The Causes and Applications of Code Switching Between Chinese and English in Social Intercourse

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This paper examines the phenomenon of code switching between Chinese and English in China. It explores the causes, types, and applications of code switching, as well as the public's attitudes towards it. The paper distinguishes between pathological and non-pathological code switching, and analyzes the corpus of code switching in Hong Kong. It also discusses how English as a dominant language affects the perception and use of code switching. The paper suggests that code switching is not only a linguistic but also an emotional process, and that speakers and listeners should be aware of their audience group when using code switching.

Keywords: code switching, social intercourse, causes, applications, negative attitude

Introduction

Code switching is when people change languages or language varieties during communication (Qu & Sun, 2007, pp. 148-150). Gardner-Chloros (2009) saw code switching as an "umbrella term", referring to certain languages, language variants dialects, and so on. People have different levels of acceptance of this way of speaking. For example, Chinese actress Jiang Yiyan was criticized for mixing simple English words in her travel notes on social media: "午后，玻璃杯里的red wine（红酒）融化了冰雪，radio（收音机）里传来的老歌真美" (In the afternoon, the red wine in the glass melted the ice and snow, and the old songs from radio were really beautiful).

Netizens jokingly called it "江一燕体" (Jiang Yiyan style) and the public's attitude towards it is relatively negative. This mixture of Chinese and English has been used in earlier literary works but has not caused such widespread discussion. Qian (2017, p. 41) had such a sentence in his *Fortress Besieged*: "Sure，值不少钱呢，Plenty of dough。买书画买了假的，一文不值，只等于waste paper" (Sure, it's worth a lot of money, plenty of dough. Buying a fake painting or calligraphy is nothing but waste paper).

This study discusses the causes and applications of code switching in social intercourse, as well as the reasons for having the negative attitude of the public.

Literature Review

Researches From the Perspective of Social Causes

Code switching occurs in bilingual or multilingual communication. Gumperz (1982) suggested that in the study of code switching, code switching is often regarded as a strategy to negotiate interpersonal relationships.

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Myers-Scotton (1995) put forward the concept "the Markedness Model". According to the theory, the selected language variant has indexability and indicates the speaker's desire to maintain rights and obligations in line with the listener's role identity. In a prescriptive context, both sides of the conversation have a "markedness metrics" to measure if code selection conforms to social norms or expectations. This "markedness metrics" is universal and part of intrinsic communicative competence (Wang & Xu, 2005, pp. 21-24).

Code switching is the process of changing between languages during a conversation. It can be conscious or unconscious and often reflects the speaker's social psychology and attitudes towards certain variants. It is influenced by factors, such as the conversation topic, communication situation, relationship between speakers, social identity, education, and experience (Wang & Xu, 2005, pp. 21-24).

Researches From the Perspective of Psychological Causes

Zhu (1992) stated that people may code-switch for several reasons: They may not remember or lack appropriate expressions in one language; they may want to keep their conversation private from others present; or they may want to emphasize certain words. Code switching is not accidental and reflects the subjective will of the speaker.

Dragojevic, Gasiorek, and Giles's (2015, pp. 1-21) Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) explains and predicts communicative adjustments during interactions. It models how others perceive, evaluate, and respond to these adjustments. Early CAT work focused on objective speech variables and conceptualized adjustment in terms of convergence, divergence, and maintenance.

Huang (2015, pp. 79-82) proposed that When a certain language form becomes mainstream, people tend to use it together and it gradually becomes a fixed habit. This is due to the herd mentality and reflects people's need for a sense of belonging.

Causes of Code Switching

Code switching can be understood in two ways: non-pathological code switching and pathological code switching.

Pathological Code Switching

Bilingual aphasia can result from brain diseases, gene defects, or external injuries. These changes in brain structure can cause patients to involuntarily mix different language systems at the levels of voice, morphology, and syntax, resulting in pathological code switching. Some patients may lose the ability to switch to another language or cannot switch between languages at will (Wu et al., 2017, pp. 331-335). Pathological code switching is uncontrollable.

Non-pathological Code Switching

What people often encounter in daily life is another kind of situation, which is purposeful, conscious, and non-pathological code switching.

Labor-saving principle. Normal bilinguals or multilinguals are free to control and change their languages in communication. Fan and Zhang (2015, pp. 109-113) claimed that bilinguals or multilinguals can suppress their language systems to communicate with monolinguals in one language. When interacting with other bilinguals or multilinguals, they can mix languages by inserting another language system into their expression according to their needs, for example:

明天我有个assignment要due。　　(I have an assignment due tomorrow.)

The emergence of this phenomenon first of all is to save some of brain power in the process of speaking, that is, in the process of output.

> MEG data showed that turning a language "off" (switching from simultaneous to single language production) led to increased activity in the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC), while turning a language "on" (switching from one language to two simultaneously) did not. (Blanco-Elorrieta, Emmoreyc, & Pylkkänen, 2018, pp. 9708-9713)

When code switching is a normal and natural process of vocabulary conversion, the brain can easily process such sentences without excessive effort. Early bilingual speakers who grew up in a bilingual environment may require less brain resources to process code-switched sentences than single language output. This suggests that code switching can be a labor-saving choice for some language users.

Speech convergence and speech divergence. Many people do code switching in order to make people around them understand what they want to express, or make people around them not understand what they want to express. Gumperz (1982) believed that code switching is a strategy used by speakers to influence or change interpersonal relationships. It is considered a contextualization cue that shows and explains the speaker's intention or conveys pragmatic meaning. Giles and Powesland (1997, pp. 232-239) proposed two types of code switching phenomena, aggregation (convergence) and dispersion (divergence).

