kansas working papers in linguistics

Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics

Volume 5, Number 2

Edited by Patricia Hamel and Ronald Schaefer

Reprinted 1992

CONTENTS

HINDI-ENGLISH, CODE-SWITCHING AND LANGUAGE CHOICE IN URBAN, UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS INDIAN FAMILIES

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Abstract: Most bilingual speakers tend to 'code-switch' between the languages they speak. The present study deals with code-switching and language choice and the speech of Hindi-English bilinguals residing in North India and the United States. The data discussed in this study are the results of personal observations and interviews made over a period of five years. Both the choice of language and the extent of code-switching are influenced by the variables of domain, status, intimacy and topic. Therefore, the situations of Indian families in the United States are different from those of their counter-parts in India.

Introduction

When a bilingual is producing sentences in one of his languages, units and patterns from the other language may suggest themselves. This kind of interference can also occur on the discourse level. When a bilingual uses successive stretches of two languages in one and the same discourse it can be said that this is interference between the two "modes of speaking" (Hasselmo 1970, p.179), e.g., Hindi and English modes of speaking. This interference on the discourse level can be termed code-switching. As a result of interference, whenever two or more languages are regularly employed within the same social system they differ significantly from the same languages as spoken in separate social systems.[1]

In the present study, the term code-switching will be applied to the introduction into the context of Hindi, discourse stretches of speech which exhibit primarily English morphological and phonological features. The stretches introduced through code-switching range from single morphemes to long sequences of discourse. All the facts and data discussed in this study about Hindi-English language choice and code-switching are the result of interviews and personal observations made both in India and the United States.

Sociological Aspects

Why does a speaker code-switch? To explain the 'why' of code-switching means to explain the relationships between the subject of discourse and the participants of an interaction and the norms of the society which determine language choice. This study will deal with this and also with the influence of the variables of domain and topic on the choice of code.

As Rubin (1962, p. 54) has shown, in bilingual societies social information is conveyed by the switch from one language to another in the same way as in monolingual societies this information is conveyed by stylistic variation.

Before expressing his ideas or thoughts in speech a speaker has to determine what, if any, limitations the environment imposes on his choice of interactional strategies. Each culture classifies its surroundings into a set of discrete categories (Blom and Gumperz 1972, p.408), e.g., home, church, etc. Such categories are determined both by universal and by culturally specific criteria and thus vary from group to group. The speaker must decide which of these classifications applies.

From his knowledge of his listeners and their possible social identities he has to determine what identity relationship to assume, i.e., whether he should treat them as equals, superiors, inferiors, casual acquaintances, colleagues, close friends, etc. He has to determine the degree of permissible variation in each domain or situation; for example, a religious gathering may allow less variation than a party. By altering any situation-specific features he may change the situation into a new one (a job interview becomes a date), or create a reaction of social outrage.

At times when the listener is a new acquaintance, code-switching back and forth reflects the speaker's uncertainty concerning which social arena to carry out the interaction in. In any bilingual discourse the initiator of the conversation, by choosing a particular language, defines the social arena into which the interaction falls. In response to a code-switch either the other participants will reciprocate in the use of the code, thereby accepting the definition of the interaction, or they will attempt their own definition and make another code choice.

As Tanner (1967, p.21) observed in his study on Indonesian students in the U.S., "any attempt on the part of one participant to move from the safety and neutrality of linguistic exchange in Indonesian can be rebuffed by the other party by ignoring the code shift and answering in Indonesian".

Status of English in India

The social group dealt with in this study is the upper middle-class living in urban Hindi-English speaking areas of North India. English was brought to India by the British. It became the major language of administration, law and education. Originally, the motives for the acquisition of English by the Indian middle class were primarily social and economic, but gradually it acquired a certain prestige and became the language of the individual in social and to some extent domestic life. Even at the present time, when Hindi is gaining in popularity, some Anglicized bilinguals go to the extent of claiming a lack of proficiency in the mother tongue and even pronounce Hindi words as a native speaker of English would. Since a large number of the upper middle-

class North Indians are native speakers of Hindi and have a near native control of English, code-switching is very common among them.

The Domain Variable

One factor that influences language choice and the degree of code-switching is the domain variable. The concept of language domains was first developed in the 1930's by Schmidt-Rohr, who proposed nine major domains, family, school, church, etc. (McRae, 1975, p.43). In fact, a number of studies have been done on the influence of domain on the choice of code. In her study of Spanish-Guarani bilingualism in Paraguay, Rubin (1968, p.514) uncovered a number of social dimensions determining reported language choice. Guarani is reported as appropriate for rural dwellers as they are probably monolingual, but also among bilinguals as a marker of intimacy. In coastal Kenya, according to Wald (1974, p.314), the young in talking to each other use both Swahili and their native languages, but in communicating with their elders it would be considered an affront to use Swahili even though the elders are also bilingual. Language choice symbolizes age relationships in the community.

