

‘Be quiet niños, please!’ Uses of Code-Switching in Four-Year-Old Monolingual Children’s
Second Language Acquisition’

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1. Introduction

Code-Switching is, according to Gumperz (1982:97), a phenomenon in which “speakers rely on juxtaposition of grammatically distinct subsystems to generate conversational inferences”. The broad use of code-switching in diverse contexts and with at least two languages in contact has made this language practice be one of behavioural features of bilinguals’ speech which has been studied most (cf. Gregori and Alcantud 2012).

Additionally, code-switching seems to accomplish an important communicative function which includes conversational purposes, that is the reason why it is a very interesting aspect of sociolinguistics to be researched. Nowadays, the development of educational provision is reaching more and more social strata. This fact, together with a wider use of new technologies and globalization, has “served to accentuate our sense of a visibly and audibly multilingual modern world” (Milroy and Muysken 1995:1). One of the consequences of this modernization has been the incorporation of second languages in the subject syllabus at earlier and earlier ages and, as a result, some new ways of communication are being created from this contact between two or more languages; this explains second language acquisition. When children are in contact with second language teachers, code switching is one of the natural devices they use in order to communicate. In fact, the “equivalence constraint on code-switching may be used to measure degree of bilingual ability” (Poplack 1980:581). At the same time, teachers make use of code-switching within the class with the purpose of achieving a more fluent communication, with their students, among other reasons. It is thus the objective of this article to analyze in which situations code-switching is used inside a second language acquisition classroom of monolingual beginners.

To achieve this objective, I selected, recorded and analyzed a class that consisted of four-year-old Spanish monolingual children in their first days of English classes, in order to study the use of code-switching by the teachers. The most remarkable conclusion drawn from the present study is that code-switching is used by teachers and students in a very high percentage to call beginners attention and to make communication and language learning easier.

The structure of this article is as follows: I will first discuss some general issues regarding-code switching such as its definition and types. I will later describe at some length the presence of code-switching within the field of language acquisition and I will attempt to restrict the boundaries of the research to code-switching used by teachers, consciously or unconsciously in the early-aged monolingual second language acquisition process. I will subsequently expose a case study carried out in a four-year-old monolingual class. This will finally allow me to draw some conclusions and comments on the uses of code-switching as a teaching/learning strategy for the sake of communication.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 General scope of code-switching

This section is devoted to depicting the use of code-switching in a broad spectrum regarding its functions, types and uses.

Code-switching can be located within a wide range of linguistic contexts, from “highly educated bilinguals [...] talking among themselves, alternating between two codes which closely reflect the relevant monolingual norms, to situations where social multilingualism is the general norm” (Gardner-Chloros 1995:68). Many scholars have been particularly influential in the search for general principles underlying code-switching: Weinreich (1953), Hangen (1950), Gumperz (1972-1984) and Poplack (1980) to mention but a few. Hence, I have made the decision of solely summing up the information gathered from all of these authors and focus on one definition:

Code-switching may be understood as the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation. The use of this alternation will occur not only between the turns of different speakers in the conversation, but between utterances within a single turn, and even within a single utterance.

(Gregori & Alcantud 2012:62)

Code-switching is the use of two languages simultaneously or interchangeably; it is a non normative form of language and, according to Luisa Duran (cf. 1994, 1977) and Köppe and Meisel (1995:277), “is seen by linguists, psycholinguists and sociolinguists as part of the total natural language development and acquisition process”. Moreover, code-switching is perceived by Bourdieu (1977,1982) and Heller (1995:160) as “a means to call into play specific forms of linguistic and cultural knowledge”, a kind of linguistic procedure drawn in order to facilitate communication.

