Codeswitching
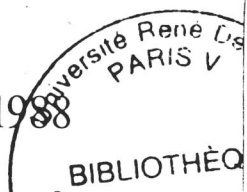
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Contributions to the Sociology of Language

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Introduction

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Codeswitching, the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode, has attracted a great deal of attention over the years, most likely because it violates a strong expectation that only one language will be used at any given time. It is seen as something to be explained, whereas the use of one language is considered normal. This notion can be so powerful that even those who codeswitch can be unaware of their behaviour and vigorously deny doing anything of the kind.

The perspective taken in this volume is that codeswitching constitutes one of many forms of language contact phenomena, and can best be understood by placing it in the double context of the speech economy of a multilingual community and of the verbal repertoires of individual members of that community. In order to understand the social significance of codeswitching, and in order to understand why it takes the particular linguistic and discourse forms that it does at specific historical moments in specific communities, it is necessary to place it in the context of other forms of language contact phenomena occurring in the community, including the absence of any such phenomena.

The approach taken here is essentially functionalist: codeswitching is seen as a boundary-levelling or boundary-maintaining strategy, which contributes, as a result, to the definition of roles and role relationships at a number of levels, to the extent that interlocutors bear multiple role relationships to each other. It is an important part of social mechanisms of negotiation and definition of social roles, networks and boundaries. At the same time, it is effective only where interlocutors share an understanding of the significance of the pool of communicative resources from which codeswitching is drawn. Conventions must be shared in order for their violation to have meaning.

Linguists have contributed greatly to the study of codeswitching, from two perspectives: 1) the study of codeswitching as a variable phenomenon, supporting arguments for the necessity of incorporating variability into any grammar; and 2) the study of codeswitching as a means to the discovery of universal linguistic categories. While these studies clearly contribute to the papers in this volume, the perspective taken here is more specifically sociological or anthropological in nature. The case studies, most of them ethnographic, attempt to address questions concerning codeswitching as social process.

The purpose of the papers in this volume, then, is to illustrate ways in which the study of codeswitching addresses fundamental anthropological and sociolinguistic issues concerning the relationship between linguistic and social processes in the interpretation of experience and the construction of social reality. By examining ways in which codeswitching is used to signal social, discourse and referential meaning, these studies work towards a model which unifies macro-level and micro-level approaches to the study of language change and social change.

It is argued that, while social and linguistic constraints on codeswitching (in the form of the existence and permeability of social and linguistic boundaries) obtain in any language contact situation, the form that codeswitching will take, when and by whom it is used, and the extent to which it can been seen to have social, discourse and referential significance, can only be understood by situating instances of codeswitching in the context of the community-wide distribution of linguistic resources (the community speech economy) and in the context of the relationship of codeswitching to other forms of communicative behaviour in individual speech repertoires. In other words, it is argued that codeswitching should be seen as a cover term for a wide variety of variable language contact phenomena, and that types of codeswitching and their relationship to other language contact phenomena are probably only interdistinguishable in community-specific ways in terms of their functions in social interaction. At the same time, in order to predict the forms and functions that language contact phenomena are likely to take in interpersonal interactions (whether in-group or intergroup) in the community, indeed, in order to predict whether codeswitching is likely to occur at all, the analyst

must have an understanding of community speech economies (or how social boundaries constrain access to linguistic resources), of individual speech repertoires (or where individuals are located in the community speech economy), and of the linguistic relationship the grammars of the languages or language varieties involved bear to each other.

While codeswitching is not the only form of linguistic variability to carry social, discourse or referential meaning, it does provide a particularly clear avenue of approach to understanding the relationship between social processes and linguistic forms, because both the social and linguistic boundaries in question tend to be more evident than in other, monolingual, settings. It is also of interest in terms of the intellectual history of the disciplines within which codeswitching has been studied (the sociology and social psychology of language, anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics, as well as theoretical and descriptive linguistics): these disciplines have tended to approach codeswitching as a structurally-unified phenomenon whose significance derives from a universal pattern of relationships between form, function and context (Genesee and Bourhis 1982; McClure 1981; Pfaff 1982). Increasingly, students of codeswitching have begun to approach it as a form of verbal strategy (Valdés 1981; Scotton 1976; Heller 1982; Gumperz 1982a), which represents the ways in which the linguistic resources available to individuals vary according to the nature of social boundaries in the community, and the ways in which individuals draw on those resources to communicative effect as part of their joint construction of interpretive frame in social interaction, based on the extent to which interlocutors share conventional associations between linguistic form and social relationships, or on the extent to which interlocutors can draw on their verbal resources to arrive at that shared understanding (Tannen 1979; Gumperz 1982b; Cicourel 1978).

