

Codeswitching: a Japanese perspective

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The term 'code', in a linguistic sense, simply means the language that a particular speaker uses. The phenomenon of 'codeswitching' usually refers to the habit amongst bilingual speakers of alternating between different languages in the same conversation. A broader definition of the term would also account for the way that some monolingual speakers alternate between different varieties of the same language. For example, the way that some English speakers of Jamaican origin, but born in Britain, alternate, in the same conversation, between standard British English and a Jamaican variety of English. This present study deals with codeswitching in the more usual sense.

Before the 1970s relatively few researchers in the field of bilingualism gave serious research attention to the phenomenon of codeswitching or considered its role as both a measure of linguistic competence and legitimate linguistic variation. Haugen, in the 1950s, was the first to consider the subject seriously, within the overall subject of bilingualism (Haugen, 1956, cited in Gardner-Chloros, 1991). Haugen wrote much on bilingualism, but nevertheless, seems to have considered borrowing and codeswitching as being rather more incidental to a language than an integral part of it (Myers-Scotton, 1992: 1967). Some early bilingual researchers tended to dismiss codeswitching as departure from normal modes of speech. For example, Weinreich (1953, cited in Myers-Scotton, 1993: 48) had this to say: 'The ideal bilingual switches from one language to the other according to

appropriate changes in the speech situation --- and certainly not within a single sentence.' We now know that such earlier views are outdated; for they not only give a less than satisfactory account of language acquisition, but also fail to acknowledge the reality of the way that many bilingual speakers actually do communicate. For, far from an interference to proper communication, much research in the 1980s and 90s has highlighted the pragmatic advantages in codeswitching and borrowing, and the way they reflect the changes and adaptations in languages which are a result of languages and cultures in contact.

This research is a study of codeswitching in Japan. It looks at the type and frequency of codeswitching that is used by (mostly) young Japanese speakers who have a good command of the English language. It attempts a descriptive approach to codeswitching, looking at the morphosyntactic elements of codeswitching and how these act as natural constraints on language in a codeswitching situation. It also attempts to provide an explanation of the social motivations for codeswitching in modern Japan. In particular this research compares codeswitching with borrowing, the sociolinguistic processes that are involved and the differences and similarities between them. It must be mentioned that the methodological approach of this work is largely instructed by the copious work done on codeswitching in Kenya and Zimbabwe in the 1990's by Carol Myers-Scotton. Her models and methods are very useful, especially since, nearly all the switches recorded in the data are intrasentential. Following on from that this research will ask the question: what happens when the Japanese language comes into contact with the English language and what changes are imposed on English words and phrases when they are used within the framework and context of the Japanese language? Does a need exist for these switches? When and how is that need realised?

Data for this research were collected from 13 recordings of naturally occurring conversations. All of the conversations were dyads. They ranged in length from 3 minutes to 25 minutes. In all, approximately 155 minutes of material was taped-recorded and later transcribed and the data analysed. In general, it was found that a sizeable number of switches were made in the conversations, although at the lower end of the scale there were very few, whereas at the upper end, in one conversation which included a young woman of twenty-three who had recently returned from a two year stay in New Zealand, there were a great many switches. Indeed, the number and variety of switches did seem to bear a strong relation to the participants experiences and interests: those with a strong interest in maintaining and ameliorating their English language skills and keeping up their contact with the world outside of Japan, either by travelling abroad or by maintaining friendships with non-Japanese, or by a combination of purposeful interests and social tendencies, tended, not surprisingly, to codeswitch more than others who did not have these interests or experiences. It is also suggested that the participants' occupations, and the topic of conversation influenced the manner and frequency of switches. I shall discuss some of these switches and relate them to the central question as to whether they represent borrowings (and what category of borrowing) or codeswitching. I will try to show that there is a logical, predicative connection between CS and borrowing and that they are not so distinct from one another as some earlier researchers found, for example, Poplack (1980); that there is indeed a "continuum" to use Myers-Scotton's (1997) word. The point is that we must ask how and when do borrowings come about in the first place? It seems fair to speculate that a great many borrowings for which there exist no apparent need in a language do indeed first come into the language as isolated occurrences of CS.

