Codeswitching & Bilingualism in a Connected World (Research Paper Sample)
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By the numbers, multilingual people - those speaking two or more languages fluently - outnumber monolinguals vastly on a global scale. It's no surprise, given the number of languages (counted variously at four to six thousand) and the number of countries (less than two hundred) that make up the world. The average American or Briton, usually monolingual, is therefore in the stark minority of the world's language users. But multilingualism is not as simple as speaking one language at home and another at school – *codeswitching* is the term used to describe the switch from one language to another in a single conversation, sentence or phrase. It's considered the most regular display of bilingualism in the world today, but many view it as improper – associating it with a lack of proficiency or professionalism – and discourage it in households, schools and wider communities across the world. And many other negative views of codeswitching are based on the idea that bilingualism *itself* is bad for children. These customs are important, but ought to be weighed against contemporary research: there's much recent evidence to suggest there are a number of cognitive and creative benefits, not just from bilingualism, but from codeswitching as a means of negotiating multiple language spheres. The question that must be asked, then, is the following: should communities, or households, or schools with a majority of multilingual speakers promote daily interchange of their languages? I'll be arguing that they should – bilingualism (in general) and codeswitching (in particular) have been demonstrated through modern research to be natural and efficacious linguistic phenomena, and they can bring a range of cognitive and creative benefits to those who utilize them in daily life. By challenging norms of linguistic "propriety", these negative views of bilingualism in general and codeswitching in particular, these benefits can be nurtured and encouraged in a way that could drastically improve the ways in which multilinguals navigate the many cultural and social spheres they inhabit.

Let's start, first, with the terms *bilingual* and *multilingual*. At least in the United States, these terms often carry a tinge of prestige to them; it may have something to do with the relatively low proportion of our population considered proficient in more than one language. By census estimates, about 20% of America is at least bilingual: mostly in Spanish, but with Chinese, Arabic and French forming significant figures as well. Measuring bilingualism by exact figures is difficult; even countries with regular censuses rarely inquire in-depth about language use habits. But most researchers estimate 50-60% of the wider world to be bilingual, with that figure naturally bound to increase over time. Precise definitions often differ on who can be considered *bilingual*, mostly on distinctions of proficiency; is someone who's in the process of learning a foreign language, but not yet fluent, also to be considered bilingual? Many would say the label doesn't apply here, but we will consider them bilinguals (if nascent) in the context of this paper - specifically because there is much research to show that codeswitching can expedite the process of learning a foreign language. The issue of *developing* bilingualism will return when we explore codeswitching in greater detail, but for now, let us say that anybody able to utilize two or more languages comprehensibly in conversation is bilingual. Multilingual, then, will be used to describe those speaking three or more languages.

How all the world's languages arose is a question for historical linguistics, but the fact of the matter is this: between the abundance of languages and the limited space in the world, it's simply impossible for language contact not to occur. And the world's countries range across the spectrum of linguistic diversity - at one end are nations like Iceland, with nearly the entire population speaking a single language, and at the other are countries like Papua New Guinea, which is reported to have approximately 850 indigenous languages (in an area not much larger than California). Most of the world's nations, however, lie somewhere closer to the middle of the spectrum. Some have overarching

national languages spoken alongside regional minority languages (as in India), while others may be divided into areas of differing majority languages, with less overlap (like Switzerland or Belgium). The upshot of all this is simply that bilingualism is natural and unavoidable, a product of how the world is structured.

The widespread nature of bilingualism is can be explained, on the level of individuals, by children's propensity for picking up multiple languages. Human cognitive development appears naturally inclined towards bilingualism at best, and perfectly accommodating at worst, especially in the earliest years of life. Meisel (2004) concludes convincingly that children of preschool-age or younger "differ qualitatively from school-age children … and adults" in their ability to acquire more than one language. This is commensurate with the idea that humans develop languages faculties differently depending on their age. Meisel notes that "awareness of bilingualism during the second half of the children's second year of life" - meaning children can identify and separate languages that they are immersed in, long before they ever gain proficiency in either one (Meisel 11). It would seem, therefore, that bilingualism or multilingualism can be appropriately considered a "natural" variant of human language acquisition, rather than abnormal. Meisel claims that children raised multilingually exhibit "multiple first language acquisition" - meaning they learn each language as proficiently as a monolingual would their native language. This is in stark contrast to many generic claims supporting the idea that bilingual children will end up underdeveloped by spreading their language faculties "too thin". "Clearly," he concludes, "the human language faculty has an endowment for multilingualism" (Meisel 32). And if this is the case, then arguments against raising bilingualism begin to splinter. The question, then, turns to the process: what's the best *way* for children continue to develop command of all these languages?