An important characteristic of Indian society is the importance placed on the interlocutor's formal status in most types of interaction. A switch from Hindi to English may have status-marking functions. It is possible to switch codes within the same encounter provided such changes are justified by the status relationship of participants within the encounter. Thus a speaker may use pədha:rie in welcoming a monolingual Hindi speaker, but then turn to a bilingual, especially if he is of a higher social status, and say welcome.

Among the upper middle-class Hindi-English bilinguals, the home, family and kindred are at the center of the individual's life. Next to these are close friends. Outside this circle of intimacy and informality are employers, business associates, religious leaders, servants and hundreds of other people one meets in everyday life. Contact with all these is a necessity of daily life, but behavior in public situations is sharply distinct from the intimacy of the family circle or peer group.

In situations which are related to intimacy there is a preference for the use of Hindi, and in those related to status a preference for English. Other sociological features that interact with each other in influencing language choice and degree of code-switching include sex, age and the speakers' roles relative to one another, such as husband-wife, teacher-pupil, shopkeeper-customer.

Following is a chart of language choice among Hindi-English bilinguals in urban North India. While the analysis is the result of my own observations of the Hindi-English bilingual situation, the format of the chart is based on the chart Fernando (1977, p.347) uses in his study of English and Sinhala bilingualism. These observations were made over a period of five years, 1972-77 in situations 'natural' to each group. For instance, the interaction between parents and children was observed at home; among friends either at the home of one of the friends or outside in a variety of settings, in the theatre while shopping, etc.

This analysis was rechecked, over a period of two months in December, 1979 and January, 1980, and no changes or new developments were found. During this period both the situations and to a great extent, the subjects, were the same.

Domain	Role	Language
Family	Parent	H.*E.** H. if receiver bilingual
	Child	H. E.
Friendship	Friend	H. E.; H. if receiver bilingual
Religion	Pandit (priest)	H.; E. if South Indian
	Devotee	H.
Education	Teacher	E.
	Pupil (playing-field)	H. E.
	(class)	E.
Employment	Peer	H. E.
	Superior	E.
	Subordinate (clerk, typist)	H. E.
	(waterman)	H.
Professional	Client	E.
	Professional-Professional	H. E.
Business (small) (dealing with	Seller-Buyer	H.
upper class only)	Seller-Buyer	E.

* Hindi
** English

In all the upper middle-class families some English is used at home. Parents in talking to children use Hindi interspersed with English words to an extent that at times it is difficult to decide which is the dominant language in a particular discourse, e.g., a mother asking the children to eat might say 'tʃəlo (come) let's have kʰana (lunch/dinner)' or a child pointing out something to his mother could say 'hae (oh!), isn't it beautiful? Mummy dekho (look)! Most often a parent while talking to his/her partner will switch to Hindi. However, a few English words may occur in the conversation, words like please, thank you, crazy, etc. have become a part of an individual's Hindi vocabulary.

According to my analysis based on the data collected for this study, if the mother is a 'receiver'[2] bilingual (Haas, 1953, p.344) the children will talk to her in English and Hindi, but she will speak only in Hindi, with a couple of English words she may have picked up from them. In conversation with her husband such words may or may not occur.

Bilingual children while addressing monolingual grandparents or other elders of the family will switch to Hindi. I have observed that when one is in the habit of talking in a particular language to some person it is hard to address him in another language.

The situation in the same type of Indian families in the U.S.A. is a little different. The children always talk to their parents in English with no or very little use of Hindi words. This is because most of the time during the day, in school and outside, English is the language they use. The parents also avoid using Hindi in speaking to the children; they may, however, switch to Hindi in addressing each other. Even mothers who are not at all fluent in English insist on using it in their interaction with their children. One would normally expect them to use their native language so that their children would learn how to speak it at least. In talking to the mothers I reached two conclusions: first, in speaking English with their offspring, they want to improve their own speech and overcome their shyness about speaking English; second, English is a prestige language and is not treated as a foreign language in India.

In the friendship domain, there is also much code-switching. Younger and older male groups use Hindi and English but older female groups (especially housewives) mostly Hindi. This is due to the fact that housewives stay at home and communicate with servants, shopkeepers, and small business people such as the milkman, who are monolingual. Hindi thus becomes the dominant language in their everyday life.