The situation to introduce the dialogue into the surrounding environment is called speech convergence. Wang and Xu (2005, pp. 21-24) proposed that speakers may intentionally approach the language style of the listener to shorten the distance between them and ensure smooth communication. This creates a friendly and cordial atmosphere. For example, English major students chatting in Chinese may naturally switch to English when their foreign teacher enters the classroom and greets them.

Speech divergence is to export the dialogue to the surrounding environment. Gao (2019, pp. 62-63) suggested code switching can increase the distance and difference between the target audience and non-target audience, distinguishing them from each other. This is especially evident when avoiding sensitive words. In social communication, some words are considered vulgar, unpleasant, or offensive and their use is taboo. Guo (2020, pp. 117-118) concluded that there are seven kinds of taboos: religious taboo, sexual taboo, human excretion taboo, disease or death taboo, color taboo, age and weight taboo, and number taboo.

Play the role of indication. There can be a gap between languages where some words have specific meanings in one language but are rare or nonexistent in another. Code switching can be necessary in these cases. For example, foreign students may say "essay" instead of "thesis" due to the subtle semantic difference between the two words. "Essay" can refer to small papers while Chinese students may think of term papers or graduation papers when referring to papers. Foreign students may use "assignment" instead of "homework" because English has two ways to express homework while Chinese only has one ("作业"). "Homework" may remind people of exam-oriented and written homework while "assignment" has a broader meaning and can refer to various tasks assigned.

Applications of Code Switching Between Chinese and English

Code switching is common in Hong Kong due to its biliterate and trilingual language policy of Cantonese, English, and Mandarin. Bilingual children's code switching frequency is related to their parents' language input. Bilingual children may not have balanced language ability and may code-switch more when speaking their

weaker language. Generally, Cantonese is the dominant language and English is the weak language (Huang, 2015, pp. 79-82). In code switching in Hong Kong, there are more notional words, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on (Shao, 2015, pp. 114-116). For example:

如果你哋同唔到你哋嘅partner合作和相处，我哋一样可以fail你哋。 (If you cannot cooperate and get along with your partners, we can also fail you.)

People in Hong Kong will also innovate and apply some Cantonese structures to English, e.g., A not A structure, which is the structure of "is it right", "is it good" in Chinese, which can be mixed into English words to say:

你ha唔happy啊？ (If you are happy or not?)

Han (2009, pp. 134-135) further concluded that code switching can be divided into three types, inter-sentential code switching, intra-sentential code switching, and tag code switching.

Inter-sentential code switching refers to the switching between two sentences or clauses, and each sentence or clause belongs to a language, for instance:

我很喜欢学英语，because English sounds beautiful。 (I like learning English very much, because English sounds beautiful.)

Intra-sentential code switching refers to the switching within a sentence or clause, for instance:

听日阿Sam做你嘅training captain line check，负责check你啊嘛。 (Tomorrow Sam will be your line training captain, he will check your performance.)

Tag code switching means that the additional elements in a sentence are expressed in different languages. To a certain extent, it belongs to intra-sentential code switching.

Reasons for People's Resistance to Code Switching

New loanwords can appear during ethnic integration and be accepted through code-switching. For example, "好久不见" (long time no see) was translated from Chinese and accepted in Western English-speaking countries. People's aversion to code switching may depend on whether it's conscious and the audience's attitude towards certain language.

People's Feelings for Different Languages

Language is associated with culture and background information.

Chinese people in the US rate Mandarin higher than Cantonese, Fujian Dialect, and Hakka Dialect in terms of being pleasant to hear and kind. Fujian Dialect and Hakka Dialect are rated lower, with Hakka Dialect tending towards negative. In terms of language practicality, English is rated highest in usefulness, identity, and convenience (Chen & Cai, 2016, pp. 255-267).

Older Chinese people in English-speaking countries may choose English to communicate with younger generations, while younger generations may choose Chinese to communicate with older generations. This is done for better communication and to strengthen group intimacy. People will understand this and not think the speaker is showing off.

English is the most spoken language in the world due to the colonial influence of the British Empire and the spread of American culture. Its global cultural strength is unmatched by any common language in history (Weizhou, 2021). English is a power language and its oppressive and strong symbolism cannot be ignored. To study in the US or UK, one must pass the TOEFL or IELTS exams which include British and American politics,

economy, arts, and customs. This integration of British and American culture into the exams can be seen as cultural invasion (Shu, 2019, pp. 53-54).

Language is not just a tool but also contains emotions and national identity. A country's social status can influence views on language. Speakers may feel distant from each other when using unfamiliar languages, leading to emotional changes over time.

Audience Groups of Different Languages

Some Chinese Americans who were raised in non-English speaking countries (e.g., Japan, German) may not use code switching when communicating with native Chinese speakers. They would not mix Chinese with Japanese, Chinese with German, etc., but they would communicate completely in Chinese. English is common in China and learned from a young age, but other languages like Japanese or German have limited audience groups, so code switching with these languages may not be necessary for communication.

Code switching occurs when the speaker and listener have a common understanding of some English words and know each other's language background. The speaker may use code switching to highlight their identity or as a convenient communication tool. If the listener is uncomfortable with code switching, they may not be the target audience.

Conclusion

Code switching occurs due to pathological and non-pathological factors. Non-pathological code switching can be for labor-saving, language convergence and divergence, or emphasis and indication. There are three types of code switching: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag. People may have different emotional attitudes towards code switching between Chinese and English due to its use and the culture represented by language. English can give a sense of oppression and some may think the speaker is showing off when using code switching. Speakers should consider the listener's cultural background and education level when using code switching.

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