

# The Purpose and Significance of Code-Switching

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**Abstract:** Code-switching is a normal human brain function that is beneficial because: first, it offers the speaker an opportunity to convey his or her thoughts in the language deemed more appropriate or easier; second, code-switching reduces the stress on the brain as it endeavors to express itself; and third, code-switching can help speakers to gain attention, making it easier to persuade others. Code-switching has gained attention from linguists because of its impact on children and its changing grammatical structure and constraints, becoming an important skill and even a norm in the modern world.

## 1. Introduction

Those who speak two or more languages or dialects tend to switch between them within the same conversation or even within the same sentence. We witness this as world travelers, particularly in border areas between cultures and civilizations. It is so common that we have come to expect it. It is what happens between cultures and peoples, and it directly affects their use of language. Linguists term the switching between languages in the course of conversations or even in sentences as “code-switching.” As this paper argues, code-switching does no harm and, in fact, is beneficial.

## 2. A Better Method for Expressing

People switch languages to convey their ideas and thoughts in “a better way.” Since second-language learners have a greater vocabulary in their native language, they might code-switch to their native tongue when grasping for a word, term, or idea. If a Chinese speaker starts to learn English, he or she might struggle to find the right and appropriate word or phrase to express what he or she means in English. In this scenario, he or she might start off speaking in English and then drift back into Chinese as he or she tries to express the thought.

To illustrate by analogy, there is a famous word in the Portuguese language that does not translate perfectly into English: “Saudades.” It is a well-known word that evokes longing, missing, loving, and nostalgia—all in one term. Since this is such a powerful word, those who speak both languages—Portuguese and English—will generally use the Portuguese term when appropriate because the term evokes so many important feelings all in one word. Through code-switching, one is able to convey their meanings more accurately and effectively.

## 3. Lack of Tax on the Brain

Furthermore, code-switching can become frequent during emotional episodes to find the most appropriate language to convey feelings at a particular moment. Given that multiple languages are active in the bilingual speaker's mind, With multiple languages active in the bilingual speaker's mind, the brain requires a control process to determine the appropriate language, which takes lots of brain power<sup>[1]</sup>. According to Dr. Green and Dr. Abutalebi, there are two types of control processes for the brain: competitive and cooperative. Under competitive control, only a single language is allowed to be

used while speaking, whereas under cooperative control, more than one language can be part of the speech pattern. Heightened emotion tends to let the brain switch to the cooperative control process that allows several languages to be used, thereby increasing the frequency of code-switching. The idea was also supported by previous studies by Dr. Tottenham, Dr. Hare, and Dr. Casey, who later discovered evidence to support how there is a lower capacity for cognitive control when emotions are heightened than the capacity in those with minimal emotion<sup>[2]</sup>. In other words, it is easier (and likely preferable) for the brain during emotional situations to code-switch.

In particular, studies have found that negative emotions reduce cognitive control by diverting resources and energy. Dr. Cohen reported an experiment involving thirty-eight healthy adult participants: These participants were scanned while being given emotional tasks through the use of happiness (positivity), fearfulness (negativity), and calmness (neutral) cues. When the adults' emotions are neutral, there is a heightened and tiring circuitry activity in the frontoparietal and frontostriatal areas where competitive control resides. In contrast, under persistent threat and excitement, cognitive control was diminished, causing the cooperative control process to take over<sup>[3]</sup>.

Thus, emotional episodes may temporarily disrupt a bilingual speaker's cognitive control, which permits free and opportunistic language use and increases the frequency of code-switching. Code-switching during emotional episodes may therefore result from the influence of heightened emotion regarding cooperative control processes, which requires a lack of energy for the brain. Naturally, people tend toward greater self-assures when adopting code switches.

#### **4. A Tool for Persuasion**

Code-switching can also hold the purpose of either attracting attention or persuading an audience. Professor Janet Holmes defines the term as metaphorical switching or as “code-switching for rhetorical reasons”<sup>[4]</sup>. In a later paper, Dr. Nerghes explains the significance of using code-switching for persuasion and attention-grabbing by saying, “Code-switching will draw the participant's attention and will enhance their motivation to carefully scrutinize the message presented”<sup>[5]</sup>. By using code-switching in persuasion and rhetoric, the speaker appears more capable of reaching his or her goal and convincing the audience. To be more specific, code-switching reflects a particular socioeconomic identity which can give the speaker more credibility and reliability. “It is concluded that code-switching is an effective strategy that leads to systematic processing of information,” Dr. Nerghes says in her study, “especially when associated with strong arguments”<sup>[5]</sup>. The reasons for code-switching are likely to convey ideas and thoughts, express feelings and emotions, and attract and persuade the audience, preferably with more accuracy and evocative power.

