



Hesitation and monitoring phenomena in bilingual speech: A consequence of code-switching or a strategy to facilitate its incorporation?

Jim Hlavac*

Monash University, PO Box 11, Faculty of Arts, Clayton, VIC 3800, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Hesitation and monitoring phenomena (hereafter HMP) are forms that occur in speech such as filled or unfilled pauses, paralinguistic markers such as (nervous) laughter or coughing, or signals which pre-empt or justify other forms in utterances. The functions of these forms have commonly been associated with planning or accessing difficulties. However, HMP can also have a function of signalling clause boundaries, changes of mood or topic, aiding intelligibility for listeners. This paper draws on a large sample of bilingual speech and examines the overall incidence of HMP from two contributing languages, Croatian and English, and their incidence in speech containing code-switching. Analysis of results seeks to establish whether there is disproportionately high frequency of HMP surrounding code-switches, and whether such HMP are indicative of accessing/production difficulties concomitant to the appearance of code-switches, or appear to perform a function that facilitates the intelligibility of code-switches. HMP co-occur disproportionately with code-switches. However, analysis of code-switching examples shows that different types of code-switches attract higher or lower frequencies of HMP, depending on their phonological and/or morphological form. Although not identical to discourse markers, HMP perform a congruent function, that of integrating or facilitating the incorporation of 'other language' text.

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1. Introduction

Descriptions of hesitation and monitoring phenomena (hereafter: 'HMP') in linguistic studies reflect various conceptualisations of what these phenomena represent and what they confirm or reveal about speech production. Early descriptions, based on an analysis of speech as an expression of rule-governed language, view examples of hesitation, pauses or false starts as peripheral production phenomena that accompany speech but whose incidence is not noteworthy: such phenomena randomly occur and exemplify the difficulty that speakers may encounter in the linear verbalising of an "underlying system of rules" (Chomsky, 1965:4). Chomsky's approach is based on an ideal notion of speech and speaker with a normative view to those phenomena that do not appear to serve the purpose of 'ideal speech production'. Although generally undesirable such 'production static' may be an indicator of the effort and labour that a speaker expends in producing 'ideal speech'. A function of hesitation phenomena as a means to 'buy time' in the planning and execution of speaking is attested in an early seminal study:

* Tel.: +61 3 99055280; fax: +61 3 99055437.

E-mail address: jim.hlavac@monash.edu.

... filled pauses and repeats ... occur just before points of highest uncertainty, points where choices are most difficult and complicated. We have also noted that filled pauses tend to occur at the junctures of larger syntactical units, presumably where constructional decisions as well as decisions of *what* to say, content-wise, are being made. (MacKay and Osgood, 1959:41–42. Italics theirs.)

This paper examines HMP as an overall feature in the Croatian speech of second-generation bilinguals and, in particular, their co-occurrence with examples of intra-clausal Croatian–English code-switching. The term ‘code-switching’ is employed here as a hypernym to refer to any communicative interaction which contains input from two or more language varieties (not necessarily ‘codes’ in speakers’ terms) through insertion, embedding or alternation. Use of the generic term ‘code-switching’ to refer to input contributed by two varieties is acknowledged even by those who use other terms, e.g. code-mixing (Muysken, 2000), code-copying (Verschik, 2008), transversion (Clyne, 2003) in a contrastive or additive sense.

In this paper, discussion on code-switching refers to both structural and conversational features (cf. Auer, 1998). Croatian and English can be distinguished here as formal and discrete linguistic varieties. However, from the situation of the Australian-born Croatian speakers of this sample, code is frequently not synonymous to language: monolingual English is the code used with ‘outsiders’; English with or without (emblematic) insertions from and alternations into Croatian is the code used with same-age peers; the code used with parents or older generation in-group speakers may be monolingual Croatian, Croatian–English code-switching or English with Croatian insertions. Situation, context and interlocutor determine speakers’ codes which determine activation and selection of variety. The informants in this sample were recorded in interactions with another Croatian–English bilingual peer, the author, and informants were in bilingual ‘mode’ (Grosjean, 2001), i.e. both languages were activated and selection of variety depended on discourse-internal circumstances. Activation of both languages and availability of forms from both varieties has consequences on speech production: HMP can be supplied by both varieties, not only one, even where discourse is largely supplied by one variety only. Studies by Kinder (1988), Blankenhorn (2003) and Hlavac (2006) show how a category congruent to HMP, discourse markers, can be supplied by both languages in otherwise largely monolingual discourse. For this reason, HMP include forms from both English and Croatian.

This paper examines HMP in a large sample overall and in the vicinity of intra-clausal code-switches. In normative descriptions, HMP are considered infelicitous and indicative of speech production problems. In contrast, Conversational Analysis views HMP in a similar way to other utterance constituents: elements that perform certain discourse functions. This paper seeks to establish whether HMP surrounding code-switches are examples of ‘performance static’ whose presence is motivated by ‘other-language’ insertions or whether HMP have a discourse function focussing on the reception of surrounding elements, including code-switches. In this paper, HMP refer to unfilled pauses, lexicalised and non-lexicalised filled pauses, pre-empted hedges and subsequent justifications. Their form and their occurrence preceding and succeeding code-switches are further examined to see if they pattern in ways similar to other utterance constituents that have a discourse-specific function.

2. Background

Some early studies record that HMP shed light on the speech production process and can be signals that allude to a speaker’s word-searching problems (Goldman-Eisler, 1968; Fromkin, 1980; Levelt and Cutler, 1983) or as indications of mental effort exerted in conceptualising speech, especially at major discourse boundaries (Chafe, 1985). Brennan and Williams (1995:396) also report that the presence of filled or unfilled pauses is indicative of how speakers search memory and monitor their search, displaying meta-cognitive states of lexical retrieval and text organisation.

Although frequent, most examples of HMP are rarely noticed as overt features of speech (Lickley and Bard, 1996; Shriberg, 2001). They become more noticeable when they precede and flag words which have a low transitional probability and a high information value (Goldman-Eisler, 1968), therefore signalling them as important features in form and/or content (Fox Tree, 1995; Stolcke and Shriberg, 1996). There is debate about whether such phenomena are produced involuntarily or “automatically” as habitualised features (Levelt, 1983) or whether they are deliberate “performance additions” (Clark and Fox Tree, 2002). They can perhaps be described as being both: they appear to be universally present in all examples of spontaneous speech and yet their occurrence varies according to discourse structures. Hesitation phenomena can thus be viewed as a symptom of performance functions and as a class of words with semantic purposes to lend emphasis to certain discourse elements, even to longer utterances as a whole. One study reports that “stronger [or longer] breaks in the discourse are more likely to co-occur with FPs [filled pauses] than do weaker [shorter] ones” (e.g. Swerts, 1998:494. Square brackets mine). Swerts (1998) suggests that such filled pauses are employed as cues with a symbolic function in conversation and therefore assume the role of discourse markers. Swerts (1998) also reports that filled pauses that occur at shorter breaks in conversation are perceived to be production related.

While HMP are usually examined from the viewpoint of the speaker, the perspective of the listener in perceiving hesitation phenomena is addressed by Martin (1970), Voss (1979) and Brennan and Williams (1995). Two studies report that listeners are sensitive to the difference between filled versus unfilled pauses as forms marking emphasis or importance given to surrounding text (Deese, 1984:79–80; Brennan and Williams, 1995:397). Brennan and Schober (2001) report that repairs accompanied by filled pauses allow more time for the listener to successfully ‘cancel’ misfired speech or misleading information and therefore aid comprehension. This function is also known as a “signal function” (Clark and Fox Tree, 2002;

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