To have code switching happening, the speaker is supposed to have a certain degree of competence in both languages implied. Code-switching in bilingual speech comprises a significant issue to be researched, and it is considered by some authors, for example, Dabène and Moore (1995:24), “linguistically constrained, and not haphazard or the result of lack of competence in one, or both, of the languages”. Conversely, this is not the case of early-aged

monolinguals because I agree with Köppe and Meisel (1995:276) that early code-switching “can be simply accounted for by the lack of knowledge of these constraints”,

The children who are in their first months of second language acquisition, have a patent lack of knowledge in their second language (English as it is the case of this present study) which makes them look for words in their native language in order to communicate and so does their teacher (cf. Huang 2008). In other words, the use of code-switching on behalf of the teachers in these situations is due to the lack of competence in L2 of the children in their class, thus, code-switching can make communication not only easier but quicker and more efficient regarding mainly the accomplishing of orders.

Regarding the types of code-switching, there are uncountable classifications by many scholars; and though an exhaustive research on this issue is out of the scope of the present study, I would like to mention solely some of them. According to Cook (2008), there are seven types of code-switching: (i) Reported speech, (ii) Interjections, (iii) Topic switching, (iv) Speaker’s role, (v) Qualifying topic, (vi) Singling out one person and (vii) Ignorance.

On the other hand, Lipski (1982) speaks of a bilingual grammar especially during intrasentential code-switching in written text and states the following types: type I is the monolingual text in which there are some Spanish words within English literature or vice-versa; type II text is the bilingual text in which lines from the two languages alternate with switches at the phrase or sentence boundaries and type III text is the bilingual text which would include intrasentential code-switches, that is, it takes place across sentences or phrase boundaries (Ennaji 2005:141, Lesley and Muysken 1995:8), the most highly developed. He proposes a bilingual grammar constructed of a finely integrated blend of two languages.

In turn, Lipski (1982) states that code-switching provides evidence on two related planes: linguistic and psychological. “The psychological includes the situational variables that permit a switch to occur, and the linguistic includes factors that facilitate the switch and the precise form that a switched utterance takes”. For obvious reasons, grammatical models are not relevant to explain the use of code-switching in the situation under study (a four-year-old monolingual class learning a second language), but the choice and the alternation between English and Spanish is triggered by a psychological factor: the need of communication (Giacalone 1995: 46-47). Nevertheless, Gumperz (cf. 1982a) argues that this lack of competence is “not a deficit to be stigmatised but as additional resource through which a range of social and rhetorical meanings are expressed”.

2.2. Code switching in second language acquisition

In this section I will sketch the usage of code-switching in the framework of second language acquisition.

Regarding the field of second language acquisition, Ellis (1994:28) defines language transfer as the “incorporation of the L1 into the knowledge systems of the L2 which the learner is trying to build” and if there is the alternative use of the L1 and L2 within a communication act, then, it is considered code-switching.

Most research points out the study of code-switching in bilingual speech; nevertheless, there is lack of code-switching in the study within second language acquisition of early-aged monolinguals as both a communication and a learning strategy born from their lack of competence in L2. As Ellis (1994:187) suggests, “learners with limited L2 proficiency find few problems in performing the speech acts that are communicatively important to them but considerable difficulty in performing them in native-like ways”. Additionally, students tend to convey ‘rules of speaking’ from their L1 to L2 and they do not contribute to communicative acts as equals. For these reasons, in my view, code-switching is an essential device for the sake of communication.

With regard to the teacher, the use of code-switching is a communication and a teaching strategy as well (Tabouret-Keller 1995:344).

In turn, Sánchez and Marti (cf. 1999) state that ‘in the classroom where the teacher has decided that all communication should be in the foreign language, English can be viewed as the language of formal instruction and Spanish as the language of informal’ Conversely, they consider code-switching on the part of the student, and in my view also on the part of the teacher, as ‘a learning strategy which learners employ in order to understand the meaning of utterances and acquire the target language’. After mentioning these two uses of code switching, they distinguish three major areas for the analysis of code-switching in the classroom interaction: (i) Code switching as in group interaction: When the teacher or students make spontaneous comments, expressing humour, complaint, irony and so on in their native tongue. (ii) Code-switching as a learning strategy: Where students may ask about an expression or lexical item in the target language by expressing themselves in their mother tongue. They may explain the meaning of utterances by means of translation. (iii) Code-switching as a teaching strategy: Where utterances are translated into the native language in order to explain their meaning. The teacher may also elicit an utterance in the target language by presenting it in the students’ mother tongue.

