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Bilingual Attitudes towards Spanish-English Code-Switching in Wyoming

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Honors Final Project

Abstract

This investigation centers on bilingual attitudes towards Spanish-English code-switching in Wyoming. “Code-switching is the change between two languages in a single discourse, sentence or constituent” (Poplack 1980). Other studies over the perceptions towards code-switching were conducted in cities along the border between the United States of America and Mexico. This investigation how a rural area perceives code-switching.

Poplack (1980) theorized that the ability to change between two languages during a single discussion demonstrates a high linguistic capacity. The speaker, without realizing it at times, follows the syntactic rules of both languages. The capacity to change between two systems, maintaining both, expresses the high linguistic capacity proposed by Poplack. Other studies such as: Hidalgo (1988), Toribio (2002), Parama, Kreiner, Stark y Schuetz (2017) have investigated the sociolinguistic attitudes towards code-switching along the border and found a general aversion towards the switching. Interestingly, the studies showed that the subjects believed that the switching occurred due to a lack of vocabulary in one of the two languages, and this contradicts with the study performed by Poplack. This investigation also focuses on the sociolinguistic attitudes, but in a rural area with a smaller Hispanic population. The hypothesis is that the subjects will show a more positive attitude towards code-switching, unlike the previous studies, caused by a different population. The attitudes were evaluated with a five point Likert scale, 1 being completely disagree and a 5 being in complete agreeance with the statements given. There were 30 participants, all bilingual with different levels of education and ages within the cities of Laramie and Cheyenne, Wyoming. Half were found at the University of Wyoming in classes of Spanish. The other were found in Cheyenne, Wyoming. I compared the attitudes of men and women, different levels of education, if they were born in the U.S.A or not, if they were

simultaneous or sequential bilinguals or if their first language was Spanish or English. I found that Wyoming does not reflect the attitudes of previous studies. The bilinguals of Wyoming showed a positive attitude towards code-switching. They enjoyed the sound and use of the switching. They did not believe that the switching interfered with the discussion or was an indication of a fault of knowledge in a language. A rural area, not along the border, with a lower Hispanic population and with less linguistic contact, has a positive attitude towards code-switching (Escobar and Potowski, 2015). The results expressed that the attitudes have changed since the investigation performed by Hidalgo in 1988. It may be that there is more acceptance of Spanish in the US since 1988, and this has caused the change in attitudes. With time Spanish and English have had more and more contact and with more contact it may be more acceptable to use both languages in society.

Key Words: *Code-Switching, Attitudes, Sociolinguistics, Bilinguals*

Introducción

The initial question is: What are the bilingual attitudes towards Spanish-English code-switching? This investigation tries to find the answer in a rural area, Wyoming. The previous studies were conducted in cities along the border such as Juarez, El Paso, Laredo, Nuevo Laredo and Edinburg, Texas, as well as another study done along the border in California. No study has investigated the attitudes in a rural area in the west of the United States such as Wyoming that has less linguistic contact than the border cities that use both Spanish and English regularly. To understand the results and also what this investigation aspires to do, it is necessary to define what is code-switching and then who are the bilinguals that this study wishes to examine.

What is code-switching?

Before presenting the attitudes that previous investigations have found it is necessary to define what is code-switching and how it functions. Code-switching is basically the use of more than one language in the same turn of speak, where there is a change from one language to another during the discourse. At first look it appears that the change happens randomly, but the study of Poplack (1980) found that the change is systematic or that there are limitations to code-switching. When a speaker uses two languages, they follow the syntactic rules of both languages, they cannot violate the rules of either language. There are certain points in a sentence where the speaker may switch languages, where the structures of the two are equivalent. This theory by Poplack is called the structural equivalence restriction. Moreover, there are other scenarios where a speaker cannot change languages. There is a theory of free and bound morphemes, where speaker may only change between free morphemes, but not between bound morphemes.

