

Language Contact, Code-Switching, and Translanguaging

Theories, Scholars, and Perspectives

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Language Contact

Code-Switching

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Conclusion

Language Contact

Language Contact: The Foundation

What is Language Contact?

- **Definition:** The use of more than one language in the same place at the same time (Thomason, 2001).
- It is the **norm**, not the exception, in human history.
- Occurs at the level of individuals (bilingualism) and entire societies.
- **Key Scholar: Uriel Weinreich**
 - His seminal work, *Languages in Contact* (1953), is the foundational text of the field.
 - He defined **interference** as "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language."

Outcomes of Language Contact

Language contact can lead to a wide range of phenomena:

- **Borrowing (Lexical & Structural):**
 - E.g., English adopting *ballet* (French), *sushi* (Japanese), *algebra* (Arabic).
 - Can also include grammatical structures.
- **Language Shift:** A community gives up its language in favor of another.
- **Language Death:** The complete disappearance of a language.
- **Pidginization:** Creation of a simplified contact language.
- **Creolization:** A pidgin that has acquired native speakers and a more complex grammar.
- **Code-Switching:** (This will be our next major topic)

Key Scholar: Uriel Weinreich (1926-1967)

- *Languages in Contact* (1953)
- Provided the first systematic and theoretical framework for studying contact.
- **Key concept: Interference.** He saw it as a neutral term, not necessarily negative.
- **Key question:** How can a bilingual individual keep two languages separate, and what factors (linguistic, social, psychological) promote or hinder interference?
- He distinguished between:
 - **Interference in Speech (Parole):** Individual, momentary lapses.
 - **Interference in Language (Langue):** When a pattern of interference becomes conventionalized and adopted by a speech community (e.g., borrowing).

Key Scholar: Sarah Thomason

- A leading contemporary figure in language contact.
- ***Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics (1988, with Terrence Kaufman)***
 - Argued against the traditional belief that only vocabulary, not grammar, could be borrowed.
 - Proposed a **borrowing scale** based on the intensity of contact.
 - **Thesis:** The *social context* of contact (e.g., language shift vs. maintenance) is the primary predictor of linguistic outcomes.
- ***Language Contact: An Introduction (2001)***
 - A standard textbook that synthesized decades of research.
 - Emphasizes that "anything can be borrowed."

Code-Switching

Code-Switching: The Bilingual Grammar

What is Code-Switching (CS)?

- **Definition:** The juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems (Gumperz, 1982).
- In simpler terms: Alternating between two or more languages, dialects, or registers in a single conversation.
- **Crucial distinction from borrowing:**
 - **Borrowing:** A word/phrase from Language B is *adapted* phonologically and morphologically into Language A. It becomes part of Language A's lexicon.
 - **Code-Switching:** The item from Language B remains part of Language B's system, inserted into a Language A frame. The speaker is actively using *two* grammars.
- **It is NOT random.** CS is a rule-governed, systematic, and meaningful linguistic practice.

Early Grammatical Models: Shana Poplack

Pioneering work in the 1980s sought to find the “rules” of code-switching, proving it was not haphazard.

- **The Equivalence Constraint (1980):**

- “Code-switches will tend to occur at points... where the juxtaposition of L1 and L2 elements does not violate a syntactic rule of either language.”
- Basically, switches happen where the word order (e.g., SVO) matches in both languages.

- **The Free Morpheme Constraint (1980):**

- “A switch may not occur between a bound morpheme and a lexical form unless the lexical form is phonologically integrated into the language of the morpheme.”
- E.g., You can’t say *eat-**iendo*** (English stem + Spanish bound morpheme). You would have to say *eating* or *comiendo*.

- **Critique:** These constraints were found to be overly strong and were violated in many language pairs, but they were foundational in establishing CS as a legitimate field of syntactic inquiry.

Sociolinguistic Models: John Gumperz

Gumperz (1982) shifted the focus from *where* switches happen (syntax) to *why* they happen (social meaning).

