

CODE SWITCHING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LINGUISTIC SYSTEM OF SIMULTANEOUS BILINGUAL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Code switching and code mixing are the phenomena commonly seen done by a bilingual. This behavior is influenced by several aspects such as the linguistic system, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and language competence of the bilingual. If children are able to distinguish two different languages since early age, they will be considered simultaneous bilinguals. They show that they develop multiple, rather than single, linguistic systems. However, it was understood that code switching and code mixing were due to the failure in using proper words, language features, and sociolinguistic competence. Yet, recent studies have shown that bilingual children are able to use both languages proficiently with no signs of confusion or failure in language use. This ability also does not hinder their cognitive development.

Keywords: *Code Switching; Code Mixing; Bilingual; Sociolinguistics*

INTRODUCTION

Code switching and code mixing are common behaviors of bilinguals. Meisel argued that code switching and language mixing are natural phenomenon of communication among bilinguals (Meisel, 2006, p. 9). Since they acquire more than one language, there is a propensity to mix those languages in the interaction. However, there are several issues regarding this linguistic behavior particularly for children who acquire two languages as their mother tongues since early childhood. This is because of the debate among researchers about the development of linguistic and grammatical system of simultaneous bilingual kids. It is still a major issue

whether the simultaneous bilingual children develop unitary linguistic system or dual linguistic system. When acquiring two languages, children develop their linguistic system that will assist them to access and get involved in the communication. This linguistic system including their ability to process grammatical features of two codes whether is developed by separating the system of both languages or not is still debatable. Their development stages since early childhood to adulthood is also an issue that becomes major discussion among researchers.

Before discussing the topic in depth, it is important to clarify the terminology because the terms code switching and code mixing are used interchangeably. "Code switching is a specific skill in the bilingual's pragmatic competence" (Meisel, 2001, p. 344). This means that when the bilinguals do code switching, this is due to their ability in analyzing sociolinguistic context of the interaction. Therefore, they do code switching in order to fulfill sociolinguistic requirements such as interlocutor. On the other hand, "code mixing is the fusion of two grammatical system, i.e. a possible characteristic of a bilingual's grammatical competence" (Meisel, 2001, p. 344). This means that when they do code mixing they mix the grammatical rules of both languages. Sometimes it is difficult to see whether they bilinguals do code switching or code mixing. The definitions sometimes do not show clear boundaries of the two terms. Hence, people may use those terms not to show distinct but similar behavior that relates to one another. In this paper, code switching and code mixing refers to bilinguals' linguistic behavior where they use both languages in the same linguistic situation.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the development of linguistic system of simultaneous bilingual children and the relation with their linguistic behavior of code switching. There are several issues related to this topic that will be discussed along with the literature review and the discussion of findings from several studies.

DISCUSSION

Simultaneous bilinguals are those who acquire two languages as their mother tongues since early childhood (Hamers & Blanc, 2005, p. 28). Most of them learn those two languages simultaneously because they grow up in a mixed-lingual family. The fact that these bilinguals develop two languages at the same time has attracted

researchers' attention to conduct research to investigate their linguistic system as well as their linguistic behavior (Genesee, 2000; Genesee, Nicoladis, & Paradis, 1995; Meisel, 2001).

Code switching is not just a linguistic behavior of bilingual children that occurs in the interaction, but it is also a phenomenon that represents their development of bilinguals' cognition, memory and linguistic system. Hence, there are several issues that researchers are keen to provide evidence to prove their hypothesis whether bilingual children behavior of code switching occurs because they have unitary linguistic system or dual linguistic system. They conducted research to reveal whether a bilingual kid has one or separate linguistic system for both languages (Meisel, 2001).

In addition, another major issue related to these bilingual phenomena is whether they are going through a phase of confusion when they simultaneously acquire two grammatical systems or not. Evidence is needed to prove that the bilinguals' children do not confuse and mix the grammatical rules of both languages. This leads to another issue whether code mixing occurs because the children are unable to differentiate both languages or not. Since the children develop their mother tongues at early childhood, their pragmatic competence, and also mental awareness in using both languages appropriately and separately are doubtful. Hence, the language experts in bilingualism conducted research to discuss this issue (Heredia & Altarriba, 2001).

Another major issue is related to the competence of bilinguals on both languages. Is it true that code switching and mixing shows lack of competence in both languages. When bilinguals express their ideas, sometimes they find it more accessible to use their first language than their second language. Hence, it is important to find out that whether this code switching occurs due to their incapability of using both languages comprehensively or not (Genesee, 2000).

All of the aforementioned issues have been investigated by the researchers, thus the evidence and findings of those studies are elaborated in the rest of this section.

According to research conducted by Meisel, he revealed that it is possible for simultaneous bilingual children to develop their grammatical system of both

languages without going through a phase of temporary confusion (Meisel, 2001, pp. 331-343). The bilingual children did not confuse the grammar of both languages. They can use the language separately with its own grammatical pattern. This is because children who acquire the languages simultaneously are capable of separating their languages (Meisel, 2006, p. 9). Even though the patterns are contradictory and distinct, they are to produce speech without confusing the grammar of those two languages.

