Case Study on Codeswitching in a Japanese-English Bilingual Family

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Abstract

This paper showcases a case study documenting the intended and actual language practices of a Japanese-English bicultural family. The study focuses on a family consisting of a father, mother, son and daughter living in Japan. The parents were interviewed by questionnaire to determine their intended language practices that follow the one parent one language (OPOL) approach. The family's speech during a dinner conversation was recorded was analyzed to determine their actual language practice. All family members used both languages during the recording session. Incidences of codeswitching are discussed according to purposes summarized from Baker (2006). The family's intended and actual practices are shown to be different. Their language practices including codeswitching and using the weaker language in the household have a positive effect on their children's bilingualism. This paper shows that despite their intentions, the family uses codeswitching to enhance communication with each other. (Appendixes)

Introduction

This paper describes a case study that examines the codeswitching practices of an English-Japanese bilingual family. The pragmatic reasons and motivations behind their language use are determined according to Baker's (2006) twelve purposes of codeswitching. This paper will examine their attitudes towards bilingualism and codeswitching and will attempt to determine whether their intentions of language use are supported or contradicted by their actual language use. Finally, this paper will include a discussion their hopes for language use in the future and a prediction on the effects that their choices may have on the children's ability to become fully functional bilinguals.

Background Theory

Bilingual families have two languages at their disposal. Studies of language use in bilingual families have revealed that codeswitching between the languages is a common factor in communication (Comeau, Genesee & Lapaquette 2003; Harding & Riley 1999; Jisa 2000; Ludi 2003; Nakagawa 1995; Nishimura 1995). Although codeswitching is often seen as a negative aspect reflecting lexical deficiency or laziness (Baker 2006), it does not necessarily indicate these negative factors and is often used instead to enhance conversation between interlocutors (Fotos 1995). It is structured, purposeful and prevalent in bilinguals' speech (Baker 2006).

Codeswitching as defined by Gumpertz (1982 in Romaine 1989: 111) is, "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems." In another definition, Baker describes codeswitching as "any switch within the course of a single conversation, whether at word or sentence level or at the level of blocks of speech" (2006: 110). In this paper, Baker's (2006) definition will be followed and any change in language will be considered as an example of codeswitching.

Codeswitching has been examined through both linguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. This paper will focus solely on the sociolinguistic reasons for

codeswitching. Codeswitching in sociolinguistic contexts is used as a mode of discourse (Gumpertz 1982 in Romaine 1989). It is used as an option of communication much like a monolingual's switching of a dialect or register depending on the listener (Gumpertz 1982 in Romaine 1989).

Codeswitching varies according to the interlocutors, the context, and the topic (Baker 2006). It can be described as situational or metaphoric (Gumperz 1982). Situational codeswitching occurs when language is switched due to a change in participants, topics or setting (Jisa 2000). Metaphorical codeswitching refers to the pragmatic reasons behind the language alteration (Romaine 1989). Various reasons for using codeswitching have been suggested (Chung 2006; Fotos 1995; Nishimura 1995; Romaine 1989), but the most comprehensive list is given by Baker (2006) He proposes twelve purposes of codeswitching summarized below:

1. Codeswitches may be used to emphasize a particular point in conversation.
2. If a person does not know a word or phrase in a language, that person may substitute a word in another language.
3. Words or phrases in two languages may not correspond exactly and the bilingual may switch to one language to express a concept that has no equivalent in the culture of the other language.
4. Codeswitching may be used to reinforce a request.
5. Repetition of a phrase or passage in another language may also be used to clarify a point.
6. Codeswitching may be used to express identity, communicate friendship or family bonding.
7. In relating a conversation held previously, the person may report the conversation in the language or languages used.
8. Codeswitching is sometimes used as a way of interjecting into a conversation.
9. Codeswitching may be used to ease tension and inject humor into a conversation.
10. Codeswitching often relates to a change of attitude or

relationship.
11. Codeswitching can also be used to exclude people from a conversation.
12. In some bilingual situations, codeswitching occurs regularly when certain topics are introduced. (2006:111–113)

The Family's Language Background

A family of four was studied. The father (F) is Japanese and the mother (M) is Australian. They have been married for eighteen years and they have two children, a son (S) who is twelve and a daughter (D) who is seven. The family has lived in Japan since the children were born, but every year the mother and the children go to Australia for a month. During this time, the children attend an Australian elementary school.