- **Conversational Code-Switching:** CS is a discourse strategy used to create meaning.
- **Contextualization Cues:** CS is one of many cues (like intonation, gesture) that speakers use to signal how their utterance is to be interpreted.
- **Some Functions of CS (Gumperz):**
 - **Quotation:** Switching to report what someone said.
 - **Addressee Specification:** Switching to address a specific person.
 - **Interjection:** Using a tag or filler from another language (e.g., ..., *y'know?*).
 - **Message Qualification:** Switching to elaborate or clarify a point.
 - **Personalization vs. Objectification:** Switching between "we" (personal) and "they" (impersonal) voices.

Dominant Grammatical Model: Carol Myers-Scotton

- **The Matrix Language Frame (MLF) Model (1993, 2002)**
 - The most influential and comprehensive grammatical model of CS.
 - It is an **asymmetrical** model: one language is always dominant in a given clause.
- **Key Concepts:**
 - **Matrix Language (ML):** The "main" language of the clause. It sets the grammatical frame (word order, functional morphemes).
 - **Embedded Language (EL):** The "guest" language, which provides content words or entire phrases.
- **Central Hypothesis:** The ML provides *all* the "system morphemes" (functional elements like tense markers, agreement, prepositions). The EL provides "content morphemes" (nouns, verbs, adjectives).

Two Key Principles:

- **The Morpheme-Order Principle:** In mixed constituents, the morpheme order (syntax) is that of the Matrix Language (ML).
 - *Example (Swahili/English):* Watu wengi wa-report-ed. (People *many* they-PAST-report-PAST)
 - The ML (Swahili) provides the subject prefix (wa-), tense (-ed), and word order. The EL (English) provides the verb stem (report).
- **The System-Morpheme Principle:** All system morphemes (tense, agreement, etc.) that have syntactic relations outside their immediate constituent must come from the ML.
 - This explains why we rarely see functional items from the EL.

The MLF model accounts for the asymmetry often found in CS data.

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Beyond discourse functions, why do people switch?

- **Accommodation Theory (Howard Giles):**

- Speakers **converge** (switch to the language of their interlocutor) to show solidarity and build rapport.
- Speakers **diverge** (switch away from the language of their interlocutor) to emphasize social distance or group identity.

- **Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton):**

- Every language choice in a multilingual community is either **marked** (unexpected) or **unmarked** (expected).
- **Using the unmarked choice:** Signals adherence to social norms.
- **Using the marked choice:** A negotiation to change the social dynamic (e.g., a student switching to a formal register with a friend to signal seriousness).

Code-Switching: A Summary

- Code-switching is a complex, rule-governed linguistic skill.
- It is not a sign of linguistic deficiency; rather, it is a sign of high bilingual competence.
- Research has moved from asking "Can it be done?" (Poplack) to "How is it done?" (Myers-Scotton) and "Why is it done?" (Gumperz, Giles).
- This "dual-grammar" or "separate systems" approach (two languages, one brain) has been the dominant paradigm for 40 years.
- However, a new perspective challenges this very foundation.

Translanguaging

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Translanguaging: The "Multilingual Turn"

The "Multilingual Turn"

A paradigm shift in linguistics and education (post-2000s).

- **A critique of the "Code-Switching" paradigm.**
- **The problem with "named languages":** Concepts like "English" and "Spanish" are seen as external, political, and social constructs, not internal, cognitive realities.
- **The problem with "bilingualism":** The very term implies two separate, discrete, monolingual systems in one head ("two solitudes").
- This new perspective argues that multilingual speakers do not have two or more grammars.
- They have **one, unitary linguistic repertoire.**

What is Translanguaging?

- The term was first coined by **Cen Williams** (1994) in Welsh as *trawsieithu*, referring to the pedagogical practice of using two languages in the classroom (e.g., reading in Welsh, writing in English).
- It was fundamentally re-conceptualized and popularized by **Ofelia García**.
- **Definition (García, 2009):** Translanguaging is "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages."
- It is not about "switching" between two systems.
- It is about **using all available semiotic and linguistic resources** to make meaning.