The study of codeswitching has moved away from typological or deterministic models relating form and function to each other and to context, and towards a dynamic model in which codeswitching can be seen as a resource for indexing situationally-salient aspects of context in speakers' attempts to accomplish interactional goals. The study of codeswitching, then, becomes a means of understanding how such verbal resources, through use,

acquire conventional social, discourse or referential meaning. Such a model further allows the relationship between these different kinds of meaning to be seen as a product of the history of the use of language contact forms, in much the same way as has been described for the social, stylistic and grammatical function of other types of linguistic variables (Labov 1972; Sankoff 1980; Thibault 1979). Codeswitching can be seen to pass from being an "exploratory" strategy (Scotton, this volume; Heller 1982), that is, one which permits interlocutors to discover to what degree they share understandings about the situation and their roles in it, from among the alternative frameworks available. This exploration permits them to establish a shared framework, and codeswitching can then become an index of that framework. It then becomes available as a discourse strategy (for signalling thematic ties, old vs. new information, and so on, as well as for signalling participants' perspectives on the discourse; cf. Valdés 1981; Gumperz 1982a; McClure 1981; Calsamiglia and Tuson 1980). Finally, language contact phenomena may not bear any indexical relationship to interpretive frames at all, as the alternative frames collapse, and so the linguistic forms come to carry referential meaning only.

In this volume, Scotton and Poplack argue that it is the difference between social and discourse meaning, on the one hand, and referential meaning, on the other, that distinguishes codeswitching from other forms of language contact phenomena. Along with Auer, Poplack also argues that the degree to which language contact phenomena are similarly used by community members distinguishes codeswitching and borrowing from individual language learning phenomena such as transfer. By situating the interactional social, discourse or referential meaning of language contact phenomena in the context of the community distribution of strategies for negotiating, defining and indexing shared frames of reference, this model provides a means of understanding the processes linking social and linguistic change.

Two related sets of concepts underlie this model: the first concerns the existence of multiple frames of reference, and the second concerns multiple roles and role relationships, or multiple identities, which are associated with those frames.

Multiple frames of reference, or the social separation of domains of social activity associated with different language varieties,

underlies the availability of codeswitching for social and discourse effect. This notion was perhaps most influentially expressed by Blom and Gumperz (1972). They proposed a basic type of code-switching, *situational codeswitching*, which is rooted in a social separation of activities (and associated role relationships), each of which is conventionally linked to the use of one of the languages or varieties in the community linguistic repertoire. Through this association linguistic varieties come to symbolize the social situations, roles and statuses and their attendant rights and obligations, expectations and assumptions. Use of each variety in unconventional contexts has the effect of calling into play all the meanings associated with the variety in situations where normally other frames of reference are operative: this is what Blom and Gumperz refer to as *metaphorical codeswitching*, because the unexpected variety is a metaphor for the social meanings the variety has come to symbolize. As an example, consider the case of French-English bilingual students and teachers in a French-language school in a predominantly English-speaking city. Everyone knows everyone else is bilingual (or how would they survive in that city?) but teachers are careful to insist that students speak French at school; teachers themselves never speak English while on school grounds. However, students have heard one teacher speak English at softball practice, because her English-speaking father-in-law joins her in coaching the team. During the school day one student comes up to her to plead for a favour in English. She refuses to speak to him in English, and won't even consider granting the favour unless he speaks French. He gives up and walks away, even though he *could have* asked her in French. The point here is that the boy felt he only had a chance at getting what he wanted if he appealed to the teacher in her non-French guise, that is, outside her role as teacher. When she insisted on French, which he associates with her teacher status, he no longer saw the point of even attempting to plead his case. Use of the unexpected variety can also merely suspend the meanings (rights and obligations, expectations and assumptions) normally operative and indexed through conventional associations between language and situation. These associations are the basis of what Scotton (this volume) refers to as *unmarked* (conventional) and *marked* (unexpected) uses of language, and are linked to the multiple role relations individuals may

bear to each other. McConvell and Heller (this volume) describe social processes which can lead to the development of multiple role relationships associated with different languages, and so to codeswitching as a strategy for defining or managing those relationships.

While Blom and Gumperz only discuss situational and metaphorical switching with respect to homogeneous groups who share the same experiences of the two languages or linguistic varieties, the concept is equally applicable to inter-group interaction. In the case of inter-group interaction there are usually conventions of language choice which govern both in-group and inter-group interaction and which constitute the set of situations on the basis of which language associations are set up. Any violation of those conventions constitutes a reference to other situations or distancing from the currently operative one; here, the interpretation is ingroup vs. outgroup role relations, as opposed to two different kinds of ingroup role relations. For example, if an English-speaking Quebecer is used to speaking French with French-speaking colleagues at work, he or she might feel put at a distance – put out of the group – if one of those French-speaking colleagues suddenly started speaking English with him or her.

