

Bargaining in two languages: conversational functions of transactional code-switching

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Introduction

Studies on the pragmatic functions of code-switching, in opposition to its macro sociolinguistic significance or syntactic structure, have been largely influenced by Gumperz's pioneering classification presented in the chapter he dedicated to this topic in his 1982 book, *Discourse strategies*. Many other taxonomies followed Gumperz's initial proposal (Appel and Muysken 1987, Poplack 1988, Romaine 1989, Heller 1992) in spite of the usually claimed difficulty in interpreting and predicting the exact functions of code-switching in any given bilingual context. Their purpose has been to identify the sociopragmatic motivation for the occurrence of a particular code-switched utterance and ultimately classify it under a fixed category such as quotation, elaboration, and reiteration, among many others¹. However, few studies have looked at the impact of code-switching on the progress of the entire conversation together with the possible set of functions it may convey.

In this sense, Auer's (1984, 1988, 1995a, 1995b, 1998) approach to the study of bilingual conversation is one that attempts to uncover the interactional meaningfulness of code-switching. The starting point for his sequential model is the distinction he establishes between participant- vs. discourse-related language alternation. While participant-related code-switching refers to "the attributes of the speaker" (Auer 1988: 192), discourse-related code-switching is defined as "the use of code-switching to organize the conversation by contributing to the interactional meaning of a particular utterance" (Auer 1998: 4). The definition of code-switching as an organizing strategy along with the assignment of interactional value to code-switched utterances creates the needed balance between the local functions and the overall structural role of code-switching in bilingual conversation. The second important point in this approach is the consideration of code-switching as a "contextualizing strategy" (Auer 1984: 90) similar to the ones present in monolingual conversation as initially established by Gumperz (1982). With the definition of these two guiding principles, Auer (1988, 1995b) puts forward a proposal that a sequential model, one that analyses the meaningfulness of the switched utterance in light of the episodes that come immediately before and after it, should be a particularly useful one.

A different approach is the one taken by Myers-Scotton in her influential Markedness Model (1993a). She assigns an important role to the social reality of the speakers and the nature of the relationship between them for the occurrence of code-switching. Her 'negotiation principle' consists of the speakers switching, or not, according to the set of rights and obligations (RO) they want to maintain, establish, or challenge in a given interaction (Myers-Scotton 1993a: 113-114). Particularly relevant to this paper will be her

¹ This particular type of approach towards the motivations for code-switching is referred to by Myers-Scotton (1993a) as the '*better-taxonomy*' approach while she refers to those studies that aim at a more theoretical interpretation of the switch, including her own early model (Myers-Scotton and Ury 1977), as the '*better-theory* approach'.

definition of code-switching as a marked choice where “the speaker dis-identifies with the expected RO set” (Myers-Scotton 1993a: 131). The switch in this case becomes meaningful as a strategy used by the speakers to signal certain positions and intentions different from expected as they depart from the unmarked code.

Drawing on these two approaches, the objective of this paper is to interpret the conversational motivations for code-switching during a Spanish/ Arabic bargaining interaction. I will define code-switching in this specific type of context as ‘transactional code-switching’ and I will analyze its local meaning, i.e., the immediate functions that it carries out, and at the same time its organizational role in the progress of the bargaining interaction as a whole. Finally, I will describe the structure that this type of switching tends to present during exchanges of this nature.

The extracts analyzed in the present paper have been selected from a single interaction that forms part of a larger corpus of data of Spanish in Northern Morocco. My preference for a single case analysis will allow for a bird’s eye view of the sequential value of transactional code-switching and its interactional meaningfulness while at the same time it will keep possible the interpretation of the switched utterances in their local conversational environment. I am nevertheless aware of the idiosyncrasies of bilingual speakers when it comes to code-switching and that the results reached in this study, while representative of those occurring in this particular sociocultural setting, do not necessarily apply to other bilingual transactional exchanges.

The interaction was recorded in Tangier in 2002 and the analyzed section has a duration of 40 minutes. The participants are speaker 1 (S1), a sixty-five Spanish-dominant Moroccan-born Spaniard, speaker 2 (S2), a seventy-five year old Arabic dominant Moroccan salesman, and speaker 3 (S3), the fieldworker who speaks both Spanish and Arabic and whose intervention in the conversation is rather limited.