Key Scholar: Ofelia García

- The most prominent scholar in translanguaging.
- **Rejects the "bilingual" label:** Prefers "multilingual speakers" or simply "speakers."
- **Internal vs. External Language:**
 - **I-Language (Internal):** The single, integrated linguistic system (repertoire) in the speaker's mind.
 - **E-Language (External):** The socially constructed, named languages (English, Spanish) with their prescribed rules.
- **Translanguaging is the process of using the I-Language.** Code-switching is a description of the *output* as judged by an external (E-Language) observer.
- This is a fundamental ideological and theoretical distinction.

- Has expanded the theoretical and cognitive dimensions of translanguaging.
- **Translanguaging Space (2011):**
 - A social, cognitive, and semiotic space where speakers "break down the... boundaries between languages, and between language and other cognitive and semiotic systems."
 - In this space, new meanings and new sociolinguistic realities are created.
- **A "Practical Theory of Language":**
 - Translanguaging is not just what speakers *do*; it is a "practical theory of language" that speakers themselves operate with.
 - It centers the speaker's agency and creativity, rather than their "deviations" from monolingual norms.

Core Tenets of Translanguaging

1. **Rejects the "Fractional View" of Bilingualism:** The idea that a bilingual is "two monolinguals in one" is false.
2. **Unitary Repertoire:** Multilingual speakers have one complex, integrated repertoire, not two or more separate ones.
3. **Critique of Monolingual Ideology:** "Named" languages are ideological constructs that serve social and political, not cognitive, functions. They are used to police and marginalize minoritized speakers.
4. **Focus on Practice (Praxis):** Translanguaging is a *practice*, a "languaging" (verb), not a static "language" (noun). It is the *act* of drawing on resources.
5. **Social Justice Orientation:** Translanguaging is often linked to a pedagogical and political goal: to validate and empower minoritized speakers by recognizing their full linguistic repertoire as a resource, not a deficit.

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Translanguaging in Education

This is where translanguaging has had its greatest impact.

- **Translanguaging Pedagogy:**

- Moves beyond “bilingual education” (where two languages are often kept separate) to an approach that encourages students to use *all* their linguistic resources to learn.
- **Example:** A teacher might introduce a science concept in English, have students discuss it in their home language(s) (e.g., Spanish and Haitian Creole), and then write about it in English.

- **Benefits:**

- Validates students’ home languages and identities.
- Fosters deeper cognitive engagement by allowing students to use their strongest linguistic resources.
- Challenges the “English-only” or “target-language-only” ideologies that dominate many schools.

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The Debate: Code-Switching vs. Translanguaging

This is a major theoretical debate in the field today.

- **Code-Switching (CS) Proponents argue:**

- "Named languages" are real, both cognitively and socially. Speakers are highly aware of which language they are using and the social consequences of switching.
- The "unitary repertoire" is a metaphor, but it can't explain the fine-grained grammatical constraints (like the MLF model) that show two systems are interacting.
- Translanguaging is a useful pedagogical *term*, but not a precise linguistic *theory*.

- **Translanguaging (TL) Proponents argue:**

- CS models are built on a flawed, monolingual premise.
- The "rules" of CS are just post-hoc descriptions of patterns, not cognitive realities.
- The focus on "constraints" (what speakers *can't* do) is deficit-oriented. TL focuses on what speakers *can* and *do* (creativity, agency).

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Conclusion

Conclusion: Summary of Concepts

Concept	Language Contact	Code-Switching	Translanguaging
Core Idea	Study of languages in contact and outcomes (e.g., borrowing, shift).	Alternating between two+ <i>separate</i> linguistic systems.	Using one's <i>unitary</i> linguistic repertoire.
View of Language	Two+ distinct systems (E-Languages).	Two+ distinct, co-existing systems (E-Languages).	One integrated system (I-Language). "Named languages" are social constructs.
Key Metaphor	"Languages in Contact"	"Switching" tracks (like a train).	"Languaging" (a holistic practice).
Focus	Linguistic outcomes (borrowing, pidgins, shift).	Grammatical constraints (MLF) & social functions (Markedness).	Speaker's agency, repertoire, and pedagogical/social justice.
Key Scholars	Weinreich, Thomason	Poplack, Myers-Scotton	Gumperz, García, Li Wei, Williams

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