The answer to that question comes in the form of codeswitching. Like bilingualism, codeswitching has some variety in how it's defined, but we'll be discussing it in its most standard definition: the use of more than one language or language variety over the course of a single conversation or utterance. Being an active and real-time implementation of bilingualism, codeswitching (henceforth referred to as CS) offers tremendous insight into how speakers of multiple languages contrast their different tongues. CS has been subject to a variety of attitudes in modern times - some positive, but the overwhelming majority either neutral or negative. In a study of English-Spanish bilinguals in California, Montes-Alcala (2000) discusses the "derogatory labels" attributed to CS between the two languages; names like "Tex-Mex" or "Spanglish" are commonly used to chastise or delegitimize CS in these environments (Montes-Alcala 1). Stigmatizations of CS in large communities often arise from perceptions of "illiteracy, lack of formal education or lack of proficiency" in the languages being used (Montes-Alcala 1). This seems to be particularly true for monolinguals evaluating bilingual usage in their own communities; "from a monolingual perspective," suggests Meisel, CS "appears to indicate an inability to keep the languages apart" (Meisel 9). Those of us who are monolingual may be accustomed to experiences like this; on a relatively diverse college campus, it's not uncommon to hear Spanish, Mandarin or Korean interspersed with English words and phrases. If it does seem haphazard or random to us, we might be able to understand the doubts people have about CS. But the truth of the matter is that practically all well-researched instances of CS demonstrate a structural organization to them, on par with any other grammatical system. The sociocultural factors influencing CS are numerous and interconnected, and it may never be possible to formalize all the reasons and motivations for utilizing CS in daily discourse. But recent research has helped to create a rich spectrum of theories to explain CS behavior - its causes, its concerns and its benefits.

Different studies over the past twenty years have explored different factors that could influence the use of CS. Many are linguistic in nature: the syntax and morphology (basically, the grammar) of

different languages can often govern the structure of codeswitched phrases. Different pairs of languages, having different grammatical systems, display a range of possible CS structures - but almost all systematically researched instances of CS show a conformity to some kind of grammatical structure. In her dissertation on Greek-English CS amongst bilingual women in New York City, Malliaroudakis (2011) highlights a number of factors that appear to correlate with CS over the course of casual conversations. On the linguistic side, she notes the tendency for speakers to switch before nouns (33% of all instances of CS in the data), conjunctions (16%) and verbs (15%) - whereas constructions like prepositional phrases were quite rare, while "calculated codeswitches at prepositional phrase boundaries was at a mere 4%" of all CS instances recorded (Malliaroudakis 2011, 17). Such trends differ depending on the languages being used in CS and their structural attributes, but the fact that CS use strongly correlates with the morphological and syntactic nature of the two (or more) languages is well-documented cross-linguistically. In analyzing CS use between Nepali and Chintang, two very structurally different languages, across generations, Stoll (2015) observes that "Chintang shows a substantial proportion of syntactically integrated insertions" (Stoll 2015, 6). What this means is the following: the form that CS takes can be strongly associated with one, if not both, of the languages' grammatical systems - phrases and words that are uttered in one language may take on grammatical features of the other when CS happens, resulting in grammatical integration. If this is the case, then CS cannot be chalked up to random or senseless whims of the speakers. The idea of "Tex-Mex" or "Spanglish" being some slapdash mix of two languages, an unstructured blend, fails to stand up to scrutiny.

