Performance Phenomena in Simultaneous and Sequential Bilinguals: a Case Study of Two Chilean Bilingual Children

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Abstract

This paper focuses on code switching and transference as produced by one simultaneous and one sequential bilingual in order to better understand some aspects of bilingualism in children due to the important role that it plays on society. This research postulates that the degree of linguistic competence influences the choice of language selected by the child when communicating.

Key Words: Simultaneous and Sequential Bilingualism, Language Alternation, Code Switching, Transference

Resumen

Este estudio de investigación esta focalizado en code switching y transference producido por un bilingüe simultáneo y secuencial para entender mejor algunos aspectos del bilingüismo en los niños debido al papel importante que desempeñan en sociedad. Esta tesis postula que el grado de capacidad lingüística influencia la opción de la lengua seleccionada por el niño al comunicarse.

Palabras clave: Bilingüismo simultaneo y secuencial, Alternación de Lenguaje, Code Switching, Transference.

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Introduction

Globalization emphasizes the importance of bilingualism (Aaronson, 1987) and knowledge of more than one language is rapidly becoming the norm for almost all people and nations around the globe. On an individual level, bilingualism means job competitiveness and better opportunities in the work force. Recognizing the advantages gained from having knowledge of two or more languages, many parents guide their children to learn other languages as early as in their infancy.

Currently, bilingualism among children has been included in every nation's state policies (McLaughlin, 1984). Countries, like China for instance, which are predominantly known for their particular nationalistic stands, including the use of language, have already embarked on implementing policies parallel with bilingualism McLaughlin (1984). McLaughlin (1984) has also described the complexity of bilingualism in Canada stating that Canadians, at this moment, live in a society where English and French are the languages of government. In addition to English and French, programs for the maintenance of languages spoken by Native Indian groups and the Inuktitut (Eskimo), as well as those spoken by major immigrant groups (German, Italian, Hungarian, and Ukrainian), are also supported by the Canadian government (Aaronson, 1987).

A discussion of bilingualism involves taking into account its psychological, linguistic, social and educational factors (Baker, 2001). However, the question of how to define bilingualism or multilingualism has engaged researchers into heated debates. The prevailing theoretical perspective six or seven decades ago is clearly illustrated by Bloomfield´s view (1933), which basically claimed that a bilingual is an individual who has full fluency in two languages. Recently, scholars have compromised on a broader definition, which does not necessarily require an individual to have native competence in two languages. For example, Grosjean (1988) adopts this more realistic stance when he states that a bilingual is someo-

ne who can function in each language according to given needs. Thus, this more descriptive view is consistent with the idea that some bilinguals possess very high levels of proficiency in both languages in the written and the oral modes. In contrast, others display varying proficiencies in comprehension and/or speaking skills depending on the immediate area of experience in which they are called upon to use their two languages (Romaine, 1995).

While there has been an increasing amount of formal research on child language acquisition, an abundance of work in this area centers on monolingual children, and particularly English-language development. Slobin (1971) first advocated the study of bilingual acquisition as a promising means for investigating theoretical constructs of language uniformities, since the number of variables related to social and cognitive factors are more easily controlled when the subject is one person with two grammars, rather than two distinct individuals.

The most obvious difference between bilinguals' and monolinguals' development is that the former are exposed to input from more than one language in such a way that they acquire multiple grammars. Children in active contact with two languages, since early infancy, are potentially able to construct two grammatical systems and thus, become competent bilinguals.

A very important variable in the discussions of the process of acquiring two languages is the age of acquisition. Haguen (1956) introduced the terms infant, childhood, adolescent, and adult bilingualism. As for the two types of pre-adolescent bilingualism, infant bilingualism refers to the simultaneous acquisition of two languages, while childhood bilingualism, refers to the establishment of a second language during the early school years, after the first has been learned in the family. Other scholars following Haugen's research labeled his definition of childhood bilingualism as successive or sequential acquisition of two languages.