Three types of code-switching have been identified, intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching (Escobar and Potowski, 2015). Intersentential indicates that the speaker switches languages between two independent sentences. For example, they say one sentence completely in Spanish and then continue to say the next sentence completely in English. Intrasentential indicates that the change happens in the middle of a sentence. A speaker can begin a sentence in Spanish and then finish it in English. “Sometimes I start a sentence in Spanish y termino en español”, the title of a work done by Poplack is an example of an intrasentential switch. Tags are connectors that aid in communication, but do not have a syntactic function. Some examples are *then* and *well* in English (Escobar y Potowski, 2015). It also helps to define what is not code-switching. There exists “give-mes” or loans, that are the use of a word from a different language in the vocabulary of another languages. There is discussion whether these are a form of code-switching or not. For some it is not a code-switch when it happens frequently. When a

community uses the loans from other languages frequently the word begins to change and become a part of daily vocabulary, thus it is a part of the vocabulary and not a switch, but just the use of one language. The loans also can adapt from the original language to the target language. In this case the word begins to transform to be part of the target language, pronounced as such, and the speaker does not switch languages, but uses the vocabulary of one. On the other hand if the frequency is lower it could be a code-switch because it is a word from another language and the speaker changes languages to use it. There exists copies of words that are direct translations from one language to another. For example, *skyscraper* in English is *rascacielos* in Spanish, which is a literal translation of *sky* and *scraper*. The word in Spanish has English roots, but is still a Spanish word and is not a code-switch.

The three types of code-switching have different levels of difficulty to produce. Tag switching is the simplest to perform because the words do not have a syntactic function and can appear in many places of a sentence. The intrasentential are the most complicated because a speaker must follow the rules of two languages in one single sentence. Poplack proposes that bilinguals who switch intersententially have a higher level of Spanish and English (1980, 588). Those that perform intersentential switches have a lower level, because the switch is less complicated. However, any code-switching is an indication of a high level in both languages, because to code-switch the speaker needs a comprehension of the syntactic rules of both.

That is how speaker perform code-switching, but why? To many it appears that the speaker changes languages because they lack vocabulary in one or both languages, and thus change to the other. However, Zentella (1997) analyzed a corpus of interviews of five girls and found that the children knew how to express themselves in both Spanish and English equally. During the interviews there were instances where they produced a word in Spanish and later on

there were instances where they produced the same word in English. It is evident that the girls possessed the vocabulary and ability to use either language, but they still changed languages. Gumperz (1982), Poplack (1980) y Myers-Scotton (1993) express that there are pragmatic and discursive motives that influence the changing between languages. For example, it is possible that speakers switch languages to give emphasis to what they are saying, to mark a change in topic or to express respect to the dominant language of the individual hearing them. Moreover, Myers-Scotton also theorizes that individuals change to mark a dual identity. Therefore code-switching is not random, but is caused by pragmatic motives.

Who is bilingual?

Apart from code-switching, it is necessary to describe what it means to be bilingual because this investigation is about the attitudes of bilinguals. There exists different descriptions of what it means to be bilingual because there are diverse characteristics of the speakers to take into account. On one hand there are those like Bloomfield (1956) and Grosjean (2008) that define bilingualism as two monolinguals in one person. That is to say that a bilingual has a native level of speaking in both languages. The problem is that the definition implies that a bilingual is like to monolingual in one mind, but bilinguals process information different than monolinguals. It is important to distinguish that a bilingual is not the sum of two monolingual minds. For him it is essential that a bilingual speaks at a native level in the two languages. At first look it makes sense, but there are many people that do not speak at a native level but should be considered bilinguals. For example there are people that live in a Latin country and develop a native level of Spanish, but when they regress to their native country they do not speak Spanish as often and lose their native level of Spanish. They have the ability to speak the languages, yet are excluded from the definition proposed by Grosjean. Haugen (Montrul 2103, 7) has given a description more

centered in the use of the languages: a bilingual is someone who uses two languages in day to day life. Again there are those that speak the languages at a high level, but perhaps not day to day. There is the other side that is more inclusive to define a bilingual as someone who has a native level of knowledge in one language and also speaks another language, probably not a native level. This definition includes more people, but it can also include those people who are in the process of learning a new language. Thus, there is the definition of Montrul (2008) that lies in between the two sides of the definition given. A bilingual for Montrul is a person that has a stable knowledge and functional control of both languages. This means that the speaker is not in the process of acquiring a language, but can already express themselves in both languages. With this definition it is not necessary to have a native level of speaking in both languages, or speak them daily. This investigation defines a bilingual following the definition given by Montrul that is the most functional while taking into account their functional ability.