The father is forty-nine years old. He started studying English as a required subject in junior high school from the age of twelve for six years. Upon completion of high school, he felt that he had very little command of English as a second language. At the age of twenty-six, he was sent to Norway for two years on business and learned how to speak English there. After returning to Japan, he got married and continued speaking English but did not study it in any formal manner. He is studying conversation and vocabulary through podcasts and self-study. He travels abroad on business two or three times a year. He speaks Japanese with the children and both Japanese and English with his wife.

The mother is a forty-four year old English speaking Australian. She has lived in Japan for the past twenty years. After getting married, she studied Japanese by herself using textbooks, watching TV, and attending volunteer language classes. She passed the highest level of the Japanese language proficiency examination and is working as a freelance Japanese-English translator. She is studying interpreting to improve her spoken Japanese. When she got married, she spoke Japanese with her husband; but after the children were born, she began to speak English all the time. She speaks English in the house with her husband and the children but uses Japanese when Japanese houseguests are present and when she is in public with the children. She feels that

language should be used accordingly so no one is excluded from the conversation.

The Family's Intended Language Practices and Expectations

Through separate interviews using the same questionnaire (Appendix A), it was found that the mother and father have different expectations and attitudes about language use and bilingualism.

In an interview, the father explained his language practices in English. He uses Japanese all the time with the children because he feels that it is natural for him as Japanese is his native language. He says that the children always speak Japanese to him so he always speaks Japanese with them. He states that the children never speak English to him directly. He feels that the children use Japanese with each other 90% of the time and only speak English with each other if other English-speaking children are present. He has negative feelings about codeswitching and thinks that the children do not codeswitch.

In the house, the father wishes that English could be the common language. He tries to speak English with his wife but often finds himself speaking Japanese because he feels it is difficult to maintain a conversation in English. He feels that he is not bilingual and considers English to be his second language. He thinks that the children are bilingual.

In the interview with the mother, she explained that before the children were born, she did research on bilingualism and after reading *The Bilingual Family* by Harding and Riley (1999), decided that they would follow the one parent one language method (OPOL). She believes that consistency is the key in promoting the bilingualism in her children. As a result, the mother feels that she has been strict about using English all the time at home. She would prefer to speak Japanese at home in order to improve her own Japanese abilities but she feels that she is obligated to use English in order to help the children maintain their English. Even if the kids speak Japanese to her, she uses English with them. She uses Japanese when saying something that has no English equivalent, when there are other Japanese speakers present or occasionally when she finds it easier and quicker than English. She doesn't have any negative feelings about codeswitching

and feels that it is a natural phenomenon.

The mother has an interesting perspective on bilingualism. Even though she is competent in spoken Japanese and works as a translator, she doesn't feel that she is bilingual. She thinks that the children's bilingualism is important because they are bicultural and she feels that successful biculturalism requires the maintenance of both languages. However, she thinks that the children are not bilingual and that balanced bilingualism in Japanese-English speakers is very rare and is probably unattainable.

The Family's Actual Language Usage

The Father

A seventeen-minute conversation between the parents and children was recorded one day over dinner. In order to prevent any nervousness on behalf of the participants, recording equipment was left with the mother and she was entrusted with recording the conversation in the absence of this researcher.

The recording revealed that the intended practices and the actual language usage of this family are somewhat similar. However, small deviations from their intentions and some instances of codeswitching were exhibited. All conversation samples are shown in Appendix B.

When speaking to the children, the father used Japanese in most instances. However, in Example A, he used English when speaking to his daughter. When speaking only to the mother, the father often used English. In one instance where the mother initiated the conversation in Japanese (Example B), the father continued the conversation in English.

In conversations with his wife in which the children are also included, the father used both Japanese (Example C) and English (Example J). In Example C, although the father's comments were directed at the mother, he spoke Japanese. Even when asked a further question in English, he continued to speak Japanese.