Transactional code-switching

Definition

Rubin and Brown (1975: 2) define the bargaining activity as the “process whereby two or more parties attempt to settle what each shall give and take or perform and receive, in a transaction between them”. Usually, the customer and the salesperson, or the service provider, engage in a discussion on the quality of the product and its price before finalizing the transaction. The bargaining process has different phases that include information exchange, proposals, and counterproposals and usually ends with the concerned parties either reaching an agreement or failing in terminating the transaction successfully (Firth 1995, Brett 2000). This practice is still very common today in Northern Morocco and all over the North African region with language choice and code-switching playing a central role in its progress. Nevertheless, this area is not unique in this sense since code-switching in transactional contexts has been the object of several studies in other regions. In his analysis of this phenomenon in Nairobi, Parkin (1974) identifies different types of what he calls ‘transactional conversations’ and presents data from interactions where the involved parties rely on code-switching to exchange ethnolinguistic information and to lay the ground for a more profitable transaction. Working with data from a similar context, Myers Scotton and Ury (1977) introduced the notion of ‘transactional arena’ where code-switching allows the speaker “to signal the

business he wants to convey” (Myers Scotton and Ury 1977: 10-11). Instances of code-switching in salesperson-customer transactional interaction were also analyzed by Genesee and Bourhis (1982, 1988) in Montreal and Quebec City and Gardner-Chloros (1985, 1991) in Strasbourg. The latter studies, however, took place in modern department stores where bargaining is not an option.

While the focal point of this paper is transactional negotiation, it differs from previous studies in that it focuses on the functions and organizational role of code-switching in an interaction where bargaining is the main procedure and the two involved parties are familiar with each other and often conduct this type of interaction. I use the term ‘transactional code-switching’ to refer to code alternation during the course of a transactional interaction as part of the bargaining procedure. It is a strategy used by the two parties to construct the interaction and solve potential organizational problems in order to reach optimal outcome. As a sub-type of marked code-switching (Myers-Scotton 1993a), transactional code-switching conveys specific local conversational functions that in their turn have an organizational role in the structural construct of the entire interaction (Auer 1995).

Functions

As mentioned above, transactional code-switching in the interaction analyzed for this paper is a marked choice. The largest part of the conversation is conducted in Spanish and code-switching to Arabic occurs only at specific moments. S1 is a Spanish dominant speaker, and he rarely code-switches during non-transactional conversations with Spanish Arabic bilinguals and even Arabic dominant speakers. On the other hand, he code-switches during transactional interactions in order to accommodate the other party and also as part of a language concession that he expects to be rewarded with a better deal. According to Myers-Scotton (1993a: 141) “making a marked choice is clearly a gamble preceded, consciously or unconsciously, by some weighting of the relative costs and rewards of making this choice rather than an unmarked choice”. This seems to be generally the case in transactional interactions between Spanish native speakers and Moroccan speakers of Spanish as a second language. The usual practice between these two groups is to use Spanish as the default code for interactions of all types. This preference for Spanish is due to its higher prestige and the strong sociohistoric presence of Spain in the area². However, during transactional interactions, Moroccan-born Spaniards often code-switch to Moroccan Arabic, even if they do not necessarily speak it fluently, as part of the negotiation process and as an index of their local identity which allows them to avoid being considered as outsiders and probably charged higher prices. It is interesting to note that all Moroccan-born Spaniards in spite of being part of third, and in some cases even fourth, generation immigrants still conserve Spanish as their sole mother tongue. Some of them develop advanced competence in Arabic but the majority claim that given the wide presence of Spanish and the nearness of Spain they feel they do not need strong knowledge of the local code. This disinterest in acquiring native-like competence in Arabic is sustained by the high presence of Spanish mass media and educational institutions in addition to the sociocultural support granted by Spain to its citizens residing in the area. The rapid economic development of this country since the

² Northern Morocco was a Spanish Protectorate between 1912 and 1956. In addition, Spain still has two North African cities, Ceuta and Melilla, which are located on the Moroccan coast.

late seventies has further reinforced the higher prestige of its language among Moroccan-born Spaniards and native Moroccans alike.