Other factors influencing CS are more social and cultural in nature. The personal relationships between speakers, their "faithfulness" to their culture(s), and conversational perspective are examples of what are called "paralinguistic" factors; they are influences that pertain to oral communication, but not to the structure of language itself. Where Malliaroudakis' research becomes very interesting is its suggestion of culturally-linked instances of CS: when her subjects began to discuss aspects of Greek life and culture (particularly cities and regions of Greece), the rate of CS from English to Greek leapt tremendously. When Greek subject matter appeared in English conversation, the subjects would switch to Greek at least 60% of the time, and for some speakers 80-90% of the time. Malliaroudakis suggests that such a speaker is "[portraying] her identity as a bilingual and to emphasize that Greece is different than America" in ways that the speaker may consciously or unconsciously wish to represent (Malliaroudakis 16). And interestingly, the converse held true as as well - when American regions or subjects came up in the course of conversations conducted largely in Greek, "all six participants would codeswitch and say the city names in English" (16). If this idea seems intuitive, it's because the cultural influences exerted on CS practices are not difficult to imagine in principle. When viewing this phenomenon through the lens of cultural identity, the question simply becomes one of free expression. If multilinguals identify themselves as belonging to two or more cultural spheres (Greek and American, in the case of Malliaroudakis' research), shouldn't we encourage them to express those different identities as freely as possible? I will consider the answer to this question to be fairly self-evident: in the interest of free expression, cultural identification and individual rights, I believe it's of paramount importance that we do so, and CS provides a powerful and flexible tool for this kind of cultural expression.

Other research goes into even greater depth to explore the cultural motivations for CS. In a particularly expansive study on two multilingual speech communities, Bhatt & Bolonyai (2011) propose the idea of a "sociolinguistic grammar". This, as they explain, is not literally a grammatical system, but "a set of principles that mobilize the most effective means of communication of meaning in any … bilingual context" (Bhatt & Bolonyai 2011, 1). In the course of analyzing large amounts of conversational data from Hungarian-English bilinguals in America and Hindu-English-Kashmiri

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trilinguals in India, they propose a framework of five principles that constitute this sociolinguistic grammar: "faith, power, solidarity, face and perspective" (Bhatt & Bolonyai 2011, 1). These principles are identified throughout their recorded excerpts, in ways that "[maximize] the potential of bilingual meaning-making" (Bhatt & Bolonyai 2011, 8). The researchers explain the principles as broad socio-cultural motivations that have an impact on how conversation is conducted. The "power" and "solidarity" principles, for example, describe "a pattern of CS … where the minority language and the majority language convey oppositional values"; these are used to create "in-group cohesion" or "co-membership" in speech communities (Bhatt & Bolonyai 2011, 7). More simply, the languages chosen to communicate are very important when conversants are constructing and displaying their social identities and relations. On the basis of the two speech communities they researched, Bhatt & Bolonyai come to the conclusion that stable multilingual communities will arrive at "optimal grammars", which will differ based on the cultural values and impulses of its speakers. Through their analysis of CS instances in the Hindu-English-Kashmiri speech communities, and the socio-cultural motivations behind them, they propose the following "order" of principles for this community:

> *{FAITH, PERSPECTIVE, FACE} >> POWER >> SOLIDARITY*
> *(Bhatt & Bolonyai 2011, 16)*

What this means, according to Bhatt & Bolonyai, is that the principles apparently most valued by the speech community in question are faith, perspective and face (on fairly equal footing), followed by power, followed by solidarity. This is not meant to be a sweeping generalization of Indian culture - it's an attempt to make sense of the tremendously complex, interconnected variables that influence how language is used in daily conversation, and suggest some overarching principles that explain the empirical data. The authors don't pass judgment on whether CS is something that communities *should* use; they simply observe that it *is* used, and this is their initial proposal for a structure that helps determine why people do it. But if individuals indeed use CS for the purpose of "reflecting different identity-positioning, meaning-making, and personal goals and desires" (Bhatt & Bolonyai 2011, 23), they shouldn't be restricted from doing so to the fullest. Even if the framework proposed in this study is not the ideal one, it makes it very clear that there *is* social significance underscoring the use of CS in multilingual communities.