When looking at any potential codeswitching data it is useful to follow Myers-Scotton's distinction between cultural borrowings and CS itself. As Myers-Scotton notes (1992; 1997), they all lie on a continuum. That is to say that "core" borrowings, (those replacing lexemes already in place in a language) will start out as CS. Cultural borrowings, on the other hand tend to enter the lexicon of a language more suddenly, precisely because there exists a more definite need to utilize those specific lexical units which encode new ideas, expressions and concepts which may be lacking in the recipient language (Myers-Scotton, 1992; 1997). There is a tendency for all switches, whether CS, "cultural" borrowings or "core" borrowings to conform to the matrix language (Myers-Scotton, 1992). This was the general pattern observed in the data.

Two young Japanese women, one age 35, the other 29 were talking about the latter's job – an arranger of wedding receptions. The conversation lasted some 22 minutes, during which there were number of switching exchanges which gave the overwhelming impression of being directly related to the topic at hand, and which mostly followed the pattern of cultural borrowings. According to the hypothesis set down by Myers-Scotton (1997), these switches conformed to the matrix language (ML), that is to say, they showed morphosyntactic agreement with Japanese.

Hiroko is asking Miyuki to explain her job.

H: Miyuki-chan wa *wedingu* no shigoto *wedingu* to ka

(su marker + sub nominaliser + work wedding etc.)

party no shigoto shiterukara sono kankeino hanashiga iikana.

(party work since you do it about that thing talk is it all right?)

H: *Miyuki, you work in the wedding business, you do things like weddings etc. so can we talk about that?*

Note that that the morphosyntactic pattern followed here conforms to Japanese (Myers-Scotton, 1997) and that the loan words have been phonologically integrated into Japanese, too. While it is noted that “party” has long since entered the Japanese lexicon as a cultural borrowing, the use of “wedding” represents a core borrowing, since it could have been replaced by the already existing Japanese “kekkonshiki”. There is morphosyntactic integration with the recipient language as “wedding” modifies the Japanese noun for work, *shigoto*, therefore the particle *no* precedes *shigoto* in order to complete a well formed noun phrase. However, wedding was later used with “dress” and “cake” (*wedingu doresu* and *wedingu keki*) without the nominaliser *no*, which suggests that the expressions “wedding dress” and “wedding cake” are perceived as singularly occurring lexemes (of course they are compounds) embracing a single concept, and as such need not be modified. These appear to be cultural borrowings, as distinct from core borrowings, to use Myers-Scotton’s (1997) terms. They are associated with western practices that were unknown before they were adopted in Japan.

It is easy to see how compound nouns such as wedding cake can enter easily into the Japanese lexicon, but what about longer phrases that denote an action, such as “the cutting of the cake”? This is not as convenient and easy to integrate into Japanese as wedding cake, but this entire phrase was nominalised and thus morphosyntactically integrated as *wedingu keki katto* (“wedding cake cut”). We may speculate that this expression initially started out as a CS form before it was altered to fit the constraints of the recipient language to make it more accessible to the general public. The Japanese verb for “cut” (*kiru*) has not been used, and cut has become part of a compound form. Clearly, when borrowing, Japanese relies on, and prefers, noun forms to other grammatical building blocks to encode con-

cepts and practices that are new. This must be because they are easier to phonologically integrate into the recipient language.

It is interesting to note that there was one expression used by M that H, who has spent 12 years abroad since her teenage years and who has acquired an excellent command of English, did not initially comprehend. It was the expression *seru doresu* (“sell dress”) as opposed to *rentaru doresu* (“rental dress”). It had to be explained to her that this meant a dress that was sold to the customer:

M: Chanto *serudoresu* de utteru tokoro toka atte.

H: Aa, *serudoresu* tte? Nan nano, *serudoresu* tte?

M: A, soka, utteru *doresu*.

M: *Sometimes we've been able to sell "selldress".*

H: *Ah, "sell dress" ? What's that, "selldress" ?*

M: *Ah, I mean that we sell dresses.*

Perhaps it is because of H's fluency in English that she was surprised by “selldress”. After all, verbs cannot qualify nouns. Such a construction would seem to violate Poplack's (1980) “equivalence constraint”. At any rate, though, the expression as used by M has been morphosyntactically integrated into the Japanese language. Unlike “wedding dress” it appears to be a core form and it seems reasonable to speculate that it is a trendy term that people like M who are employed in the wedding business regularly use, but which is yet to come into common parlance, and as such it represents a CS form that is in the process of becoming a B form. Myers-Scotton's observation that such forms fall on a continuum is instructive.