While in transactional encounters in bilingual communities, code-switching often tends to be used as an exploratory choice before settling on the most adequate code (Myers-Scotton 1988, 1993a), in this case the length of the interaction, the relation between the involved parties, and the presence of the bargaining practice all allow for additional functions to be present.

a. Marking of specific information

Transactional code-switching serves as a strategy to mark a specific part of the exchanged information. In fact, information exchange is a central part in transactional negotiation as indicated by Putnam and Jones (1982: 270) who claim that “communication in bargaining frequently uses information as a means of persuading one’s opponent”. By code-switching to the dominant language of the co-participant, speakers tend to highlight a specific piece of information in an effort to underscore the offer and/ or the concessions made, especially regarding the price. In extract (1), S1 code-switches to Arabic to tell S2 the price of one of the books he is offering. It is interesting to note that he seems to struggle to find the correct form for the price in Arabic but he persists and does not switch back to Spanish, instead. This could be a result of his belief that saying the price in Spanish would not sound as much of a high amount of money as it does in Arabic. As a result, he succeeds in attracting S2’s attention who asks whether these books are still valuable today using Arabic and not Spanish even though S1 has switched back to Spanish by the end of his turn. The fact that the price of the book is embedded in a code-switched utterance makes it stand out among the rest of S1’s turn and proves to be a successful bargaining strategy that produces the desired effect in S2. Another strategy that is also worth mentioning in (1) is the fact that S1 uses discourse markers in both languages (*mira* and *šuf*) to attract the attention of the other party as he argues for the value of these items.

(1)³

S1: Mira, *šuf*, estos libros valen mucho dinero ¿sabes? No los de ahora, estos de antes, antiguos ¿sabes? ((picks up one of the books)) Es antiguo, mira, mira el precio *dialu*, *šuf*, *[[rba]een*, *[[rba]a*, *[[rba]a wa xamseen frank, eh? šuf*, mira, Dans la Guerre du Commissaire, sí, libros antiguos, sí, tienen valor estos libros.

S2: *Daba?*

S1: Look, *look*, these books are worth a lot of money, you know? Not those of today, these are old books, antique, you know? ((picks up one of the books)) It’s antique, look, look at *its* price, *look, forty, four, fifty-four Francs, eh? Look*, look, Dans la Guerre du Commissaire, yes, old books, yes, they are valuable these books.

S2: *Now?*

³ Transcription convention: *italicized* = utterances in Arabic and their translation into English, [] = overlapping, hhh = laughter, (()) = description of speech context.

b. Highlighting or questioning of an item's quality

In the same way that the speaker marks the price by code-switching, he may use the same strategy to highlight the quality of the product he is selling. In extract (2), S1 is praising the quality of the watch he is offering as part of the deal by comparing it to the one he is wearing. This strategy is also described by Myers-Scotton (1993a: 141) who states that “the content of a marked choice is often a repetition of what has already been said in the unmarked medium of the exchange; alternatively, the marked choice may come first, with the message repeated in the unmarked choice. Either way, the speaker makes sure that the referential content is understood”. In (2), S1 is also trying to be more convincing using both Spanish and Arabic, a practice that he does not do in regular non-transactional conversation as already mentioned. In (3) on the other hand, S1 is praising the quality of one of the books but S2 challenges that by trivializing the title using one that not only sounds like a title for a children book but also in which the part in the base language rhymes with the switched one in the form of a wordplay. This sends a clear message to S1 that S2 is not seriously interested in the content of the books or their possible value and forces him to reformulate his proposal.

(2)

S2: ¿La pila? ¿Nšuflo la pila o cómo?

S2: La pila, šuflo la pila. Éste es como éste, igual. *Kif kif bħal hada*, la pila, [a]milo la pila *dialo wa safi*.

S2: ¿Dónde metes la pila? ¿Aquí?