Apart from defining what it is to be bilingual, it is important to recognize the different types of bilinguals that exist. The types depend in when the speaker began to learn a second language. There is early bilingualism that means that the speaker learns both languages between birth and the age of 12. Late bilingualism signifies that the speaker learns the second language after turning 12 years old. Within early bilingualism, it is possible to distinguish simultaneous bilinguals and sequential bilinguals. The simultaneous bilinguals learned both languages at the same time. The child is born into an environment with two languages, where neither is their first nor second language because the two were acquired simultaneously. The sequential bilinguals learned one language and then learned the other (Montrul 2013). This can happen between birth and turning 12, or after turning 12 with the late bilingualism as well. This investigation

distinguishes between simultaneous and sequential bilinguals because they had a different learning environment that can influence the use and attitude towards code-switching.

For the investigations it is also useful to know from which generation is the bilingual. It is useful to know because there can be great differences between the generations in the use and knowledge of the languages, as well as the attitudes towards the languages. For example take a family that immigrated from Mexico, first there is the generation that immigrated to the U.S. Then there is the first generation that was born in the U.S that learn Spanish at a high level from their parents and also learn English at a low level from the community. The second generations learns Spanish at an intermediate level, not native, but not basic either and learn English at a high level. With the third generation the Spanish is nearly lost while the English is maintained at a high native level. The following generations typically completely lose the Spanish. There are many factors that influence the loss of a language such as the environment of the new language, the daily use of the language from the parents, social classes and others as well. It helps to distinguish between generations because each generations receives a different environment that influences the use of the languages and possibly the attitudes towards the languages. For the first generation it is more important to maintain and preserve the use of the two languages, but by the third generation and on only one language is used and prioritized.

Other Studies-

With the definition of what is code-switching and who bilinguals are it is easier to understand the attitudes of bilinguals towards code-switching. The majority of the studies found a negatives sentiment towards code-switching like Toribio (2002), Rangel y Loureiro-Roriguez (2015), Hidalgo (1988), and Galindo (1996). All of the studies were done in cities along the border, the majority being done in Texas. Hidalgo and Galindo showed that cities in Mexico had a worse

attitude towards code-switching. Possibly it is for the pride and loyalty. The Mexicans want to preserve their language and their culture, and viewed the mixing of Spanish with English as an invasion to their language. In a city along the border where businesses and languages mix, it is important to define and preserve their own culture. Language is a way to express themselves and part of the culture for the Mexicans and is part of their identity that they do not want to mix with English, or code-switching (Hidalgo 1988, 15). The negative attitudes could also stem from a low use of the other language, in this case English. When there is less linguistic contact, code-switching might be less acceptable as it is less common. A low level of linguistic contact indicates that normally speakers use one languages and the mixing of two languages causes confusion compared to an area with more contact.

The participants believed that code-switching sounded bad. To them the change between languages, although it follows rules, did not sound good or pretty. It bothered them when others used code-switching. Code-switching broke the flow of the sentence for some. Bialystok (2009) indicates that bilinguals have problems with accessing vocabulary and when they search for a word in either language, the flow of the speaker suffers. There exists the idea that a bilingual should behave as two monolinguals when they speak (Grosjean 2008). The bilingual should not alter or switch languages. One explanation is the loyalty mentioned above. They do not like that their languages mixes with another, the mixing violated the sanctity of both. The changing between languages can interfere with the comprehension of the sentence and confuse the audience.