Code switching is not a sign of bilinguals incompetency in separating the linguistic system of both languages (Genesee, 2000, p. 2). This is because they can use languages appropriately with different people. Code switching occurs due to language accessibility factors such as failure to retrieve correct word, frequency of language use, grammatical features, and sociolinguistic (Heredia & Altarriba, 2001, p. 165). Code switching occurs not because of lacking of proficiency but because of failure to retrieve memory (Altarriba & Palomo, 1999, p. 3; Genesee, 2001, p. 157). When bilingual children cannot retrieve the words that are suitable to express their ideas in their second language, it is more accessible to use words in their first language. In addition, the frequency of using the language also determines their ability to produce speech in their second language. If they rarely use the terms or words in their second language, it is easier for them to use their first language. Bilinguals also do code switching not because of their lack of competence in their second language but because of their pragmatic competence. They are able to switch the language according to the interlocutors. For examples, when the bilingual children who are exposed to "one language one principle", they are able to use a language to their father and use another language to their mother (Genesee, 2001).

Children, in the early ages, are able to select language according to the sociolinguistics requirements (Meisel, 2006, p. 9). One of the requirements is interlocutor, it has been proved that bilingual children are able to select and use languages according to their addressee. They can suddenly switch their languages from first language to second language when they speak to people who share the same language. In addition, they rarely violate grammatical rules of both languages, hence, they can separate grammatical system of both languages (Genesee, 2001, p. 155; Meisel, 2006, p. 9).

Findings of research show that bilingual children in their early development are able to use their languages according to their interlocutors. After examining 2 year-old bilingual kid where her mother consistently used French and her father consistently used English, the finding shows that the child is able to use and switch the language according to the addressee (Genesee, Nicoladis, Paradis in Genesee, 2001). The child used French when she spoke to her mother and she suddenly switched to English when she spoke to her father. Children can differentiate both languages when they can speak different languages to each of their parents (Genesee et al., 1995, p. 621). Genesee et al (1995) conducted a research in Montreal Quebec by taking five families as their participants. In each case, their mothers speak English more frequently than their fathers. On the other hand, their fathers' predominantly speak French. The transcription of the both video-and audiotaped conversation revealed that, in the interaction either with either of their parents or alone with one parent, the children used language that is predominantly spoken by their parents. When they speak to their mothers, they use English. On the other hand, when they speak with their fathers, they use French. This evidence revealed that they can differentiate and use both languages appropriately (Genesee et al., 1995, p. 627).

Code mixing does not show that they are not able to separate two languages, it is a stage of their development (Lanza, 1992, p. 641). Simultaneous bilinguals kids acquire the language separately from the beginning (Genesee, 2000, p. 2). Findings of a longitudinal study shows (Lanza, 1992) that Sire whose father is Norwegian and whose mother is American that are exposed to one-person-one language principle is able to separate both languages. The data consisting of audiotape recording of her speech in the interaction between Sire and her mother, Sire and her father, and family when she was only a child was collected. It revealed that in her early age, when she was two years old, Sire was able to switch the languages. This shows that she already developed pragmatic competence and bilingual awareness. Later on, when she matures, she will develop more complex pragmatic competence and bilingual awareness. This means that she is able to analyze sociolinguistic aspects in depth when involving in the conversation with people who share same mother tongues with her.

In his study, Meisel took two 12-month children who speak German and French (Meisel, 2001). The principle of one-person-one language was also investigated. One recording per month was transcribed and analyzed to reveal the children's linguistic behavior. They focus on grammatical system particularly word order and subject-verb-agreement of French and German. Meisel found that they are able to distinguish the grammatical pattern of both languages without going through a phase of confusion. Meisel also argued that the children have dual linguistic not unitary linguistic system since early childhood. This claim is contradictory with the claim proposed by Volterra and Taeschner in 1978 that the children have to go through three stages of development before they develop dual-linguistic system (Meisel, 2001, p. 328).

In his article, Fred (Genesee, 2001) discussed about pragmatic competence in relation to code mixing and bilingual syntactic development. Fred argued that code switching should be viewed in terms of proficiency not their incapability to develop different linguistic system during their early phase of language acquisition (Genesee, 2001, p. 157). In addition, code switching shows children development of their pragmatic skill.

CONCLUSION

Code switching and code mixing are natural phenomena occurring among bilinguals. This linguistic behavior covers several major issues such as linguistic system, language competence, sociolinguistic aspect, pragmatic and competence of bilinguals. Simultaneous bilingual children in their early childhood are able to differentiate both languages. This shows that they develop not unitary but dual linguistic system. Code switching which is a common linguistic behavior of bilinguals occurs not because they are lacking of competence in both languages but due to psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors. The failure to retrieve words, frequency of language use, grammatical feature, pragmatic competence, and sociolinguistic factors contribute to bilinguals' behavior of code switching. Research findings also show that the bilingual children in their early childhood are able to differentiate the grammatical system of both languages. In addition, as their pragmatic and bilingual awareness develop, they are able to switch their languages according to the

addressee. One-person one-language principle was investigated during the research. It has been proven that they are able to speak different language to their father and another language to their mother either on one to one interaction or in family interaction. This shows that they do not go through a phase of temporary confusion.

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