S2: The battery? *Do I have to get a battery or what?*

S1: The battery, *get a battery*. It is like this, the same. *The same, it is like this one, the battery, put in its battery and that is it.*

S2: Where do you put the battery? Here?

(3)

S1: Mira, mira este libro, mira, aquí tienes un libro muy bueno, [ése también

S2: [Ad-diku ar-rumio
se perdió, no? hhh.

S1: Look, look at this book. Look, here you have a very good book, [that one too

S2: [The peacock
got lost, no? hhh.

c. Avoiding premature closure

There are moments where the negotiation in the base language becomes too strained and the proposal made by one of the participants is met by silence or rejection from the other party in what appears to be an impasse in the negotiation. Speakers at that moment may code-switch as a strategy to avoid premature closure especially by involving third parties, topic shifting, or both at the same time. It is a sort of diversion from the bargaining process to which the speakers return when the inserted side-sequence ends. Insisting on continuing the negotiation at such points would become a face-threatening act (Brown

and Levinson 1978) and might jeopardize its outcome. On the other hand, temporarily getting away from it represents a break that makes it easier to return to bargaining with additional information and/ or a counterproposal. In (4), S2 is not satisfied with the last proposal made by S1, instead of leaving or ending the interaction he code-switches to Arabic to address S3 telling him about another transaction that he had previously conducted with S1. Both S1 and S2 then talk in Spanish about when that happened and how successful that was. At the end of the extract, S2 finds the right moment to go back to negotiating by reaffirming the good quality of the item he is selling now. The bargaining process is then retaken where it was left before the switch.

(4)

S1: hhh. ¿Quieres cambiar?

S2: Entonces, ¿Eso no? ((long pause))

S1: Si quieres te cambio los zapatos por las sandalias

S2: ¿Qué zapatos?

S1: Cambiar esas, déjame las sandalias y yo te dejo los zapatos

S2: Eso ya. ((pause then addressing S3)) *[/na /adilt im/ah isabat diali,*
((addressing S1)) ¿Cuánto? Un año y medio?

S1: No *muš* un año y medio, no, hace tres, dos meses o tres meses me lo trajo.

S2: ¿Qué tres meses?

S1: ((addressing S3)) Esos son de él, esos zapatos son suyos

S3: ¿ Él, él los trajo?

S2: Sí, [sí,

S1: [Sí, los compré a él

S3: Muy buenos

S1: Son buenos, son buenos

S2: Ah, sí

S1: Son buenos, [son buenos

S2: [Echa el ojo, que están mejores éstos ahora, están mejores éstos

S1: hhh. Do you want to trade?

S2: So, that one is not included? ((long pause))

S1: If you want, I can trade the shoes for the sandals

S2: What shoes?

S1: Trade those, give me the sandals and I will give you the shoes

S2: Not that. ((pause then addressing S3)) *I sold him those shoes,* ((addressing S1)) How long ago? A year and a half?

S1: No, *not* a year and a half, no, it was three, two or three months ago when you brought them

S2: Three months?

S1: ((addressing S3)) These are his, these shoes are his

S3: He, he brought them?

S2: Yes, [yes,

S1: [Yes, I bought them from him

S3: They are good ones
 S1: They are good, they are good
 S2: Oh, yes
 S1: They are good, [they are good
 S2: [Have a look, these are better now, these are better

d. Repair

Usually repair sequences serve to solve local organizational problems that may cause misunderstanding or ambiguity but do not necessarily threaten the continuity of the interaction, as is the case in self-repair sequences. However, in the context of transactional negotiation, I assign code-switching the function of a repair strategy for the overall progress of the interaction. It may happen after a long pause, when the negotiation becomes too aggressive, or when one of the participants is getting upset or losing interest. It serves to introduce a side-sequence during which the speakers lower the tension by being friendly with each other verbally or through a specific action. In (5), S2 is getting upset, but after a long pause he addresses S3 telling him that S1 is in reality a good friend of his and that he will always be. The conversation then evolves around the relationship between S1 and S2, who also seems pleased by their long-standing friendship. S2 takes yet another friendly gesture by offering S1 some tobacco before going back to the bargaining process a few turns later with a better mood.