#### **5. Interests in Code-Switching**

Adults are not the only ones who adopt code-switching during conversations. Children also utilize the method to express themselves from a young age, especially with limited vocabulary<sup>[6]</sup>. Studies have shown that very young children pick up languages when they hear their parents speaking them, so they start learning or imitating the languages. Kiran and Ashir are two parents who often switch languages when playing outside with their kids or working inside their house. This pattern of speaking causes their children to naturally switch between languages whenever they want. Therefore, the children listen and learn from their speaking patterns and the contexts in which they occur<sup>[7]</sup>.

Dr. Paradis discovered from his research that when children code-switch, they are able to maintain the rules of grammar of both languages<sup>[8]</sup>. In other words, they can keep their languages separate and coherently organized in speech and thought. In one of the experiments, Dr. Byer-Heinlein examines that newborns whose mothers spoke both English and Tagalog regularly during pregnancy showed an equal preference for both languages. Amazingly, the preference for two languages does not suggest the

children have confusion separating them<sup>[9]</sup>. As a result, it can be shown that children, despite their youthfulness, do not tangle the languages that they are learning.

From a linguistic standpoint, code-switching continues to intrigue researchers with its unique use of grammatical structure. It then becomes interesting as linguists try to pinpoint and explain the grammatical structure of using multiple languages in the same sentence or conversation.

The Equivalence Constraint Model of Code-switching, based on Dr. Poplack and Dr. Sankoff, gives an idea of the grammatical structure within code-switching as they explain that language switching tends to occur at points where the two languages have the same word order representation<sup>[10]</sup>. Since the syntactic rule is violated in the Persian-English switches, code-switching does not occur. Discovering in these ways-how code-switching functions in a child's brain, as well as the grammar/sentence structure behind code-switching, is interesting to many linguists.

## 6. Exceptions of Code-Switching

There appears to be scant evidence that code-switching "hurts" people's ability to communicate. To prescribe not using code-switching would, on the other hand, only be advisable in certain circumstances where "standard English," "pure Mandarin," or "Portuguese as spoken on the Brazilian Supreme Court" would be preferable. But these are class and institutional contexts, distinct from the norm of societies and cultures coming together. The individual's ability in the Anglo-Saxon context to dominate and employ "standard English" certainly has its place. All who study and work in the Anglo-Saxon world should learn "standard English" to attain professional competence and acceptance within the elite professions.

But employing code-switching in cities like Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Manchester, London, or Liverpool would be decidedly advantageous to the speaker in a wide variety of quite normal, day-to-day contexts. Therefore, one might well leave "the standard language form" to specific contexts such as the practice of law, university-level academic discourse, or efforts of social categories to exercise exclusion. In such circumstances, it might make sense to encourage those who would engage in these levels of social interaction to employ such language standards and leave aside the natural tendency to code-switch. These circumstances, however, merit further discussion in another paper.

## 7. Conclusion

For the last word, it is worth remembering the writing of a man considered by many people of England's greatest 20th-century novelists, essayists, and thinkers: George Orwell. Orwell offered a great deal of thought on many matters of language use, including code-switching. In his influential essay, *Politics and the English Language*<sup>[11]</sup>, he left us with a withering critique of modern English writing (and language use). He made a direct reference to the problem of code-switching in the course of his essay's discussion, likely long before linguists invented the term, in his "rules (v) and (vi)" (of six rules) of good English writing. In his 5th and 6th rules, he recommended: (v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent. (vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous<sup>[11]</sup>.

Both ironic and prescriptive, Orwell weighed in mightily on the ambiguity of casting judgment on what is "quite normal" within the use of language: moving from one to another among those who speak variously. He admonished such movement, at times, and at others, embraced it-indeed, to avoid saying "anything outright barbarous." Orwell thus quite clearly avoided being prescriptive, as in the argument here, on code-switching.

In this multicultural world, code-switching has become an important skill to develop. Frequently moving from one social group to the next while changing aspects of speech allow us to progress in our professional and personal lives while avoiding potentially awkward situations. Through code-

switching, we often find common ground through our patterns of language use. Code-switching has also grown particularly important as modernization, technological advances, and mass migrations have become the norm virtually everywhere. With code-switching, people can easily find their paths through problems and all kinds of novel situations that are social and cultural, with language playing an essential role.

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