Consecutively, Martin-Jones (199:93) identifies five communicative functions of code-switching in a class of English within a Chinese context: (i) for translation, (ii) as a “we code”, (iii) for procedures and directions, (iv) for clarification and (v) to check for understanding.

Additionally, Martin-Jones (199:98) argues that both actors in the teaching act, that is, teachers and students, use code-switching as a conversational tool in the classroom used to “demarcate different types of discourse” and thus, “code-switching can therefore be seen as a resource similar to some punctuation features in written discourse: a means of conveying

pragmatic information to interlocutors as to how a particular utterance is to be ‘read’ in context”. In fact, code switching sometimes takes place within the conversational turn at the same time as other “cues, prosodic and non-verbal” (cf. Zentella 1981, Lin 1990) such as changes of pitch and volume.

2.3. The English situation in the Valencian public primary school context.

In this section, it is my intention to shed some light on the current situation of the teaching and learning of English as a second language in the Valencian public primary school, a bilingual community in the East of Spain. The two languages in contact in this community are Spanish and Valencian. Understood by every person in Valencia, Valencian is spoken by part of the urban population and English is technically considered L3 at school by the ruling government (though, depending on the student could be L2).

By way of introduction, I shall briefly discuss that there is not much research carried out regarding the issue of third language acquisition in pre-primary school according to Cenoz (2003:2), nevertheless, most of these few existing studies show a positive influence of bilingualism in the acquisition of a third language (cf. Cenoz 2003:3, Cenoz & Genesee, 1998b; cf. Muñoz, 2000). The reasons for this positive influence are, as Cenoz (2003:3-4) argues, the linguistic interdependence, a bigger development of the metalinguistic conscience and of the teaching strategies.

At first sight, it seems that there is a genuine interest in children becoming trilingual (Spanish-Valencian-English) because they start studying English at earlier and earlier ages. Additionally, they keep on studying English for many years (six years at primary school, four years at secondary school and two years at bachillerato). However, the truth is that most children end their studies without being able to communicate properly in that language.

In my view, some of the reasons for this lack of good results is that there are no-specialized teachers teaching English in the primary school together with the fact that there is only one hour of the subject of English in pre-primary school (from 3 to 5 years) and up to two in the first cycle of the primary school, obviously, not sufficient. Furthermore, the great quantity of children in class makes it a cumbersome task to deal with adequate activities related to the main competences pointed by the European Framework of Reference for Education: reading, writing, listening and, above all, speaking¹.

Another issue to be taken into account is that there are different opinions among teachers of English concerning the methodology to be used in second language acquisition classes in Spanish public primary school: should the language be taught completely in English or might we use Spanish, at least at some stages of the lesson? The first option is the most spread one and, in fact, in my view, it should be the right one. The reality is that the Spanish

¹ For more information, consult: [http://sapiens.ya.com/antoniocantero/espana.htm#La escuela española](http://sapiens.ya.com/antoniocantero/espana.htm#La%20escuela%20espa%C3%B1ola)

language learning politic has not been competent enough to enhance the ability of our children concerning second or even third language acquisition. For this reason, raising bilingual Spanish-English children in a society that does not foster the use of English out of the school is a challenging task for native Spanish teachers who have to teach, for instance, a four-year-old class in the Spanish Public school, similar to the one which has been the object of my study.

Teachers have to start from the beginning, that is to say, the vast majority of children do not speak a word in English and those hardworking teachers who try to teach the whole class in the L2, find it a very difficult task to carry on. Furthermore, twenty children in a class, under the described conditions, is a burdensome task to accomplish.

In the case under study, these children started to learn English only three months ago and Carol, the teacher in this class, finds it very difficult to keep children motivated and concentrated in an English class, so-code-switching, although used unconsciously, is the bridge, the key to communicate with her students and keep the class under control.

3. Methodology

3.1. Objective and procedure

The underlying aim of this article is to state what situations and the reasons why Spanish speaking teachers use code-switching inside the classroom, especially when they have to face beginner monolingual students who are starting their second language acquisition process.