In the studies of Galindo (1996), Hidalgo (1988), Nava y Goswami (2010), Parama et. al (2017), Rangel et. al (2015) y Toribio (2002), many of the subject commented about the connotations with code-switching. Many of the participants that used code-switching felt that

other viewed them as less intelligent for doing so, that there was a stigma against it (Parama et. al 2017). In the case of Galindo (1996), the women felt like gringas when they spoke with competent Spanish speakers, because they committed errors or changed language. The native speakers, perhaps caused by their pride, viewed them as less intelligent because they did not know the rules of Spanish and used English as a way to evade using Spanish. In this area it was known that those who used code-switching were *los ponchos*, or Americanized speakers. The speakers that were marked as *ponchos* were not able to identify with either language or culture. Thus, the negative sentiment has created a stigma against the use of code-switching. Nava and Goswami (2010) found that speakers that used code-switching believed that others viewed their switching as a sign of linguistic incompetence. Furthermore, they thought that code-switching was negatively affecting their use of languages. They felt that the act of changing interfered with their ability to use the languages, like the Mexicans from the Hidalgo study (1988). The interviews from Toribio also supported that the speakers felt that others viewed them as less intelligent and that code-switching influenced the loss of language. During the interviews of Toribio there were some contradictions: one participant did not believe that code-switching affected competence, and that it did not cause a loss of language. Parama, Kreiner, Stark y Schuetz (2017) contradict this sentiments found by Toribio of the fault of competence. In their study the bilinguals perceived code-switching as an indication of high cognitive ability.

Vocabulary-

Apart from appearing more or less intelligent, code-switching can be an indication of knowledge and fluidity. For the participants in the majority of studies code-switching was an indication of a fault of access to vocabulary in one language or the other. Bialystok (2009) supports this notion that bilinguals have problems accessing their vocabulary. It is possible that

the bilinguals do know the word in the two languages, but when they speak they only remember the word in one language and need to change to the language in which they remember the word. Zentella (1997) proposes that it is not a fault of access, but rather a way to communicate better for alternative motives.

Hidalgo (1988, 14) theorizes that code-switching for monolinguals, appears more random and less fluid because they do not understand part of the conversation. The monolinguals felt disoriented and the disorientation caused a negative ability. However, Parama et.al (2017) disagree with Hidalgo. They propose rather, that monolinguals do not demonstrate a more negative attitude than bilinguals, or that they feel more or less the same about code-switching as bilinguals.

Environments-

Code-switching is normally used in a familiar environment. The participants from Nava and Goswami (2010) indicated that they did not use code-switching in professional situations, but rather spoke only one language in those environments. Furthermore, they found that people who and stayed in the United States for longer used code-switching more with the passing of time. In Texas participants related that the businesses normally used only English. Again, in more professional situations they were restrained to one language. In this area the distinction between English and Spanish had created a hierarchy where English was more valued and more prestigious. When one language is valued as more prestigious or useful than another it creates negative attitudes towards code-switching. If one language is better than another, the action of mixing it with a less prestigious language can be considered disrespectful by the speakers of the more prestigious language. At the same time the speakers of the less prestigious language view code-switching as pretentious.

Reception in the media-

In the context of the media code-switching has received different reactions. Potowski (2011) found that the use of code-switching in greeting cards was not received well. Although the idea of the cards was to include the Hispanic group, the participants did not like the use of mixing languages. It was viewed as an insult. However, another study by Bishop (2010) showed that the announcements or commercials that used code-switching were better received. The bilingual consumers were more involved and convinced by the commercials. It is possible that the difference is caused by the sensitivity used when making the cards and commercials. With code-switching it can be easy to offend and to ridicule.

The attitudes towards code-switching extend from a negative feeling to seeming less intelligent. However, the perceptions of speakers does not always coincide with the what studies have found to be true such as the rules or restrictions of code-switching and the high linguistic ability.