Example B also shows an instance of intrasentential codeswitching. Instead of using the

English word 'taste' the father used the Japanese equivalent '*ajimi*'. According to Baker's (2006) reasons for codeswitching, this switch may have been triggered by a lack of lexical knowledge at that moment. Because the father is fluent in English, he probably knows the correct word but just couldn't produce it at the needed time. He used the Japanese equivalent to cover for his memory loss. This technique has been called translanguistic wording and is a common strategy that non-native speakers use for overcoming lexical limitations (Ludi 2003). The father stated in his interview that he tries to use the words he knows in English, but with his wife, he knows that she will understand the Japanese so he uses it occasionally to replace any unknown English words.

The Mother

In the interview with the mother, she stressed her intention to use English all the time in the house but noted that she occasionally uses Japanese when it is easier. In her conversations, incidences of codeswitching and Japanese language use can be seen.

Looking again at Example B, the mother uses Japanese when talking about how delicious the dinner was. The phrase '*gochisosama deshita*' has no direct English equivalent and it is always said after a meal. Her response to her husband's use of the same phrase in Example E is also given in Japanese. This is explained by Baker (2006) when he states that codeswitching is used to express feelings or concepts that aren't directly translatable. In contrast, the mother's use of the phrase '*oishikatta,*' which can be directly translated to 'that was delicious,' cannot be accounted for by this reason. Gumpertz (1982 in Romaine 1989: 149–150) suggests that codeswitching can be used to invite the listener into the conversation. Because the mother was speaking to the father, her use of Japanese may have indicated that she wanted to start a conversation with him instead of the children. Alternatively, the use of the Japanese term could be a bonding mechanism. Baker (2006) suggests that this kind of codeswitching is often used to indicate that the speaker wants to be a part of a group. Thus, this brief use of Japanese could be a reflection of the mother's desire to speak Japanese. Codeswitches are often used for several reasons at the same time (Fotos 1995), so it is difficult to determine the precise reasoning behind the mother's language choices in this conversation.

In Examples A and C, the mother replaces an English phrase with a Japanese one. Again, her use of Japanese here could be a reflection of her desire to speak Japanese but more likely it is used for emphasis or clarification (Baker 2006). The mother may have intentionally codeswitched to emphasize the importance of the topic and to make sure that she was understood.

In Example D, she joins one conversation and speaks Japanese to the children and her husband. Why does the mother waver from her policy of English only in the home on this occasion? Her usage of Japanese in this instance could be due to the fact that the conversation was instigated by the father in Japanese, thus flowing better without the use of English. It could also indicate her desire to belong to the group of Japanese speakers.

The Daughter

The children's use of language is quite different. The daughter spoke Japanese for the entire conversation except for two instances of codeswitching used for clarification (Examples F and G) and one instance of a request in English (Example H).

The pragmatic reasons for the use of the English request here are difficult to determine but Baker (2006) suggests that codeswitching can be governed by cultural attitudes. In this example, the differences in the Japanese and Australian culture may provide a reason. In Japanese, communicative style is often indirect (Clancy 1986). This is especially true when asking for something. In Japanese, a common way of asking for a drink is to say *'Nodo kawaita'* (My throat is dry). In English however, direct requests are usually used when asking for something to eat or drink (e.g., May I have a drink?). Perhaps the daughter prefers to use English when requesting something from her mother because it follows the cultural norms in the English language even though it goes against Japanese culture.

In the mother's interview, she described her daughter's language use as 'parrot-like'. The above examples reflect this description. In Examples F and G, she repeats what her mother has said in both instances. In Example H, she is repeating something that she

has probably been taught to say. However, because of her impolite use of the word 'can', she was immediately corrected by both her mother and her brother and quickly switched back to Japanese.

The daughter is able to speak English and does so quite capably while she is in Australia or speaking to a monolingual English speaker. However, with her family, Japanese is her dominant language and she is in monolingual mode (Grosjean 1985). This is emphasized in a conversation about the use of exaggeration in English in which she asks her brother to repeat what he has said because she doesn't understand it (Example I).

The daughter's lack of frequent codeswitching may be explained by her age. Young children do not have the pragmatic, social or textual competence that is required for pragmatic codeswitching (Jisa 2000). Without these abilities, the daughter remains in monolingual mode and uses repetition techniques to clarify what her mother has said.

The Son

In Example I, the son's use of codeswitching can be seen. When he quoted his mother, he used English. Baker (2006) suggests that relating a conversation that has previously been held in the same language is a reason for codeswitching. Fotos (1995: 12) also found that codeswitching is used when reporting speech.