The whole research in the classroom has been carried out in a monolingual environment. I collected natural language in interactive situations in order to gather authentic examples. Hence, I recorded a four- year monolingual class of English as a second language in a Spanish public primary school in order to find out when unconscious code-switching took place in the teacher and student's speech. After having registered all the examples, I studied these situations in order to identify the types of communicative cases in which code-switching was used and why.

I made the decision of recording this class because the use of the alternate use of L1 (Spanish) and L2 (English) and, by extension, code-switching, was almost ensured by the lack of competence in L2 of the children in this class. Additionally, I wanted to observe language behaviour in real situations paying particular attention to the way in which code-switching was introduced in the speech.

3.2. Participants

This case-study explores the situation of a class of four year olds located in the Public primary school Padre Tomás de Montañana, in Valencia, Spain. As stated previously, Valencia is a bilingual Spanish Community (Spanish-local language –Valencian). This class is composed

of twenty children, ten boys and ten girls. In public schools in Valencia, you can find monolingual –just Spanish- or bilingual classes – Spanish-Valencian-. This case subject is a monolingual class where fifteen out of the twenty children speak solely Spanish. The other five children, as far as I know, are at least bilingual, two of them come from Nigeria, two more come from Arabic countries and the other one has Hungarian mother and an Argentinean father.

The teacher that is with them most of the time is Isabel and they have got another teacher only for the subject of English, named Carol, who teaches them English one hour a week. Carol tries to speak English throughout the whole class, but there are some social factors which make her task very complex: firstly, most of the children are monolingual, as I have mentioned above, they only know a few words in English (which they learned in their kindergarten and hardly remember). These children do not try to speak English at all; they just repeat some words or chants when they are asked to. Secondly, there are some behavioural problems with three of the children who are unable to pay attention or concentrate, so they are disturbing, fighting and speaking most of the class.

4. Results and discussion

After listening carefully to the recorded class, there are some very interesting aspects to point out. Before analyzing the use of code-switching in this class, we can observe that despite the fact that this teacher, Carol, tries to speak to them the whole class in English, these children do not try to do the same unless they are singing or repeating isolated words when they are asked. It is necessary to highlight again that the behavioural setting of some of them makes the task of teaching in a language that they are not used to and that they do not understand really difficult. I have found different uses of code-switching and I have listed them all:

1. Spontaneous speech acts
2. To give clear instructions
3. To answer questions made in Spanish not related with the lesson.
4. To encourage children to do something
5. To solve arguments or fights.

After classifying all the excerpts, I agree with Sánchez and Martí (cf. 1999) in the sense that code-switching is a teaching and learning strategy, but in this case, as children are unable to speak their second language yet, it is proved to be just a teaching strategy. It is my intention at this point of the article to depict the uses of code-switching listed previously by means of real examples drawn from the recording.

The main use of code-switching in the class is due to spontaneous speech acts. We have to remember that the teacher, Carol, is a native Spanish speaker and as far as could find out by analyzing the recording, she is not very fluent and skilled in English. The numbers appearing before the examples lines correspond to the order in which they appear regarding the whole transcription of the recording. See examples 136 and 173 below:

136. T. **A ver**, Andrea, Where's Andrea? Andrea, you have one! You have two! You have three! (noise) This and this, ok. Kelly, very good, no, no paint! Paint with colours.

“A Ver” instead of “let's see” comes to her in a spontaneous way. In the same sense, I found this other example:

173. T. Nuria come here, take a paper, take the paper and take the scissors. **Vale**... gives me everybody the paper. One, two, three, the class is over.

“Vale” instead of “all right” or “ok” for instance. In example 172, the teacher switches into Spanish spontaneously but suddenly she corrects herself and starts to speak again in English as soon as she realizes:

172. No, under the pink, **aquí**, here, here, ok. Take one (noise) Take one, your name, Claudia, very good, write with your pencil. (noise) Very good, paint with colour, blue colour, oh very good, Nuria.

