in English-medium primary schools in South Africa.

**3.2 Cultural background**

South Africa has 11 official languages, not to mention unofficial languages. Most of these are native African languages, with the exception of English and Afrikaans (the languages of the British and Dutch settlers, respectively). Most South Africans speak more than one language, meaning that South Africa is a fertile ground for CS (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000).

One possible explanation for this occurrence of CS is what is referred to as the “interconnectedness of languages” (Makoni, 1999). Simply put, certain South African languages bear a resemblance to each other. They can be divided into four groups: Nguni, seSotho, xiTsonga, and tshiVenda, and the languages within each group bear similarities both in their written and spoken forms. They may even be considered by some (Herbert, 1992) as dialects of the same language that have been artificially divided into separate languages. According to Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000), this separation was used as a divisive tool of the Apartheid regime. The similarity – or interconnectedness – between these languages is what allows for mixed codes (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000).

During the Apartheid regime (1948-1994), as part of the education language policies, schools were divided according to language. Today, the schools include students from mixed backgrounds who speak various languages. Many students are multilingual. (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000).

**3.3 Theoretical background**

CS in this paper is defined as both inter- and intra-sentential mixing (Myers-Scotton, 1993a). It involves the mixing of words and phrases from more than one language within a sentence or conversation. This paper addresses two models by Myers-Scotton in reference to CS: the Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton, 1983) and the Matrix Language Frame Model (Myers-Scotton, 1988).

The Matrix Language Frame Model recognizes a matrix language, which is the dominant language and provides the syntactic frame for the CS, and an embedded language, which is the secondary language used. There may be more than one embedded language (Myers-Scotton, 1988).

The Markedness Model says that the choice to codeswitch can carry extra-social meaning beyond the semantic meaning of the words. A code is either marked or unmarked: unmarked is neutral and carries no extra meaning; marked conveys a meta-message, or extra-social meaning (Myers-Scotton, 1988).

Kamwangamalu (1998) also talks about the element of social context, arguing that CS is a dynamic phenomenon. Kieswetter (1995) suggests social variables that may be the target of CS: identity, status, group solidarity, etc.

There are many studies exploring the phenomenon of CS in South Africa, more specifically in primary schools. According to Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000), there is agreement amongst researchers that CS in these instances is a communicative tool and a valuable resource that takes a certain level of skill and language proficiency.

**3.4 Methods**

The study observed 40 multilingual students, aged six to ten, in two primary schools in Johannesburg, South Africa. The teaching language in these schools was English, while Afrikaans and isiZulu were taught as school subjects. Almost all 11 languages were represented amongst the participants, and about half of them spoke English as a second language. The children were recorded during lessons and lunch breaks (the recordings were then transcribed). The CS was examined in these two different contexts: formal (during classes) and informal (during lunch breaks) (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000).

**3.5 Results**

In the formal setting of the classroom, the reasons observed for CS were defiance or solidarity. An example of defiance was when a student spoke in an African language in class, knowing that it is forbidden (only English must be spoken). An example of CS for the sake of solidarity is when a student used a common language to try and curry favor with another student to whom she is speaking (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000).

While CS in the classroom was relatively infrequent, it occurred much more in the informal setting - the playground. CS in this sort of environment – where English is the dominant language but there are many multilinguals – is so common that it seems to be the norm. When the goal is simply to relay a clear message understood by everyone, it is considered unmarked (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000).

In situations of marked CS, where a meta-message is being conveyed, the paper lists several motivations. According to Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000), these are: CS as a directive function, which serves to include or exclude someone from a conversation; CS as an exploratory choice, which aims to explore the language preferences of the addressees; CS as a quotation, used as a direct quote of an utterance in a different language; CS as an indication of ethnic identity and solidarity; CS as reiteration, to reinforce or emphasize something specific; CS as neutrality, a strategy to avoid speaking one particular language; and CS as an attempt to hide one’s identity. Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000) divide the CS they observed in the study into these categories, presenting an example of for each of these specific motivations.