According to Tabors (1997), simultaneous bilingualism occurs when children are exposed to two languages from a very early age; while sequential bilingualism occurs when a child begins learning a second language after the first language is at least partially established. With respect to simultaneous bilingualism, we can see that infants are exposed to two languages in various patterns of exposure. One of the most common is a "one-person, one-language" situation where each parent speaks their own native language, or they experience a situation where both parents speak both languages. The "one-person, one-language" is said to help children separate and learn the two languages (Romaine, 1995).

In the case of sequential bilingualism, a child begins learning a second language after s/he has already figured out the basic rules of their first language, and, this may affect his or her learning of the second language. S/he knows how to have conversations and is cognitively more mature than the infant acquiring two first languages simultaneously. The child's task is to add a second language to the one s/he already has, a task that takes years to accomplish.

Within the aforementioned types of bilingualism the concept of language alternation exists which is a normal, common, and important aspect. (Grosjean, 1982). Language alternation is rule governed and represents shifts to the other language within or across sentence boundaries (Poplack, 1980). Language alternation also serves as an additional communicative tool that can be applied by bilingual speakers to enlarge their set of interactionable devices in order to ensure a smoother or more pointed processing of communication (Reershemius, 2001). As Grosean (1982) further points out, at any given point in time and based on numerous psychosocial and linguistic factors the bilingual has to decide, usually quite unconsciously, which language to use and how much of the other language is needed. The process of learning or acquiring two separate languages can therefore be illustrated through the circumstances that affect the acquisition of a second language. Is the child exposed to the acquisition of two separate languages at the same time, or is the child's second language acquired after the first language has been learned?

Within these two separate means of bilingualism two specific phenomena exist. They are code switching and interference or transfer. For bilinguals, the phenomenon of code switching consists of a non-random, sophisticated linguistic manipulation of the two languages (Aguirre, 1988; Miller, 1984). To illustrate this, suppose a child is attempting to communicate an indirect request (e.g., "I need to go to the bathroom). If the child is able to provide the appropriate message in both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) or two first languages, s/he might be considered bilingually advantaged. Communication in either language does not differ significantly. The bilingual speaker is viewed as a competent communicator, and the use of code switching may be present.

According to Pérez-Bazan (2002), it is evident that children, who demonstrate as well as feel confident with in one language or the other, will choose that language when speaking to others. Furthermore, Pérez-Bazan states that if a child feels that s/he has a good command over both languages, then s/he may perhaps elicit either one of the two languages when choosing to express ideas and opinions.

According to Poplack (1980), there are three types of code switching which are identified as 1) tag switching, 2) inter-sentential and 3) intra-sentential switching. Tag switching involves the insertion of a tag in one language into an utterance that is entirely in another language. For example, a Spanish/English bilingual might say, "She went back home again, ¿verdad?." Here the tag and switch being the word verdad. Inter-sentential switching involves a switch at a clause or sentence boundary where each sentence or clause is in one language or another. An example of this might be a Spanish/English bilingual saying, "I need some help, ven aquí, and give me a hand." Here the phrase "ven aquí" is inserted at the end of one clause and before the next clause begins. Lastly, intra-sentential switching involves a switch within a clause or sentence boundary. An example of this sophisticated phenomenon is a Spanish/English bilingual saying, "Here estoy next to the house." As one notices the word "estoy" is within the clause (Romaine, 1995).

Since the early seventies two studies Gumperz, 1982; Poplack 1980 showed that these types of code switching are a very common phenomenon among bilingual children. Code switching is considered to be the norm rather than the exception in bilingual speech (Grosjean, 1982). These studies have additionally shown that this sophisticated communicative mechanism is a rule-governed phenomenon serving as a communicative strategy for the bilingual person. Gumperz (1982) suggests that linguists need to look at code switching as a communicative option available to any member of the bilingual community because it may be used as an expressive function that has pragmatic meaning.

Recently, Pérez-Bazán (2002) also noted that social and environmental factors affect a simultaneous child's preference for one language to its counterpart. The child contextually shifts in usage from a word in one language to its equivalent in the other. Although some bilingual children who acquire two languages simultaneously show no confusion of identifying/using two languages, others appear to be confused and affected by their environment. The situation where the two languages seem to be in competition with each other and the child tends to prefer one of the two languages is a momentary event. Once the child realizes that there are two languages, in his or her environment, this competition ceases and s/he manages to use the appropriate words and grammar in both languages.