Thus at the heart of codeswitching is the separation of languages in different domains, a separation that is undoubtedly behind the fact that many people who codeswitch are not aware of their behaviour until it is brought to their attention – and even when it is they often resist the notion that they really speak that way. An example: I was talking to a group of French-English bilingual seventh- and eighth-grade students in Toronto about codeswitching. I was trying to get a grasp of the syntactic limits on acceptable codeswitching for this group, many of whom codeswitched. I used the standard linguistic methods of trying out variations of codeswitched utterances, asking the students if any of the example utterances sounded like things they would say. They all denied that they ever talked like that, but they did allow that they knew people who said things that resembled some of the sample sentences (cf. Blom and Gumperz 1972: 428–430 for another example from Norway). At most, some codeswitchers might admit that that is how they talk amongst themselves when

no one else (no outsider) is listening, but often this type of talk is presented as not being "real" language.

However, the sparse amount of ethnographic evidence that we have regarding this subject indicates that in some communities codeswitching is not only widespread but also accepted as the normal way of speaking. Poplack, for example, states that codeswitching is the norm for *ingroup* talk among Puerto Ricans in Spanish Harlem (1980). On the other hand, I have argued elsewhere (Heller 1982) that codeswitching may become the norm for *intergroup* talk between francophones and anglophones in Quebec. However, even in those communities there is a basic separation of domains: for Puerto Ricans in New York this probably corresponds to the homeland on the one hand and English-speaking mainstream society on the other, while for Quebecers this corresponds to separate francophone and anglophone in-group domains. It is possible that it doesn't really matter whether within each separate domain the "sanctity" of the language is maintained, but that it is the dominance of one language over the other that matters, or to be more precise, the dominance or conventionality of sets of rights and obligations conventionally associated with the languages. Moreover, codeswitching itself becomes conventional when it indexes a shared frame of reference which represents the neutralization of tension at the boundary between separate domains.

In examining the separation of domains two questions stand out: the first has to do with the actual distribution of codeswitching in the community, and the other has to do with speakers' awareness of codeswitching as a way of speaking and their acceptance of it as a normal way to talk. The answers to these questions can then be used as evidence to explain the social uses of codeswitching and the linguistic consequences of it. The notion of separate domains, whatever it corresponds to in linguistic structure, is, I believe, fundamental to codeswitching, while codeswitching itself, seemingly paradoxically, is the direct contradiction of separation. This has implications both for our ideas about how languages work and for our ideas about the organization of social life.

While the social separation of domains implies the existence of social boundaries regulating or constraining access to linguistic

resources which form part of the social life of those domains, the existence of codeswitching necessitates that at least some individuals have access to all the domains in question, and therefore have access to those linguistic resources. More importantly, perhaps, for understanding the nature of codeswitching, those individuals have access to certain kinds of roles and role relationships within each of those domains: that is, they have access to *multiple* roles and role relationships. However, as several papers in this volume point out (Woolard; McClure and McClure), even where multiple domains exist in a community, codeswitching may be totally or relatively unavailable, because the social boundaries separating the domains are relatively impermeable. Put differently, the social consequences of crossing the barrier may be too costly for individual members of the community (see Heller, this volume). Finally, even where codeswitching exists, it may not be universally available: only those who are so socially situated with respect to the social boundaries that they have access to multiple roles will be likely to be able to use codeswitching to communicative effect, for they are the only ones for whom the significance of the multiple frames of reference is at all pertinent. Lieberson (1970) describes, for example, the social separation of domains between French and English in Montreal in the 1960's, in which most francophones and anglophones never came in contact with each other, and so never became bilingual. A notable exception, indeed one which was crucial for the economy of the community, concerned francophone working class males of an age to be in the labour market, most of whom provided the labour in anglophone-owned and -managed private enterprise. The degree of bilingualism, as might be expected, was much higher for these members of the community than for any others (francophone or anglophone). Further, not only did they have access to the linguistic resources of both anglophone and francophone domains (at least to some of them), they carried out different roles in each of these domains, and shared with each other a multiple set of roles and role relationships (neighbours or kin, for example, whose role relationship would conventionally be associated with French, could also work together in a domain where the conventional language was English). They would therefore be plausible as candidates for codeswitchers. Many other such examples have

been cited in the literature (cf. Blom and Gumperz 1972; Gal 1979; Scotton 1976; Gumperz and Hernandes-Chavez 1971).

There are other ways in which individuals may bear multiple role relationships to each other. The above examples all focus on codeswitching among members of one group, but intergroup interaction is another area where participants of necessity bear multiple role relationships to each other, as members of different groups, and as participants in a particular kind of social interaction (e.g. a service encounter, as in Heller 1982 or Scotton, this volume; or a gate-keeping encounter, as in Scotton, this volume; etc.). Here, on the boundary, is another area where codeswitching is at least potentially available.