(5)

S1: Sí, éste sí. Éste está bien
 S3: Sí, sí muy bien, muy bueno éste
 S2: Bueno, ya ha pasado, bueno. ((long pause)) *hada saħbi*, amigo siempre amigo
 S3: ¿Hace mucho tiempo que le conoce?
 S1: Uh muchos años
 S3: *[[eš ħal?*
 S2: Mucho tiempo, mucho tiempo, *min kan ihna fi tanġa wa [[na]arfu*
 S1: hhh.
 S3: ¿Qué? ¿Hace cincuenta años por hay?
 S1: Sí, quizás
 S2: ((addressing S1)) ¿Quieres un poco de rapé?

S1: Yes, this one yes. This one is good
 S3: Yes, yes, very good. This is a very good one
 S2: Good, but it is over now. ((long pause)) *This is my friend*, a friend, he has always been a friend.
 S3: Have you known him for a long time?
 S1: Uh, many years
 S3: *How long?*
 S2: A long time, a long time, *all the time he has been here in Tangier, I have always known him*
 S1: hhh.
 S3: What? Around fifty years or so?

S1: Yes, perhaps

S2: ((addressing S1)) Do you want some tobacco snuff?

e. Seeking support and/or mediation

In addition to providing further information to persuade the opposite party, speakers seek the opinion and support of a third party when they think it might help their case. This is also a common technique in bargaining since a third party that has no direct interest in the direct outcome of the transaction may provide neutral judgment. In (6), S2 questions the value of the lamp that S1 is including in the deal. Consequently, S1 tells him to go and get the opinion of somebody else but what S2 does instead is to get the opinion of S3 on the price of the sandals he is trying to sell to S1 by switching to Arabic. The reaction of S3 shows the success of this strategy and even S1 ends up agreeing with both of them on the fact that the price of the sandals would be much higher in Spain. Later in the interaction, S1 offers more money for them confirming the success of the strategy and bringing the interaction closer to its end.

(6)

S1: Mira esta, esta lámpara

S2: Ésta no vale ni mil quinientos francos ¿qué vas a decir?

S1: Qué vas hablando mil quinientos francos, anda y pregunta por allí

S2: ((addressing S3)) *ya bin ʃami*

S3: *Ya bin ʃami?*

S2: *Sita wa ʃšreen ʃʃ frank*

S3: *Sita wa ʃšreen ʃʃ frank?*

S2: *Fi España hada?* Treinta y cinco mil pesetas

S1: No, si en España están los zapatos más caros que aquí

S2: Más caros, sí

S1: Sí, más caros

S1: Look at this, this lamp

S2: It is not worth even one thousand five hundred francs, what are you saying?

S1: What are you talking about one thousand five hundred Francs, go and ask around

S2: ((addressing S3)) *my cousin*

S3: *Yes cousin?*

S2: *Twenty-six thousand francs*

S3: *Twenty-six thousand francs?*

S2: *In Spain, this one?* Thirty-five thousand pesetas

S1: Yes, in Spain, shoes are more expensive than here

S2: More expensive, yes

S1: Yes, more expensive

f. Improper closing

Because the final proposals were not accepted, no agreement was reached after the long bargaining process and since there were already several repair attempts, the conversation is finally terminated unsuccessfully with an improper closing. Improper closing is also common in failed transactional interactions especially if the participants are highly dissatisfied. In this case, there is no pre-closing sequence as both speakers use minimal expressions to end the conversation, each in his own dominating language. S1 only says “adiós” and S2 says the same in Arabic as he complains about the outcome of the transaction. The lack of convergence during the final turns indicates that the speakers are giving up on reaching a better outcome. In addition, they express their total dissatisfaction by breaking Grice’s (1975) cooperative principle, which immediately puts an end to the whole encounter.

(7)

S1: Venga ya está, mejor, [ahora estoy más contento

S2: [¡Está conforme!