Once again, also, we see the heavy reliance on noun forms that have

been morphosyntactically integrated. The collected data strongly suggest that, on the whole, Japanese is most comfortable with noun borrowings and switches which express concepts that are new or, indeed, for new ways of expressing familiar concepts. Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame (Myers-Scotton, 1992; 1997) does provide a useful tool with which to chart the likely passage of an original CS form on its way to becoming a commonly used B form. Ultimately, new words must conform to whichever language is the matrix language if they are to become standard usage: "One language is identified as the ML by the greater frequency of its morphemes; it turns out this same language sets the morphosyntactic frame of ML+EL constituents" (Myers-Scotton, 1992, p.37).

The data for this paper show clearly that, in areas of contact between the Japanese and English languages, Japanese is almost invariably the ML language. The overwhelming number of morphosyntactically integrated B forms and relative lack of CS forms showing up in the embedded language testifies to this. The data show absolute concurrence with the assertion that "there is a clear link between all types of EL material as 'off the preferential path'." (Myers-Scotton, *ibid.*). The preferred path in Japanese is one of speedy integration. Very little is left stranded in the EL. This is no doubt why many would probably argue that there is little "true" codeswitching in Japanese. However, remembering Myers-Scotton's "continuum", all such borrowings must have been coined for a first time by someone, representing genuine CS. As Myers-Scotton (1997, p.5) says, "There is no question that singly occurring CS lexemes and single lexical borrowings resemble each other—it is unproductive to try to distinguish them, *from the standpoint of the morphosyntactic processes which they undergo.*" That is why "any CS model adequately accounting for single CS forms also necessarily accounts for B forms" (Myers-Scotton, 1992, p.37).

It is suggested that from the point of view of morphology, syntax, and especially phonology, Japanese cannot tolerate foreign lexical items unless they are fully integrated into the ML, even core borrowings which start out as CS forms. It should be noted that there are many phonemes in English which are difficult for the average Japanese to pronounce - even for fluent speakers of English.

In one quite lengthy conversation about travel between two 19 year old university students, majoring in English who had both spent time in English speaking countries, a mere four, common core borrowings were used: open, adobaisu (advice), homushiku (homesick) and hosto famili (host family), although the last is arguably a cultural borrowing. The Japanese show a marked tendency to employ foreign words (even unnecessary lexical items) and the ML seems well set up to quickly subsume any well favoured, initial CS forms.

Data from other conversations reveal similar patterns; for example in a conversation between two young women aged 23 and 25, one of whom is a nurse, the other an office worker with a very strong interest in dance, anything which could be construed as CS, directly reflects the interlocutors' interests, occupations, or intentions.

Mikiko is relating her intention to spend a year in Australia next year:

S: Nani shite hatarakitai? /What kind of work do you want to do?

M: Uuuun...*tsuo kondakuta* toka ga ii kedo, eigo ga shaberenai to muzukashii kara omiyageya-san toka. /A tour conductor would be nice, but if you don't speak English it's difficult to get that kind of work, so something like selling souvenirs.

S: *Souvenir shop* toka? /Working in a souvenir shop?

M: Uun. /Yeah.

S: *Dansu no sensei toka?* /What about being a dance teacher?

M: *Dansu no sensei wa tabun muri.* /It's probably impossible to get a job as a dance teacher.

Later in the conversation, Shiori, who is a nurse, explains that she wouldn't travel abroad for an extended period unless she could pursue her profession at the same time:

M: Shiori mo ikeru yo. /You can go too, Shiori!

S: *Nasu o yametaku nai kara.* Moshi gaikoku ni iku nara London ni itte shikakutotte *nasu* to shite hataraku ka. /I don't want to give up my job as a nurse. If I did go overseas, it'd be to London where I might be able to work as a nurse.