The second phenomenon that needs to be investigated within language alternation is interference or transfer. The term interference is defined as, "those instances of deviation from the norm of either language, which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language," (Weinreich, 1953:1). In the initial stages

of sequential acquisition, when the child has already acquired a first language and is in the process of learning a second, s/he uses the first language system to help construct the second language (Kessler, 1982). This results in transference as normal errors are produced when L1 rules are applied to L2.

Language transference or transfer can be defined as the cross-linguistic effect or influence two or more languages have on one another (Odlin, 1989). It may occur in either direction, that is, between the first native language and the second language or vice versa and may be classified as either positive or negative.

Language transference, or transfer, is used when people acquiring two languages use the first language system to help construct the second language (Kessler 1982). Transference often occurs in the course of learning a second language and can be defined as "the adoption of any elements or features from the other language" (Romaine 1995: 69). Lindholm and Padilla (1977) maintain that bilingual children employ one manner of language transference when they lack the lexical entry in the appropriate language.

Several factors are included when determining whether a bilingual will code switch or transfer. As Grosjean, (1988) points out, among these are included:

· the participant(s), that is the person(s) being spoken or listened to (this includes such factors as language proficiency, and attitudes).

· the situation (physical location, presence of monolinguals, degree of formality and of intimacy).

· the form and content of the message being uttered or listened to (language used, topic, and type of vocabulary needed).

· the function of the language act (to communicate information, to request something, to create a social distance between the speakers, to exclude someone, to take part in an experiment).

Although performance phenomena are practically impossible to predict, the fact that bilingual children produce more unexpected structures than their monolingual counterparts opens the way to a more in depth study (Swain, 1972). Moreover, the study of simultaneous and second language bilingual development may contribute a great deal to our understanding of the transition from no language knowledge to the ability to structure complex sentences in two languages. It is therefore extremely important for the individual learner as well as the teacher, to

be informed about the current trends and issues involved in the afore-mentioned areas.

Goal of Research

The goal of this research was to determine whether the number of instances of either code switching or transference could indicate an important aspect related to the intriguing phenomenon of bilingualism and make some new generalizations associated with the development of simultaneous and sequential bilingualism. This research project was designed to examine how simultaneous and sequential bilingual children produce and use two specific performance phenomena, code switching and transference.

Methodology

The researcher executed the investigation in the following manner. One simultaneous and one sequential bilingual were chosen for the research. The activity sessions occurred over a one-month period. The activities were varied thereby ensuring a wide range of responses in both languages and offering a flourishing environment to discover the natural process in language development. These sessions were tape recorded in order to maintain an accurate account

In this investigation, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilized in order to discover the factors involved in the production and usage of language alternation namely, code switching and transference, in two bilingual children.

The utterances that were gathered from the two bilingual subjects required careful analysis for correct classification. Upon reviewing the transcriptions and listening to the recordings that were made, there was the arduous task of placing the utterances made by the bilingual subjects into their appropriate categories. Several guidelines were employed that were originally suggested by Poplack (1988) and Romaine (1995) in order to make the appropriate decisions.

After a complete transcript was prepared from each of the sessions, it was necessary to conduct yet another specialized session. This gua-ranteed the authenticity of the classifications that were made. After the bilingual children made the Spanish utterances, they were specifically asked if they could reproduce them in the English.

The distinction between code switching and transference was based on the degree of linguistic competence demonstrated. If the bilingual child was able to produce the same words or phrases in both languages during the follow up session, this was considered to be an instance of code switching. If the child could not produce the word or phrase, due to the fact that s/he did not know the equivalent in the L2, it was concluded that this utterance was the result of transference.

For this research project two bilingual children, one nine year old, simultaneous bilingual, and one thirteen year old, sequential bilingual, were studied.. The simultaneous bilingual has a Chilean mother and a North American father. He is considered a simultaneous bilingual because in his early years of language development he was raised under the one-person one language format of acquiring his two first languages. He spoke only English with his father while only speaking Spanish with his mother. When he reached age six, he began to attend school full time. He currently attends a school which is not bilingual. Thus, he uses English at home while, at school, he generally uses Spanish.