S1: De verdad ahora ya, ahora, porque yo no quería pagar cincuenta dirhams

S2: *Allah ʃʃawnik*

S1: Adiós

S2: *allah ʃʃawnik, allah ʃʃawnik, están muy buenos estos. ʃʃhna xasna indabru ma xasneš nixsru, ih ya wilidi, allah ʃʃawin, allah ʃʃawin*

S3: *Allah ʃʃawnik*

S2: *Bislama, ((addressing S3)) fi laman a xai*

S1: Adiós

S1: Ok, that’s it, much better. [Now I am happier

S2: [contented!

S1: Really, now, now, because I did not want to pay fifty dirhams

S2: *God help you*

S1: Bye

S2: *God help you, God help you, these are better. I want to make some money not lose, oh boy, God helps, God helps*

S3: *God help you*

S2: *Goodbye, ((addressing S3)) peace my brother*

S1: Goodbye

Structure

Since it may serve any of the functions described above and is in part responsible for the organization of bilingual negotiation, transactional code-switching is predominantly intersentential. However, in the bargaining process there are a few word-level switches often in the form of interjections and discourse markers as in (1). As mentioned above, in this context, Spanish is the Matrix language and Moroccan Arabic the embedded one (Myers-Scotton 1993b). Given the predominance of Spanish in interactions between Moroccan-born Spaniards and Moroccan speakers of Spanish as a second language, Spanish is the *de facto* Matrix language no matter how proficient the Moroccan-born Spaniards are in Arabic. This consistency in always having the same Matrix language is

not the norm in other bilingual communities where it may change during the same interaction and is not necessarily pre-established (Myers-Scotton 1993a, 1993b). On the other hand, Moroccan speakers of Spanish tend to have Arabic as the Matrix language during their in-group interactions where they often make frequent switched to Spanish. On the conversational level, applying Auer's theory of code-alternation (1995), the pattern that transactional code-switching has would be the one he refers to as *Pattern 1b*, where A and B stand for the languages used and 1 and 2 for the speakers involved:

A1 A2 A1 A2 A1//B1 B2 B1 B2

Auer (1995: 125) describes this type of pattern as the one that “contributes to the organization of discourse in that particular episode”, which is the role found in the extracts analyzed above. In this particular context, the pattern should be slightly modified to signal that the number of turns produced in language B, Arabic in this case, are not comparable in number to those produced in language A, Spanish. In addition, when one of the speakers code-switches the other one does not necessarily follow him but continues with the conversation as better serves his bargaining strategies. A suggested pattern for Spanish/Arabic transactional code-switching based on the data analyzed in this paper would be the following:

A1 A2 A1 A2 A1//B_(1 or 2) B_(1 or 2) // A1 A2 A1 A2

Summary

I have argued that the sequentiality of the switched utterances has a direct impact on the development of the bargaining process and consequently its final outcome. Code-switching serves to move from a bargaining sequence to a side-sequence as an organizational strategy before returning to the bargaining procedure. In this way, code-switching is comparable to other strategies and contextualizing cues that speakers rely on during monolingual interaction (Gumperz 1982, Auer 1984). A sequential approach to code-switching links the local pragmatic functions and its organizational meaningfulness for a more complete understanding of this phenomenon as it has been proven in the case of transactional code-switching. In this paper, the latter has been defined as a marked code-switching that serves as a device for the speakers to organize the bargaining activity. Finally, and as a conclusion, a claim can be made that the conversational functions of code-switching and its pragmatic value do not necessarily have to be fixed but rather should be perceived as variable across types of exchanges. Additional importance should be given to understanding the sociocultural context and the nature of the contact between the two languages under study. The practice of bargaining in Northern Morocco and the strong presence that Spanish enjoys prove that generic interpretations of code-switching are not always applicable in diverse contexts. This implicates that the occurrence of code-switching and the nature of its conversational functions are context and interaction sensitive, both at the same time. Taken this way, variation in the occurrence and motivations of code-switching bears strong similarities to variation in style-shifting in monolingual speech as described by Labov (1972). A certain interaction type may require use of code-switching in a context where the conversation would otherwise take place in the unmarked code. Undoubtedly, a quantitative study of a number of bargaining

interactions should be the next step to empirically confirm the interdependence claimed in this study between local conversational functions and the overall organizational role of code-switching in transactional interactions and possibly other types of conventionalized exchanges.

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