

## CODE-SWITCHING IN BILINGUAL CHILDREN

# STUDIES IN THEORETICAL PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

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# CODE-SWITCHING IN BILINGUAL CHILDREN

by

KATJA F. CANTONE

University of Bremen, Germany

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**voglio essere la hexe del rathaus (Carlotta, 4;1,0)**

**vogliamo il il pirati la angel klauen (Lukas, 3;7,15)**

**e aladin è andato con suo ehm ehm con suo teppich volante  
(Jan, 4;10,6)**

**queste sono le füße e questo pah pah! (Aurelio, 3;6,14)**

**gleich wenn ich so mach werd ich ein tricheco (Marta, 3;8,4)**

**Maybe in doing research you only understand what you were  
doing LATER...**

**first you do it and later, if you are lucky,  
you understand what you were trying to do and  
these questions become sort of clarified through time.**

*Noam Chomsky,*

*An Interview on Minimalism (in Belletti & Rizzi (eds.)2001:155)*

## NOTE TO THE READER

I decided to hyphenate code-switching, and I will consistently do so in this work. For the sake of simplicity, citations will reflect the spelling convention in the cited work (e.g. *codeswitching* or *code switching*). I will also use the abbreviation CS.

With respect to the topic of this book: The terms *switch* and *mix* are used as equivalents. In the examples, the switching points, hence the mixed elements, are always underlined. Please consider that the English translation is literal.

Finally, the abbreviations and conventions used in this work are following:

Age e.g. 4;2,11	Four years, two months, eleven days
Ca	Carlotta
Lu	Lukas
Ja	Jan
Au	Aurelio
Ma	Marta
IC	Italian Context
GC	German Context
Ka, An	Italian Interlocutors
Na, Ta, Jn, Kt	German Interlocutors
/	end of an utterance
,	pause
(x)	illegible item

## INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the issue of code-switching in young bilingual children, in particular, intra-sentential switches, that is, mixing within an utterance. The data come from five bilingual Italian/German children (age 1;8 to 5 years), who grew up in Hamburg, Germany. The term *bilingual* is used in order to describe a person who has been exposed to both languages from birth on (Meisel 1989:20). Hence, this work is placed within the research field of *Bilingual First Language Acquisition*.

The present book discusses three main issues.

The first assumption concerns language mixing in young bilingual children. Differently from former studies on mixing in children, I claim that bilingual children's mixed utterances should be analyzed in the same way as adult mixing. I further argue that child grammar is organized in the same way as adult grammar. Therefore, a grammatical development should not explain a different type of switching. In fact, I claim that there is no relation between the development of grammar in child speech and the quality of language mixing. The data rather show that language mixing depends on an individual choice, that is, either children mix throughout or they do not. Following Cantone & Müller (2005), slightly higher rates at the beginning of language production might be due to a performance factor. Since the operation *Select* has no full practice to pick items according to the language context yet, some *errors* might occur as long as fluency has not been reached.

A second claim is that code-switching should not be constrained by external rules. In the study of adult code-switching, a considerable number of restrictions have been proposed in order to account for the grammaticality of mixing two languages in a discourse, and,



more specifically, within a sentence. The underlying idea is that code-switching should be restricted and regulated by grammatical constraints. However, this discussion leads to formulating rules of a *third grammar*, a grammar of code-switching. By contrast, MacSwan (1999, 2000, 2004, 2005a,b) proposes that in code-switching no *third grammar* is required. The consequence is that what is allowed in monolingual grammar will also be allowed in code-switching. The analysis of the present data will confirm this approach. I agree with MacSwan (1999:146) that ‘nothing constrains code-switching apart from the requirement of the mixed grammars’.

A further important assumption of the present work concerns the grammatical analysis of code-switching. I claim that functional categories are crucial in studying word order in mixed utterances. The idea is that, in order to predict which language determines the structure of a mixed utterance, one has to look at functional categories. I will particularly discuss certain aspects, namely when the two grammars involved make different (and incompatible) predictions with respect to a specific grammatical phenomenon. I assume the following claims:

- (g) **C<sup>0</sup> determines the features of the code-switched complements**
- (h) **T<sup>0</sup> determines the features of the code-switched complements**
- (i) **The switched noun determines the gender of the determiner**

The analysis in chapter 7 will show that (i) cannot be maintained in full. As a matter of fact, the mixed utterances analyzed indicate that what occurs within the VP (Verbal Phrase) is independent of the language of T<sup>0</sup>. However, I argue that these claims make correct predictions for the analysis of code-switching.

I finally argue that the present data confirm the latest minimalist assumptions on the architecture of the mind, and moreover, that they shed light on some specific notions, which are difficult to account for with monolingual data.

The content looks as follows.

In chapter 1, the basic definitions used in this work are introduced, namely, bilingualism, and Bilingual First Language Acquisition (BFLA). Additionally, an overview on studies on these topics is given.

Chapter 2 discusses the issue of early mixing in young bilingual children. Several accounts which try to explain mixing in the earliest stage of language acquisition will be presented.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the theoretical framework this book is based on. Accordingly, both latest generative accounts (including the analysis of functional categories) and research on language acquisition are outlined.

Chapter 4 focusses on the issue of code-switching. In reviewing the literature, several constraints proposed in order to regulate this speech style are presented. A recent proposal to assume that code-switching is grammatical as long as the two grammars of the languages involved are respected will be sketched. The chapter ends with explaining why child mixing can be accounted for in terms of code-switching.

In chapter 5, the corpus which will be analyzed in this book will be introduced. Information on data collection, on the methodology and on the children studied is given. Additionally, the research design and the three main claims proposed here in order to make prediction about the language which determines word order in code-switching are sketched out.

Chapter 6 includes the empirical analysis of language mixing in the early stage of language acquisition. A quantitative as well as a qualitative discussion is pursued. The results show that the children mix to a low extent.

Chapter 7 is concerned with the analysis of the grammaticality of the mixed utterances produced by the children from approximately age 2;4 onwards. Some complicated instances of mixing, which at first sight seem to be ungrammatical, will also be discussed. In addition, it will be checked whether the claims formulated are corroborated by the present data.

Finally, in chapter 8, the findings of the analysis of code-switching data coming from five children are summed up. Furthermore, some proposals for further research in this field are raised.