The language used by Indian friends in the U.S. is mostly English. This may be due to the dominance of English in most spheres of their everyday life.

In religious gatherings there is little or no code-switching, the language used being Sanskrit or Hindi: Sanskrit in saying prayers and reading religious texts, Hindi in conversation. Even children, when addressing the religious leaders, use Hindi. There is, however, one exception to this situation; if the priest comes from the south of India, there is code-switching between Hindi and English. English is used for addressing the priest, since speakers of Dravidian languages prefer to speak English with natives of other languages and have little knowledge of Hindi.

Among the upper middle class it is prestigious to send children to public schools or convents (Catholic schools), where the medium of instruction is English. The only language used in the classroom is English. In Hindi classes (where Hindi language and literature are taught), both the teacher and the students code-switch between Hindi and English. Outside in the playground both English and Hindi are used.

At the university level Hindi becomes almost as dominant as English. The medium of instruction is still English but there is code-switching in the classroom, both among students and in teacher-student discourses. This is because there are students from different backgrounds in the class. The lower middle class and lower class students are mostly receiver bilinguals or monolinguals.

In the domain of employment the language choice and degree of code-switching also depends on the role of the individual. A person talking

to an equal or a superior always uses English but switches to Hindi
interspersed with English loanwords in addressing the peon or waterman.
However, if the subordinate is a clerk or typist, a superior will use
both Hindi and English.

At times s superior in an otherwise Hindi discourse with a subordi-
nate may code-switch to English to give emphasis and draw attention.
This too proves that English is still a prestige language in India.

In the professional field the language used with a client is always
English if the client is a bilingual. Among equals there is switching
between Hindi and English.

In the market place the language is Hindi. At times shopkeepers
(monolingual or receiver bilingual), in noting that a customer is
bilingual, try to use English words or speak in what, in India, is often
referred to as 'broken' English. This is in order to impress the
customer. In businesses catering to the rich and all upper social
groups the language is always English.

The Topic Variable

The topic variable is related to the domain variable but will be
dealt with separately in this paper. According to Ervin-Tripp (1964,
p.333) bilinguals can frequently give reliable accounts of topical
change as generating code shift, and their behavior often agrees with
their accounts. In a study on Japanese women, Ervin-Tripp (1964,
pp.250-51) observed that proficiency in English among Japanese speakers
acquiring it as a second language varied according to topic. The
Japanese women who had married Americans spoke English primarily to
their husbands, children and neighbors. When they spoke to their
Japanese friends they used English in discussing food, clothing,
husbands, and Japanese in talking about personal concerns and Japanese
matters. It was thus a combination of the listener and the topic that
affected their language choice.

These observations can be corroborated with evidence from similar
situations in Indian life. In general, a Hindi-English bilingual uses
the native language in speaking of rural life, Hindi movies, religion,
family and shopping sprees, and English in talking about his job,
school, English films, and of course, to bilingual listeners.

The bilingual when discussing topics related to a domain in which
he uses a particular language will use the same language for related
topics. For instance, in talking about his religion he will use Hindi,
since that is the language he uses at religious meetings.

When a listener is a monolingual the speaker will switch to Hindi
even though he normally uses English for those particular topics. Ob-
serving a bilingual in such a situation one notes that he uses hesi-
tation pauses, is less fluent in Hindi and borrows English words.

When Hindi-English bilinguals residing in the United States talk
to each other, they normally use Hindi in discussing things 'back
home', family, culture, religion, but use English for their experiences
in the U.S.: American life, graduate school, etc. When the listener
is an American the speaker will have some difficulty discussing topics

such as Indian religion and culture; first, because he normally uses Hindi for these topics, and second, because all cultures and religions have certain unique situations and vocabulary items which cannot be easily translated into another language. Indian women in the States who are not fluent in English nevertheless always use the language when relating experiences or conversations which took place with Americans and in which the medium was English. To quote Haugen (1953, p.5), "even those who acquire two languages in childhood and use them consistently in later life develop areas of experience in which one or the other language is preferred".

It may be concluded that in the community studied, choice of Hindi or English and extent of code-switching differ mainly according to the domain of interaction. However, the variables of status, intimacy and topic are also interconnected with the domain variable in influencing bilingual speech behavior.

Footnotes

1 Indian English differs considerably from the English current among speakers of English in America or the British Isles. When an Indian uses English his speech shares many of the features of the Indian codes with which English alternates in his daily life.

2 A 'receiver' bilingual is one who understands but does not speak a given language, in this case English.

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