In the entire conversation which lasted approximately 10 minutes and which was centred, as noted earlier, around activities that were very important to them, these were the only "switches" produced. Again, the interesting point is that these borrowings are all core forms, they are all phonologically integrated (with the notable exception of *souvenir shop*) and they all show conformity to Japanese syntax and morphology rules, for example "dance teacher" was realised with the noun phrase *dansu no sensei*, using the Japanese particle *no*. This is strong evidence to show that even core borrowings which start out as CS can be soon integrated into the ML of Japanese and become the "unmarked" form, to use Myers-Scotton's term. In this conversation and in nearly all of the others recorded, the use of such core forms elicited no surprise, lack of comprehension or comment. However, S's use of *souvenir shop* with "English pronunciation" is consid-

ered to be a marked CS form; it occurred in an unlikely place, since it immediately followed M's more standard use of *omiyageya-san*. It may have been a kind of "showing off".

To illustrate further this idea that Japanese speakers who reverse the normal pattern, and pronounce borrowings with English phonology, where they are almost always pronounced with Japanese phonology, intending them as "marked" choices, let us look now at some exchanges from another conversation between two young women, one of whom has just returned from two years in New Zealand:

Mako: Jinsei wa, jinsei wa, "enjoy" ja nakute, kore eigo da [LAUGHING]. Jinsei wa
 Life, life, enjoy not, that English is Life
 tanoshima nakya.
 enjoyable must be.

Life is to be enjoyed

It should be noted that Mako speaks English in a very natural way (and even with a New Zealand accent !) so it would not have been unreasonable for her to use the word "enjoy" in the above sentence. In fact, it is a rather common core borrowing, but invariably pronounced with Japanese phonology. Mako, however, checked herself when she uttered this word with English phonology and proceeded to reformulate her utterance with the Japanese expression for "enjoy". Many Japanese have remarked to me that they find it pretentious or ostentatious when borrowings are uttered with English phonology, rather than being phonologically integrated into the matrix language-Japanese.

In the same conversation, Mako even brought attention to her friend's

(only) CS exchange, pronounced with English phonology, by repeating the exact words, but with Japanese phonology:

Mako: Yahari zenzen nayande inain desukedo futotte iku-chu

Ayaka: *Beauty* aah, *talk* ?

Mako: *Byutii toku* ?

M: I guess I should be more worried about getting fat. /A: Beauty ah, talk ? /M: You mean byutii toku ?

In summary here, putting a somewhat different slant on Myers-Scotton's markedness model, in Japanese, CS exchanges with English phonology can sometimes be the "marked" choice.

Therefore, Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model, as a way of explaining the social motivation of such borrowings, would appear to be a useful starting point or consideration for future work on codeswitching. Japanese speakers need not feel that they are being pretentious or nonconformist by using such expressions which, nevertheless, fulfil no apparent, immediate lexical need. It could be argued, however, that they are enriching their vocabulary while at the same time taking the language in a new direction, one that is both reflective of greater interaction with the world outside of Japan and which prepares the language to meet future language/cultural challenges resulting from such contact.

In the light of findings from the data some proposals regarding language learning policy and acquirement are suggested. Firstly, it is suggested that the scope and variety of codeswitching/borrowing in Japan tells us a lot about both the Japanese language and people and the contact they have had with the world outside of Japan. It tells us a lot about the

strengths, weaknesses and tendencies of the Japanese language and shows us some of the considerable changes that have occurred in a relatively short time (remember that until not so long ago Japan was a very isolated and closed country). The vocabulary and linguistic habits of young Japanese continue to alter rapidly, due in some measure to the success of English in this country; (even if a majority of people do fall short of being able to communicate effectively in English, the way that it has affected their communicative habits within the framework of Japanese is undeniable). A greater awareness and improved understanding of the phenomenon of codeswitching would lead to a greater appreciation of the cultural boundaries and, indeed, of the areas where these boundaries seem to be blurred or absent. One definite goal should be a refinement in the way language is taught; another is a better understanding of the processes involved in the continuing development of a language.

Finally, there are some areas for further research. It was noted that there are a great many borrowed forms in modern Japanese, and yet, it is suggested, these are not always properly understood by many people, even though, as is often the case, they represent radical lexical replacements, standing in for key concepts for which, oftentimes, indigenous words are already in place. Why is this so? And why and how then do these new lexical items become established in the first place? What is the secret of their popularity? Is codeswitching the main impetus? Which are more likely to be integrated into the Japanese language, "true" codeswitching forms or borrowed forms? Is the process of codeswitching the all important door through which foreign lexical items (as well as cultural and social phenomena) enter a language and eventually end up as part of the mental lexicon of that language?

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