**3.6 Conclusions**

Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000) conclude that the CS taking place in primary schools has specific aims, depending on the context and specific situation. They see the interconnectedness of language as a main reason for the frequent occurrence of CS. They also consider the use of CS as a potential teaching strategy, which would help cater to bilingual and multilingual learners instead of the current policy, which favors English speakers and doesn’t allow for plurality of languages (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000).

1. **Discussion of Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000)**

**4.1 Codeswitching in South Africa**

Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000) present many examples from the data collected in the experiment, each categorized under a specific motivation based on Kieswetter’s (1995) social factors that tend to come up during CS. However, some of the examples they present may have other possible explanations that do not fit into these categories of motivation for CS. For example, what is presented as an attempt to show solidarity or present a certain identity may simply be a speaker reverting to their mother tongue for the sake of ease or fluency.

The interconnectedness of language as presented by Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, (2000), which is claimed to be a major reason for the frequent occurrence of CS, does not seem to play a major role in the results of this study. Out of the 12 examples shown in the results, only three present CS between languages from the same major grouping. Most of the instances of CS involve English, which is to be expected as the study was conducted in an English medium school, but there were also instances of CS between native African languages – just not necessarily from the same language family.

According to Slabbert & Finlayson (1999), The more intense the contact between languages has become, the more complex the exchange of linguistic items has become. People wanted to transcend and break down the ethnic barriers forced upon them by the Apartheid regime. CS was a way of doing so, as it is usually serves as a form of accommodation rather than alienation. Without a language majority it became a melting pot for all the languages. The patterns of CS and range of languages is dependent on many factors: political factors, the status of the different languages, functional value – how many people understand it – etc. After the Apartheid regime ended, two major shifts occurred in regard to languages: a shift from Eurocentric to Afrocentric, and a shift from a lingua franca to the use of multiple languages (Slabbert & Finlayson, 1999). This could provide an alternative explanation for the high frequency of CS.

**4.2 Codeswitching in South African classrooms**

Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000) assert that CS deserves a place in education in the South African school system, specifically because of the multitude of bilingual and multilingual learners. According to Wei & Martin (2009), CS is “perhaps, the most common, unremarkable and distinctive feature of bilingual behavior” and often goes unnoticed in multilingual settings. In their opinion, what brings CS to the forefront in the context of the classroom is the language policies that seek to limit or even prohibit it. These policies – top-down language practices – often clash with what happens in reality in the classrooms – bottom-up language practices – as was seen in Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000). Wei & Martin (2009) assert that there is a monolingual ideology influencing the language policies at school. Additionally, CS is considered a flawed mode of communication and is perceived as inadequacy, while English is considered the language of choice. Students may not be able to engage with the study material if it is taught in a language they cannot understand (Wei & Martin).

* 1. **Differences and similarities between Hinglish codeswitching and codeswitching in South African schools**

The main similarity seen in both Anderson-Finch (2011) and Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000) is that the use of both Hinglish and South African CS are seen as a tool or resource which serves a specific purpose. It is not a lack of lingual proficiency – quite the opposite, it takes skill and understanding of social situations to be used successfully. In both cases using CS is such a common phenomenon that it can be considered an unmarked choice and is the norm in many settings. Interestingly, while the use of Hinglish is generally seen as the unmarked choice (Anderson-Finch, 2011), South African CS is considered unmarked if it is only used to relay a clear message, and marked if it relays extra meaning (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000).

India and South Africa are both postcolonial countries where English was the colonial language. That past reality continues to have an effect to this day, and in both cases English is considered a “high” or “superior” language, which may affect the choice to use or not use it in conversation (Anderson-Finch,2011; Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000). In the case of Hinglish, Anderson-Finch (2011) asserts that it is less affected by the macro-level, while in South Africa it seems to have a greater effect. However, this may be due to the specific setting of South African primary schools and not be an overarching theme. While the Indian subjects in the study by Anderson-Finch (2011) attended English-medium schools, there is not much other information regarding their educational background; therefore, it is not directly comparable.

In conclusion, it seems that there are many parallels and similarities between these two postcolonial countries. It would be interesting to investigate CS in additional postcolonial countries and to observe to what extent education affects the language habits formed in these settings.

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