The second use of code-switching is to give clear instructions, as the children do not understand them in English and she needs to explain things clearly. A case in point is example 27 below:

27. T. **Si estamos todos in silence**, lets' go to dance, ok? In silence.

In example 27, the teacher wants to start the lesson but all the children are speaking and not paying attention to the teacher. Another case are examples 65-67 below in which the teacher has just entered the classroom and after placing the recorder somewhere (it seems to be a table) she does not want Kelly(one of the problematic students) to touch it:

65. T2.Hello

66. (ALL CHILDREN). Hello.

67. T. Good morning. **No toques eso**, Kelly. Don't touch

Some examples of giving instructions show how the teacher repeats the same instructions in Spanish and in English to get children used to instructions in English. See examples 118, 135 and 176 below:

118. T. El **capitán que coja los colores**. The captain takes the colours. (A lot of children speaking at the same time)

135. T. Marcos! Where's Marcos? Sit down. **Pon tu nombre**.

176. T. Marina, Juan, **a recoger**. Very good, give me the paper, come on, the class is over, Laurenta, write your name, Laurenta, write your name...

Thirdly, code-switching is used solely to fill in the lack of communication existing due to the fact that these children do not speak English at all. The teacher used to answer her students' questions when they are not referred to what they are studying at that moment. See examples 9-19 below:

9. T. Do you remember the numbers?

10. S1. Numbers.

11. S2. Numbers.

12. S3. No hemos acabado la ficha.

13. T. Ya la acabarás, cariño.

14. T. One,

15. (ALL STUDENTS). One

16. T. Two

17. (ALL STUDENTS). Two.

18. T. Three.

19. (ALL STUDENTS). Three

She is trying to revise the numbers, but one child makes a comment which is not referred to this topic so, she answers him in L1 to be able to carry on with her lesson. Examples 56-63 below show a similar situation:

56. S2. ¿Me dejas tu teléfono?

57. T. No es un teléfono cariño.

58. S2. ¿Es tuyo?

59. T no, no es mío.

60. S2. ¿De quien es?

61. T. No lo sé cariño. **Come here.**

62. S2. ¿Es de Isabel?

63. T. Yes, it's **de** Isabel.

The boy has seen the recorder and he wanted to play with it, she speaks to him in Spanish to end the matter as soon as possible, and then she tries to switch into English

Fourthly, code switching is also used to encourage children to do something (see in examples 22 and 32 below):

22. T. Clap, clap, clap, let's go to dance, **quien lo haga mejor**, dance with me, ok? Ok. Kelly, sit down, come on.

32. T. OK, ¿**Quien lo ha hecho bien, bien, bien**, very well, very well, very well?

The last use of code-switching within the class takes place when there is an argument, fight or trouble in the classroom; she uses Spanish as well in order to end the situation as soon as possible.

S1. Yo no lo he hecho, Carol.

79. S2 Yo no lo he hecho.

80. T. **Come on, come on.**

81. S1. Yo no lo he hecho.

82. Nuria, Nuria, sit down ok?

83. Nuria. Quiero hacerlo otra vez.

84. S2. Quiero hacerlo otra vez.

85. S3 Quiero hacerlo otra vez.

86. T. **Come on.**

87. S. Quiero otra vez.

88. T You want again? Wait, sit down, come on, wait a moment ok? Sit down, Andrea, ok?

89. S. Yo tambien quiero otra vez.

90. T. Si nos portamos bien... Laurenta está pegando a... (Child cries) ¿Qué pasa aquí?

91. S. ¿Por qué me has pegao?

92. T. Pues ya no puedes hacer el tren si le estás pegando, ¿Te ha hecho daño? venga, pide perdón, perdón.

93. S. Me pega, me pega.

94. S. No le ha pegado, yo he visto que le ha pegado en la nariz, Kelly, Laurenta no le ha pegado.

95. T. Laurenta, Laurenta, aquí, laurenta

96. S. No

97. T. **Very good, very good, very good, thank you Laurenta, él te pidió perdón, ¿vale? Venga, ya está, take the jacket, come on.**

This one is another example of problem solving, see examples 107 and 144-149 below:

107. T. Come on... the (...) under the table, si no, no empezamos, come on... Laurenta no vamos a jugar porque estos dos siempre están peleándose, os poneis ahí o llamo a Isabel. Nuria, come on, under the table. Moid, under the table.