The second subject was classified as a sequential bilingual because she spoke only Spanish until she reached the age of six. In addition to her parents, the main language of the surrounding environment was Spanish. Once she reached six, the subject began studying in a bilingual school. Now at age thirteen, she uses English all day because she is currently attending a school, Pedro de Valdivia, which is bilingual and all of her courses are in English.

Below are two examples of code switching and transfer made by both the bilingual subjects in order to give the reader a clearer idea of how the distinctions were made.

DG = Researcher

D = Simultaneous Bilingual

G = Sequential Bilingual

+ = Connotes special session done to verify linguistic competence of subject

DG. Okay, can you summarize for me what happened?
D. That girl named Doreta woke up very surprised porque la casa que estaba ya no estaba se desapareció todo
+DG – D….., I was wondering if you could translate something you said to me in Spanish into English

+D- Okay, I will try

+DG- Okay, please say this phrase in English: la casa que estaba ya no estaba se desapareció todo

+D- The house that was there wasn´t there because everything disappeared **Code Switching**

G – Aah ok, a day when I am in school, and yo fui con algunos compañeros y fuimos a un lugar

+DG – Could you please translate this in English for me? Yo fui con algunos compañeros y fuimos a un lugar

+G – I went with some friends and we went to a place. **Code Switching**

D – And everyone was saying 'no I didn't eat it because, because algo'

DG – They all made excuses, right?

D – Yes

+DG- Daniel, tell me something: Do you know how to say the word algo in English?

+D- Um.. algo I think that means some…… I´m not really sure if it means someone or somebody. **Transfer**

+DG- Actually it means something.

G. Dorotea. La bruja quitó el zapato a Dorotea. She enfadó y *tiró* agua a la bruja. The monkey helped and meet with her friends.

+DG – Do you know how to say this phrase in English Ella enfadó y tiró Agua a la bruja

+G – She angry and put water to the witch **Transfer**

In general, the evaluation of these two bilinguals was intended to characterize the differences between a simultaneous bilingual and a sequential bilingual child. The research also attempted to identify two main types of performance phenomena, code switching and transference, produced by simultaneous and sequential bilingual children. Specifically, the interview and the activities with the two children were conducted to: (1) investigate the differences between the two bilinguals, (2) compare and contrast the different performance phenomena produced by these children, (3) measure if such performance phenomenon as code switching occurred more often than transference in a simultaneous bilingual child; (4) verify if transference occurred more often than code switching in the sequential bilingual child; and (5) make some conclusions associated with the development of simultaneous and sequential bilingualism.

Discussion

There are an estimated six thousand languages spoken throughout the world (Grimes, 1992). In Chile, the official language for communication is Spanish. Because of the changes brought about by globalization,

people in Chile recognize the need to learn English. In general, many countries, including Chile believe that the development of multiple language proficiency is possible, and indeed, educators, policy makers and parents view it as desirable. Languages are dynamic and their speakers are constantly recreating them. When people become bilingual, their two languages presumably do not remain completely separate. They affect one another in ways, which are sometimes predictable and sometimes surprising. Why is this? Many linguists argue, "competences are indeed permeable whether they are complete language systems or inter-languages" (Smith 1989: 225). Some of the processes that most frequently take place when two languages come into contact are language transfer, borrowing and code switching. These processes, which can apparently occur in both directions from the L1 to the L2 and vice versa, have been labeled differently at various times, thus, creating confusion. Indeed, there has been considerable difficulty in clearly identifying these language phenomena. One of the contributions of this research study was the manner in which the categories of code switching and transfer were defined in order to be identified in the experiment with the two bilingual children. The importance of this distinction will enable professors to better understand how to address the difficulties that bilinguals face when learning a second language.

The phenomena of code switching and transfer must be re-investigated in depth by other authors since this research shows that both phenomena (code-switching, usually associated with factors other than lack of knowledge of one of the two languages, and transfer, definitely associated with less knowledge of the less dominant language) occurred with higher frequency in the sequential bilingual. The implication that can be drawn from this study is that in order to label an instance of language alternation code switching or transfer, the researcher needs to find out what is the cause of the alternation. In other words, is the cause due to ignorance of the equivalent form or is it simply a personal desire to switch languages. The answer to this question is critical because it will aid educators as to how to shape and define their curriculums in both the high school and university environment.