Methods

I am going to answer my question with a questionnaire. I am going to use a questionnaire based in other studies so as to compare results with them. With the questionnaire I can see how the participants feel about code-switching in an effective way. It costs less money and is easier to use a questionnaire than to interview and record those interviews. The questionnaire gives me the opportunity to have more participants with less conversations. It is easier to create a table and evaluate perceptions with a questionnaire than to try and quantify an interview. I presented the participants with the questionnaire while present so that I could answer any question that would arise during the process. Participants were divided into groups mentioned above, by their: sex, age, education, place of birth, type of bilingualism, and their first language. Then for each group

it was possible to compare the variables within the groups and see if the independent variables affect the perception of code-switching. There were 30 participants in total, all were volunteers. 17 of them were found at the University of Wyoming. They were found in Spanish classes and volunteered their time to fill out the questionnaire. The others were found in Cheyenne, Wyoming through personal connections, mostly of a higher age in the workforce. The individuals span the groups well and give a well-rounded picture of the sentiments given the population size. All of the subjects were bilingual. The following table illustrates the groups, and how they were divided.

Variable	Possibilities
Sex	Male Female Transgender
Ages	18-25 26-40 41-60 61-older
Education Level	Undergraduate Student Graduate Student Faculty Workforce
Born in the U.S.A	Yes No
Type of Bilingualism	Simultaneous

	Sequential
First language	English Spanish

The questionnaire is useful because it does not cost a lot to do and it is possible to include contradicting questions to view the honesty of the subject. The first nine questions of the questionnaire divide the subjects into the various groups to which they pertain. Then the following questions are affirmations with a five point Likert scale, where the subjects indicate using the scale the to what level the agree or disagree with the statements. The questions are based on the questionnaire by Parama et. al (2017). The tabulation was compiled as shown in the table below. The values in each area are the mean of the sum of various questions that pertain to each category. Positive attitudes is the mean of questions 12, 15, 18, 20, 25 y 26. Negative attitudes are the mean of questions 13, 14, 19, 22, 23, 24, 27 y 28. I evaluated if the speaker is more intelligent based on the mean of questions 20 y 25; and then valued if the speaker was less intelligent with question 13. The structure of code-switching was evaluated with the mean of questions 15 y 26. The mean of questions 16, 19 y 27 showed if there was no structure. Fluency was valued with mean of questions 18, 26, 29. Thus the lack of fluency was valued with the mean of questions 17, 19, 21, 23 y 28.

	Positive Attitudes	Negative Attitudes	More Intelligent	Less Intelligent	Structure	No Structure	Fluent	Not fluent
Sex								
Age								
Education								
Place of Birth								
Type of Bilingualism								
First Language								

Results

The results did not vary much among the different groups. Across the board there was a general positive attitude towards code-switching. Each group was more positive than they were negative, showing an acceptance and even a like of the use of code-switching. In a similar fashion, across the board the subjects believed that code-switching made the speaker appear more intelligent. They believed that there was structure to code-switching in general and finally that the speaker did appear fluent. These were the finding across the different groups.

Notable differences within groups were first in the sex. The females appeared more positive in each category as compared to the males. That is to say that they had a more positive attitude towards code-switching. This may be because there were less females in the study, so less variance, or that the females were more extraneous or extreme in their answering. The other

noticeable difference was within the age groups. The groups of 18-25 and 41-60, were the majority of participants felt were more radical in their responses.

Discussion

The results shown by the rural area in Wyoming not along border showed a much more positive attitude than previously demonstrated in other studies. This area contested many of the beliefs of participants from other studies. In Wyoming the subjects showed a positive attitude, felt that code-switching showed intelligence, that there was structure to code-switching, and that the speaker was fluent in both languages.

This contradiction may be due to a smaller sample sized than some of the studies. More likely this difference in belief is contributed to the difference in Hispanic population in the area and less linguistic contact in the area. In Wyoming there is a low Hispanic population and low linguistic contact which means that many individuals do not hear code-switching. Thus, hearing the phenomenon for some could show intelligence because the speaker is using two languages, an ability not commonly found in the area. The participants, many in college, may have a greater appreciation of code-switching being in classes and being taught the intricacies of code-switching. It seemed that there was no indication of first language or place of birth having an influence on the perception of code-switching shown in the study of Hidalgo (1988). It may also be possible that the United States in general has become more accepting of the phenomenon since the study of Hidalgo in 1988. That is to say that people are more accepting of Spanish and thus, code-switching as well.

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