It is evident that codeswitching does not occur in all multilingual communities, and even in communities where it does exist not everyone codeswitches; further, even among those who do codeswitch, codeswitching does not necessarily occur in all social situations. Unfortunately, not enough attention has been paid to negative cases, that is, cases where there is no codeswitching; nevertheless, several papers in this volume (McClure and McClure, Woolard, Heller, Poplack) have addressed the question of the conditions under which one finds or does not find codeswitching and it is possible to derive some generalizations from these case study analyses. Specifically, it seems that when groups occupy separate economic niches the multiplicity of role relationships across groups is unlikely to occur; boundary-levelling has severe economic consequences.

An analysis of the sources of codeswitching may, then, begin with the separation of domains upon which codeswitching rests. I believe that intra-utterance codeswitching will not occur in situations where, for social reasons, it is important to maintain that separation, whereas it will occur when it is important to overcome the barriers. On the other hand, situational switching (or language choice conventions) may occur in boundary-maintenance conditions: the individuals may speak different languages depending on the situation, but the language spoken in that situation does not vary. This analysis also accounts for interactions in which speakers each use their own preferred language (while communication is not blocked because of the at least passive bilingualism of the speakers), since we can infer that while cross-cultural interaction

may be necessary, speakers find it important to maintain the social boundary between them.

However, the question remains of when it is going to be important to maintain or overcome boundaries. Here I believe the analysis must rest on the short-term and long-term social goals of individuals, goals which will necessarily be informed by their social status and the various social, economic and political processes which may affect that status. In analytic terms, codeswitching, as mentioned earlier, can be approached as a function of what it accomplishes; the consequences of codeswitching link long-term social consequences (e.g., acceptance of an individual into a group, access to certain activities, etc.) to short-term discourse or conversational consequences (e.g., making a point, getting the floor). It is at the level of social interaction, then, that analysis can link the form that codeswitching takes to its discourse and conversational functions or effects and eventually to longer-term social consequences in the light of ethnographic information which permits the interaction to be situated in the first place. This ethnographic information must situate codeswitching within the linguistic repertoire not only of codeswitchers, but of the community of which they may form only one sub-group; similarly, such an ethnography must situate codeswitching encounters in the context of community encounters in many of which codeswitching may be absent, including the context of the appearance, evolution or disappearance of the use of codeswitching over time.

Codeswitching, then, provides a clear illustration of the ways in which sociohistorical context is tied to the use of language in social interaction. These papers detail the ways in which the socio-ecological framework constrains possibilities for individuals to have access to multiple roles and role relationships (multiple identities) and therefore to a variety of linguistic resources, which are then used in the negotiation and articulation of social identity and social action. Put somewhat differently, codeswitching provides a clear example of the ways in which individuals draw on their linguistic resources to signal changes in the different aspects of context which they wish to foreground, to make salient, thereby opening opportunities for the redefinition of social reality, exploiting or creating ambiguity in the relationships between form and context to do so. The approaches adopted here

tie together historical, community-level and interactional/inter-
pretive approaches to the study of language change and social
change, and of language use and the construction of social reality.

The social, discourse and referential function of linguistic
resources cannot be inferred solely from a study of the form these
resources take, in isolated texts or utterances; they must be
situated in the community speech economy and in historical
context. In other words, since individuals in a community have
differential access to multiple roles and linguistic resources, and
experience differential consequences of the use of those resources,
they are, according to their own socioecological position and the
distribution of resources in the community (i.e. the nature of
social boundaries in the community), more or less likely to be able
to use certain resources to social, discourse or referential effect,
given also the nature of the social interactions in which they are
participating.

Consequently, specific forms may be ambiguous, and the nature
of codeswitching is not amenable to purely structural analysis,
although within a speech economy structural factors will convey
the communicative effect of codeswitching. It is therefore unlikely
that a universal linguistic grammar of codeswitching exists, or that
codeswitching can be distinguished from borrowing or other lan-
guage contact phenomena on purely formal grounds; rather, cer-
tain structural strategies (some of which are widely available) will
be used in each speech community to set off socially-, discourse-
and referentially-significant forms from each other. However, even
within an individual's speech repertoire, or in a community speech
economy, ambiguity may still exist due to the changing nature of
social boundaries. Indeed, this ambiguity may itself be successfully
exploited in the negotiation of interpretive frames of social action.

Different disciplinary perspectives have in the past been brought
to bear on various aspects of the role of codeswitching in linking
the interpretive processes of interpersonal interaction to processes
of maintenance and change of social boundaries between groups.

The sociology of language (cf., e.g., Fishman 1972; Fishman
et al. 1971; see also Ferguson 1964) has addressed the nature of
the conventional association of languages or language varieties to
activity in identifiable social domains, pointing to the importance
of studying the nature of social boundaries in a community, and