144. T. Marcos, sit down. Come on! Come on! Hay más.

145. S. Me lo ha 'quitao'.

146. T. Hay más.

147. S. Yo quiero el azul.

148. T. Blue, blue, blue.

149. S. Azul, blue.

5. Conclusion

My aim in this article was to provide greater insights into the nature of code-switching in the classroom, in this case by teachers working with monolingual beginners in the Spanish public primary school, by means of the observation and analysis of real examples. After analyzing this recording I strongly agree with Huang (2008) and Crystal (1987) in that:

there are a number of possible reasons for switching from one language to another. First, sometimes speakers cannot use one language to completely express what they want to say and therefore switch to another language to make up the deficiency or difficulty so that the conversation may continue unabated. Second, a switch often occurs when one particular social group develops solidarity and seeks to exclude outsiders.

Crystal (cf. 1987):

Crystal's first point suits to a certain extent with the subject class under study. The main reason why code-switching is used in the classroom is lack of vocabulary in L2 on the part of the students which makes it very difficult for the teacher to maintain L2 all along the class. In other words, code switching is the bridge which makes both ends meet: the teacher speaking English and the students speaking Spanish most of the time.

Although the teacher's efforts to speak English are huge, code switching is used in the five situations described: as spontaneous speech acts, to give clear instructions, to answer questions made in Spanish not related with the lesson, to encourage children to do something and to solve arguments or fights between students. These five uses might be included in the group named by Sánchez and Martí and (1999) 'teaching strategies' because they facilitate the comprehension of the L2 students. I agree with them as well in the sense that code-switching is a sign of ethnic identification occurring when the teacher and the students are non-native speakers of the target language and due to this reason; they do not feel comfortable speaking a

language which is not natural or spontaneous for them. The teacher behaves as if she was performing a role play and when she has to say something aside the script, Spanish is her natural language – that is the reason why there are so many examples of what I have called spontaneous speech acts and so many examples of solving arguments between students in Spanish and conversations related to doubts referred to the lesson they are studying.

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7. Summary

Code-Switching is a phenomenon in which "speakers rely on juxtaposition of grammatically distinct subsystems to generate conversational inferences" according to Gumperz (1982:97). In turn, one of the consequences of modernization has been the incorporation of second languages in the subject syllabus at earlier and earlier ages and, as a result, some new ways of communication are being created from this contact between two or more languages. When children are in contact with second language teachers, code switching is one of the natural devices they use in order to communicate. It is thus the objective of this article to analyze in which situations code-switching is exactly used inside a second language acquisition language beginners' classroom. To achieve this objective, I recorded and analyzed a class composed of four-year-old Spanish monolingual children.

Key words: Bilingualism, code-switching, languages in contact, communication, second language acquisition.

Resum

El canvi de codi és un fenomen en què "els oradors es basen en la juxtaposició de subsistemes gramaticals diferents de generar inferències de conversa", segons Gumperz (1982:97). Al seu

torn, una de les conseqüències de la modernització ha estat la incorporació de les segones llengües en el programa de l'assignatura en les edats més primerenques i, com a resultat, algunes noves formes de comunicació estan sent creats a partir d'aquest contacte entre dos o més idiomes. Quan els nens estan en contacte amb els professors de llengües en segon lloc, el canvi de codi és un dels dispositius naturals que utilitzen per comunicar-se. Per tant, és l'objectiu d'aquest article analitzar en quines situacions el canvi de codi exactament s'utilitza dins d'una aula amb principiants d'adquisició d'una segona llengua . Per aconseguir aquest objectiu, em van registrar i analitzar una classe composta de xiquets i xiquetes de quatre anys d'edat, tots monolingües en espanyol.

Paraules clau: Bilingüisme, el canvi de codi, llengües en contacte, la comunicació, l'adquisició de segones llengües.