The study of the influence of one language over another has undergone significant changes over the past few decades. Investigators such as Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) hold that language transfer is relatively unimportant in language acquisition and that its major impact is on accent. More recently, the pendulum has swayed, and Gass and Selinker (1992) have proposed that there is overwhelming evidence to support the claim that language transfer is indeed a real and central phenomenon that must be considered in order to understand second language acquisition. Sridhar (1996: 62) argues that language transfer

is "a powerful force in language change, acquisition and use in multilingual communities."

There is considerable evidence to indicate that code switching serves important language functions in the communities where it is used. Not until the 1960s was code switching seriously studied after linguists concluded that it was not a random phenomenon. The most widely accepted definition of conversational code switching is that of Gumperz (1982: 59). He describes it as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems of subsystems." Poplack and Sankoff argue (1988) that, for the balanced bilingual, code switching appears to be subject to an equivalence constraint. It tends to occur at points in discourse where the juxtaposition of L1 and L2 elements do not violate a surface syntactic rule of either language. Code switching is not a result of imperfect competence in either of the two monolingual modes of communication, but rather results from knowledge of both their similarities and differences. Furthermore, code switchers do not suffer loss of competence by virtue of their skill at the code switching mode. In their opinion and in that of many linguists such as Zentella (1997), rather than representing debasement of linguistic skill, code switching is actually a sensitive indicator of bilingual ability. In other words bilinguals who code switch should not be shunned but on the contrary should be encouraged to continue such activity in order to enhance their bilingual development.

In this research, the simultaneous bilingual clearly demonstrated a better fluency in English, as well as a more varied vocabulary. This can be attributed to the fact that since both languages, Spanish and English, were acquired from birth the child had established two first languages rather than a first and a second and therefore feels comfortable in both.. However it is also interesting to note that the simultaneous bilingual had more problems reading in English than in Spanish and had much more difficulty in reproducing a story in English. This may be due to the fact that he now studies in a Spanish speaking school and thus does not practice the other important skills of language such as reading and writing. This supports the view that bilingualism is a relative concept suggesting that a bilingual may be advanced in some of the skills, but not necessarily in all of them.

Some speculative observations as to why both code switching and transference occurred more often in the sequential bilingual are the following. During the activities administered to the children, the researcher was able to note that the simultaneous bilingual had a much more fluid command of the English language than the sequential bilingual. In addition, although the sequential bilingual might have known the

appropriate phrase or word in English, which was verified by applying a follow up session, she felt more comfortable using Spanish in order to express it. Thus, she was not accustomed to using English freely and only used English for specific purposes in her classes. In contrast, the simultaneous bilingual felt comfortable enough in both languages and the need to switch did not occur. When he began to speak in one language, he usually continued and finished what he was communicating in the same language. This was attributed to his confidence in his abilities in both English and Spanish.

It is also speculated that the greater control of both of the languages, the more freedom there was in the constant maneuvering amongst the two languages. However, what is concluded from this research study is that the more linguistic competence within a language, the less need there is to code switch. Social circumstances, therefore, may dictate more as to when instances of code switching may be more frequent. Another postulation is that the simultaneous bilingual knew that the researcher's dominant language was English. He felt proud of his command of that language and wanted to impress the researcher. He might have also thought that it was incorrect to constantly switch from English to Spanish.

Results of this study suggest that code switching may occur more frequently when there is a lack of confidence or security in the L2 language versus confidence. Children who learn a second language later in their lives do face greater issues in terms of code switching compared to children who learn two languages at the same time. Therefore, the educational system, in the bilingual community, needs to further enhance their policies and programs to cater to the unique needs of sequential bilinguals regarding code switching. This is especially important because of the new program being implemented here in Chile "English Open Doors". Attempting to make this country bilingual is no easy task and focus needs to be geared towards exactly how and what kinds of issues bilinguals will face when learning a second or foreign language.

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