Although most of the son's speech was in Japanese, he occasionally switched to English when answering his mother as seen in Examples J and C. These are examples of situational codeswitching in which the language used by the interlocutor can trigger a switch (Hamers & Blanc 1989; Jisa 2000). Although the participants haven't changed, the responses are directed solely to the mother and are therefore said in English.

The son also uses codeswitching to break the tension (Baker 2006) when his sister is being scolded by her parents for taking a long time to eat (Example K).

Discussion

The family's language practices are similar to their intentions; however, there are some deviations. In his interview, the father stated that he always speaks Japanese to the children. In Example A, however, he speaks English to his daughter for no apparent pragmatic reason. In conversations with the mother, he speaks both Japanese and English and does occasionally codeswitch (Examples A and B). He also stated in the interview that he thinks that the children do not codeswitch but from the evidence presented here (Examples C, F, G, H, I, J, K), it is obvious that they do. Although the father has negative feelings about codeswitching, those who are more fluent in languages tend to codeswitch more often (Meisel 2004 in Baker 2006). Codeswitching is a valuable linguistic tool that bilinguals use purposely to converse with other bilinguals (Baker 2006).

The mother tries to use English as much as possible with the children but occasionally slips into Japanese when it is easier or more convenient (Example C). She uses both English and Japanese with her husband and occasionally with the children perhaps due to a desire to speak Japanese in the home. She also uses codeswitching for concepts that aren't directly translated into English (Examples B and E).

The son appears to be a functional bilingual. He has a good command of spoken English and understands what his mother says. Overall however, he uses Japanese much more than English. He uses codeswitching for pragmatic reasons as well as situational ones.

The daughter appears to be a passive bilingual in the home. She only uses English to repeat something for clarification and she relies on Japanese for most of her communication. When she is in Australia, she is fluent in English but in Japan, she falls into monolingual mode. The social environment plays a large role in her language choices.

There is an interesting contradiction in the desires of the parents about future language use in the home. The father prefers that English be the main language in the house. The mother, however, would prefer to use Japanese. She has tried to follow the OPOL method in the hopes that her English use would help the children maintain their English level. However, the OPOL method is not always successful in this goal (De-Houwer

2007; Noguchi 1996). Noguchi (1996: 245) also suggests that strict adherence to a method such as OPOL may in fact impede communication between family members. Because the mother can understand Japanese and uses it outside the home, communication will not be impeded, but if the mother decides to start using Japanese inside the home as well, how will this affect the children's chances at becoming balanced bilinguals?

Studies have proven that the minority language must be used in the home if there is any chance for the children to become bilingual (De-Houwer 2007; Noguchi 1996). However, the use of the minority language does not guarantee bilingualism or that the children will use the minority language in the home (De-Houwer 2007). There is a greater chance of success in both bilingualism and children's production of the minority language if both parents use the minority language consistently at home (De-Houwer 2007; Noguchi 1996). If the mother decides to speak Japanese in the home, it could have a detrimental effect on the children's bilingualism. Even now, we can see from the daughter's failure to understand her brother's English explanation in Example I, that her passive bilingual ability is not very high. With less input in the minority language, we can assume that the daughter's passive bilingual abilities would decrease even further.

This case study has shown that in spite of their intentions, this family uses both of their languages to enhance their conversations. Codeswitching is not used solely for lexical deficiencies, but for pragmatic, social and cultural reasons. It is a valuable tool that this bilingual family uses to make their conversations richer and more understandable.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions adapted from (Harding & Riley 1999; Serna 2007)

1. What languages do you speak (background history)?

2. When did you come to Japan?

3. How did you learn Japanese (English)?

4. How old are your children?

5. What language did you use when they were babies?

6. What languages do you speak to the children (how do you use languages)?

7. Which language do you prefer to speak with the children?

8. If you speak to the kids in English (Japanese) and they reply in Japanese (English), which language do you continue to use?