But even if cultural motivations such as these seem abstract and difficult to quantify, there's an analogous body of research demonstrating the academic and cognitive benefits brought by CS. Monolingual schools in multilingual communities provide interesting testing grounds for the potentials of CS, and the harms that arise from stifling it. Many countries outside the Western world, particularly those with colonial legacies, have one or two official languages in which state education is conducted. Namibia, in sub-Saharan Africa, is such a country: a recently published survey, Simasiku, Kasanda & Smit (2015), explore the benefits of encouraging CS between teachers and students in the classroom. Spurred by rising high school drop-out rates in the Caprivi region, the researchers investigate the potential of encouraging multilingual education in a part of Namibia where English-only education had long been the official policy. One of the central problems to the educational system, they find, is the "huge difference between the English vocabularies [the students] know and the English vocabularies they need" to succeed in English-taught classes (Simasiku, Kasanda & Smit 2015, 2). This discrepancy, they explain, comes from a lack of sufficient support by parents and teachers to learn English effectively. By being forced through an education system conducted in a non-native language, students largely miss out on the benefits that education can bring. Over the course of an academic year, the researchers had teachers in the region reflect on their own experiences using CS in the classroom; most admitted that "it made the course easier to understand if CS was utilized". And even the more conservative teachers, who advocated for a fully monolingual English-language education,

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acknowledged "CS as a means of strengthening their learners' comprehension in the English language" (Simasiku, Kasanda & Smit 2015, 7). While it may seem paradoxical at first, this means that CS actually helped Namibian students improve their understanding of not only the material being taught, but also the English language. When considering the aforementioned research that children are able to distinguish multiple language inputs from a very early age, the logic that CS is somehow harmful in the classroom is completely counteracted by the results of this study. The researchers, too, are aware of these misconceptions, and hope to challenge them: "if teachers are assured they are doing the right thing" when using CS, they posit, those teachers "may accomplish what [CS] is intended for, namely: enhancing teaching, learning and concept clarification" (Simasiku, Kasanda & Smit 2015, 7).

The potential of CS for *strengthening* second or third languages is incredibly valuable in and of itself, but its tangible benefits go even further, beyond the classroom environment. In a study conducted with multilinguals at the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, Kharkhurin & Wei (2014) observe that "habitual code-switchers", or people who use CS frequently, "often produce highly innovative forms that incorporate elements from different languages" in an effortless manner (Kharkhurin & Wei 2014, 4). They suggest that "extensive CS practice may result in enhanced selective attention capacity", which they identify as a chief component of "creative performance" (Kharkhurin & Wei 2014, 6). By using the Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults (ATTA), a metric of certain aspects of creative thinking, they test the relative creative capacities of monolinguals and bilinguals (English-Arabic or English-Urdu) at the university. Their results suggested that a difference exists even among those who view CS favorably: the previously mentioned "habitual CSers" exhibited greater potential for creative capacity than both the monolingual group *and* the students who only seldomly used CS. While this is study is speculative and preliminary, like many others on the topic of CS, the trends are difficult to ignore, particularly when certain motivations are taken under consideration. Kharkhurin & Wei note that "CS induced by a particular emotional state … appeared to relate to an increase in innovative capacity" (Kharkhurin & Wei 2014, 12). This correlates strongly with the cultural, personal and emotional factors that compel CS decisions, as explored by Bhatt & Bolonyai; the phenomenon of CS is at least partially explained as multilinguals utilizing their entire linguistic resources to communicate as effectively and meaningfully as possible.

So what, then, are we to make of all this research, all this dialogue on the subjects of multilingualism and CS? Firstly, it's clear that attitudes condemning both bilingual learning and CS as unnatural are unfounded when put under scrutiny. Multilingualism as a paradigm and CS as its primary implementation appear to be natural for human beings. Additionally, the latter is clearly not arbitrary, but the product of an incredibly intricate network of linguistic, social, personal and emotional influences - if language's primary purpose is meaningful communication, CS is an immeasurably powerful tool for multilinguals to achieve it. It permits freer expression for people attempting to navigate multiple cultural spheres and identities, as is often seen in immigrant communities and multilingual households. In fact, such communities stand to benefit hugely from encouraging CS on even more practical fronts: far from hindering foreign language education, CS serves as a tool to boost comprehension and language acquisition among younger speakers in the classroom. For minority language communities, this can be an invaluable way to develop proficiency in the majority language of the wider community - and as these multilinguals grow and develop, continued use of CS helps to increase their potential for innovative and creative forms of thinking. The field of researching CS is relatively young, and only stands to grow in the coming years; the results of studies presented here may indeed be preliminary, but they go very far in demonstrating the abundant benefits of encouraging CS. The proportion of multilinguals in the world is growing every day - it's time we embraced that fact, and time we allowed those of us who are multilingual to express themselves as freely and effectively as possible.

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