

No mixed grammars, no phonological disjunction: A new perspective on intra-sentential code-switching



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Abstract

The study aims to challenge MacSwan's (2000, 2005, 2010) Minimalist model of intra-sentential CS on theoretical grounds. It argues that his conception of CS as a 'union' of, at least, two lexically-encoded grammars (Gs) constrained by the requirements of 'mixed Gs' is a Minimalist version of the Equivalence Constraint. It argues that the logical consequence of employing the Minimalist Program as theoretical framework is to view CS, instead, as 'mixing' of, at least, two language-specific halves (Lexicons) through the language-independent Computational System of Human Language (C_{HL}) to produce a 'well-formed' grammatical structure which is externally counted as an expression of one and only one G; hence, no 'hybrid' expressions, no 'mixed Gs'. Likewise, MacSwan's Phonological Form Disjunction Theorem is conceptually redundant as the default design of the C_{HL} itself restricts CS within X^0 , and, consequently, turns out to be as much an unmotivated CS-specific grammatical postulate as is the Free Morpheme Constraint a CS-specific constraint. With its elimination, the differences between monolingual and bilingual linguistic competence are logically reduced only to an additional L, enabling a bilingual speaker to produce an infinite number of well-formed sentences which are counted as expressions of either G_x or G_y . © 2017 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Intrasentential code-switching; Bilingual linguistic competence; Lexicon; Computational system; Mixed grammars

1. Introduction

Based on a naturalistic corpus of Urdu/English code-switching (CS), the present study aims to challenge MacSwan's (1999, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2010) Minimalist model of intra-sentential CS on theoretical grounds. It argues that his model is based on a fundamental misconception that a bilingual speaker possesses two distinct grammars (Gs) in the sense two monolingual speakers of two distinct languages possess two distinct Gs. This misconception appears to arise from MacSwan's tacit acceptance of Poplack's (1980, 1981) formal restrictions on CS termed the Equivalence Constraint (EC) and the Free Morpheme Constraint (FMC) which MacSwan originally intends to reject for being unmotivated CS-specific constraints. He appears to exploit Chomsky's (1995, 2000, 2001) Minimalist Program (MP) only to find a theoretical justification for the EC and the FMC. It appears that both the core assumptions of his Minimalist model of intra-sentential CS are but reformulation of Poplack's EC and the FMC in Minimalist terms.

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1.1. Objectives of the study

The study attempts to establish specifically the following:

1. Instead of viewing CS as a 'union' of two distinct Gs constrained only by the requirements of 'mixed Gs' as proposed by MacSwan, CS, in Minimalist terms, should be considered 'mixing' of, at least, two language-specific halves (Lexicons/Ls) through the language-independent Computational System of Human Language (C_{HL}) to produce a well-formed grammatical structure which should externally be counted as an expression of one and only one G.
2. The check on word-internal CS, falsely attributed by MacSwan (2005) to the phonological disjunction of two languages, is but an attempt to accommodate, in Minimalist terms, what the FMC stipulates; consequently, Phonological Form (PF) Disjunction Theorem (later termed the PF Interface condition (see MacSwan and Colina, 2014)) turns out to be as much a CS-specific grammatical postulate as is the FMC a CS-specific constraint.
3. A logical consequence of employing the MP as theoretical framework in an account of Intra-sentential CS is to postulate that instead of possessing two distinct Gs, bilingual linguistic competence (BLC) possesses the potential of producing an infinite number of well-formed sentences which are externally counted as expressions of either G_x or G_y (but not of the both), constrained by the grammatical requirements of one and only one G; hence, no 'hybrid' expressions, no 'mixed Gs'.

1.2. Background to the study

CS has generally been defined as the ability of bilinguals to switch between two different languages effortlessly either at clause boundaries or within the boundary of a clause. CS at clause boundaries generally referred to as Inter-sentential CS has attracted the attention of the scholars who are interested in understanding social significance and motivations of different linguistic choices made by speakers in different domains of a speech community. CS within the boundary of a clause referred to as Intra-sentential CS, on the other hand, has been studied from a grammatical point of view.

The primary objective of grammatical studies has been to provide such an account of grammatical structure of code-switched sentences as may be generalized across different language-pairs. Ever since the scholars started taking interest in mixing of two different languages within the boundary of a clause, the nature of grammatical restrictions which determine the structure of mixed sentences involving two distinct languages has been the focus of the research (Bullock and Toribio, 2009). Different studies attempt to account for the grammaticality of mixed data by employing different types of datasets with the objective of generalizing their account across different language-pairs.

MacSwan (2010) classifies different attempts made at understanding the grammatical structure of CS data into two broad categories-constraint-based and constraint-free accounts. According to MacSwan (2010), the constraint-based accounts of CS attempt to account for CS data by proposing certain constraints which are not found to be part of monolingual linguistic capacity, thereby implying a so-called 'third' grammar arising out of the of two distinct Gs (see, among others, Timm, 1975; Pfaff, 1979; Poplack, 1980, 1981; Joshi, 1985). However, it has been a general problem that a constraint which has been found to work in the context of one language-pair has been found to be inapplicable in the context of another language-pair. All constraint-based models of CS end up either positing some CS-specific constraint or failing in predicting CS patterns across different language-pairs or both at one and the same time (MacSwan, 2009).

One of the earliest traditions in research on the grammatical aspects of CS has been to permit CS only at points where the grammatical requirements of both languages converge, exhibiting some kind of equivalence in surface order of the mixed constituents. Of particular interest in the context of the present study is the model of intra-sentential CS proposed by Poplack (1980, 1981). The model is among the earliest of the attempts at accounting for CS through 'equivalence' in surface order of two languages involved. The model, she proposes, is based on two grammatical constraints which are believed to govern the process of mixing of two distinct languages within a single sentence:

The Equivalence Constraint

'Codes will tend to be switched at points where the surface structures of the languages map onto each other'.

The Free Morpheme Constraint

'A switch may occur at any point in the discourse at which it is possible to make a surface constituent cut and still retain a free morpheme'.

According to the EC, CS is possible only where there is 'equivalence' in grammatical requirements of both the languages involved in CS. Poplack (1981) claims that the EC correctly predicts (1) to be ungrammatical because of the differences in linear order of English and Spanish regarding the placement of the object (clitic) pronoun.

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