9. When the children play alone, what language do they use with each other?

10. Do you see any differences in the way the children use language (Does one use Japanese more than the other)?

11. Have your children learned to read and write in both languages?

12. How did you accomplish this?

13. How often do you go abroad?

14. Which language do you prefer to speak at home?

15. What language do you speak to your spouse?

16. When or why do you change languages with the kids or your spouse?

17. How do you feel when your kids mix languages?

18. Why do you want your children to be bilingual?

19. Do you think you are bilingual?

20. Do you think your children are bilingual?

Appendix B
Conversation Transcript

Regular font – English

Italics – Japanese

(Parenthesis) – English glosses of Japanese words and phrases

{brackets} – paralinguistic features

* The children call their parents *Otoosan* (Dad) and *Okaasan* (Mom). These were not considered to be examples of codeswitching.

Example A

M: Remember what I said? *Sebone ga magatteiru*. (Your backbone is curved.)

S: *Iisugiteiruyo*. (You say it too much.)

D: *Otoosan, S no doko ga warui no*? (Dad, what part of brother's body is bad?)

F: It depends on what kind of treatment he had. *Dou yuu fuu ni? Oboeteinai? Senaka? Ashi?*

        (What was it like? Don't you remember? Your back? Your legs?)

Example B

M: *Oishikatta*. (That was delicious)

F: Are you finished?

M: Um. *Gochisosama deshita.* (Yes, thank you for the meal.)

F: Did you do *ajimi* or... (taste)

M: No I um...

F: You said you were…

M: Yeah, I've been sick after that lunch.

Example C

M: Um…tomorrow we have to get *mochimono* (the things to take) ready.

S*: Soieba shiroi kutsushita wa attakke?*

(Oh yeah, do I have any white socks?)

F: *Shiroi kutsushita hitsuyo na no?* (Do you need white socks?)

M: Um…do you have to wear them with the uniform?

S: Maybe.

M: You could borrow some of *Otosan's* (father's) cause you haven't got any. We'll borrow..buy some tomorrow.

M: In summer do you wear shorts?

F: {laughter} *Sonna wakai – igirisu ja nai da zo.*

(He's not that young. This isn't England you know.)

M: I just wondered. I thought it'd be sensible.

D: *Eh? Soshitara astuii jan.* (Then you'll be so hot.)

M: Don't they wear shorts?

S*: Atari mae des yo*! (Of course they don't!)

F: *Nihon no natsu wa, hanzubon haita kara te suzushikuwa narinain da yo.*

Yoso ni gyaku ni nagazubon yousurruni omota ho ga suzushi ne. Dochi ka to yuu to.

(The Japanese summer is so hot that even if you wear short pants, you don't feel any cooler. In fact, thinking it is too hot because you are wearing long pants seems cooler.)

Example D

F*: Ki tsukanai kimi na.* (You don't even notice that do you?)

M: *Ki ni tsukanai ka, ki ni shinai.* (She doesn't notice or she doesn't care.)

Example E

F: *Gochisosamadeshita* (Thank you for the meal.)

M: *Iie. Doitashimashite.* (No, you're welcome.)

Example F

D: *Watashi no apuron te doko na no*? (Where is my apron?)

M: In the drawer.

D: In the drawer? *Ah asoko ne.* (Oh, over there.)

Example G

M: Don't touch it daughter!

D: *Ja*, touch *wa damme to yuu koto*? (So you mean I can't touch it?)

M: Finish your dinner please.

Example H

D: Can I have some more water please?

M: Yes you may.

S: May.

D: *Datte sa* (well).

Example I

S: *G machi de takebi shitta toki ni boku ga hi o tsuketa bo o mottara, okasan ga kyuuni* "Hey you burnt my shorts" *te* nearly *te.*

> (In G town when we had a campfire, when I picked up a burning stick, mom suddenly said 'Hey you burnt my shorts' then she said 'nearly'.)

M: You burnt my what?

S: You burnt my you burnt my pants. *Ato de* nearly. (Then nearly.)

D: *Ne ne nihongo ni shite imi ga wakaranai.*

> (Hey, say it in Japanese, I don't understand.)

S: *Dakara, kimi wa atashi no zubon o moyashita te itte ato chotto de.*

> (I said, You are burning my pants well, almost.)

Example J

M: Is this mine or D's?

S: Hm?

F: I think you did.

S: This is *okaasan's*. (mother's)

Example K

D: *Minna wa hayai yo.* (Everyone is so fast.)

F: *Anata ga shabetteiru bakari kuri desho*?

> (That's because all you are doing is talking, right?)

D*: Shabetteiru bakkari nai yo.* (I am not just talking.)

S: No talking. Just eating. {laughing}